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Priyanka Chopra: ‘regrets’? She’s got a few about a doomed activism reality show

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)





Priyanka Chopra: ‘The show had got it wrong.’ Photograph: Fadel Senna/AFP/Getty Images

Sat 18 Sep 2021 10.00 EDT

Just when you think entertainment and celebrity culture cannot get any more surreal, it does. The last few days have seen: professional health officials in several countries feeling obliged to contradict a tweet by Nicki Minaj about her cousin’s [friend’s swollen testicles](#); comedian Larry David [being grumpy](#) at unlikely public events; and “inventive” interpretations of the “American independence” theme at the Met Gala, from political slogans on backsides to Kim Kardashian’s [head-to-toe black Balenciaga](#). (Her look reminded me of when the boys in my home town used to put black socks over their trainers to get past the bouncers at the local club, which had a strict shoes-only dress code.) After more than a year of lockdowns, and therefore limited opportunities to shine, famous people are putting themselves out there with gusto.

Nowhere has this chaotic energy been more apparent than in the saga of [The Activist](#), which has been as compelling as a novel, albeit one that would be considered a bit too far-fetched. To recap, American television network CBS announced a new reality show called *The Activist*, which would pit six political activists against each other in a competition format, measuring their

“successes” by online engagement, social media metrics and the judgments of the panel: noted grassroots organisers Julianne Hough, [Priyanka Chopra](#) and Usher. The final challenge, a showstopper, if you will, would have seen contestants lobbying at the forthcoming G20 in Rome.

Unsurprisingly, there was a backlash to end all backlashes and one that ended *The Activist* as it was supposed to be. Usually, I’d argue that you should see a show before you judge it, but this one defies all common sense. It’s as if *The X Factor* decided to to find Britain’s Next Top Doctor, with qualifications optional, so long as there’s a good sob story to carry the winner to victory.

I feel for the activists involved. Plenty of more thoughtful critics pointed out that the show was exploiting an underfunded arena and that enforced competition is not really in keeping with community-minded work. Inevitably, theproducers announced that *The Activist* would no longer air as planned, but would be reshot as a one-hour documentary, with each contestant receiving a cash grant. Chopra posted a message on Friday admitting that the show had got it wrong. Hough had posted a similar statement earlier in the week, saying she had listened to the criticism. “I do not claim to be an activist and wholeheartedly agree that the judging aspect of the show missed the mark,” she wrote. No doubt the online engagement and social media metrics were excellent.

The understudy’s hour has come



Mark Oxtoby and Christopher Lloyd take a curtain call for *Back to the Future: The Musical*. Photograph: David M Benett/Dave Benett/Getty Images for McFly Productions Ltd

A couple of weeks ago, I went to the theatre, for the first time since March 2020. Back then, the question of whether or not it was a good idea to sit in a room crammed full of people somewhat tainted the evening's entertainment. This was a different experience, at a newly built outdoor theatre. But the pandemic continues to reverberate. Before the play began, one of the actors came on stage to announce that not one, not two, but eight of the roles would be played by understudies that night. Despite this, maybe even because of it, it was energetic and magnificent.

In the West End on Monday, the actor [Mark Oxtoby took on the part of Doc Brown](#) on opening night of the much-awaited *Back to the Future: The Musical*. The 1985 film's Doc Brown, Christopher Lloyd, was in the audience, but the original stage actor, Roger Bart, was out for Covid reasons. Oxtoby was the understudy; he only found out that day that he would be stepping into the lead role. By all accounts, it was a triumph. This skin-of-the-teeth ability to adapt in the face of extraordinary disruption is keeping theatre going and we should celebrate the resilience of productions and the understudies.

That's too many TV cooks for Jamie



Jamie Oliver: fed up to his back teeth with cookery shows. Photograph: Ken McKay/ITV/REX/Shutterstock

Jamie Oliver, currently presenting a cooking show on television, has told the *Radio Times* that he "tends not to" watch cooking shows on television. (In other news, busman not so keen on holidays.) He suggested that such shows no longer take risks with new ideas. "There's extraordinary talent out there, but they're making their own content on YouTube," he said.

It's true that cooking programmes are not as vital as they were. We are far from the instructional days of Delia Smith's long reign. (Delia, with excellent foresight, effectively resigned from TV in 2013, to set up an online cookery school.) We are decades on from the bish bash bosh of Jamie's arrival, when you couldn't eat anything without a generous splosh of balsamic vinegar. *MasterChef* and *Bake Off* are competitions, and solid entertainment, while we seem to seek familiarity and comfort from the few remaining TV chefs who show us how to make things. It doesn't feel as if there is a space for anything innovative.

That's a shame, and an oversight, because food TV is more popular than ever, from celebrity-fronted foodie travelogues to 12-part Netflix series

about far-flung restaurants that serve only fermented heritage tomatoes (that one is yet to be commissioned, but surely it's in the works). In *Cooked*, one of his many brilliant books on food, the American author Michael Pollan is excellent on what he calls “the curious paradox” of people spending less time than ever cooking and preparing food, but more time than ever watching it on screens. Surely it's time for a new approach, especially as the internet already has the talent on the hob.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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Britain's broadcast media is too valuable to be the toy of politicians and moguls

[Will Hutton](#)





Piers Morgan presents 'Good Morning Britain' on 13 September 2017.

Photograph: Ken McKay/ITV/Shutterstock

Sun 19 Sep 2021 03.00 EDT

Britain's stubborn attachment to non-Tory values infuriates and worries Conservative politicians to equal degree. Yes, there is a suspicion of immigration or welfare cheats and an attachment to law and order they can exploit, but belief in fairness, in standing together and public spiritedness and, increasingly, in matters green seem impervious to attack.

Right-of-centre British newspapers have done an unparalleled job in attempting to move public opinion to the right, but as their circulation declines so their influence wanes. Without a politician of the campaigning zest of Boris Johnson, Tories concede, their chance of winning elections will fade. The imperative is to use the current conjuncture to follow the US and build a broadcast media as effective as the fading print media in cheerleading the Conservative cause. Public service broadcasting and, above all, broadcast regulators' attachment to impartiality are in their crosshairs.

Last week came two important moves on the chessboard. Rupert Murdoch announced he is expanding the model of talkRadio into a television arm, talkTV, [signing up Piers Morgan](#) as a lead presenter. The ambition is for

talkTV to be the channel that GB News wanted to be – more aggressively to the right than its ex-chair, [Andrew Neil](#), thought congruent with journalistic integrity, but less tedious and shouty than the rightwing headbangers who hector GB News’ shrinking audiences.

Unlike them, Morgan, for all his foibles, can broadcast (as can Neil). And Murdoch, whatever else, has a nose for what works. But he might need Ofcom to indulge his attempt to stretch notions of impartiality and for that he needs a rightwing ideologue as its chair. That man was to be *ex-Daily Mail* editor [Paul Dacre](#).

But at the end of May Johnson’s attempt to shoehorn him into Ofcom collapsed; the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport [appointments board declared him unappointable](#) – he was disqualified because of his disdain for digital technology and impartiality rules. Downing Street and, in particular, Johnson’s aide Munira Mirza, who zealously polices all public-sector appointments and is especially alert to the fulcrum role of culture and media, were not happy.

In July, the former culture secretary Oliver Dowden, desperate to save himself in the coming reshuffle, brought forward the politically [toxic privatisation of Channel 4](#) as proof he understood what his task was – a form of Tory virtue signalling. It didn’t work. Last week, he was unceremoniously dispatched to be replaced by Nadine Dorries.

Neither Johnson nor the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, was impressed by the political flak being incurred by the rushed sale of profitable [Channel 4](#), allegedly for its own good. Protests came from advertisers, independent TV producers and MPs outside London. No 10’s doubts were intensified by the warmth of the reception given to Channel 4 screening the final of the US Open – by buying the rights from Amazon Prime – and Emma Raducanu’s famous victory.

It was looking like bad politics. Nor was it good economics. Sunak is concerned about removing a pillar of one of the UK’s most successful industries – independent television producers who count Channel 4 a foundational source of commissions. He could not see how, with guarantees required about commissioning from small British companies, sustaining

British content and keeping a powerful presence outside London, as Dowden had conceded, it was going to raise any serious money.

What is needed in the DCMS is a thick-skinned Tory culture warrior who will rerun the appointment for Ofcom chair

ITV's chair might salivate over the potential synergies if ITV bought the channel, but it was unlikely that the Competition and Markets Authority would sanction less competition in the broadcast media. Channel 4 would be sold abroad for a pittance amid public and industry protest – and the protesters would be right.

Far more important to Johnson now seems to be to spend scarce political capital in the bid to make Dacre (or a surrogate) the chair of [Ofcom](#), the chief blockage to creating a broadcast media as openly partisan as that in the US. If that were secured, everything else could follow. What is needed in the DCMS is a thick-skinned Tory culture warrior and Johnson loyalist who will rerun the appointment even if it breaks, as Julian Knight, the chair of the Commons culture select committee insists, industry standards on allowing failed appointees to reapply.

Enter Dorries. Her job is to appoint Dacre (or the surrogate), to weaken Ofcom and its commitment to “due impartiality” in its broadcast code, cow the BBC and use the DCMS to appoint culture warriors in her own and Mirza’s image on every public body for which she has responsibility. If she judges it expedient to put the privatisation of Channel 4 to one side, as new housing minister, Michael Gove, has done with planning reform, then so be it. But she must deliver on the big prizes – weakening Ofcom and the BBC – that will make life so much easier for talkTV and other rightwing channels that may follow.

It may take two parliaments or more to complete the job – Johnson is supremely confident he will win again– but the dismantling of impartiality rules and the weakening of public service broadcasting will be done, if slowly step by step.

Johnson is going carefully because he knows the ground is treacherous: the British cherish their public service broadcasters nearly as much as they cherish the NHS and there are one-nation Tories, along with the new intake from the north, who can't see ending *Match of the Day*, *The Great British Bake Off* or even *BBC News* as vote winners.

Yes, we like the new streaming services, but we like them alongside traditional broadcast channels with their commitment to impartiality, not instead of them. Better still, if we don't have to subscribe, as is the case with More4, because the digital streaming is paid for by advertising.

The opposition parties fight shy of entering this battle, but it could be an opportunity if they had the same killer political instinct as Johnson. Britain and Britishness are intimately wrapped up with our public service broadcasters. It is the Tories, for their own partisan interests, who want to destroy requirements of impartiality. For those politicians who blow the whistle on all of this, there are rich electoral rewards.

Will Hutton is an Observer columnist

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[OpinionAukus](#)

The Observer view on Anglo-French relations

[Observer editorial](#)



Paris has dismissed Britain as a mere US accomplice in the Aukus row.
Photograph: Artur Widak/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Sun 19 Sep 2021 01.30 EDT

France's extraordinary decision to [recall its ambassadors](#) to the US and Australia reflects deep anger over its exclusion from the secretly negotiated Aukus defence pact and the cancellation by Canberra of a [£48bn submarine-building contract](#). Similar action has not been taken against Britain. But the row marks a new low in already tattered Anglo-French relations.

That's but one of many challenges facing the new foreign secretary, [Liz Truss](#), who replaced Dominic Raab in last week's cabinet reshuffle. Is she up to the task? While popular among party activists, her record as a Brexit-

promoting international trade secretary lacks significant achievement. Her elevation, like other new cabinet appointments, suggests once again that Boris Johnson favours chums over competence.

The Aukus row highlights fundamental problems with the “global Britain” project that Truss champions. One is the UK’s increasing subordination to the US when the Biden administration is exhibiting strong unilateralist tendencies. Britain was dragged along in the US’s slipstream during the [Afghan debacle](#), which was Raab’s undoing, forced to follow a withdrawal policy it did not support.

Biden promised European partners last summer that post-Trump America was “back” in terms of transatlantic cooperation. That’s not how it looks now as Paris, Berlin and Brussels contemplate a major rift over the conduct and structure of security policy [in the Indo-Pacific](#). China has condemned Aukus but will be delighted by the disarray among the western allies.

Hawkish Truss’s unoriginal, predictable views on Russia, Iran and the need to “get tough” with China may win approval in some quarters when she accompanies Johnson to the US this week. But over-reliance on an unreliable America would be fatal. She will do Britain a disservice if she fails to grasp the need to keep the UK and [Europe](#) aligned on security, defence and other issues.



Will Liz Truss, the new foreign secretary, be able to repair tattered Anglo-French relations? Photograph: Mark Thomas/Rex/Shutterstock

Despite the Brexit rupture, despite the Aukus “stab in the back” and despite Anglo-French tensions over migrants and fish, it is, or should be, obvious that the EU and Britain retain a shared interest in maintaining a common front in many areas. That’s what Mark Rutte, the Dutch prime minister, reportedly [told Johnson](#) last week.

With the backing of France and Germany, Rutte re-tabled a proposal for increased security and defence collaboration with the EU. To smooth the way, Brussels has taken a more conciliatory stance on Irish-border customs controls. That should resonate with Truss, given the [renewed warning](#) by top Democrat Nancy Pelosi that a US-UK trade deal will not happen if Brexit undermines peace in Ireland.

Britain and [France](#) are Europe’s two biggest military powers, with capabilities that others, notably Germany, lack. Their common agenda extends to tackling the climate crisis – another big test for Truss as the Cop26 summit approaches – and the reviving threat of Islamist terrorism. It’s vital France’s suspicions that it is the victim of an “Anglosphere” conspiracy are not allowed to fester.

The furious reaction of Emmanuel Macron, France's president, to the [Aukus](#) pact is not simply about lost business, though that undoubtedly hurts. It's about a national and diplomatic humiliation coming seven months before a tough re-election battle against the resurgent far right. Do Truss and Johnson really want to end up dealing with a hostile, xenophobic President Marine Le Pen?

Latest developments are certain to intensify pressure within the EU, in the post-Merkel era, for the sort of strategic autonomy long advocated by Macron. Ursula von der Leyen, commission president, last week [urged member states](#) to find the "political will" to develop a credible, independent European military force. Whatever the intention, such a force, if created, would undercut Nato, Britain's first and last line of defence.

Here's a question for the new foreign secretary. If an increasingly unbidable US goes one way and an angry, alienated Europe goes the other, where does Britain go?

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[Opinion](#)[Coronavirus](#)

The Observer view on the government's flawed winter plan for Covid

[Observer editorial](#)



The lack of masks at last week's first meeting of Boris Johnson's reshuffled cabinet serves to undermine public messaging on face coverings.
Photograph: Reuters

Sun 19 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

A small room, with the windows shut, packed tightly with more than 30 people, [none wearing masks](#). This is the image the government released last week of Boris Johnson's reshuffled cabinet at their first meeting. The people around the table may have changed but the fundamentals remain: this is still a government determined to cut support for low-paid parents during a pandemic and to target asylum seekers in its willingness to stoke the culture war. And it is still a government acting with gross hypocrisy with its measures to control the pandemic. Ministers say they "expect" us to wear

masks in crowded and enclosed spaces but that expectation appears not to extend to the senior politicians running the country.

With the prime minister and his cabinet publicly flaunting their own guidance, it is perhaps little wonder mask wearing has dropped significantly since mid-July, when the government made face coverings in England a recommendation rather than compulsory on public transport and in shops. Surveys suggest only [six in 10 people](#) had worn a mask when in public places in the past two weeks, down from seven in 10 a few weeks earlier.

This is concerning because, despite two-thirds of the population being fully vaccinated, the pandemic is far from over. Infection rates have stabilised in England after a steep rise up to mid-July but there is [great uncertainty](#) about what will happen this autumn, with most experts forecasting cases will rise further as a result of Covid spreading in schools. While the vaccination push has dramatically reduced death rates, and the booster programme for those aged over 50 and the clinically vulnerable will help combat waning immunity, vaccines provide substantial but not 100% protection against ending up in hospital. If hospital admission rates continue to increase, the knock-on impacts on the nation's health will be severe. This is because the NHS has so little spare capacity, both as a result of a decade of [underfunding](#) and because of the impact Covid-19 has had on waiting lists, with treatment for life-saving conditions such as cancer delayed. Clinicians are expecting greater strain than usual from serious respiratory viruses and influenza as a result of reduced population immunity because of social distancing over the past year; if Covid hospital cases rise significantly, this will have a profound impact on people who have already waited months for life-changing surgery such as hip replacements.

The lack of urgency in the government's [winter plan](#) for Covid, published last week, is extraordinary in light of this. It is clear the government has scrapped almost all focus on so-called "non-pharmaceutical interventions", such as mask wearing and improving ventilation in buildings, particularly in schools, in the hope that vaccinations alone will be sufficient to get us through the winter – its "plan A". Some of plan A's measures – testing for travellers entering from amber-list countries – were scrapped barely 48 hours after the publication of the [winter plan](#). The government has said it will only invoke "plan B" – compulsory face coverings in some settings,

more working from home where possible, and the introduction of vaccine passports – as a response to “concerning” data.

A successful vaccination programme cannot compensate for the grievous mistakes the government has made in this pandemic

This makes no sense. [Mask wearing in public](#) spaces is a cheap and effective way of reducing the level of community infections. The cost of providing proper ventilation in schools pales in comparison with the far greater costs of the NHS having to delay urgent care for non-Covid conditions. Yet the government has chosen to delay the reintroduction of compulsory mask wearing until the situation for the NHS, which is [already under pressure](#), with non-emergency treatment levels significantly lower than normal thanks to Covid, gets worse. It has failed to invest in ventilation technology for schools, despite having months to prepare for the return of schools this autumn; no money has been allocated for improving [ventilation in schools](#) since January. Instead, the government has launched a pilot scheme, involving just a handful of schools in Bradford, to test the efficacy of measures to improve ventilation – when experts say there is more than enough existing evidence to justify spending now to improve ventilation across all schools, as many [other countries have done](#). This is particularly worrying given the delay in expanding the vaccination programme to 12- to 15-year-olds, which means that most teenagers will go into school for the first few weeks of this term unvaccinated.

A successful vaccination programme cannot compensate for the other grievous mistakes the government has made in this pandemic. The government has repeatedly taken too long to introduce measures to control the pandemic, resulting in tens of thousands more deaths than necessary and longer, more expensive social restrictions. It has also been too reluctant to control the pandemic using measures other than vaccines, such as the delay in introducing travel restrictions from India earlier this year, which allowed the Delta variant to seed in the UK far more quickly than it otherwise would have done. The government is continuing to make these mistakes as we head into the autumn: it is sending confusing signals about mask wearing and eroding the all-important social norms that are holding up well in other countries.

Why would the government so recklessly abandon relatively low-cost measures that would further improve the effectiveness of the vaccine programme, preferring instead to wait until things get worse before introducing them? It is the product of a prime minister trying to compensate for his lack of an agenda by showing the public that the vaccine rollout has returned life to its pre-Covid normality. Compulsory mask wearing, investment in ventilation technology for schools: none of this is convenient for that narrative. However, the government's lax approach simply increases the risk that people will not receive the critical healthcare they need this winter. That he regards this as a risk worth taking shows [Boris Johnson](#) has learned nothing from the tragic mistakes of the past 18 months.

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[Notebook](#)[Nadine Dorries](#)

Nadine Dorries should write what she likes. And I'll read what I like

[Alex Clark](#)



Prolific author and new culture secretary, Nadine Dorries, attends her first cabinet meeting. Photograph: Mark Thomas/REX/Shutterstock

Sat 18 Sep 2021 12.30 EDT

In the latest tedious round of the culture war, I did not expect to be taking a position on the books of the new [culture secretary](#), Nadine Dorries, whose defenders point to her being a prolific novelist as evidence of a [sincere interest in the arts](#). Instantly, we are pitched into a world of literature “that people actually want to read”, defined against all those who think novels should be about feelings and Kierkegaard and preferably only understood by a coterie of four critics. Does anyone who likes books really think like this?

Dorries's novels, which often feature nurses, Liverpool and [Ireland](#), all of which reflect their author's biography, tend to come in groups – the Lovely Lane series, the Tarabeg trilogy, the Four Streets series – and are produced at impressive speed. If people enjoy reading them, who am I to complain that they're not exactly Thomas Mann? The answer is that snobbery in books, while often perceived to be top-down – *de haut en bas*, if you want to be posh about it – frequently seems to go in the other direction: though I'm perfectly happy for people to fill their boots with Dorries's nurses, me losing myself in something long and weird and unpronounceable really gets on the anti-lit brigade's nerves.

The idea, I suppose, is that one can't possibly be enjoying oneself and is just doing it for show or to make everybody else feel bad. Ah, well. I note that Dorries is about to embark on a new series, [the Belfont Legacy](#), whose first tranche is entitled *A Wicked Woman* but for which we will have to wait until next summer.

Irish roots showing



Heir Island: 'fiendishly wiggly coast'. Photograph: Terry Whittaker / Alamy/Alamy

Dorries has said that she credits her Irish grandmother for some of her inspiration, having been whisked away to the west of Ireland on childhood holidays, there to be enveloped in “the scent of raw peat and Holy Smoke”. Coincidentally, I’m currently watching repeats of the television drama *The Irish R.M.*, shown daily here in Ireland on TG4, the Irish language channel that I watch in the pretence that I’m getting really serious about learning Gaeilge. Luckily, the 1980s adaptation of Somerville and Ross’s novels, which featured Peter Bowles as a retired Victorian army officer turned resident magistrate and Bryan Murray as the local rogue hellbent on outwitting him, is being shown in English. The programme is an unrepentant celebration of appalling stereotypes – drunkenness, fecklessness, dishonesty and a lot of horses – and thoroughly enjoyable, largely because the Irish always get the upper hand.

A recent episode saw a pompous Englishman set sail for Heir Island, in West Cork’s Roaring Water Bay, to collect examples of folk tales; he ends up ensnared in an illegal drinking den while islanders spout cod-antique nonsense at him. I squeaked with excitement because that bit of fiendishly wiggly coast is where our family always heads on holiday, the latest excitement being that the tiny island now has its own pizza place, PizzHeiria.

Meanwhile, back in the 21st century, Irish-UK relations continue to be complex, the latest manifestation being that post-Brexit regulations mean packages from England are taking forever to get here and frequently come with mystifying additional charges. Progress.

Hooked on thrillers



Strange goings-on in the neighbourhood. James Stewart in *Rear Window*.
Photograph: Allstar Collection/Cinetext/PARA/Sportsphoto Ltd./Allstar

I should add that it's not all Proust and Woolf in my reading nook. During lockdown, I developed a serious addiction to psychological thrillers and am now up to about three a week. Among their most popular themes – your husband isn't who you think he is, your daughter's got a secret drug habit, the next-door neighbour's a serial killer – perhaps the most abiding is house anxiety. Protagonists are forever moving into homes they can't really afford, or where a dreadful crime has been committed unbeknown to them, or where there's a clandestine surveillance system, and sometimes all three. Often, there is a neighbourhood queen bee whose shiny kitchen cabinets mark her out as a villain. By their fiction shall you know their most deeply rooted fears.

Alex Clark is an Observer columnist

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Observer comment cartoon

Conservatives

All aboard Boris Johnson's lying bus – cartoon

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[Opinion](#)[Boris Johnson](#)

That's the trouble with Chequers: it makes you forget you might have some work to do

[Catherine Bennett](#)





Boris Johnson entertains German chancellor, Angela Merkel, in the rose garden of at Chequers in July. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Sun 19 Sep 2021 02.30 EDT

Before he became boon companion to the now-disgraced financier, Lex Greensill, [David Cameron](#) devoted a chunk of his [autobiography](#) to justifying Chequers, first among the government's collection of country houses. "All I can say is that it makes the job more do-able and frees the PM from the day-to-day fray so he or she can think or plan."

It's amazing, we learn, what a fully staffed mansion with a pool and tennis court – in the case of [Chevening House](#), a maze and lake – can do to remind a minister of a calling that might easily, in the confines of Downing Street or a family or constituency home, slip their mind. In fact, there could hardly be a greater tribute to the foresight of Sir Arthur Lee, who gave Chequers to the nation, than Cameron's confirmation that the place occasionally recalled for him "the higher purpose of politics".

No wonder Boris Johnson, a man only marginally less keen than Prince Andrew on gated, grace-and-favour boltholes, wanted to [mark the centenary](#) of Lee's 1917 gift becoming an official residence with a party this weekend. Sadly, Cameron, along with fellow beneficiaries Tony Blair, Gordon Brown

and John Major, was unable to join the Johnsons, who have added [trail bike](#) rides to the midlife alleviators on offer. But his memoir is clear about the value of country retreats, regardless of the high cost in both maintenance (£1m annually) and, presumably, the kind of cabinet discontent now afflicting [Dominic Raab and Liz Truss](#), who both want Chevening.



Chevening House in Kent is the grace-and-favour country retreat usually used by the foreign secretary. Photograph: Johnny Green/PA

“It helped me to forget,” Cameron explained, “about all the gossip and intrigues and fire-fighting back in Westminster and think about the bigger picture, take the longer view, and think hard about the big decisions I was taking.”

Cameron was not the first to find that a stream of visitors, some eminent, many less so, only enhanced the Lee’s [“house of peace”](#), Cameron was not the first to find. Years ago, the Blairs hosted, among many others, Chris Evans and Geri Halliwell. Guests at Sarah Brown’s [“slumber party”](#) included Wendi Deng, Elisabeth Murdoch and Cameron’s riding friend and Murdoch executive Rebekah Brooks. Cameron invited Jeremy Clarkson, [Johnson courted Allegra Stratton](#).

For further detail about the part played by Chequers in, as its donor put it, “the moulding of the future”, we’re indebted to Rachel Johnson, Sarah Vine and, in particular, to Sasha Swire, whose [Diary of an MP’s Wife](#) makes such a valuable companion to Cameron’s *For the Record*. His recollection of Chequers epiphanies should always be read alongside hers of, for instance, Chequers table talk. “When I announce that I enjoy sex much more in my fifties than in my forties, they express surprise,” she notes of an evening when fellow guests included Evgeny Lebedev and the famously library-phobic Etonian, [Ed Vaizey](#). Vine, like Swire, recalls their host’s undeviating commitment to cocktails: “The place was positively rocking most weekends.”

Not until Swire recorded the glee as Cameron’s favourites laid claim in 2010 to the vacant grace-and-favours was their potential to distort a certain kind of personality (ie not the revolutionaries Lee once envisaged) so dismally clear. “We are like kids in a sweetshop,” Swire wrote, though her friends’ hankering for parterres and wildernesses is more reminiscent of Jane Austen’s least appealing matriarchs.

The glory of such real estate only adds, as Dominic Raab is reportedly discovering, to the agony of its withdrawal

While [sneering](#) at traces of a previous [Dorneywood](#) occupant, “the fragrant Pauline” (Prescott), Swire notes George Osborne’s early arrival there before Nick Clegg could get in; her husband, the fragrant Hugo, is also delighted with his prize, Hillsborough. “You have to be nice to me now, Sasha,” Cameron jokes. “I’ve given your husband a castle and a butler for goodness sake.” But the glory of such real estate only adds, as Raab is reportedly discovering, to the agony of its withdrawal. Likewise, despite actually resigning, Johnson took three weeks to quit his Foreign Office mansion.

Arriving at Chequers, Swire recalls being welcomed by a “rather stiff” staff member she compares – presumably on the understanding this individual a) can’t read; b) can’t feel; or c) knows her place – to Mrs Danvers, Daphne du Maurier’s sinister housekeeper. The droll similarity also strikes Rachel Johnson in *Rake’s Progress*, where we find the new first family arriving for Stanley Johnson’s birthday party. Greeted by a “Mrs Danvers-dressed

woman”, the tribe, excited beyond measure, checks out the free toiletries, the “museum quality paintings”, the beds of “cloudlike softness”, further unnamed “RAF flunkeys” whose privilege it is to serve her brother, his girlfriend and their dog.

As for Johnson, his attachment to Chequers and, occasionally, Chevening, can probably be measured by the regularity with which he has vanished – from the lavishly refurbished No 10 – into them, whether this is to reconfigure his personal life, finish a book, [dodge Cobra meetings](#) or allow him to rent out his own country house for a [tax efficient](#) £4,250 a month. “For him,” his sister writes, “a win is being hailed as the next Churchill and Chequers and a cavalcade of armoured Range Rovers...”

None of which is to say that Chequers’s latest iteration, as a top party house/hiding place for former Bullingdon Club members, renders it entirely pointless. Theresa May, who appears, perhaps yielding to a sadistic impulse, to be the only former premier willing to attend Johnson’s self-aggrandising event, sometimes entertained visiting leaders there. Though this much-rehearsed rationale would be more compelling if the public weren’t already paying for a queen, her heirs and a selection of palaces. How many such venues, absent some horrifying dignitary influx, does a country need?

Full credit then, to the prime minister, for advertising with his spurious party what might so easily have been overlooked for another century: that the government’s country homes collection is a national liability. Without the attraction of these massive houses to politicians such as Johnson, interested solely in status, we might have been spared his premiership, that of Cameron, that of opportunists yet to come. Thanks, Sir Arthur.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer Columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/sep/19/thats-the-trouble-with-chequers-it-makes-you-forget-you-might-have-some-work-to-do>

Observer lettersPensions

Letters: this government has betrayed pensioners



Boris Johnson with the Conservative manifesto in November 2019.
Photograph: Phil Noble/Reuters

Sun 19 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

I nearly fell off my chair when I read Andrew Rawnsley's claim that "not for the first time, a Conservative government has rewarded its core vote of the retired at the expense of workers" ("[Boris Johnson's generation game: the young and poor pay for the old and rich](#)", Comment). Anyone would think that in the previous week the government hadn't "suspended" its triple lock guarantee to recipients of the state pension because the increase in average earnings would otherwise produce a significant increase in the pension payout.

But Rawnsley has in mind only the increase in national insurance to inject funds into the NHS and, if it is lucky, social care. In so doing, he overlooks the betrayal of people on a state pension. This is surely now the main electoral worry for the Conservatives. Pensioners have just been very badly let down by the government, which has shamelessly broken the Conservative manifesto commitment to retain the triple lock for the duration of the current parliament – and pensioners vote.

David Head

Peterborough

Yvonne Roberts's failure to acknowledge the nearly one-fifth of pensioners living in poverty was astonishing ("[These strange times have made us experts in loss and loneliness](#)", Comment). Instead, she describes retirement communities as "plush establishments... for those with sufficient income". What about those who are not so fortunate?

Joanna Whitehead

London E8

Cruelty to animals continues

The author and campaigner Paula S Owen asks if we can, hand on heart, say we are any more humane to animals today than we were 100 years ago ("[How cruel death of a little stray dog led to riots in 1900s Britain](#)", News). Given that the latest figures suggest that every year in the UK we now experiment on about 3 million laboratory animals, report more than a million cases of animal cruelty against "pets" and produce more than 700 million intensive/factory farmed animals, the answer is surely a resounding "no".

Tracey Gregory

Hemingford Abbots, Cambridgeshire

Managers, to your mops

I read with great interest your article about how poorly cleaners are being treated by a company called Churchill Group, which manages Facebook's London offices ("[Union activist who led protests against Facebook fears for job](#)", News). Cleaners say that they were told to clean a washroom with five lavatory cubicles and a shower in one minute and 30 seconds. A

spokesperson for Churchill Group responded that “each task has been timed and undertaken by our own management to ensure they are realistic and achievable”.

But it is one thing to time a specific job and another thing altogether to time these same tasks across a working day. Telling someone to clean a washroom in one minute 30 seconds might just be achievable if this were the only task they had to do, but this does not mean that one could clean 10 such washrooms in 15 minutes, any more than if someone could run a mile in four minutes they could run 10 miles in 40 minutes. No wonder the cleaners are exhausted.

I have a suggestion. Instead of timing cleaners while they work, why don’t managers work alongside the cleaners for a day – leading by example, as it were – and help them complete the tasks that they have to do for that day? Start and finish at the same time the cleaners do. Is it still possible to clean 12 floors in the time that was previously allocated to five? If so, Churchill can stick to its present policy; if not, it should revise its schedules.

Dr Kenneth Smith

London E2

Lack of ventilators cost lives

Gabriel Scally justifiably castigates Johnson’s government for failures, including omitting to fund an urgent programme of improving workplace ventilation before winter sets in (“[The winter Covid plan will be marked by delay, confusion and ignorance. Sound familiar?](#)”, Comment. But ventilators used to treat Covid are also important.

Prof Devi Sridhar, Edinburgh University’s chair of global public health, [pointed out](#) in March 2020 that the government squandered nine weeks by failing to ensure enough PPE and ventilators. It goes back further than that: despite a 2016 simulation highlighting the risk of “[inadequate ventilation](#)” in a future pandemic, successive Conservative governments failed to ensure sufficient supplies of ventilators.

Scally’s important point is that, in contrast to the Johnson government’s bumbling approach, those countries whose strategy controlled the virus not

only saved lives but safeguarded their economies.

David Murray

Wallington, Surrey

The business of flying

While Irvin Slater (“[One class, fewer planes](#)”, Letters) has a well-meaning solution to reduce the carbon impact of flying, it would not work. Operators generate little or no profit and even losses on standard class over the Atlantic; most of their profits are from business and first-class passengers.

John Fernandes

London SE9

The fear factor

You report that Emma Raducanu pulled out of Wimbledon “after experiencing ‘breathing difficulties’” (“[How teen stars are taking the sporting world by storm](#)”, News). In fact, she experienced breathing difficulties. Whatever their cause (and Raducanu herself has explained that she had been overwhelmed by events), her symptoms were real. They do not deserve to be belittled by inverted commas, suggesting that her physical symptoms did not exist.

Anyone who has experienced proper fear – simply standing on a diving board or waiting to walk on to a school stage – will know that psychological stress produces physical effects. The fact that such symptoms are a response to a difficult situation does not make them less real or important and makes it all the more impressive that Raducanu has subsequently channelled her emotions to such a magnificent effect.

Dr Lucy Pollock

Taunton, Somerset

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

For the record

Sun 19 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

A column ([Exploiting loopholes can be a losing strategy](#), 12 September, New Review, page 5) referred to a charity prize draw by Frome Town FC being “advertised as a free competition on MoneySavingExpert.com” (MSE). To clarify: the information about the draw was posted in the community section of the website, where users share tips among themselves; it was not advice given by MSE itself.

Louis Armstrong collaborated on the making of a musical called *The Real Ambassadors*, and performed the lead role of Hero, but he did not “compose” the work, as we said. The music and lyrics were written by Dave Brubeck and Iola Brubeck respectively ([Satchmo and the spy....](#), 12 September, page 37).

[A recipe for courgettes with tahini](#) included the well-meaning tip that those allergic to sesame could “use a little dried thyme in the flour instead of the za’atar”. This advice did not account for the fact that, while za’atar includes sesame seeds, so too does tahini.

An interview with Ian Wright and Musa Okwonga said that in 1990 Wright’s team, Crystal Palace, lost the FA Cup final in extra time; in fact they lost in a replay ([‘Kids need two things: love and education ...’](#), 12 September, New Review, page 8).

Other recently amended articles include:

[The Making of Incarnation by Tom McCarthy review – all work and no play](#)

[Numbers don’t always mean what they seem to mean](#)

[Jagmeet Singh: the ex-lawyer and TikTok star who could topple Trudeau](#)

How the cruel death of a little stray dog led to riots in 1900s Britain

*Write to the Readers' Editor, the Observer, York Way, London N1 9GU,
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[Opinion](#)[Health](#)

America's mortality gap should sound a blaring alarm across the Atlantic

[Kenan Malik](#)



The debacle of American healthcare has lessons for the UK. Photograph: Alex Edelman/EPA

Sun 19 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

Americans die younger than Europeans. That is true whether they are rich or poor, black or white, toddlers or OAPs. The latest confirmation of the mortality gap across the Atlantic comes from a [newly published study](#) that tracked death rates in the United States and Europe over the past 30 years. The paper sets out to compare the changing gap in mortality rates of black and white Americans over time, using Europe as an external benchmark. (The paper combines data from six countries – England, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain.) In so doing, it provides lessons, not just for America but for European nations too, not least Britain.

In 1990, the gap between the life expectancies of black and white Americans was huge, while rich white Americans died at around the same rate as Europeans. Today, the mortality gap between the average American and the average European is greater than that found between black and white Americans. The racial gap in America has narrowed even as that with Europe has widened. In 2017, the average American lived for 78.6 years, the average French citizen four years longer, the average Briton almost three years more.

The social and economic differences between the US and Europe are myriad and there can be no single explanation for these changes. A number of issues, however, stand out. The first is the role of inequality.

Social inequality is a key political issue in Europe and is at the heart of the “levelling- up” debate in Britain. The pandemic has exposed much of the underlying social and health inequalities. Last week, Public Health England revealed that not only has life expectancy fallen to its lowest level since 2011 but that [inequality in life expectancy](#) between the most and least deprived areas of England is at its highest.

The US has among the worst levels of poverty and inequality in the OECD... that has a major impact on life expectancy

In comparison with America, however, European nations can appear highly egalitarian. The US has among the worst levels of poverty and inequality within the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#). And that inequality has a major impact on life expectancy.

It should not surprise us that, from infancy to old age, Americans are more likely to die in the poorest areas than in richer ones. More telling, though, is that inequality has a greater impact in the US than it does in Europe. If you plot mortality against poverty, the slope of the curve is much steeper in America.

Rich Americans outlive poor Americans but, strikingly, rich Europeans outlive rich Americans. Inequality is a particular burden on the poor and it is those at the bottom of the ladder whose fate should concern us. However, the fact that, when it comes to life expectancy, the rich in America don't always benefit from greater inequality should also give us pause for thought. The reasons for this are manifold. It suggests, however, that deep inequality is a curse on the poor but not necessarily a blessing for the rich.

If the relationship between inequality and life expectancy is relatively clear, the relationship between race, class and mortality is not so straightforward. Black Americans have a higher mortality rate than whites and have always done so. There are major racial disparities both in access to healthcare and in healthcare outcomes.

At the same time, the mortality gap between black and white Americans has narrowed considerably, decreasing by almost half over the past 30 years, from seven to 3.6 years. This is partly for reasons of policy, such as US Medicare expansion, and partly because of better medical intervention, including improvements in treating cardiovascular disease and cancer.

The racial gap has also narrowed, however, for a bleaker reason – the reduction in the lifespan of poor white people, especially those without higher education. The economists [Anne Case and Angus Deaton](#) have shown that, when it comes to mortality statistics, black people with a university degree have almost caught up with university-educated white people, while white people without a degree have fallen almost to the level of black people who lack university education. “Education,” they observe, “is now a sharper

differentiator of expected years of life between 25 and 75 than is race, a reversal of the situation in 1990.” That education divide is a major issue on this side of the Atlantic, too.

Case and Deaton have tracked the surge in recent years of what they call “[deaths of despair](#)” – deaths from alcoholism, drug addiction and suicides – among working-class white people. The latest data suggest that the biggest single contributor to the closing of the racial gap in mortality is the disproportionate rise in deaths of despair among poor white people.

European nations may be less unequal than the US but the American experience is still a warning

What, then, are the lessons in all this for Europe? The first is the devastating impact of inequality, not just on the poorest but on society as a whole. European nations may be less unequal than the US but the American experience is still a warning. Income inequality is [worse in the UK](#) than in most European countries. A government that talks of “[levelling up](#)” while willing to [cut the universal credit £20 uplift](#) is not serious about the issue.

The second lesson is that what matters for health outcomes is not simply the amount of money spent, though that is important, but also what a health service is designed to do.

One of the most extraordinary features of the US system is that no country spends more of its national income on health – 16.8% of GDP in 2018 compared with 11.1% for France and 10.2% for the UK – and yet has such [poor outcomes](#). The money delivers not better healthcare but bulging bank balances for profit-seeking corporations. This, again, should be a warning at a time when there is greater pressure and, in some quarters, a strong desire to increase the role of private corporations within the NHS.

The US also reveals the complex inter-relationship between race and class in shaping health outcomes. Questions of race and class play out differently in Britain than across the pond and there are no direct comparisons. However, there is often a common blindness, ignoring the complexity of race and class and using the one to deny the reality of the other.

The US experience does not translate directly to Britain. Nevertheless, the issues at the heart of the debacle that is American healthcare – social inequality, the scourge of the profit motive in the health industry, the disparities of race and class – are central to debates in Britain, too. We have been warned.

Kenan Malik is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/sep/19/americas-mortality-gap-should-sound-a-blaring-alarm-across-the-atlantic>

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[Opinion](#)[Viktor Orbán](#)

Meet the brave, consensual mayor set to face down Hungary's autocrat

[Nick Cohen](#)



Since 2010, Hungary's PM Viktor Orbán has worked on creating the fear that if you speak out you will lose your job. Photograph: Bernadett Szabó/Reuters

Sat 18 Sep 2021 14.00 EDT

Gergely Karácsony does not have the commanding features of a warrior who can fight Europe's authoritarian nationalists. The mayor of Budapest is 46, but his mild manner makes him look like an unassuming junior lecturer who could not take on a class of rowdy students, let alone Viktor Orbán, Hungary's [de facto dictator](#).

He doesn't shout or sloganise. He talks in a learned manner about how the [European Union](#) has fallen for a Fukuyaman delusion that democracy is irreversible while all the time providing cover for the dismantling of democracy in Poland and Hungary.

Yet Karácsony has a fair chance of being the sole opposition candidate in next year's Hungarian elections precisely because he is not a populist. In desperation at the threat to the rule of law Orbán poses, six Hungarian parties have revived the classic anti-fascist tactic of a popular front. Politicians, from the formerly far-right [Jobbik party](#) all the way through to the radical-left Greens, have put aside their ideologies for the greater good of smashing a rigged system. After a decade of fruitless infighting, they have learnt that, when democracy is in danger, divisions between left and right, social conservatives and woke progressives are irrelevant.

To win, they must build a consensus and appeal to the widest possible spectrum of support. They cannot beat populists by being populist. They cannot afford to treat large numbers of their fellow citizens as enemies. They must focus their energies on isolating and overthrowing the elite who run the ruling Fidesz party and everything else that matters in [Hungary](#). The high stakes are not immediately obvious. To the casual visitor, Budapest appears unchanged. The baroque and art nouveau architecture is as gorgeous as ever. The supermarket shelves are full in eastern Europe, to the wide-eyed wonderment of British visitors from behind the Brexit curtain.

Orbán understood that the tactics of the troll and the thug could be used to mould whole nations

I found Zsuzsanna Szelényi can help foreigners understand how deep the rot has penetrated. She became one of Fidesz's first MPs in 1990. Orbán posed as a liberal back then because liberalism seemed the way of the future. She broke with him because his innate authoritarianism became too hard to ignore and now sees her former ally as "Europe's most unscrupulous autocratic political chief".

Better than Vladimir Putin, Orbán understood that the tactics of the troll and the thug could be used to mould whole nations. As soon as Fidesz won power in 2010, it began [rigging the system](#). It redrew parliamentary boundaries and added a novel concept of "winner compensation" that awarded the victorious party with extra votes. Fractured and often discredited opposition parties helped. But political fixing gives Orbán a [two-thirds majority](#) of parliamentary seats, which allows him to rewrite the constitution at will, without a majority of the votes cast.

State capture has followed. Bureaucrats and police and military officers know their position depends on not crossing the ruling party. Power in Hungary is not based on fear of arrest and torture but on the gentler but no less effective fear that if you speak out you will lose your job.

Meanwhile, and I accept this is a bold claim for a British journalist to make, the Hungarian media are the most prostituted in Europe. The state controls its broadcasting services directly. Elsewhere, it relies on a network of Orbán-supporting oligarchs, who put 500 media outlets under the editorial control of a state foundation. The simple but effective tactic of rewarding servile journalism with taxpayer-funded advertising revenue mops up most of the rest. No stratagem is too debased to follow. Orbán has been the leading promoter of the conspiracy theory that the [Jewish financier George Soros](#) is using his wealth to destroy the white, Christian west by flooding it with migrants. Across the world, a belief in his "Soros plot" is as reliable an indicator of far-right affiliation in the 21st century as a swastika badge on the lapel and a copy of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* on the bookcase were in the 20th.

Taxes and [EU funds](#) are routinely stolen. The only benefit of Brexit I can see is that our money is no longer ending up in the pockets of Fidesz's thieves. For it is a bitter truth for those who support the EU that until last year Europe's Christian democrats in general, and the over-praised Angela Merkel in particular, were the protectors of anti-democratic movements in Hungary. Merkel's long overdue retirement and [a defeat for her party](#) in the [German elections](#) will do wonders for European freedom.

The Central European University academics and students are nowhere to be seen because Orbán drove them into exile

I am writing from the Budapest forum, a conference of progressive European mayors at the Central European University. There's no better place to contemplate the apparent futility of fighting the autocratic state. Its academics and students are nowhere to be seen because Orbán drove them into exile in Vienna rather than permit the existence of a centre for independent thought.

To their credit, the Hungarian opposition has not given up. Starting next month, opposition parties will hold primaries in every constituency to decide who should be the sole unity candidate at the April 2022 general election. Karácsony may not win the separate primary to be the stand-alone opposition candidate for prime minister – leaders of other parties have an equal claim – but whoever wins must imitate his reassuring manner that tells wavering Hungarians that it is safe to risk a change of government.

And what of us? The UK is not heading towards dictatorship. The police do not hound opposition politicians as they do in Hungary. The full resources of the troll state's media are not used to smear them. But look at this government's attempts to nobble the Electoral Commission, put a rightwing radical in charge of broadcasting regulation and rig the system to the Conservative party's advantage. Unlike in Hungary, Labour and Scottish National party obduracy has scuppered the idea of [electoral pacts](#) that would ensure parties stood aside to allow the candidate with the best chance of beating the Conservative to have a clear run. Nothing can shift their parochial sectarianism.

Fidesz came to power in 2010, the same year the Conservatives took power in the UK. Perhaps because the threat to freedom is greater, Hungarians are prepared to do whatever it takes to stop a one-party state. Meanwhile, their British counterparts are willing to see it stretch on for years without end.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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- [Environment Most plans for new coal power plants scrapped since Paris agreement](#)
- [Climate crisis Four in 10 young people fear having children given the future](#)
- [Britain Last coal power stations to get huge sums to keep lights on](#)
- [Heating Experts condemn plan to install thousands of gas boilers across UK](#)

[Coal](#)

Most plans for new coal plants scrapped since Paris agreement



A coal plant in Nantong in China, which is responsible for more than half of the world's coal plant plans. Photograph: AP

Jillian Ambrose Energy correspondent

Tue 14 Sep 2021 01.01 EDT

The global pipeline of new coal power plants has collapsed since the 2015 [Paris climate agreement](#), according to research that suggests the end of the polluting energy source is in sight.

The report found that more than three-quarters of the world's planned plants have been scrapped since the climate deal was signed, meaning 44 countries no longer have any future coal power plans.

The climate groups behind the report – E3G, Global [Energy](#) Monitor and Ember – said those countries now have the opportunity to join the 40 countries that have already signed up to a “no new coal” commitment to help tackle global carbon emissions.

“Only five years ago, there were so many new coal power plants planned to be built, but most of these have now been either officially halted, or are paused and unlikely to ever be built,” said Dave Jones, from Ember.

“Multiple countries can add their voices to a snowball of public commitments to ‘no new coal’, collectively delivering a key milestone to sealing coal’s fate.”

The remaining coal power plants in the pipeline are spread across 31 countries, half of which have only one planned for the future.

Chris Littlecott, the associate director at E3G, said the economics of coal have become “increasingly uncompetitive in comparison to renewable energy, while the risk of stranded assets has increased”.

The report found that if [China](#), which is responsible for more than half of the world’s coal plant plans, opted to scrap the projects, alongside India, Vietnam, Indonesia, Turkey and Bangladesh, then the number of coal power plants in the pipeline would shrink by almost 90%.

Christine Shearer, the programme director at Global Energy Monitor, and co-author of the report, said that the Cop26 climate talks to be held in Glasgow in November were “an opportune time for the world’s leaders to come together and commit to a world with no new coal plants”.

Alok Sharma, the UK’s Cop26 president, said that keeping global temperatures from rising by more than 1.5C above pre-industrialised levels would be “extremely difficult” without a commitment from countries to phase out coal.

Coal is one of the biggest contributors to the carbon emissions responsible for the climate crisis, and the [UN has said](#) that the use of it must fall by 79%

compared with 2019 levels by the end of the decade if the world hopes to meet the Paris climate agreement targets.

04:35

The climate science behind wildfires: why are they getting worse? – video explainer

Sharma's warning came after ministers from more than 50 countries closed a two-day meeting in London this summer [without full agreement on phasing out coal.](#)

However, Leo Roberts, a researcher at E3G and the author of the report, said: "Those countries still considering new power plants should urgently recognise the inevitability of the global shift away from coal, and avoid the costly mistake of building new projects."

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Climate crisis

Four in 10 young people fear having children due to climate crisis



A Sunrise Movement demonstration in Washington DC last June seeking more action from the Biden administration on the climate crisis. Photograph: Allison Bailey/Rex/Shutterstock

Fiona Harvey Environment correspondent

Tue 14 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Four in 10 young people around the world are hesitant to have children as a result of the climate crisis, and fear that governments are doing too little to prevent climate catastrophe, a poll in 10 countries has found.

Nearly six in 10 young people, aged 16 to 25, were very or extremely worried about climate change, according to the [biggest scientific study yet on climate anxiety and young people](#), published on Tuesday. A similar

number said governments were not protecting them, the planet, or future generations, and felt betrayed by the older generation and governments.

Three-quarters agreed with the statement “the future is frightening”, and more than half felt they would have fewer opportunities than their parents. Nearly half reported feeling distressed or anxious about the climate in a way that was affecting their daily lives and functioning.

The poll of about 10,000 young people covered Australia, Brazil, Finland, France, India, Nigeria, the Philippines, Portugal, the UK and the US. It was paid for by the campaigning organisation Avaaz.

Young climate activists said feelings of anxiety over the climate were now widespread among today’s youth. Mitzi Tan, 23, from the Philippines, said: “I grew up being afraid of drowning in my own bedroom. Society tells me that this anxiety is an irrational fear that needs to be overcome, one that meditation and healthy coping mechanisms will ‘fix’.” At its root, our climate anxiety comes from this deep-set feeling of betrayal because of government inaction. To truly address our growing climate anxiety, we need justice.”

It is now common for young people to worry about having children, according to Luisa Neubauer, a 25-year-old climate activist, who is co-organiser of the school strike movement in Germany and helped achieve the court victory that has forced the German government to re-evaluate its climate policies.

She said: “I meet a lot of young girls, who ask whether it’s still OK to have children. It’s a simple question, yet it tells so much about the climate reality we are living in. We young people realised that just worrying about the climate crisis won’t stop it. So we turned our individual anxiety into collective action. And now, we are fighting everywhere: on the streets, at the courts, in and outside institutions across the globe. Yet governments are still failing us, as emissions are rising to record levels. The appropriate answer to this study would be governments to start acting like they promised they would.”

Earlier this month, [Unicef found that children and young people around the world were bearing the brunt of the climate crisis](#), with 1 billion children at “extreme risk” from the impacts of climate breakdown.

The study, entitled [Young People’s Voices on Climate Anxiety, Government Betrayal and Moral Injury: A Global Phenomenon](#), has been released on a pre-publication basis, while it is under the peer review process, by the scientific journal Lancet Planetary Health. The survey was conducted and analysed by seven academic institutions in the UK, Europe and the US, including the University of Bath, the University of East Anglia, and the Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust.

The poll adds to [previous surveys](#), which have also found [high levels of anxiety](#) about the climate crisis around the world, including [fears about having children](#).

Caroline Hickman, from the University of Bath, Climate Psychology Alliance and co-lead author on the study, said: “This study paints a horrific picture of widespread climate anxiety in our children and young people. It suggests for the first time that high levels of psychological distress in youth is linked to government inaction. Our children’s anxiety is a completely rational reaction given the inadequate responses to climate change they are seeing from governments. What more do governments need to hear to take action?”

Francois Hollande, who was president of France when the Paris agreement was forged in 2015, urged governments meeting in November in Glasgow for the Cop26 UN climate summit to take note. “Six years after the Paris agreement, we must open our eyes to the violence of climate change, to its impact on our planet, but also to the mental health of our youth, as this alarming study shows. We must act urgently and do everything we can to give younger generations a future,” he said.

Energy industry

Britain's last coal power stations to be paid huge sums to keep lights on



The Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station near Nottingham is among the coal-fired plants to benefit from record energy prices. Photograph: eye35.pix/Alamy

[Jillian Ambrose](#) Energy correspondent

Mon 13 Sep 2021 14.40 EDT

Owners of the UK's last remaining coal power stations are in line to be paid record sums to keep the lights on as energy prices reach fresh highs, and could be pushed even higher by lower wind power.

Coal plants have been called on to supply power steadily in recent months, through one of the least windy summers on record since 1961 and sharply rising prices in the wholesale energy market.

The UK's electricity system operator (ESO) spent more than £86m last week alone to keep the lights on, which involved making payments of up to £4,000 per megawatt-hour for fossil fuel power stations to generate electricity at short notice, including the West Burton plant in Nottinghamshire and a coal unit at the [Drax](#) site in North Yorkshire.

Britain has largely been weaned off coal power in recent years, but the remaining plants are available on standby to accept eye-watering offers from National Grid ESO in times of need, such as during cold spikes or low wind conditions . The Ratcliffe-on-Soar coal plant near Nottingham is also in line to benefit from record power prices this week.

[energy prices graphic](#)

The price of electricity on the UK's main power auction rose above £400 per unit for the first time on Monday, while the price of gas surged to a record of 150p per therm.

The increases follow market highs last week. Experts predict that UK wholesale energy prices will climb higher in the days ahead owing to forecasts of low wind speeds, which will limit the country's renewable energy generation.

The price of electricity during Tuesday evening's peak power demand hours has reached a new record of £1,750 a MWh, more than 2,900% higher than the average price over the last decade, according to Bloomberg data.

Prices have soared in recent months owing to [a global gas market surge](#), which followed a cold winter in the northern hemisphere that left gas storage facilities depleted. The record gas price has made electricity more expensive in the UK, where almost half of all electricity is generated in gas plants.

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In addition, the UK has faced a “perfect storm” of power plant outages and low wind speeds that has forced energy prices higher despite demand “not

being very high at the moment”, according to Rajiv Gogna, a partner at LCP [Energy](#) Analytics.

Phil Hewitt, a director at the energy consultancy EnAppSys, added that Wednesday and Thursday looked even more volatile than the start of the week, “so we suspect that this is not the end of the high prices”.

The record market prices are expected to lead to hikes in household energy bills until 2022, plunging more than half a million people in the UK into fuel poverty for the first time and causing [many small energy suppliers to go bust](#).

Clare Moriarty, the chief executive of Citizens Advice, said it was deeply concerning that energy prices were continuing to rise, “meaning we’re likely to see yet another hike in bills next year”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/sep/13/britain-last-coal-power-stations-to-be-paid-huge-sums-to-keep-lights-on-record-energy-prices>

Energy

Experts condemn plan to install thousands of gas boilers across UK



The government's 'preferred option' is for 20,000 new gas boilers to be installed in homes that currently lack central heating. Photograph: Joe Giddens/PA

[Fiona Harvey](#) Environment correspondent

Tue 14 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Energy bill-payers will be asked to subsidise the installation of tens of thousands of new gas boilers across the UK under government plans, at a time when experts say gas boilers should be urgently phased out.

Experts said it was baffling that ministers should be promoting the installation of new fossil fuel boilers, instead of low-carbon dioxide alternatives such as [heat pumps](#).

At least 20,000 new gas boilers will be installed under the energy company obligation (Eco) scheme, which requires energy companies to fund improvements that should cut greenhouse gas emissions. The long-running scheme has been criticised in the past for [providing discounts to well-off households to replace ageing gas boilers](#) with more efficient models, rather than focusing on more difficult but more effective improvements, such as [helping low-income households](#) with home insulation.

In a consultation document, slipped out this summer without fanfare, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy laid out plans for how the Eco should work from March 2022 to March 2026. The [government's "preferred option", shown in the 62-page document](#), is for 20,000 new gas boilers to be installed in homes that currently lack central heating.

A further 25,000 homes will have broken heaters repaired or replaced, which could also involve the repair of gas boilers or the installation of new ones.

Government plans to reduce emissions from home heating, which accounts for roughly 14% of the UK's overall emissions and have remained stubbornly high despite two decades of efforts to reduce them, have been in disarray since the failure of the green homes grant earlier this year.

Under the £2bn green homes grant, announced last summer as part of the [prime minister's promise to "build back greener"](#) from the Covid-19 pandemic, at least 600,000 homes were supposed to be upgraded with insulation, heat pumps and other low-CO₂ improvements. But the scheme was [beset by administrative problems](#) and fewer than 50,000 households received the help envisaged. The scheme was [scrapped after less than six months](#).

A new heat and buildings strategy has been in preparation for months, but has yet to be published, although time is running out before the UK hosts the Cop26 UN climate talks in Glasgow this November, at which all countries will be asked to come up with concrete plans for slashing emissions.

Ministers are understood to be nervous about proposals that would require all households with gas boilers – the dominant form of home heating in the UK – to rip them out and replace them in the next decade. The Treasury has also blocked proposals to subsidise the switch to low-CO₂ heat pumps or electric boilers, and calls for ministers to ban new gas boilers from 2025.

Experts said the effective subsidies for new gas boilers ran contrary to the government's targets on cutting greenhouse gas emissions, by 68% by 2030, and by 78% by 2035, compared with 1990 levels.

Jess Ralston, analyst at the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit, said: “While it’s important that vulnerable households are supported in staying warm at home, installing new fossil fuel boilers – which contribute to harmful air pollution in homes that are already more likely to have poor air quality – just means that fuel-poor families are locked into dirtier, more expensive and more unhealthy heating systems for longer. It’s wasteful and baffling when it’s clear that a clean heating revolution is just around the corner and gas prices are rocketing.”

Parallel plans for improving the energy efficiency of social housing have ruled out fossil fuel boilers, in favour of low-CO₂ alternatives.

“Making this the norm – instead of continuing to rely on outdated, unhealthy and inefficient technology – would help boost the government’s credentials on green homes while placing households suffering from fuel poverty in prime position for Britain’s cleaner, healthier heating future,” Ralston added.

Jan Rosenow, Europe director at the Regulatory Assistance Project, said: “Paying people to install new heating systems running on fossil fuels is incompatible with the UK’s climate goals. Rather than subsidising gas boilers we urgently need a policy to support the transition to clean heating. Other countries have stopped funding new fossil heating systems through public programmes. The UK should lead by example a few months before the world will gather in Glasgow to hold [Cop26] climate talks.”

A spokesperson for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy said: “While we remain committed to transitioning away from gas boilers over the next 15 years, we make no apology for supporting low-

income households in the short term to replace a limited number of the most inefficient gas boilers, thereby cutting energy bills and CO₂ emissions. The majority of the 3.3m measures installed under the energy company obligation so far are insulation measures, and we expect that to continue in the future.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/sep/14/experts-condemn-plan-install-thousands-gas-boilers-uk>

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Met Gala 2021: stars explore ‘American independence’ theme – in pictures

Met gala co-chair Billie Eilish is in custom Oscar de la Renta. Photograph: Stephen Lovekin/Rex/Shutterstock

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Met Gala 2021

The Met Gala 2021: eight key moments from fashion's big night

02:25

The weird, the wonderful and the political: highlights from the 2021 Met Gala red carpet

[Michael Sun](#), [Rafqa Touma](#) and [Alyx Gorman](#)

Tue 14 Sep 2021 00.58 EDT

With crowds of Black Lives Matter protesters outside, and a vaccine mandate inside, the much-delayed Met Gala finally went ahead in New York on Monday evening. The event, usually held on the first Monday in May, was cancelled in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and rescheduled this year for the same reason.

The 2021 event was themed “American independence” and co-chaired by the singer Billie Eilish, the tennis pro Naomi Osaka, the actor Timothée Chalamet and the poet Amanda Gorman – all Gen Z darlings.

The annual fundraising event for the Costume Institute Gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Arts has become simultaneously the Oscars and the Olympics of fashion. It also marks the opening of the institute’s major annual exhibition. That show, [In America: A Lexicon of Fashion](#), is more overtly political than usual this year. Focusing on a broad-ranging selection of often-overlooked designers, its curator, Andrew Bolton, told the Guardian the exhibition “very much came out of the [Black Lives Matter](#) movement”.

Politics was overt on the red carpet too, with outfits that spoke to income and gender inequality – and even proposed some solutions.

AOC’s ‘Tax the Rich’ reveal

Typically, the politics of fashion is a subtle business, with colour or cut used to convey a message. So it was with the front of congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez' dress at her first Met Gala appearance. The gown was suffragette white, with tuxedo detailing more typically seen in menswear. But when she turned around, the message was loud and clear: "Tax the Rich" printed in bold, red typeface across the entire back bodice.

The dress was designed by Aurora James, the creative director of Brother Vellis. James is a vocal supporter of, in her words, "economic justice". In 2020, she started the 15% Pledge – a call to major retailers in the US to ensure at least 15% of their shelf space is dedicated to black-owned businesses, a campaign that Sephora, West Elm and Vogue have signed up to. On the red carpet, she told Vogue that the campaign had directed \$10bn towards Black businesses to date.

But, as New York Times' fashion editor, Vanessa Friedman, notes, the optics are complicated.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez attending the \$35,000-a-ticket #MetGala in a Brother Vellies gown blaring "Tax the Rich" is a complicated proposition. pic.twitter.com/prxOojWxwx

— Vanessa Friedman (@VVFriedman) [September 14, 2021](#)

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was not the only attendee in a slogan gown. The model and actor Cara Delevingne, also in white and red, had "Peg the patriarchy" printed across her chest, while the congresswoman Carolyn Maloney wore a gown in the full spectrum of suffragette shades (green, white and violet – for "give women votes") that read "Equal rights for women" across two long trains falling from her shoulders. Unfortunately, the secretary of the interior, Deb Haaland, whose use of fashion is the most skilful in US politics today, was not in attendance.

Bennifer share a masked-up kiss

Bennifer giving the people what they want #MetGala
<https://pic.twitter.com/oHjW7EGOOK> pic.twitter.com/RHIOXOllkw

— The Cut (@TheCut) [September 14, 2021](#)

The reunion of Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck has caused significant, nostalgic delight. Lopez's Ralph Lauren outfit was also an exercise in remembrance, with a plunging neckline that harked back to her Versace Oscars dress (a look so widely sought-after that it prompted Google to [invent image search](#)) and a matching cowboy hat. Her association with matching cowboy hats predates Affleck – she wore a cream one at the 1998 VMAs, with Mark Wahlberg on her arm.

While the armchair fashion historians might praise this multitude of nods, the armchair epidemiologists will probably despair the kiss she shared with Affleck, since health advice on mask wearing suggests you should not touch the outside of them.

Lil Nas X pulls a Gaga

After [taking home video of the year](#) at the 2021 MTV Video Music awards on Sunday in a lilac [half-suit half-gown](#), the US rapper Lil Nas X made his debut at the Met Gala with an even more elaborate show, inspired by a coterie of great pop divas.

Dressed all in gold by Versace, the performer arrived draped in a regal velvet cape (echoing Rihanna's [omelette gown](#) from 2015, with a bit of King Henry VIII). He threw this off to reveal a reflective suit of armour beneath (Sweet Dreams-era Beyoncé, with a bit of Tin Man). Then he unclasped that to show off his final look: a crystal-studded catsuit (every popstar, at some point).

Lil Nas X told reporters on the carpet that the drawn-out show was symbolic of his “coming out of his shell” over the past year. Though show-stealing, costume changes are not an unprecedented move, with the rapper's look being likened to Lady Gaga's [four-piece strip-down](#) at the 2019 Met Gala.



Lil Nas X shows off his three looks. Composite: Mike Coppola/Getty/Rex

Frank Ocean's mechanical baby date

Frank Ocean brought a new meaning to “bring your child to work day”. Accompanying him was a ghoulish robotic baby whose head appeared to move on its own accord, meeting photographers with a steely, horrifying gaze. Not since Rosemary’s have we seen a baby this devilish; its face and skin a shock of lime green. Decked out in a printed onesie, the infant – whose name is Cody – matched its father’s freshly dyed buzzcut.

The soulful [softboi](#) (Frank, not Cody) is no stranger to red-carpet absurdism. In 2019 he arrived at the otherwise colourful camp-themed Met Gala in a sober black-and-white set, drawing comparisons to valets and security guards, and immediately inciting [furious debate](#) about the definition of camp itself.

The [#MetGala](#) is always fun with a friend. [#FrankOcean](#) agrees. □
[#MetInAmerica](#) pic.twitter.com/6mJRG3iOW7

— The Metropolitan Museum of Art (@metmuseum) [September 14, 2021](#)

This year the connection between a slime-hued baby and the gala's America theme isn't yet clear but the theorising has already begun: a [Shrek reference](#), a return to [dadcore](#), or just this season's hottest [accessory](#).

Frank Ocean really brought this to the met gala
pic.twitter.com/vbHztgO6wb

— Ryan (@blackpinkspears) [September 13, 2021](#)

Frank Ocean took a robotic baby to the Met Gala as an accessory that complements his hair color. I have no choice, but to love it.
pic.twitter.com/ySLooh1iUy

— Dedee □ (@thoughtfulbae) [September 14, 2021](#)

Whoopi Goldberg on vaccines

The edict that all guests be vaccinated precluded at least one star from attending: [Nicki Minaj](#). Minaj gained instant infamy for tweeting a story from a famously reliable source (a friend of her cousin) involving intimate swelling and a cancelled wedding, by way of explanation for her absence.

Whoopi Goldberg, on the other hand, was all for the vaccine mandate. In a red carpet interview, she said: "If you're not going to get vaccinated you really have to question where you stand in the country."

Kim Kardashian West covers up

For the second time this week, Kim Kardashian West wore an all-black, fetish-inspired outfit with her face fully covered. The first look, designed by Balenciaga, prompted speculation that the reality star and entrepreneur had reunited with her ex-husband Kanye West.

This, it turns out, was merely a dress-rehearsal, since her Met Gala gown was designed by West himself.

When Kardashian-West first appeared at the Met Gala in 2013, heavily pregnant in a tight floral dress, she quickly became the subject of memes, many of which compared her to a couch. In 2019, before the last Met Gala, she tweeted that the stress and insecurity of that moment had brought her to tears after the event, but that she had eventually come to love the look. That resilience will serve her well, since her ability to inspire internet humorists certainly hasn't waned.

me and my anxiety when i go out [#MetGala](#) [#MetGala2021](#)
pic.twitter.com/nqP8JQ2Fc3

— kristen□ (@kristen_siebs) [September 14, 2021](#)

Billie Eilish's bargaining power

Continuing her [run of references](#) to classic glamour, Eilish paid homage to [Old Hollywood](#) in a peachy Oscar de la Renta ballgown complete with a four-metre train floating down the [famously hazardous stairs](#) of the Met Gala.

The couture came with a caveat, though: that the fashion house stop using fur. "I find it shocking that wearing fur isn't completely outlawed at this point in 2021," Eilish – who is a vegan and animal rights activist – said in a statement to [Vogue](#). "I am so beyond thrilled [to] ... have made a change that not only makes an impact for the greater good for animals but also for our planet and the environment."

There have been calls in the past for the company to stop using fur, including from its own creative directors, who [questioned its contemporary relevance](#). But it wasn't until Eilish's stipulation that the brand's chief executive, Alex Bolen, relented. "I have to surround myself with people with different points of view," he told the [New York Times](#).

Billie Eilish only agreed to wear Oscar de la Renta at the [#MetGala](#) if the company promised to terminate all fur sales!!
<https://t.co/P6GAYyBX17> pic.twitter.com/LhV2hbDl4e

— Jarett Wieselman (@JarettSays) [September 13, 2021](#)

Weighty questions



Simone Biles is helped up the stairs. Photograph: Taylor Hill/WireImage

The subject of celebrities' weight should probably be off-limits on and off the red carpet but, when it comes to the heft of their dresses, the gymnast Simone Biles and the model Precious Lee were both happy to share. Biles' crystal-encrusted silver gown, from Beckett Fogg and Piotrek Panszczyk's label Area, clocked in at 40kg (88lb). While the gymnast showed considerable strength in staying upright at all, she did have a team of six people helping her up the notoriously tricky steps.

Lee, also wearing Area, shouldered 45kg of crystals with remarkable elegance too.

This article was amended on 16 September 2021 to correct the spelling of Whoopi Goldberg and Nicki Minaj's names

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Delayed gratification ... (clockwise from top left) Schitt's Creek; Line of Duty; Billy Eilish, This Country; The Morning Show; Lizzo; Ted Lasso. Composite: Guardian/Apple/Invision/AP/PR/BBC/World Productions/BBC/Sophie Mutevelian

Hurry up and wait: the joys of slow culture

Delayed gratification ... (clockwise from top left) Schitt's Creek; Line of Duty; Billy Eilish, This Country; The Morning Show; Lizzo; Ted Lasso. Composite: Guardian/Apple/Invision/AP/PR/BBC/World Productions/BBC/Sophie Mutevelian

by [Rachel Aroesti](#)

Tue 14 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

If one thing guarantees a TV hit in 2021, it's a lukewarm reception. Take [Ted Lasso](#), a sitcom about a perky, naive American football coach transplanted on to British soil. Its first season premiered last summer to

barely any fanfare – but little by little came mass critical reconsideration. The show ended up a smash hit, breaking the record for most Emmy nominations for a first season of a comedy. Its second series, concluding next month, has made it one of the most talked-about shows of the year.

The Guide – sign up for our weekly look at the best in pop culture.

Then there is [The Morning Show](#), which stars Jennifer Aniston and Reese Witherspoon as breakfast news anchors and returns to Apple TV+ for season two this month. Despite debuting in 2019 to a tepid response, by the end of its first run reviewers were harmonising about a change of heart. Even [Succession](#), back soon for a wildly anticipated third series, was greeted with some ambivalence at first, something its creator Jesse Armstrong took in his stride – even hinting it was an intentional feature when he recently described it as “a prickly pear of a show”.



Slow TV ... Jeremy Strong in Succession. Photograph: HBO

The sleeper hit has always existed but its contemporary pervasiveness is startling. The lightning-fast nature of social media seems primed for the quickly metabolised, soon-forgotten craze; the instantaneous access occasioned by streaming suggests a world with no time to foster slow-burn

success. Yet we have become strangely accommodating to the pop-cultural grower.

Partly, we have the pandemic to thank. While there were flash-in-the-pan sensations during lockdown (notably [Tiger King](#)), the fact that film and television production stalled meant demand outstripped supply. The internet was suddenly laden with recommendations for underrated streaming delights. It gave people a chance to catch their breath: with more time than usual on their hands, and freed temporarily from the constant stream of brand new “must-see”, viewers could discover things on their own terms.

There were unpredictable developments. [Lad: A Yorkshire Story](#), an unsung low-budget film from 2011, became a lockdown hit, amassing nearly 2m views. The video game [Among Us](#), a space-themed multiplayer in which certain users secretly sabotage the team, garnered little attention in 2018 but erupted in popularity last year. Its guessing game conceit offered an escape from the stress of the pandemic and let players socialise with friends during lockdown.



Moor's the pity ... *Lad: A Yorkshire Story*. Photograph: Chris Hodgson

One of the biggest Covid TV successes was [Schitt's Creek](#), a comfort watch that, coincidentally, mined comedy from a family's uncomfortable

confinement. The show saw a serious uptick in popularity as the first lockdown set in – although its slow-burn trajectory pre-dates the pandemic. The Canadian sitcom, created by and starring father-and-son duo Dan and Eugene Levy, originally aired in the US on an obscure channel called Pop TV.

It only reached wider attention after its third season was picked up by Netflix – a phenomenon known as “the Netflix bump” (previous recipients include *Breaking Bad*). Last year, the show swept the Emmys, winning all seven major comedy awards. It was a similar slow-burn success story for the Cotswolds-set mockumentary *This Country* – a show about being cut off from wider society in a supposed rural idyll – which met with virtual silence in 2017. By the time its third series concluded in early 2020, it was a ratings triumph, attracting a staggering 52m iPlayer requests.

Streaming has reconfigured the pop culture timeline. Previously, a sleeper hit would develop linearly (Nirvana’s 1991 album *Nevermind* spent four months climbing the charts), often directed by cultural gatekeepers, such as TV channels repeating certain programmes (*The Office* gained traction following a sleepy summer debut in 2001). On-demand streaming has derailed those trajectories: something can flop at first, never get another chance from the powers that be, and still find its crowd years later.

Songs, especially, have a longer window for potential success than they once did. Sleeper superstar [Lizzo](#) rose from indie concern to the mainstream in 2019, coinciding with the release of her third album, *Cuz I Love You*. Yet it was two older tracks – *Good As Hell* (2016) and *Truth Hurts* (2017) – that cemented her position as the year’s breakout icon. The latter gained massive traction after going viral on TikTok and appearing on the soundtrack to Netflix film *Someone Great*; the former was simply rediscovered by new converts.

Novelty still drives the web to a degree – but that novelty may come from the past. TikTok has a determinedly untimely approach to pop culture, resurrecting songs both ancient and merely dated. It might tap into shared nostalgia (the renewed interest in Natasha Bedingfield’s 2004 single *Unwritten*) or grant an audience to a song that never had one: last year,

obscure Orlando indie duo Sales had two songs – 2013's *Renee* and 2014's *Chinese New Year* – go viral, the former soundtracking 1.2m TikTok clips to date.

While there is often a random aspect to these breakthroughs, it increasingly feels as if pop culture is being designed for the slow burn. Recently named the UK's most-watched drama of the century, *Line of Duty* was always brilliant, but such a feat would have been impossible to predict by the end of the deliberately knotty, modestly viewed first series in 2012. It became a word-of-mouth hit, with streaming apparently hardwired into its success: this year's sixth series repeatedly referenced clues, characters and plots from the first, necessitating a mass rewatch. It might be a mirage, but in retrospect it seems as though *Line of Duty* was always engineered for the long haul.



Coasting along ... *The White Lotus*. Photograph: HBO

Similarly, two of the year's most-anticipated albums look like being growers. Lorde's [Solar Power](#) is a mellow, unshowy record that slowly ingratiates itself; Billie Eilish's [Happier Than Ever](#) is cut from a similar, if more subdued, cloth – perhaps because, in both cases, precocious superstardom has left their makers less interested in courting celebrity and more intent on securing longevity and sustainability. The series of this summer, meanwhile, was Mike White's HBO drama [The White Lotus](#),

which for all the slightly hysterical hype turned out to be a nifty exercise in slow-burn appeal. Hooking the viewer in with a mysterious killing, it proceeded to offer a sun-baked meditation on privilege and identity politics that was subtle and simmering.

The internet made culture limitless and the mainstream is more fractured than ever. It creates the impression of an infinite pop-culture stream, all of it eminently disposable. The slow burn cuts through this malaise: there is a sense that despite the overwhelming onslaught of material, quality will eventually triumph.

In fact, it may be even more likely to. In the past, pop's objective was to shift CDs on the week of release, TV aimed to attract viewers during broadcast and most films only had a limited time to make their box-office mark. The point was to get people to pay for these things once. Nowadays, repeat streams – or consolidated viewing figures – are the key to success in all mediums. Could the internet, counter to most logic, actually be making pop culture less transient? We'll just have to wait and see.

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The Great British Bake Off 2021: this year's contestants – ranked!



Back in the tent ... The Great British Bake Off.



[Stuart Heritage](#)

[@stuheritage](#)

Tue 14 Sep 2021 04.24 EDT

A new series of [The Great British Bake Off](#) is upon us. In just one week, 12 contestants will enter a big tent and be judged on their ability to create a wide variety of impractical food on demand. It must be daunting for them, but not as daunting as this – I am about to rank The Great British Bake Off 2021 contestants purely on the state of their biographies. Come back in a few weeks and you'll see how right I was about all these people.

12. Chigs, 40, Leicestershire



Photograph: Mark Bourdillon/Love Productions

This might not be fair, but I have already taken against Chigs. Why? Because he says he only started baking during lockdown. He took it up on a whim, then immediately found a place on The Great British Bake Off. Do you know what I did during lockdown, Chigs? Do you? I went bald, put on loads of weight and just felt really sad all the time. Honestly, the absolute cheek of you.

11. Giuseppe, 45, Bristol



Here's why I am worried about Giuseppe. His father was a professional chef and I'm terrified he entered Bake Off as part of some ongoing paternal psychodrama. I'm assuming he has for ever lived in the shadow of his domineering father and that his participation on Bake Off is down to a pathological need to receive the emotional validation he never felt as a child. Also, he says the only confectionery he wants his children to eat is his homemade stuff. The cycle continues.

10. Maggie, 70, Dorset



A retired midwife, Maggie sounds almost unimaginably active. She canoes and sails and likes to set off on adventures in her camper van. However, she does state that, if she were a showstopper, she would be a “modern sculpture of a woman holding a baby”. Maybe I’m reading too much into this, but it does sound a little like she is advocating the eating of children. Potentially a monster!

9. Lizzie, 28, Liverpool



Lizzie is, by her own admission, a frantic and messy person. But she is also studying for a criminology degree, which makes me believe that she is less a human being and more the cliched lead character of an as yet unmade ITV3 detective drama. As such, I don't think she'll be very good at baking.

8. Jairzeno, 51, London



Trinidad-born Jairzeno claims that “baking is like breathing”, which gives me tremendous anxiety about the sensation of suffocating in flour. More worrying, though, is Jairzeno’s stated claim that one of his hobbies is going for walks with his partner, looking for shapes in nature that can inspire his next bake. Will everything he cooks on Bake Off look like a dog poo?

7. George, 34, London



George seems like a very sweet man and is the only contestant this year to own a miniature zoo, so it pains me to point out that he has mid-table mediocrity written all over him. He describes his baking style as “shabby chic”, which sounds like it might be code for “desperately unhygienic”. He answered the Q&A question: “You are a showstopper – what would you be and why?” with a terrified: “I have no idea.” Just say you’re ice-cream or something, George. It isn’t difficult.

6. Tom, 28, Kent



Another of the questions asked of the contestants on the Bake Off press release is: "If you had to make a selfie biscuit of yourself, what would it look like and why?" Tom says he would make a biscuit based on the time he went camping on a clifftop with his sister, when a storm hit and his tent blew out to sea. Tom is an agent of chaos and should not be treated lightly.

5. Freya, 19, North Yorkshire



I'm a big fan of Freya, for one simple reason. Part of the Bake Off contestant biographies involves answering what item they would take to a desert island. A worrying amount of contestants answered with items like "a can opener" or "a spatula", which are genuinely stupid things to pick. Freya, though? Vegetable seeds. Freya is nobody's fool. She'll go far.

4. Rochica, 27, Birmingham



Rochica grew up dreaming of dancing and only took up baking when injury robbed her of achieving her life's ambition. Now, I've seen Black Swan. I know what a mess of resentment Rochica must be. This is just her backup plan. If she could magically uninjure herself, do you really think she would be cooking macaroons for Prue Leith? Of course not. She would be fulfilling her dream of being a world-famous dancer. She probably hates being in that tent. This woman is an unexploded bomb.

3. Amanda, 56, London



We have every right to fear Amanda. A detective with the Metropolitan police, Amanda is a) clearly very intelligent and b) possibly willing to let a succession of crimes go unsolved so she can cook a doughnut for Paul Hollywood. Further cause for concern comes in her official contestant Q&A, where she reveals that during lockdown “I baked things I never imagined I could bake, like a macaron?!??!?!?” Anybody who demonstrates this cavalier attitude to punctuation should be treated as a threat.

2. Crystelle, 26, London



I have to level with you here, Crystelle is my wildcard pick for Bake Off 2021. On paper – and remember, at this stage, paper is all I have to go on – she sounds like a nightmare. She admits to succumbing to stress very easily and mentions her love of karaoke so many times in her press bio that she may be a flat-out security risk. But you know what? Maybe what the Bake Off tent needs more than anything is a full dose of screaming mayhem.

1. Jürgen, 56, Sussex



I am already deeply in love with Jürgen. He's a Germany-born physicist who admits to lending his exacting scientific standards to his baking. He claims that his first thought when told he was going to appear on Bake Off was, quite sensibly: "Do I really want to do this?" And remember that question about what item the contestants would like to bring to a desert island? Jürgen chose a knife. This is the closest we will ever get to having the Terminator appear on Bake Off. This man will go all the way.

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Coronavirus

‘The virus is painfully real’: vaccine hesitant people are dying – and their loved ones want the world to listen



‘I have never experienced grief like it’ ... (from left) Marcus Birks, who died aged 40 from Covid, his wife, Lis, and best friend, Matt Wynter. Photograph: Handout



Sirin Kale

Tue 14 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Matt Wynter, a 42-year-old music agent from Leek, Staffordshire, was working out in his local gym in mid-August when he saw, to his great surprise, that his best friend, Marcus Birks, was on the television. He jumped off the elliptical trainer and listened carefully.

The first thing he noticed was that Birks, who was also from Leek and a performer with the dance group Cappella, looked terrible. He was gasping for breath and his face was pale. “Marcus would never usually have gone on TV without having done his hair and had a shave,” Wynter says.

Breathing heavily from his intensive care unit bed at Royal Stoke university hospital, Birks told [the BBC interviewer](#) that he had been wrong about Covid-19. “If you haven’t been ill,” he said, “you don’t think you’re going to get ill, so you listen to the [anti-vaccine] stuff.” He spoke of his regret at not being vaccinated. “First thing I am going [to] tell all my family to do is get the vaccine and [then] anybody I see,” he said. “And as soon as I can get it, I am definitely getting it.”

Birks had rejected the vaccine because he thought it had been rushed through. “He thought it was an emergency vaccine,” says Wynter, “and he

wanted to wait it out a little bit, before taking it.” Birks was the sort of person who was always “very anti putting anything in his body at all”, Wynter says. He wouldn’t drink or touch drugs – he wouldn’t even take paracetamol for a headache. And besides, Birks was a fitness enthusiast, going to the gym five times a week, so he figured that if he got Covid, he would most likely be fine.

Watching his interview, Wynter had never been so proud of his best friend. “It takes a lot of balls to stand up there and admit that maybe you made the wrong decision and had the wrong views,” he said. He texted Birks straight away. “I’m really proud of you mate, you’re a hero.” Birks responded from his hospital bed: “Thanks man, that was mad.”



Matt Wynter (centre) with Lis and Marcus Birks.

Birks never got a chance to get out of hospital and get vaccinated. He died [on 27 August, aged 40](#). He left behind his wife and musical partner, Lis, who is pregnant with their first child. (Wynter is speaking with Lis’s blessing.) “I have never experienced grief like it,” says Wynter.

In the UK and other developed nations such as France and the US, Covid-19 has become a pandemic of the unvaccinated. Last month, Prof Chris Whitty, England’s chief medical officer, [tweeted that](#): “The majority of our

hospitalised Covid patients are unvaccinated and regret delaying [their vaccines].” About [60% of all hospitalisations](#) due to Covid in the UK are of unvaccinated people. An [Office for National Statistics report published on Monday](#) says that in the first six months of 2021, Covid was involved in 37.4% of deaths in unvaccinated people – and just 0.8% of deaths in fully vaccinated people.

While 80% of the UK adult population is fully vaccinated (and 89% have received a first dose, indicating they will go on to be fully vaccinated), vaccine uptake rates have been tapering off in [virtually all regions of the UK](#). For months, healthcare professionals have been sounding the alarm about the unvaccinated people they’re treating for Covid-19. “What we are seeing right now,” says Dr David Windsor, a critical care consultant working with Covid-19 patients in south-west England, “is a large number of unvaccinated people coming into hospital – far more than we would expect.”

Windsor tells me that he hasn’t had a single death of a vaccinated person in his unit in the past month. “I’ve seen hundreds of patients,” he says, “who would normally have succumbed to Covid, who have survived because they’re double-vaccinated.” By contrast, the unvaccinated patients he’s treating are sometimes in their 20s and 30s, and desperately sick. “It’s emotionally a really hard thing,” Windsor says, “when you know this disease can be prevented. Especially for the nursing staff, who are with these patients for 12 hours at a time. It’s heartbreakingly.”

For the most part, when an unvaccinated person dies of Covid-19, their families grieve privately. It is not hard to see why: the internet is a callous place. Social media trolls greet the death of unvaccinated people with jubilant celebration, as if they themselves never made a bad judgment call. Trolls congregate on the Facebook page of an [unvaccinated Bournemouth solicitor](#), Leslie Lawrenson, who died of Covid-19 after uploading videos claiming that Covid-19 was “nothing to be afraid of”. “The world is a slightly better place now,” one user writes. “Would you look at that!” crows another. “Natural selection.” There is even a Reddit community, [r/HermanCainAward](#), named for the former Republican presidential candidate who died of Covid-19 after opposing mask mandates. Its 138,000 members swap stories in triumphalist tones about unvaccinated people who died of Covid-19.

Birks, too, has been the subject of online sniping. “Anti-vaxxer musician dies from Covid” read a headline on Mail Online. “People need to show empathy for the situation,” Wynter says. “Just because someone has an opinion on something doesn’t mean they deserve the worst thing to happen to them. There are thousands of people who don’t agree with vaccinations. That doesn’t mean this should happen to them. I never met a person who would put people before himself more than Marcus. He was the one person who would be with you through thick and thin.”

Despite the gloating misanthropes, some people are speaking out about the deaths of their Covid-sceptic friends and relatives, in the hope of encouraging unvaccinated people to ignore social media misinformation and get vaccinated. “If even a few people get vaccinated because of what I say,” says Wynter, “then it’s worth it.” It is, after all, what Birks would have wanted. “I know,” Wynter says, “the reason he did that interview was because he wanted people to see how serious it was, and how real it was, and he had no pride in admitting that he should have taken the vaccine. And he didn’t want anyone else to make the same mistake that he did.”

Jaden (not his real name), a 44-year-old business owner from the West Midlands, wasn’t an anti-vaxxer, even if later in life he would sometimes associate with them at the anti-lockdown rallies he attended before he died of Covid-19. “He was a gentle giant,” says his wife, Priti, 41, a commercial director. “Caring. He’d listen to people. He wouldn’t necessarily agree with them, but he’d listen.” They had been married for 20 years, and had two sons. (At her sons’ request, Priti is speaking under a pseudonym.)

Jaden was a loving, free-spirited, family-oriented man. He practised yoga and meditation, seldom drank alcohol, and ate a mostly plant-based diet. “I don’t want to call him a hippy,” Priti says, “but he was edging towards it.” He once took an online quiz to determine his political beliefs and came out as a libertarian.

When the pandemic began, Jaden’s counter-establishment beliefs widened from a hairline fracture into a vertiginous fissure. A major reason for his disenchantment with government policy was the fact that he was excluded from most support, as was Priti, because they were limited-company

directors. “It impacted him heavily,” Priti says. “We’d worked forever and paid loads of taxes and didn’t get anything.” This, says Prof Karen Douglas of the University of Kent, is a routine driver of conspiratorial beliefs. “Feeling alienated and disenfranchised is associated with greater belief in conspiracy theories,” she says. “People tend to believe in conspiracy theories when they lack power, are part of a minority group, or are disadvantaged.”

On social media, Jaden began to post anti-lockdown messages. In May 2020, he described the lockdown restrictions in a Facebook post as the “worst interference in personal liberties [in] our history”; in September and October, he attended anti-lockdown protests alongside figures such as the conspiracy theorist Piers Corbyn. “Electrifying energy!”, he captioned a picture of the crowd at the protest.

Jaden refused to wear a mask, meaning that Priti did the shopping. “He was an anti-masker,” says Priti. “I’m not going to lie.” Jaden felt the government didn’t have the right to make people wear masks, and that it had equivocated on its position on mask-wearing. (After initially disputing the evidence on masks, the government made face masks compulsory on public transport and in NHS hospitals in England and Wales on 15 June 2020.) “One of the most important factors in social influence,” says Douglas, “especially when a smaller group is trying to persuade the majority to do something, is to be consistent in the message. When inconsistencies creep into an argument, it’s less likely that the masses will be persuaded.”

Jaden did believe the pandemic was real. “But he didn’t approve of the masks and the chopping and changing by the government, and being told what to do,” Priti says. Jaden believed that if he got Covid-19, he would be fine. Priti does not think he would have taken the vaccine, had it been offered to him. (He died before the rollout reached his age group.)

After Jaden fell ill with Covid-19 in January, his perspective shifted. One day Priti found him on the sofa, browsing face masks on his phone. “He said: ‘This Ted Baker mask looks nice, I’ll get this one,’” remembers Priti. On social media, Jaden was repentant. “For the past 10 months,” he wrote on Facebook in January, “those of you that have stayed connected to me have seen posts that can now be described as grossly wrong on the subject of lockdowns, masks, and restrictions … I apologise to all those that I have

offended and argued with. If you are still in the Covid-19 hoax or Covid overreaction camp, please believe the virus is painfully real.”

Jaden died of Covid-19 in February 2021. Priti believes that, had he recovered, he would have had the vaccine. She is talking with me in the hope of encouraging others to get the jab. “He was scared,” says Priti of his final days. “He didn’t want to die.”

Being young, fit and health-conscious; politically engaged; a free thinker; excluded from government support; headstrong and opinionated. If there was a bingo scorecard for the type of people likely to reject mask mandates and vaccinations, Jaden and Birks would get a full house.

“What tends to underpin conspiracy theories and beliefs,” says Dr Susannah Kola-Palmer, an expert in health psychology at the University of Huddersfield, “is that they come from a place of strong emotion, be that resentment, discontent, or fear.” She tells me that anti-vaxxers or vaccine-hesitant people tend to be far-left or far-right politically, have lower trust in authority, get most of their Covid information from social media, and score lower on civic responsibility tests.

Another crucial reason why people may reject vaccinations: “They have lower benefit perceptions,” says Kola-Palmer, “meaning they are less likely to believe that the vaccine will be beneficial to them.” It is not that men such as Jaden and Birks believed the fruitier (and often antisemitic) conspiracy theories. They did not think that Covid-19 was a hoax, or a scheme by evil overlords to microchip the global population. But they *did* fatally miscalculate the risk-benefit ratio of vaccination versus non-vaccination. “When you’re young, fit and healthy,” says Wynter, “you think you can get through anything. You don’t realise how fragile life is, and how it can be gone so quickly.”

Jaden and Birks exhibited optimism bias: our tendency to believe that negative events in the future are less likely to happen to us than the real-world data suggests. “People tend to take in and encode positive information about their own future more than negative information,” is how Prof Tali Sharot, a cognitive neuroscientist at University College London, puts it.

Imagine that you are a 60-year-old woman and you read online that women are less likely to fall ill from Covid than men. “You think to yourself,” says Sharot, “well, my likelihood is not as high as I thought.” But if you also read that people in their 60s are more vulnerable to Covid, you discount this information, telling yourself that you work out and eat healthily and are unlikely to get sick. “It’s not that you’re totally ignoring the negative information,” says Sharot. “It’s just that you’re putting less weight on the negatives than the positives.”

There is a reason that about half of the 20% of the population who do not exhibit optimism bias are clinically depressed, and the other half probably have a predisposition to depression, but just don’t know it yet. Optimism is a protective carapace that shields us from the chaotic unpredictability of the world. It is the mantra that bad things can and do happen, but not to me, or the people I love. Optimism bias enables us to embrace all of the things that make life worth living – falling in love, having children, going on holiday, swimming in the sea – without becoming consumed by the certainty that our partners will die and our children will be abducted by paedophiles and our plane will be hijacked by terrorists before we are finally eaten by sharks. “Optimism bias is necessary,” says Sharot. “It keeps us healthy and keeps us going.”

Optimism bias is a gift. Optimism bias keeps us happy, healthy, and sane. Optimism bias keeps us alive – most of the time. But for Jaden and Birks, optimism bias was a fatal miscalculation.

Optimism bias can help explain why some people reject vaccines. But this is not to say that we should entirely let these vaccine-refusers off the hook. There are many people who can’t get vaccinated for health reasons, and every healthy person who rejects vaccination imperils the wellbeing of others, by further enabling the virus to spread. Priti is vaccinated, but she defends the rights of others to reject vaccines – some of the people in her life aren’t vaccinated, even after knowing what happened to Jaden. “It’s their personal choice,” she says, sounding fatigued. “I can’t be bothered to be angry with them. Because what’s the point? It’s not going to make me feel better.”

There is clear daylight between vaccine-hesitant people such as Jaden and Birks, and full-blown anti-vaxxers. When anti-vaxxers fall ill with Covid-19, the public's reserves of sympathy are justifiably limited: these are, after all, people who often proselytise misinformation about vaccination to impressionable people, encouraging them to reject medical science in favour of quack cures such as ivermectin or bleach.

In the US, the influential podcaster Joe Rogan has [touted the controversial ivermectin](#) as a treatment for Covid-19, while people have been hospitalised after drinking disinfectant at the suggestion of Donald Trump. Closer to home, the anti-vaxxer conspiracy theorist and ex-nurse Kate Shemirani has [suggested that](#) NHS staff should be executed like Nazi war criminals for their role in carrying out vaccinations, has shared antisemitic misinformation about the origins of the pandemic, which she puts down to a shadowy global cabal seeking to control the world population, and has compared public health restrictions to the Holocaust. GPs have faced abuse [from bellicose anti-vaxxers](#) who turn up at surgeries to confront staff providing the vaccine, even going so far as to accuse them of war crimes, and BBC reporters have [received death threats](#) and [been harassed in the street](#) by people who think Covid-19 is a giant hoax.

But it is the stories of these hardened anti-vaxxers that can possibly do the most to shift perceptions among their friends, family and peers. “We know some good will come out of this for sure,” says Mark Valentine, a 65-year-old trial consultant from Wendell, North Carolina. His brother, the Nashville, Tennessee-based conservative radio talkshow host Phil Valentine, died from Covid-19 in August, aged 61. “We have had dozens of people who have written in to tell us they got vaccinated as a result of what happened to Phil.

“People would love nothing better than to dance on his grave because he was an anti-vax person,” adds Mark. “But there’s no evidence to support that.” Now it is true that Phil did suggest that people with underlying conditions should get vaccinated, but this nuance may have been lost on his listeners, who heard Phil rail against mask mandates, compare the vaccination status badges worn by medical personnel to the yellow stars pressed on Jewish people in Nazi Germany, and even perform a [parody song](#), Vaxman, set to the tune of the Beatles’ 1966 song Taxman.



Phil Valentine at a Tea Party rally in Nashville, Tennessee, in 2019.
Photograph: Larry McCormack/AP

However, before he died, Phil repented. He sent a message to his brother from his hospital bed, asking him to undo his calamitous legacy. “He recognised the fact that, as an influential media person, a lot of people probably didn’t get vaccinated because he didn’t,” says Mark. “And he regretted that until the day he died. That’s why he asked me to go out and do what I could, to fix it. He said: ‘If I could go out there right now, I would tell people I made the wrong decision. I should have had the vaccination and I didn’t.’”

“Anecdotes and personal narratives are emotional appeals, and as such they can be helpful,” says Kola-Palmer. In general, she adds, people don’t respond well when you put the fear of God into them, or bombard them with data. What is better is “trying to meet a person where they are. Finding out if there are fears or worries that underpin their attitude, finding common ground, and building a dialogue from there.”

Mark is a gregarious and charming presence who is sincerely doing his best to clean up his brother’s mess; he tells me that he knows of at least 20 people from his local community who have been vaccinated as a result of Phil’s death. But speaking with him also demonstrates how partisan the

vaccination issue is in the US. An August [NBC News poll](#) found that only 55% of Republicans are vaccinated, compared with 88% of Democrats. “The whole thing is politicised,” says Mark. “And it’s costing people their lives, most recently, my brother.”

But he refuses to condemn Republican lawmakers who have pushed anti-mask policies. He repeatedly references the inaccurate claim that [illegal immigration](#) on the southern border is to blame for exponential growth of the highly transmissible Delta variant, alleges the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is putting out inaccurate data, and tells me that “Biden has spread more Covid … than anybody on Earth”. A well-meaning person in a vortex of misinformation, Mark illustrates the real-world difficulties of extricating an entire cohort of people – only 46% of Trump-supporting Republicans are vaccinated – from what increasingly resembles a death cult.

Mark, at least, got vaccinated after his brother’s death, and is urging others to do the same. But there are some people who will never come out of the misinformation whorl, not even on their deathbeds. “I asked him,” says Kayleigh Michelle Stein, 22, a waitress from Erie, Kansas, recounting a conversation she had with her father, Michael Stein, as he lay in hospital, “‘When you pull through this, will you get the shot?’ And he told me that he would not.”

Kayleigh is newly orphaned. Michael, who was 53 and worked as a truck driver, and his wife, Michelle, also a 53-year-old truck driver, died of Covid-19 on 13 August. Both were unvaccinated. Before he died, Michael had described Covid-19 as “one big sham to keep us all in fear” in a Facebook post, and shared offensive memes about vaccination. “He believed that it was the government putting the tracking chip in people,” says Kayleigh. “And he was worried about it making him sick.” He had absorbed these messages on long truck journeys down rural roads, often late at night. “Pretty much all he did was drive down the road,” Kayleigh says, “listening to news stations on the radio.”

Michael had underlying health issues – he’d had heart attacks – and, as someone in his 50s, he was exactly the sort of person the vaccine was designed to protect. “It was political, pretty much,” says Kayleigh. “He was

a full-blown Republican.” Nothing could disabuse her father of his anti-vaccination views, not even impending death. He is an extreme example of how some anti-vaxxers will die in the service of their beliefs, steadfastly rejecting medical science even as their breath grows more laboured and the look in their doctors’ eyes more grave.



Died on the same day ... Michelle and Michael Stein. Photograph: Facebook

“We definitely see a lot of regret,” Windsor tells me, of his patients in southwest England. “People who regret not being vaccinated when they come in. But not everybody feels that way. There are some people who disagree with us. They refuse to believe they have Covid. They put their shortness of breath down to other conditions. They say that they don’t need to go on ventilators, because they’ll be fine. We know that won’t be the case.” Attempting to remonstrate with these people, says Kola-Palmer, is a futile endeavour. “Those who are very entrenched in anti-vaccine beliefs,” she says, “we may never reach. But for those who are unsure or hesitant, with empathic listening and correction of misinformation, you might get there.”

Who is to blame for this mess? The social media companies, for not doing enough to stamp out misinformation? National governments, for not better communicating the importance of mask-wearing and vaccination? Conspiracy theorists who push dangerous misinformation for the dopamine

rush of online validation and peer-group affirmation? Or individuals, for making bad choices that imperil the health of others? “There’s more than enough blame to go around,” Mark observes, correctly. Kayleigh is sanguine. “A part of me is mad,” she says. “I wish my parents were here, of course. But I also believe in not making people do things they don’t believe in.”

When everything is said and done, when the jeering online commenters drift away and the anger dissipates, all that is left is sadness. It is the emotion in unvaccinated patients’ eyes as doctors prepare to intubate them; it is the hand-wringing in waiting rooms as relatives prepare for bad news. “My biggest regret is not realising how sick he was,” says Wynter. “I could have been there more. That goes through my head a lot, if I’m honest with you.” Phil spent his last days consumed by terror that the damage he had done could not be unwrought. “He was full of regret,” says Mark of his brother. “He got it wrong and he should have got the vaccination.”

He sighs. “That’s why I’m trying to mitigate the damage.”

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Coronavirus

Fully vaccinated people account for 1.2% of England's Covid-19 deaths



The Office for National Statistics figures reveal that the risk of death involving Covid-19 is consistently lower for people who receive two doses of the vaccine. Photograph: Dado Ruvic/Reuters

[Ben Quinn](#)

[@BenQuinn75](#)

Mon 13 Sep 2021 12.22 EDT

People who were fully vaccinated accounted for just 1.2% of all deaths involving Covid-19 in England in the first seven months of this year.

The figures, [published by the Office for National Statistics](#) (ONS), [have been seized on](#) as proof of the success of the vaccine programme.

The figures show a total of 51,281 deaths involving Covid-19 in England between 2 January and 2 July, of which 38,964 were of unvaccinated people.

Of the total Covid-related deaths, 458 (about 0.9%) were of people who died at least 21 days after their second vaccine dose. Just 256 deaths (0.5%) were of people who were fully vaccinated and had their first positive PCR test at least 14 days after their second dose.

No vaccine is 100% effective against Covid-19, and health authorities have made it clear that some deaths of vaccinated individuals are to be expected. Public Health England (PHE) has estimated that two-dose effectiveness against hospital admission with infections from the Delta variant – which is now the UK's dominant strain – has been around 94%.

However, the figures on Monday underlined that the risk of death involving Covid-19 is consistently lower for people who have received two doses compared with one dose or no vaccination at all.

Age-standardised mortality rates for deaths involving **#COVID19** are consistently lower for people who have received two vaccinations
<https://t.co/EkaAS1MNTT> pic.twitter.com/3EpkfaNsO1

— Office for National Statistics (ONS) (@ONS) [September 13, 2021](#)

A detailed breakdown of data was made available for 252 of the 256 people who died after having received both jabs and who first tested positive at least 14 days after the second dose. They are what the ONS describes as “breakthrough” deaths.

It shows that just over three-quarters of these deaths (76.6%) occurred in those who were clinically extremely vulnerable – a slightly higher proportion than for other Covid-19 deaths (74.5%) and deaths not involving Covid-19 (69.7%).

Of the breakthrough deaths, 61.1% occurred in males, which is higher than for other Covid-19 deaths (52.2%) and deaths not involving Covid-19 (48.5%), while 13% were among people who were immunocompromised.

Chart

Experts emphasised the importance of context in terms of the data, which covered a period when the seven-day average daily UK deaths varied between six and more than 1,200 per day. Trends were increasing at the end of the ONS study period, when rates were about 25 per day, while daily death rates are now consistently over 100 per day.

Dr Duncan Robertson, a data analyst at Loughborough University who has been focusing on Covid-19 modelling and analysis, said: “By definition, as the proportion of vaccinated people increases, fewer remain in the unvaccinated category. In the extreme, if everyone were vaccinated, 100% of deaths would be of vaccinated people, just as before the vaccine rollout, 0% of deaths would be of vaccinated people.”

But he added: “What is clear from the ONS data is the significance of being fully vaccinated – full vaccination offers very high – but not perfect – protection against death, where only having a first dose offers significantly less protection.”

The PNS data came days after [Public Health England published figures](#) showing the vaccination status of individuals who were infected, who were hospitalised, and who died.

“While figures for protection against infection needs careful interpretation, particularly in the estimates of population in each age category, it is clear that vaccine protection against death is very high after the second dose,” added Dr Robertson, who stressed that work still needed to be done to ensure that vaccinations reach those in cohorts where there had already been significant uptake.

There are about 1 million over-60s who are not fully vaccinated, he pointed out. Only two-thirds of black over-50s have been vaccinated compared with more than 9 in 10 white over-50s. People are four times more likely to not be fully vaccinated if they live in the most deprived areas, compared with those living in the least deprived areas.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/13/fully-vaccinated-people-account-for-12-of-englands-covid-19-deaths>

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[China](#)

‘China’s Dr Fauci’: How Zhang Wenhong became the face of Beijing’s Covid battle



Zhang, who heads up Shanghai’s expert panel on Covid, is now one of the country’s best-known and most-respected medical experts. Photograph: REX/Shutterstock

[Vincent Ni](#) China affairs correspondent

Mon 13 Sep 2021 05.42 EDT

Early last year, as Covid-19 began to disrupt livelihoods in Shanghai, local media struggled to persuade the public to stay at home. Then they turned to an infectious diseases expert, Dr Zhang Wenhong, who also heads up Shanghai’s expert panel on Covid-19.

“You’re bored to death at home, so the virus will be bored to death, too,” Zhang said in rapid-fire mandarin mixed with a distinctive Shanghainese

accent. “Stay at home for two weeks … then we’ll be an inch closer to success.”

Zhang’s vivid and urgent plea to the public immediately captured the imagination of the city of 25 million, winning him nicknames such as “Daddy Zhang”. The video was widely shared in Shanghai’s online portals, and was even re-published by the [state news agency Xinhua](#) in Beijing.

On 10 September, shortly before a [new outbreak](#) began in the south-eastern Fujian province, Zhang told a group of students in Shanghai that China was “still facing tremendous challenges” in tackling Covid-19. “We are now maintaining a very active yet cautious strategy to not allow the epidemic to spread in China.”

Since last year, 52-year-old Zhang has become the face for China’s battle against the virus. He’s now one of the country’s best-known and most-respected medical experts, with nearly 4 million followers on Weibo and countless memes on WeChat. International media call him “China’s Dr Fauci” – even though he does not hold the kind of public position in [China](#) that the chief medical adviser, Anthony Fauci, does in the US.

But like Fauci, whose communication style made him stand out amid the chaos of the Trump administration’s response last year, Zhang’s adroit use of language and respectful manner when speaking to the public marked him a refreshing departure from the way Chinese officials often carry themselves in public.

It’s rarer, analysts say, for someone who rose from within the system to act in such a manner in today’s China, where the public discourse is filled with rising nationalism, foreign conspiracies and confidence in the superiority of its own political system.

“We don’t often see such a technocrat speak to the public in this way in China,” said Prof Zhengming Chen of Oxford University, who attended the same Shanghai university as Zhang. “It’s not easy to be so frank these days, but Zhang understands that as an expert he has the obligation to speak

common sense and to communicate with the general public in plain language.”

Yanzhong Huang, of the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, agrees. “He fits neatly into the Chinese public’s expectation of a traditional intelligentsia. He’s done some important work in public health, but he became famous largely by being himself and telling the truth.

“It’s also a reminder to the authorities in Beijing that in order to fully persuade your public, you have to go back to the basics,” Huang added.



Anthony Fauci’s communication style made him stand out amid the chaos of the Trump administration’s response last year. Photograph: Eric Baradat/AFP/Getty Images

Last year, when Chinese and foreign experts were engaged in a row over whether Remdesivir or Chinese medicine was more effective in preventing Covid, Zhang implied in an interview that there was no point in such a politicised argument. “As the old saying goes, to see whether it’s a mule or a horse, take it out for a walk,” he said.

Zhang’s skills of persuasion, as well as China’s strict “zero tolerance” virus containment strategy, paid off. By June last year, [official figures](#) showed that

there were only 350 locally transmitted cases in Shanghai. And for most of last year, Chinese citizens enjoyed a largely virus-free life.

Yet Zhang's popularity does not derive only from his unique ability to persuade. Shortly after he became a household name in Shanghai, a city he immigrated to at a young age from a nearby province, his fans compiled a list of "golden quotes" that revealed his oratory skills and his character.

Once, in explaining what "limited people-to-people transmission" was like, he used the example of a woman infected with avian influenza, who was taken better care of by her mother than by her husband. "As a result, she's more likely to pass the virus on to her mother, rather than her husband," [Zhang said](#). "At that very moment, I lost faith in romantic love."

In the same talk, Zhang tried to explain to his audience the difference between a cold and a flu virus, because the two words sound similar in Chinese language. He said: "Influenza is not a cold, just like a tiger is not a cat."

When telling the public [not to share food](#) on the same plate – a Chinese custom – last year, he said: "Separating the food is not what we are advocating, but it's something that you must do. If you do not separate your food, it's like you are running naked in front of the disease – very dangerous."



For most of last year, Chinese citizens enjoyed a largely virus-free life.
Photograph: Kevin Frayer/Getty Images

In another interview with the English-language China Daily newspaper, Zhang was asked about his legacy. He responded: “when the pandemic is over ... I will also silently leave.” He explained further [in a separate Shanghai TV interview](#) last year: “Fame only reduced the joy in my life.”

Zhang’s ability to explain complex matters also won him respect from senior figures. Last year, after speaking to US-based Chinese students, Zhang received a handwritten note from Cui Tiankai, then China’s ambassador to the US. Cui, who was born in Shanghai, praised Zhang’s “down-to-earth” style, and promised to pay him a visit when he next returned to his home town.

However, with celebrity status comes scrutiny and divided opinion. On 29 July, as the highly infectious Delta variant began to circulate in China, [Zhang posted on social media](#) calling for the “wisdom” of long-term coexistence with the virus – an approach adopted by countries such as Britain and Singapore.

That candid essay drew Zhang into the firing line. Some online commenters accused him of “pandering to foreign ideas” and being “a US lacky”. Gao

Qiang, a former health minister, also weighed in, with a lengthy article published in People's Daily. Gao – without naming Zhang – criticised western countries' laissez-faire “living with the virus” approach and urged: “We absolutely cannot repeat their mistakes.”

On 14 August, a new post began to emerge on Weibo, accusing Zhang of plagiarising a part of his PhD dissertation 21 years ago. His alma mater, Fudan University in Shanghai, quickly issued a statement, saying they had begun investigating the matter.



Zhang Wenhong, head of Shanghai Covid-19 Medical Treatment Expert Team, talks during a live video streaming webcast. Photograph: Yves Dean/Getty Images

Critics of Zhang said that he was “an academic fraud” who had gone too far to criticise the government’s “zero tolerance” policy.

But his supporters fiercely and openly defended him, alleging that such accusations must have been manipulated by those who wanted Zhang out of the picture.

A slew of essays began to pop up on social media immediately after the incident emerged. One wrote: “If a society cannot even tolerate a Zhang Wenhong, then it's the misfortune of a nation”. Another wrote: “The people

protecting him will not deny any criticism of him just because they like him. They do not think it is fair that someone tries to discredit him just because that person disagrees with his views.”

While the row went on, official locally transmitted cases had been dropping to single digits daily. On 23 August, China reported zero locally transmitted symptomatic cases nationally for the first time since July – a further sign that Beijing is unlikely to alter its “zero tolerance” Covid policy.

Zhang did not respond to Gao’s remark and opponents’ attacks online directly. But he finally broke three weeks of silence on 18 August: “The Covid-19 strategy our country has adopted is one that suits us the best at present ... You have to try the shoes on yourself to know whether they fit properly,” he wrote on Weibo.

Five days later, Fudan University said in a statement that an investigation had found “no evidence of academic misconduct”.

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[Technology startups](#)

UK government fund invested in kombucha and luxury ship builder



Rishi Sunak said it was ‘fantastic’ that UK taxpayers had a stake in so many innovative British firms. Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

[Kalyeena Makortoff](#) Banking correspondent

[@kalyeena](#)

Mon 13 Sep 2021 19.01 EDT

The UK government has become a shareholder in more than 150 companies during the Covid crisis, including a kombucha drinks maker, a bespoke ship builder and a knitting and crochet supplier, data reveals.

It is the first time that the government’s development bank has revealed the list of firms that received special taxpayer-backed convertible loans that were earmarked for startups.

But while the taxpayer now holds stakes in companies like [Vaccitech](#), a co-inventor of the AstraZeneca vaccine, and [Ripple Energy](#), which allows customers to take shares in a windfarm, the government has also been left part-owning crafting firms, soft drinks businesses and entertainment companies.

The [Future Fund](#) was originally pitched as a way for the government to support innovative companies that may have otherwise struggled to secure money on their own during the pandemic.

The list, published by the British Business Bank (BBB) on Tuesday, includes companies like Secret Group Limited, the firm that runs the Secret Cinema series of immersive film events, as well as ski suit maker [Oneskee](#), and [Oto International Limited](#), which makes the cannabis extract CBD oil.

That is on top of an array of drinks firms including [Skinny Tonic Limited](#), Watkins Drinks and kombucha maker Better Tasting Drinks Co Limited.

Taxpayers also hold shares in [Arksen Limited](#), which builds “authentic explorer vessels” for “families and friends”, and [Dice FM](#), which runs an app and website for nightclub, festival and gig tickets.

In total, the government spent about £1.1bn supporting 1,190 companies through the Future Fund. About 158 of those companies have had their loans converted into equity stakes in August after they successfully raised money from private investment that at least matched government funding, leaving the taxpayer holding shares in a vast array of small companies across the UK. The list will be updated on a quarterly basis.

“The Future Fund was set up to ensure that investment keeps flowing to our most innovative businesses, and it’s fantastic that taxpayers now have equity in these top-performing startups,” the chancellor, [Rishi Sunak](#), said in a statement released by the Treasury to coincide with the release of the BBB’s data.

“Investing in these companies has the potential to accelerate innovations that will transform UK industry, develop new medicines and strengthen our position as a science superpower.”

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If Johnson is serious about ‘levelling up’, he needs to look at what Labour got right

[Polly Toynbee](#)





‘Over that decade I closely followed the NDC on Lambeth’s dilapidated and crime-ridden Clapham Park estate in south London.’ Photograph: Dan Chung/The Guardian

Tue 14 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

No one knows what “levelling up” is, but now Boris Johnson wants [10 more years](#) to do it. A white paper on the grand strategy is promised but, in the meantime, take a good look at this week’s [report](#) from Onward – a centre-right thinktank co-founded by Neil O’Brien, the prime minister’s levelling-up adviser, heading a taskforce of 60 Tory MPs.

Here’s the surprise: examining 50 years of regeneration programmes, they found that a New Labour-era policy, the New Deal for [Communities](#) (NDCs), was the most successful. Its impact, they suggested, had been seriously underestimated, when it should be a model.

It will come as good but bitter news for all who toiled for a decade to make NDCs work, only to see them blown away by post-2010 austerity, abandoning the valiant community volunteers extolled in this report.

In 2000, the millennium era of exuberant social optimism, [Labour](#) launched an extraordinary experiment. Identifying the country’s 2,000 most deprived

estates, just 39 were chosen as a regeneration testbed. NDCs focused on lifting people's quality of life by giving them the power and the money. Each neighbourhood received a 10-year budget of £56m – electing their own resident-dominated boards.

The targets set were eye-wateringly ambitious: 100% of housing was to be repaired to “decent” standard, crime and unemployment to fall to national averages, child and adult education qualifications to reach the national average, along with health levels. At least 85% of residents were to feel “satisfied with their area” and three-quarters “involved” in their community.

These overexpectations were monitored by Ipsos Mori, with a mass of data collected. Over that decade I closely followed the NDC on Lambeth’s dilapidated and crime-ridden Clapham Park estate in south London with its 7,300 inhabitants. I lived there for a few months writing my book Hard Work, exploring life on the minimum wage. The residents’ board let me sit in on meetings to watch their progress.

At first there was no “community”, no organisations to build on, only a handful of volunteers who hired some professionals. But what galvanised people was the cheque placed in their own hands to follow their own priorities. They created 64 projects, from debt advice, job support and training, arts and sports for children, clubs for the lonely, a community centre, an annual festival, a bike repair training scheme, family outings – and undertook massive housing repairs. New wardens walked the streets and dozens of crack houses were shut down.

“Community” isn’t easy (ask [Jackie Weaver](#)) and there were rows: their first elected chair was ejected. “More Afghanistan than Ambridge,” the next chair whispered to me once – the admirable Donna Charmaine Henry, a dental nurse, born in St Kitts, who had previously shunned neighbours, fearing the estate’s drug dealers and sex workers. She had no idea what burden she would take on, her flat stacked with files, but she helped keep it together. Sadly she [died](#) suddenly last year: when we last met she was distraught at losing so much ground gained after 2010. How she would sigh over this Onward report.

Clapham Park results were good by 2010: 74% of people were now “satisfied” with the estate, only 20% feeling unsafe. A tenth fewer lived on very low incomes, 6% more had qualifications, with 3% more in work. These figures never captured the high turnover of half the residents in that decade: some with jobs moved out, replaced with frail people or newly arrived, non-English speakers, while the right-to-buy disaster saw flats bought by landlords and packed with itinerant people.

Nonetheless, Onward’s study of all 39 NDCs finds 77% saw deprivation fall relative to the national average. Where communities were most involved, deprivation fell fastest. Those “satisfied with their area” rose by 18 percentage points, employment up by 10 points. That’s remarkable.

But here’s what happened next. “Interestingly” the report notes, “many areas saw their improvement in the Index of Multiple Deprivation start to fall back after 2010.” That “interestingly” is Onward’s political caution: more than half the NDCs that caught up to their local authority average fell back again. Nor does this report take enough account of how NDCs benefited from services improving all around them: Clapham Park opened two Sure Start children’s centres, the NHS was getting 7% more a year, while school results rose with a boost to teacher numbers and spending. Post-2010 cuts to public services and benefits meant few NDCs sustained their gains.

A thinktank associated with the Tories, Onward is perhaps tactfully silent on that. In 70 pages there’s no mention, not one, of universal credit or its imminent £20 cut. No amount of good community organising can overcome that damage, with [worse austerity to come](#).

With every emblem of Labour social policy grubbed up in 2010, a revival of what worked is welcome. Learning from NDCs, Onward’s director, Will Tanner, exhorts the government to “use neighbourhoods – the most effective organising unit in society – to drive levelling up in the places that need it most”. The report calls for (unspecified) funds to go directly to local organisations, though Onward’s flavour is more Cameron’s “big society”, Edmund Burke’s little platoons of volunteers or Michael Oakeshott’s anti-statist civilians, than Labour social democracy. But it’s no use pretending local heroes, like Donna Charmaine Henry, can move social mountains unless backed by strong social and public services.

So far Johnson's centralised, pork-barrel view of regeneration has considered Tory seats, regardless of need. So far he prefers eye-catching infrastructure, not daily good done by a nursery teacher, district nurse, debt adviser, carer, further education instructor – and, yes, a well-supported volunteer. The quiet work done by those services is hard to measure and invisible to TV cameras. Do you think that's what Boris Johnson intends?

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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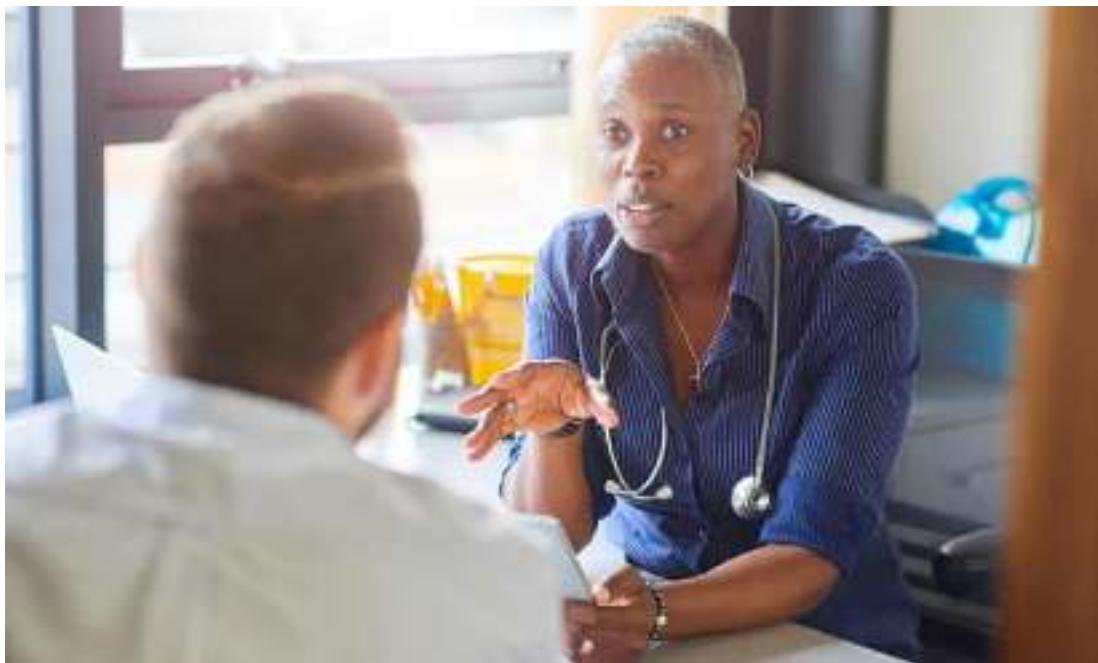
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NHS

GPs are full of kindness and wisdom – so why do they face constant criticism?

Zoe Williams



Decisions that cause problems for patients are usually made at policy level, not by GPs in the community. Photograph: sturti/Getty Images

Tue 14 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

Once I met my GP at a party. I was sitting bang opposite, trying desperately to place her, asking insistent questions such as: “Were you a member of the Battersea Labour party in ’84 through ’92?” and: “Do you use that dry cleaner on Lavender Hill?” Finally, in desperation: “Are you famous?”

When I figured it out, I realised that there is probably a GP discretion protocol, where they don’t recognise you, and you don’t recognise them. Over decades, collectively, they have tested out all the other social alternatives for the doctor-patient meet’n’chat – “Hi! Haven’t seen you since your gallstones, how’s that working out?”; “You were right! I hadn’t gone deaf in one ear, I was just depressed” – and this is just the way it has to be.

GPs are under almost constant criticism: for the hiatus in face-to-face appointments, for their convoluted and overstretched systems, for staff shortages and, lately, an issue with blood tests. It is not so much pointless as peculiarly ineffective to dissent on facts: to point out that many of these problems are actually policy decisions made many echelons above the surgery, related mainly to money and partly to Brexit.

Something about the raging anecdotalist – “I couldn’t get an appointment for three weeks and then they misdiagnosed my aneurysm over the phone” – always seems to grab the attention. And it’s hard to pull the focus back to the day-to-day excellence because, unless you have a health emergency, your GP’s acts of kindness and wisdom are usually quite tiny.

It will be the doctor who knew not to say hello to you at a party. The receptionist at my surgery (I know I’m fortunate but, again, funding ...) who always, without fail, over 20 years, finds an appointment that day, as long as I call at 8am and not one minute after. The way they will always see a kid with a stomach ache face to face, even in the middle of a pandemic, even if they can see from the records that that kid is no stranger to stomach ache.

I absolutely love my GP, and say that from a position of perfect health. You should have heard me praise her when I got an allergy on my eyelids. I promise, though, never to tell her that at a party.

Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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Freezing your eggs may be getting easier, but it's no simple fertility fix

[Eleanor Morgan](#)



'Fertility experts have long been lobbying against the 10-year limit on freezing eggs, embryos and sperm.' Liquid nitrogen being poured into a canister in an egg-freezing facility. Photograph: Science Photo Library/Getty Images

Tue 14 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

Eleven years ago, a gynaecologist told me my fallopian tubes were "obliterated". He had just performed adhesiolysis, the surgical removal of scar tissue. In my case, the scarring was from a ruptured appendix in my youth, and, as has subsequently been discovered, endometriosis. As I wouldn't be able to conceive naturally, the doctor asked me whether I would like to do free egg or embryo freezing with the NHS. Having always known I'd want a baby some day, the answer was yes.

The doctor told me that the chances of a future pregnancy would be higher if I froze fertilised embryos, rather than my eggs alone. I am gay, not around sperm much, and always preferred the idea of using a donor to conceive rather than doing it with a male friend. So I selected a donor from a US sperm bank and had it shipped over before my freezing cycle began. After a fortnight-long [hormonal drug cocktail](#), my eggs were “harvested”. The viable ones were fertilised and produced some good embryos. They have been in a hospital freezer for 10 years; a comforting thought, but also one so abstract I can barely entertain its implications.

Under current UK legislation, my embryos can stay on ice for 55 years because the treatment was the result of a medical problem. If they had been frozen instead for “social” reasons – because I had not met someone I wanted to have children with yet or didn’t think I could afford a baby – I would have had a maximum of 10 years in which to use them. It is punishing to think that, if things were different, they could have been destroyed this year simply because I don’t feel ready to have a child.

Fertility experts have long been lobbying against the 10-year limit on freezing eggs, embryos and sperm. The rule, set out by [The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act](#) in 1990, is arbitrary; eggs and embryos can be safely freezed [indefinitely](#). The UK government finally seems to be listening and announced this week that the [10-year rule would be scrapped](#). In future, everyone will be able to freeze genetic material for up to 55 years, regardless of their reasons for doing so.

There has been a rapid growth in egg freezing in the past 10 years, from just under [230 cycles in 2009 to 2,400 cycles in 2019](#). The process involves 10-12 days of self-administering injections containing hormonal medication that stimulates egg production in the ovary follicles, with regular clinic visits for scans and blood tests to monitor progress. Following this, under sedation or general anaesthetic, a process called [transvaginal oocyte retrieval](#) happens, where a doctor inserts a needle through the vaginal wall and into the follicles to retrieve the eggs. Let me tell you: you can feel that this has happened.

Egg freezing was once reserved for medical reasons, such as preserving fertility that might be affected by chemotherapy. It has since been rebranded as a way for women to gain some control over their fertility clocks; to own

our future. The egg-freezing industry is worth millions in the US, where private equity firms target twentysomething women with the idea that freezing eggs at 25 is a smart career move.

Here in the UK, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) inspects fertility clinics against a code of practice, which states that they should not highlight high success rates that only apply to small, selected groups of patients. But thousands of women every year continue to absorb the idea that we can buy time, paying a small fortune for hope.

The average cost of egg freezing is about £3,350, not including the hormonal medication required, which can cost thousands. There is a postcode lottery for what NHS fertility clinics can offer people – some will offer elective egg freezing and storage, if you pay for it – and many turn to the private sector. The cost of storing eggs can be up to £350 a year. Prices like these should come with guarantees, but that is impossible.

The reality is that not every egg makes an embryo; not every embryo results in pregnancy; and not every pregnancy results in a baby being born. Data from the HFEA shows that once-frozen eggs account for only 1-2% of all IVF treatment cycles. Age is a crucial factor: eggs are of a much higher quality in our 20s and, if they are frozen below the age of 35, the chances of success will be higher than the natural conception rate as the woman gets older. This makes scrapping the 10-year storage limit even more necessary – if women need to freeze their eggs earlier for a better chance of getting pregnant, they need more time in which to access them later on.

If the new 55-year storage limit does encourage more people to freeze their eggs, clinics have a responsibility to convey the reality of the process. Framing fertility treatment as something you can just pop into a clinic for is misleading: manufacturing then surgically retrieving eggs from your body can be challenging. The hormonal medication can make you feel bloated, queasy and anxious, while the egg collection can cause a lot of pain, with possible complications. (I had a bad time of it, but not everyone does.)

Being able to use technology such as egg freezing and not feel so pressured by our fertility clocks is a benefit of living in the modern world. But the modern world is also what is driving this booming market, particularly for

young people – the ones who stand the highest chance of preserving their fertility, should they wish. Living is more expensive than it ever was. That the process will be unaffordable to so many adds another layer of unfairness.

The prospect of more room to make important decisions about having children is great, but we must remain realistic about what egg and embryo freezing actually entails, how accessible it is and the inherent lack of certainty. After all, many people of childbearing age feel the choice of having a family has been taken away from them, not by the inaccessibility of fertility treatment, but by a complete lack of economic security in life. (Britain's [birthrate is plummeting](#); in the US, the birthrate is the [lowest it has been in 35 years](#).)

Better wages, access to stable housing, affordable childcare: fundamental social changes like these are required to temper the crushing uncertainty so many of us feel about having babies at all. Having the option to store eggs for longer is good, but it is not the panacea we are often led to believe it is.

- Eleanor Morgan is author of Hormonal: A Conversation About Women's Bodies, Mental [Health](#) and Why We Need to Be Heard
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[Opinion](#)[Early years education](#)

Lockdown has made UK families reconsider the cost of childcare – and they're furious

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)





Pre-school children walk around Blackpool with staff. Photograph: MediaWorldImages/Alamy Stock Photo

Mon 13 Sep 2021 10.20 EDT

Build the tower up, only to knock it to the floor. When my son was tiny, he could play that game for hours. As he got older, often it felt as if I was doing the same.

Childcare for working parents is one huge wobbling Jenga stack, in which someone is always yanking out the brick that brings everything crashing down. Child running a temperature? Crash. Stuck late at work? Crash. But increasingly, what's collapsing it is the cost.

A [survey](#) of more than 20,000 working parents, coordinated by the website Mumsnet with 13 other groups, lays bare a broken system. A third of parents spend more on childcare than on their rent or mortgage (rising to almost half of black respondents). The cost of a one-year-old's nursery place in England rose four times faster than wages between 2008 and 2016, and more than seven times faster in London. But it's hardly as if the people changing your toddler's nappies, or teaching them the alphabet, are getting rich as a result.

Wages for early years staff are [embarrassingly low](#), given we trust them with the most precious thing in our lives and that they've been on the Covid frontline during the pandemic, something which may help explain reports of nurseries [struggling to recruit](#). As for nannies, even Boris and Carrie Johnson apparently couldn't afford one; when baby Wilfred was born, party donors were [reportedly approached](#) about chipping in.

Somehow we have ended up with a system that's too expensive for parents (especially single parents) but not lucrative enough to pay staff properly, plus a hidden drag on the economy, as parents reduce their hours because they can't afford a full-time nursery place. A staggering 94% of those changing their working patterns after having children say childcare costs were a factor; surprise surprise, women were more likely than men to say they'd be more senior or better paid if it wasn't for childcare considerations.

There's no money to fix this, obviously; there's never any money, unless of course the right people start asking. For a decade now, successive chancellors have frozen fuel tax for fear of a backlash from White Van Man, [forgoing an estimated £50bn](#). But if Blue Collar Woman can't afford to do her job because childcare would swallow everything she earns and then some – well, that's different. Yes, it's welcome progress that three- and four-year-olds (plus disadvantaged two-year-olds) can now get up to [30 hours of free care a week](#). But there's a [worrying gap](#) between what the state pays providers for supplying those free places and the actual cost of doing it, which means free places get harder to find and costs for younger toddlers or parents needing longer hours are pushed up to compensate. Don't even get me started on the plight of shift workers whose jobs don't fit neatly around nursery hours, or holiday provision for older children.

All of this has been the constant background music not only to my parenting life, but for decades before that. But something about the current surge of fury – the campaign group Pregnant Then Screwed and Grazia magazine together collected the 100,000 [petition signatures](#) needed to trigger a debate on the funding and affordability of childcare in parliament on Monday – feels new.

Millennial mothers are thrillingly activist by comparison with us exhausted Generation Xers. They don't feel grateful simply to have kept their jobs after giving birth, and won't be fobbed off with lectures about how they shouldn't have kids they can't afford (generally from people who are only here to say it because they were born when houses were so cheap that families only needed one salary). During lockdown, parents came to appreciate the childcare they suddenly didn't have as never before. But for some, the money they weren't having to spend on it was also the only thing keeping that precarious tower in the air, and returning to the office will knock it to the floor again. Are we really going to leave it there?

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
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US faces ‘real battle for democracy’ against far right, says Hillary Clinton

02:07

Hillary Clinton: US still faces ‘real battle for democracy’ – video

[Julian Borger](#) in Washington

Mon 13 Sep 2021 19.25 EDT

Hillary Clinton has said that the US was still in a “real battle for our democracy” against pro-Trump forces on the far right, seeking to entrench minority rule and turn back the clock on women’s rights.

At a Guardian Live online event on Monday, Clinton fended off suggestions that the world was now witnessing the twilight of US democracy, but said: “I do believe we are in a struggle for the future of our country”.

The former secretary of state and presidential candidate, speaking from her family home in Chappaqua, New York, said she believed that there was majority support for Joe Biden’s agenda of huge investment in infrastructure and budget support for families.

“But the other side wants to rule by minority,” she told Guardian journalist Jonathan Freedland. “It has a very powerful weapon in the filibuster in the Senate to rule by minority. It wants to change election laws so that it doesn’t lose elections, despite what the will of the people might be.”

Clinton was referring to a [raft of state legislation](#) promoted by Republicans aimed at restricting access to the ballot. She also referred to what she called the “crazy, dysfunctional” electoral college system, by which she won the popular vote in 2016 by three million votes but was defeated by Donald

Trump by a few tens of thousands of votes in a couple of battleground states, a loss that haunted her long afterwards.

Was feeling frustrated & disillusioned after so much political negativity, esp in my community. Until I listened to [@HillaryClinton](#) speaking to [@freeland](#) [@guardian](#) this aft. I needed to hear her matter-of-fact, articulate, and extremely knowledgeable take today. Thank you! pic.twitter.com/K7877MDQrH

— Alysson4CK (she/her) (@Alysson4CK) [September 13, 2021](#)

“I thought about it every day during the four years of his administration, but I think what is really, most concerning is that he continues to be destructive,” she said.

“The January 6 insurrection at our capitol was a terrorist attack,” Clinton added, noting the parallel with the 9/11 attacks. “We are now much more worried about internal threats, and there are some who say you can’t equate them, having planes flown into the World Trade Center and the terrible loss of life.”

“That’s a horrific external attack, but now we are engaged in a very serious unfortunate but real battle for our democracy against forces, either led by or inspired by Donald Trump.”

Clinton was also asked about the [abortion ban passed in Texas](#) at the beginning of month, reversing gains for women’s rights won a generation ago.

“So you ask if I’m surprised or discouraged. I’m neither. I’m not surprised because I’ve been involved in the women’s movement, the civil rights movement,” she said. “I’ve seen the forces that are arrayed against progress when it comes to women’s autonomy, when it comes to the advancement of civil and political and economic rights. I know very well that the other side never gives up.

“They are relentless in their view of what is a properly constructed society, and in that view, white men are at the very top and nobody else is even close.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/sep/14/us-faces-real-battle-for-democracy-against-far-right-says-hillary-clinton>

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[The Merkel years](#)[European Union](#)

‘Time to take sides’: post-Merkel era needs radical new direction, says study



The study, based on polling in 12 EU member states, found ‘strong and continued’ support for German leadership within the bloc. Photograph: Matthias Rietschel/Reuters

[Jon Henley](#) Europe correspondent

[@jonhenley](#)

Tue 14 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

After 15 years of “Merkelism” the German chancellor’s neutral, consensus-building approach means many Europeans accept her country as the EU’s leader – but post-Angela Merkel Berlin will have to radically change tack, according to a study.

“Angela Merkel has come to embody a strong and stable Germany, positioning herself as Europe’s anchor though more than a decade of crises,”

said Piotr Buras, the co-author of the [report by the European Council on Foreign Relations \(ECFR\)](#).

“But ‘Merkelism’ is no longer sustainable. Merkel may have adroitly managed the status quo across the continent, but the challenges that Europe faces now – the pandemic, climate change, geopolitical competition – require radical solutions, not cosmetic changes. The EU needs a visionary [Germany](#).”

The study, based on polling in 12 EU member states, found “strong and continued” support for German leadership within the bloc and enduring approval for the chancellor, who steps down this month ahead of [federal elections](#).

[EU president](#)

A large plurality (41%) of respondents, including majorities in the Netherlands (58%), Spain (57%) and Portugal (52%) said they would favour Merkel over France’s Emmanuel Macron in a hypothetical contest for EU president.

Pluralities across the 12 countries also said they trusted Germany to defend their interests across a range of issues, including – despite criticism of Germany’s hard line on austerity and balanced budgets – economic and financial policy (36%).

Even countries with very different policies, such as Spain (45%) and non-eurozone Hungary (50%), backed German economic leadership, while even the low 24% recorded in Italy was the strongest answer among those who expressed an opinion.



Merkel and the Polish PM, Mateusz Morawiecki, in Warsaw on Saturday.
Photograph: Hubert Mathis/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Similarly, 35% of Europeans surveyed said they would be happy to see Berlin take the lead for the EU on defending human rights, including 49% of respondents in Hungary and 23% in Poland, both of which are involved in rule-of-law disputes with the bloc.

A plurality of Europeans polled for the study also believed that without Merkel there would have been more conflict in the world rather than less, a view held most strongly in Spain (33%), the Netherlands (30%) and Portugal (28%).

Support for Berlin as a potential geopolitical leader, however, was markedly low. Only 25% of respondents felt Germany should handle the EU's relationship with the US, for example, with support for Berlin taking the lead in the [bloc's dealings with Russia](#) (20%) and China (17%) even lower.

The report revealed a disconnect between the way Europeans see Germany and the way Germany sees itself, with German respondents yet to be persuaded that their country could or should play a greater role within the EU.

Only on the question of standing up for human rights and democracy did more than one-third (38%) of Germans say their country could defend EU interests, with one in five saying it would be unable to lead on any of the issues addressed in the survey.

German leadership

Germans were also pessimistic about their country's [post-Merkel future](#), with a majority (52%) believing its "golden age" was past – a view shared by a sizeable minority (34%) in the 12 countries surveyed. Only 10% believed it was still to come.

The authors said the survey showed that to maintain the reputation and trust it has built up under Merkel's leadership, Germany must radically rethink its EU policies, going beyond Merkelism to confront member states such as Poland and Hungary that are accused of [violating the bloc's values](#).

Beyond Europe's borders, Germany must also change its broader foreign policy, they argued, finding a way to use its economic and political clout to defend Europe's interests and principles by, for example, working closely with Joe Biden's administration on a transatlantic approach to China.

The survey showed, however, that German domestic opinion would be an obstacle. "The key challenge, for whoever wins next week's election, will be to convince Germans that a serious shift is required in how their country engages with the EU," said the co-author Jana Puglierin, a senior policy fellow at the ECFR.

Germany standing

"The approach of putting EU cohesion above all else, which has shaped much of the EU's policy agenda during the Merkel era, could prove a tempting pathway for Merkel's successor. But in the face of international crises and domestic concerns about Germany's role within the EU, 'more of the same' is unlikely to hold."

For Germany to retain its status as the leading driver of EU policy, Puglierin said, it would need to "engage with the issues that are important to its

citizens, and provide its EU partners with clearcut ideas about how the EU can compete in a divided and crisis-shaken world”.

Merkel’s successors would also need to “sell the importance of German leadership in the bloc to their voters at home”, she said. “They can no longer afford to remain neutral, or pursue the status quo. It is time for Berlin to take sides.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/14/post-merkel-era-needs-radical-new-direction-german-election-study>.

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[Rights and freedom](#)[Press freedom](#)

Taliban's return 'a catastrophe' for journalism in Afghanistan



Two Afghan reporters beaten by the Taliban after covering a women's protest in Kabul. The UN says Taliban violence against journalists is rising.
Photograph: Bernat Armangué/AP

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HUMANITY UNITED

[About this content](#)

[Kim Willsher](#)

Tue 14 Sep 2021 01.30 EDT

Journalism in Afghanistan is in danger of disappearing, according to the head of the [International Federation of Journalists](#), who said that reporters trying to continue working under the Taliban have been subjected to beatings and imprisonment.

“The Taliban don’t want to make too many waves right now, but they will want to take control of everything, including the foreign press in [Afghanistan](#),” Anthony Bellanger, the IFJ secretary general, told the Guardian. “And as often happens in such situations, foreign journalists will be considered agents of foreign governments.

“I believe what we will see emerge is an official media – a Taliban media – and no women. All other journalists will just disappear. It wasn’t easy before – and even before the Taliban took power, journalists were killed – but it is very bleak now.

Bellanger believes there is currently a “grace” period before the Taliban cracks down on international and Afghan journalists.

“It’s a question of weeks before it changes. I am pessimistic – I will be glad to be proved wrong, but the Taliban is still the Taliban. They announced an inclusive government and what did we get – no women. It’s a catastrophe.”

IFJ representatives are in close contact with colleagues in Afghanistan and believe about 1,300 journalists remain in the country, of which about 220 are women, most of them in Kabul. The IFJ is affiliated with Afghanistan’s National Journalists’ Union and the Afghan Independent Journalists’ Association.



Female reporters try to question the Taliban’s Zabihullah Mujahid, centre, in Kabul just after the Islamists’ takeover. ‘It is now completely impossible for female journalists to work,’ said the IFJ’s Anthony Bellanger. Photograph: Hoshang Hashimi/AFP/Getty

“It is now completely impossible for female journalists to work. The rest are doing a very difficult job and are doing what they can. We have photographs of journalists who have been imprisoned and beaten, so the situation for them is very difficult and dangerous,” he said.

The United Nations human rights body, the UN high commissioner for human rights, warned last week of a 'growing resort by the Taliban to force against those involved in or reporting on' demonstrations.

The IFJ, representing 600,000 journalists worldwide, said it was still trying to evacuate journalists from Kabul.

But Bellanger said: “It’s not about getting all journalists out. We cannot do that and we wouldn’t want to, because if nobody is reporting on what is happening then it happens in the dark. There will be journalists who want to stay and do their job, but the future is black for them.”

Bellanger said the IFJ had already [collected €40,000](#) (£35,000) in donations from affiliated media unions, many of them in the UK, to help Afghan colleagues.

“We raised this in just three weeks, so I would like to thank people for their generosity. There has been a unique wave of solidarity on this. We are continuing the [international campaign for donations](#).

“The most pressing problem is how to help our colleagues there. Some have lost their homes, others their jobs. Some have been injured and most of the doctors have left. Most people in the higher, professional echelons of society have left the country.

“On Monday we will begin sending money to journalists in Kabul who need it. Every euro will be accounted for and we will be verifying that it is going to journalists and their families.

“Now we are asking governments to offer a new humanitarian visa for journalists whose lives are in danger and who need to leave.”

He said Afghan journalists had already been evacuated to Qatar, North Macedonia, France, the UK, Canada, the US, Australia and Belgium, but some countries, including Greece and the Netherlands, had not issued emergency visas.

“My worry is that in a few days, a few weeks, the news agenda will have moved on and the media will forget Afghanistan,” Bellanger said. “For the journalists who remain, I fear they will find either they can choose not to do journalism – or to do journalism for the Taliban.”

He added: “It is stupid and naive to think we can talk to the Taliban about this. There are journalists who want to stay because their life is in Afghanistan.

“We will try to take out those in great danger and those who have already had death threats, but we want to leave as many as possible on the ground so we can have information. It’s these kind of moments when people realise how much we need journalists.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/sep/14/talibans-return-a-catastrophe-for-journalism-in-afghanistan>

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[Justin Trudeau](#)

Trudeau energized by anti-vaccine protests in Canada election few wanted



Justin Trudeau at an election campaign rally in Oakville, Ontario.
Photograph: Carlos Osorio/Reuters

[Leyland Cecco](#) in Toronto

Tue 14 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

When he was [pelted with a handful of gravel by anti-vaccine protesters](#) last week, the Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, joined an illustrious list of political leaders who have had things hurled at them by disgruntled citizens. His father, former prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, had rocks (and tomatoes and eggs) thrown at his train car in the early 1980s.

But the gravel incident – which led to charges of assault with a weapon against the protester – has thrust the image of a prime minister on the

defensive to the forefront of an election that, for many, is unwanted and has so far lacked a coherent theme.

Trudeau [called the snap election in late August](#), prompting grumbling that the country would be casting ballots during the fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic. He defended the move, saying that after weathering a deadly pandemic, Canadians should have a say in the country's future.

"After making it through 17 months of nothing like we've ever experienced, Canadians deserve to choose what the next 17 months, what the next 17 years and beyond, will look like. And I know that we have the right plan, the right team and the proven leadership to meet that moment," he said. "So to the other parties: please explain why you don't think Canadians should have the choice? Why you don't think that this is a pivotal moment?"

The initial response was a collapse in the polls for the incumbent prime minister, who is seeking his third term after six years in office.

Days before the country votes, numerous polls suggest that most Canadians don't believe the election is necessary. And Trudeau now trails the Conservative leader, Erin O'Toole, a former air force navigator, by an average of nearly two points in national polls.

O'Toole, who has run a middle-road campaign with an emphasis on workers' rights, has argued that Trudeau's political ambitions in parliament – not the health of the country – are the reason Canadians are facing their second federal election in two years.

"Leadership is about putting others first, not yourself," O'Toole said [during the only English language debate](#).

Despite his stumble in the polls, however, Trudeau's political fate isn't necessarily tied to the horse-race nature of public opinion. Conservative support is strongest in areas, like Alberta and Saskatchewan, where fewer seats can be won. The Liberals, conversely, do well in seat-rich provinces like Ontario and Quebec. In 2019, for example, the Liberal party won 157 of

parliament's 338 seats, despite losing the popular vote to the Conservatives by 1.2%, or 220,449 votes. The Conservatives won only 121 seats.

And with the early days of the campaign playing out during the summer holidays, most voters have only recently started to pay attention to the blazingly short, 36-day campaign, giving Trudeau the chance to salvage his chances of a third win when Canadians go to the polls on 20 September.

In recent weeks, a wave of protests – some of which have forced the cancellation of the prime minister's public events – have drawn attention to a virulent anti-vaccine movement, as well as growing influence of the far-right People's party of [Canada](#), whose supporters are fixtures of the protests.

Led by former Conservative cabinet minister Maxime Bernier (who himself was recently hit with an egg), the party has campaigned for years on [an anti-immigrant, Islamophobic populist platform](#), with little electoral success.

But months of public lockdowns has given the party an opportunity to channel mounting frustrations – largely among male voters.

"[The People's party] has taken this anti-vaccine, anti-lockdown, anti-mask platform and connected a more traditional, hard-right agenda. And that's given them a lift in the polls that we haven't really seen before," said Andrew McDougall, a professor of political science at the University of Toronto. "Whether or not those supporting the People's party will show up on election day is an open question. We don't know what effect this party will have – people are still trying to make sense of it."

The PPC still has low electoral prospects even in its best-case scenario, but it has nonetheless overtaken the Green party, [which is mired in political infighting](#).

"O'Toole is likely wary that he may be losing votes on the edge to the People's party. And that's something he's going to want to keep an eye on. But he'll lose more votes if he decides to embrace the hard-right agenda."

Sensing an opportunity to shift the narratives of the campaign, Trudeau has repeatedly attacked O'Toole's refusal to embrace vaccine mandates as

Covid-19 cases rise – and tried to link the Conservative leader to the anti-vaccine protests.

“Shame on you, Erin O’Toole,” Trudeau said after he was heckled by protesters. “You need to condemn those people, you need to correct them, you need to use your voice and actually add it to those of us who understand that vaccinations are the way through this pandemic.”

O’Toole has repeatedly condemned the protests, but has been dogged by questions from reporters about unvaccinated members of his own party. While the party has said it encourages vaccines, it has stopped short of supporting a mandate, instead suggesting the decision should be one of personal choice.

The protests have nonetheless given his campaign something that has been missing, said Aaron Wherry, a veteran political journalist at the CBC and author of *Promise & Peril: Justin Trudeau in Power*.

After an event was cancelled due to protests, Trudeau met with reporters later that night.

“He went in front of the media and he talked about the protests. And that was the first time it felt like he got some real energy.” said Wherry. “Up until then, it felt like he’d been grasping for an idea or a narrative in this campaign. This seemed like the first time he’d hit his stride.”

When Trudeau lost his parliamentary majority in 2019, party leaders gently pulled him back from the spotlight.

But the [shooting down of a plane full of Iranian Canadians](#), [national anti-pipeline protests](#) and a global pandemic meant his retreat from the public eye was short-lived.

Two years later Trudeau finds himself in the same position as before the last election: facing accusations from progressive voters that his government hasn’t done enough on social issues and climate change and a vote that will probably be fought over social issues.

“He called an election because he wants a majority. And he knows exactly which ridings [electoral districts] he would have to flip in order to make that happen,” said Lori Turnbull, a professor of political science at Dalhousie University. “And so the national polls don’t necessarily mean a whole lot, as long as the seats add up to the way he wants.”

A weak result for the Liberals on 20 September, however, could upend the power brokering in parliament.

In 2019, Jagmeet Singh, leader of the leftwing New Democratic party, ruled out working with the Conservatives. This time round, he has expressed more openness to cutting deals with the current leader, O’Toole, who shares a focus on affordability and workers’ rights.

But Singh and Trudeau are more natural allies, and despite sparring in the most recent debate, are more closely aligned in their progressive policies.

A narrow win on 20 September – even if it means losing seats in parliament – could help Trudeau cement a legacy with Singh’s help, including the delivery of low-cost expanded childcare, a long-unfulfilled promise by the party that has finally rolled out, says Wherry.

Trudeau’s climate plans, despite coming under attack during the most recent debate, have won plaudits from economists – and from a former top Green party leader, who called them “bold and thoughtful”.

Before his election in 2015, Trudeau was able to convert fatigue with Conservative policies – and the hope of a new, fresh way of doing politics – into a surprise parliamentary majority. Soon after, the election of Donald Trump as president offered the perfect counterpoint to Trudeau’s image as a progressive leader.

But the forces that thrust him into the country’s highest office – his promises of change, his youthful appearance and his fame – could be working against him. All political leaders, especially incumbents, inevitably face voter fatigue.

“You’re not just going out and making promises and talking about how great things are going to be – you have to defend whatever has happened over the past six years,” said Wherry. “Inevitably, there’s just wear-and-tear. As much as the pandemic may have boosted and reset his image, you can’t resist gravity.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/14/trudeau-anti-vaccine-protests-canada-election-campaign>

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[China](#)

China property giant Evergrande admits debt crisis as protesters besiege HQ



Security personnel form a human chain as they guard outside the Evergrande's headquarters, where people gathered to demand repayment of loans and financial products, in Shenzhen on Monday. Photograph: David Kirton/Reuters

[Martin Farrer](#)

Tue 14 Sep 2021 05.42 EDT

Property giant [China](#) Evergrande Group has said that it cannot sell properties and other assets fast enough to service its massive \$300bn debts, and that its cashflow was under “tremendous pressure”.

Only hours after angry investors besieged its Shenzhen headquarters and the company denied it was set for bankruptcy, Evergrande [issued a statement to](#)

[the Hong Kong stock exchange](#) saying that a significant drop in sales would continue this month, which was likely to further deteriorate its liquidity and cash flow.

The company blamed “ongoing negative media reports” for dampening investor confidence, resulting in a further decline in sales in September – usually a strong month for sales in China.

Evergrande also said two of its subsidiaries had failed to discharge guarantee obligations for 934m yuan (\$145m) worth of wealth management products issued by third parties. That could “lead to cross-default”, it said.

And in a sign that restructuring plans are speeding up, the board also said it had appointed advisers to “assess the group’s capital structure, evaluate the liquidity of the group and explore all feasible solutions to ease the current liquidity issue”.

Shares in the group closed down nearly 12% in Hong Kong on Tuesday. The statement also said it had failed to find a buyer in the distressed sale of its electric vehicle and property service subsidiaries, prompting shares in those businesses to fall by 25% and 12% respectively.

Evergrande is one of the world’s most indebted companies, and has seen its shares tumble 75% this year, sparking fears among analysts of “a risk of contagion” spreading through China’s overheated property sector and also its banking system.

Years of borrowing by Evergrande to fund rapid growth has combined with a crackdown on the industry by Beijing to fuel the crisis.

The dramatic announcement on Tuesday follows a turbulent day on Monday which saw increasingly desperate protests by small investors and homebuyers demanding their money back.

“Evergrande return our money!” pic.twitter.com/F6zbJu21jF

— David Kirton (@DavidKirton_) [September 13, 2021](#)

Chaotic scenes erupted at the company's headquarters in Shenzhen as around 100 disgruntled investors crowded into the lobby to demand repayment of loans and financial products.

More than 60 security personnel formed a wall in front of the main entrances to the towering skyscraper in the southern city where protesters gathered to shout at company representatives.

Du Liang, identified by staff as general manager and legal representative of Evergrande's wealth management division, read out a repayments proposal for those who held wealth management products, according to financial media outlet Caixin, but protesters at the company's headquarters appeared to reject it.

"They said repayment would take two years, but there's no real guarantee and I'm worried the company will be bankrupt by the end of the year," said a protester surnamed Wang, who said he works for Evergrande and had invested 100,000 yuan (\$15,500) with the company, while his relatives invested about 1m yuan.

Hundreds of people in recent months have also protested on an online forum set up by the People's Daily, the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist party, seeking government help.

Many analysts believe Evergrande will be [forced to restructure its debt](#) and possibly faces being dismantled under a government-orchestrated operation to ensure a soft landing that does not capsize the country's bloated property market.

But late on Monday, Evergrande responded to the speculation that it was facing a restructuring as "totally untrue".

"The recent comments that have appeared online about Evergrande's restructuring are completely false," [the company said in a statement](#).

It went on to say the company "is indeed facing unprecedented difficulties at the moment, but it will firmly carry out its main corporate responsibilities, fully dedicate itself towards the resumption of work and industry".

The group will “protect housing transactions (and) intends to do everything possible to restore normal business operations, and fully guarantee customers’ legal rights and interests”, the statement added.

However, the group faces serious financial problems and the statement on Tuesday appeared to lay bare the magnitude of the crisis which has seen its bonds fall to less than 75% face value in some cases. Some trading was suspended again on Tuesday amid wild swings in prices.

After highlighting its problems raising cash from the firesale of properties and other assets, it said: “In view of the difficulties, challenges and uncertainties in improving its liquidity, there is no guarantee that the group will be able to meet its financial obligations under the relevant financing documents and other contracts.

“If the group is unable to meet its guarantee obligation or to repay any debt when due or agree with the relevant creditors on extensions of such debts or alternative agreements, it may lead to cross-default under the group’s existing financing arrangements and relevant creditors demanding acceleration of repayment. This would have a material adverse effect on the group’s business, prospects, financial condition and results of operations.”

According to Caixin, Evergrande on Monday proposed that investors choose to accept 10% of the principal and interest of the matured product now and the rest via 10% instalments quarterly, payment by property assets, or by using the outstanding product value to offset home purchase payments.

On Friday, Evergrande vowed to repay all of its matured wealth management products as soon as possible.

Many buyers of Evergrande-built homes have expressed concern about down-payments made for projects now suspended by the property firm, airing concerns on Weibo, China’s Twitter equivalent.

A report last week by [Capital Economics](#) said Evergrande had 1.4m properties it has committed to completing, as of the end of June.

Analysts at the Hong Kong-based market intelligence firm [Reorg](#) described in a recent report how the disputes over contractor payments intertwined with Evergrande's large exposure of unfinished properties that buyers – as is common in China – have already paid for upfront.

“In extreme cases, if China Evergrande fails to complete pre-sold property projects on time, due to inability to pay contractors, China Evergrande will be liable to the purchasers for their losses,” Reorg said.

“In line with industry practice, the group pre-sells properties prior to their completion – as a result, banks providing financing to end purchasers require China Evergrande to guarantee their customers’ mortgage loans. If a purchaser defaults on a mortgage loan, the group may have to repurchase the underlying property by paying off the mortgage.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/14/china-property-giant-evergrande-admits-debt-crisis-as-protesters-besiege-hg>

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- [Coronavirus UK scientist warns over relaxation of Covid travel rules](#)
- [Live PM chairs first meeting of new cabinet as updated Covid travel rules set to be announced](#)
- [Business Aviation shares rise as relaxation of England's Covid travel rules planned](#)
- [UK travel 'Red list' countries to be cut by up to half](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

UK scientist warns over relaxation of Covid travel rules



Passengers arrive at Gatwick airport in London

Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

[Jamie Grierson](#)

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Fri 17 Sep 2021 04.05 EDT

One of the scientists behind the UK's testing network for quickly identifying Covid variants of concern has urged the government to continue surveillance of coronavirus cases brought in to the UK from abroad.

Alan McNally, a professor in microbial evolutionary genomics who worked on setting up the lighthouse laboratories, made the comments amid reports

ministers are preparing to overhaul Covid travel restrictions, including a relaxing of test rules.

It has been reported that double-jabbed travellers will no longer need to take a more costly PCR test after returning from green countries, but take a cheaper lateral flow test instead, while pre-departure tests, taken 72 hours before a passenger flies home are also likely to be scrapped.

It is only positive PCR tests that are referred for genomic sequencing – the process that identifies whether the infection was caused by a new variant of coronavirus.

McNally said: “It kind of makes sense if you look at the rates of Covid in the UK right now, they’re high, so probably lateral flow tests will be sufficient for travellers.

“But I don’t think we can just completely remove all controls on travel and travel-associated Covid, we know from the past that travel-associated Covid is very high risk to this country.

“The devil’s in the detail in this and I would really hope there will be a very strong mandate that any lateral flow positive test from travel have to get a confirmatory PCR test because in my opinion we still that genome level surveillance of Covid cases being introduced into the UK from abroad.”

He added: “I do think it’s vitally important we do genome surveillance on travel Covid cases.”

McNally said there were two groups of people that needed genome surveillance: those who had been double vaccinated but were hospitalised and those who had travelled, adding: “If we’re not monitoring travel-related Covid cases we can end up in big trouble.”

As well as changes to the travel testing regime, it is understood ministers are to slash the number of [red list countries](#). The traffic light system will be overhauled, with the amber tier removed so there is a clearer distinction between “go” and “no go” destinations.

Currently, scientists working at the Joint Biosecurity Centre suggest changes to the three lists depending on each country's Covid case, vaccine and variant levels, though ministers vet these and make the ultimate decisions.

Speaking on Sky News on Friday, the environment secretary, George Eustice, said: "My understanding is no decisions have been taken yet, there may be a meeting today to review this."

Government insiders told the Guardian the ultimate aim was to simplify the rules, after Labour called for the amber list to be scrapped in order to clarify guidance on which destinations are relatively safe and which are not.

However, they also admitted it would have the effect of providing a greater incentive to the 10% of those eligible to be vaccinated who had not yet had their first jab, given the extra money people would have to pay for a PCR test instead of a cheaper lateral flow one, as well as avoiding the hassle of having to self-isolate.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/17/uk-scientist-warns-relaxation-covid-travel-rules-genome-surveillance>

Politics live with Andrew Sparrow

Coronavirus

UK Covid: Turkey off red list as part of wide-ranging easing of travel rules – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2021/sep/16/boris-johnson-new-cabinet-updated-covid-travel-rules-live-coronavirus-red-green-list-latest-updates>

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Stock markets

Aviation shares jump as relaxation of England's Covid travel rules planned



Shares in British Airways owner IAG jumped almost 7% on Friday afternoon. Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters

[Mark Sweney](#)

[@marksweney](#)

Fri 17 Sep 2021 08.52 EDT

Shares in travel and aviation businesses including the [British Airways](#) owner, IAG, Ryanair and the aero engine maker Rolls-Royce have received a boost from news that the UK government is planning to simplify England's rules for international travel.

Investors were buoyed up by the changes – which could include [removing dozens of destinations from the 62-country “red list”](#), the highest alert for

international travel requiring 11 nights' hotel quarantine on return – which are expected to be officially announced by ministers on Friday.

Ministers are also considering removing the amber list category of countries entirely, meaning there would be a clearer distinction between “go” and “no-go” destinations.

Shares in IAG jumped almost 7% on Friday afternoon, making the airline group the biggest riser on the FTSE 100, while shares in InterContinental Hotels Group, the owner of the Holiday Inn chain, were up 2%. [Rolls-Royce](#) was another big beneficiary among FTSE 100 stocks, rising more than 3%.

The relaxation of rules, which could include scrapping the requirement for fully vaccinated people to take PCR tests upon returning to the UK, also provided a boost to the package holiday group Tui, with a near 5% lift in shares making it one of the biggest risers on the FTSE 250 on Friday afternoon. EasyJet rose 3.4%, while rival airlines [Ryanair](#) and Wizz Air were up 2%.

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WH Smith, which does strong trade from its operations in airports, had a 2% rise, while the Restaurant Group, which owns the Wagamama and Frankie & Benny's chains, climbed 5%. Global conference organiser Informa, which has been hit particularly hard by the pandemic, saw a 2.5% bounce, while retailer Burberry climbed 1.8% on the back of hopes of the return of international tourism.

“Companies highly reliant on international tourists saw a jump start to their share price today with a big shake-up in travel rules due,” said Susannah Streeter, a senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown. “This is the jolt of energy the travel industry desperately needed after months of uncertainty.”

Under the current rules, fully vaccinated people arriving from green and amber list countries must take a Covid-19 test within the 72 hours preceding

their return to England, and take a PCR test on or before their second day back.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/sep/17/aviation-shares-rise-as-relaxation-of-england-covid-travel-rules-planned>

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Coronavirus

Ministers to cut ‘red list’ countries by up to half to simplify England’s travel rules



Government insiders said the change would have the effect of providing a greater incentive to the 10% of those eligible to be vaccinated who have not yet had their first jab. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Aubrey Allegretti

@breeallegretti

Thu 16 Sep 2021 14.16 EDT

Ministers are to slash the number of “[red list” countries](#) by up to half as part of plans to simplify England’s rules for international travel, with sources claiming it would incentivise vaccination.

The traffic light system will be overhauled, with the amber tier removed so there is a clearer distinction between “go” and “no go” destinations.

Those who have been double-jabbed are likely to be able to escape quarantine – or the need for costly PCR testing – upon arrival, while unvaccinated passengers will still face those hurdles.

“It will be made much simpler, particularly for those who are double-vaxxed,” a government source said.

It is understood the new red list is likely to be focused on countries where there is a significant concern about Covid variants.

Government insiders said the ultimate aim was to simplify the rules, after Labour called for the amber list to be scrapped in order to clarify guidance on which destinations are relatively safe and which are not.

However, they also admitted it would have the effect of providing a greater incentive to the 10% of those eligible to be vaccinated who have not yet had their first jab, given the extra money people will have to fork out for a PCR test instead of a cheaper lateral flow one, as well as avoiding the hassle of having to self-isolate.

For those returning from red-list countries, quarantine hotels are expected to remain in place. However, the number of destinations on the red list is expected to be reduced significantly, with a senior government source indicating it could be as much as half.

Ministers will gather on Friday morning to sign off the plans and an announcement is expected later that afternoon. The process usually takes place every three weeks on a Thursday or Wednesday, but it is understood to have been delayed due to the reshuffle.

The decision will also be watched closely to see whether the composition of so-called “dove” and “hawk” cabinet ministers – those who are more cautious versus others who want a speedier relaxing of restrictions – has changed with the appointment of Liz Truss as foreign secretary and the bringing into cabinet of Nadhim Zahawi, Anne-Marie Trevelyan and Nadine Dorries.

Currently, scientists working at the Joint Biosecurity Centre suggest changes to the three lists depending on each country's Covid case, vaccine and variant levels, though ministers vet these and make the ultimate decisions. They have been accused previously by data experts of not being transparent enough about what information they use and being inconsistent in the methodology behind triggering a country's move from one list to another.

Coronavirus data analyst Tim White said predicting which countries would be moved was a "travel lottery" and that "no one can be sure". But he added: "The data firmly support Turkey being removed, as it has no threat of variants and a lot of genomic sequencing."

While the red, amber and green lists are looked at regularly, there were three review points designed to look at whether wholesale change of the current travel rules were needed. The last – 31 July – saw the dropping of the quarantine requirement for double-vaccinated people returning from amber list countries. The next is scheduled for 1 October.

Some of those who have been double-jabbed outside the UK will also be hopeful that the government makes good on its pledge for people who are still registered with a GP to be able to have this added to their NHS vaccine record.

Nadhim Zahawi, then vaccines minister and now education secretary, pledged in July: "By the end of this month, UK nationals who have been vaccinated overseas will be able to talk to their GP, go through what vaccine they have had, and have it registered with the NHS that they have been vaccinated."

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- Driving Miss Margolyes A hilarious road trip through Europe in lockdown
- Sex Education season three review The spark has gone
- Rapper Tion Wayne Police don't want us to win, they want us in jail

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Interview

‘Everything just kept getting bigger!’ Genesis on prog, 80s stardom and Phil Collins’s health

[Harry Sword](#)



Genesis in 2021 ... the core trio of Mike Rutherford, Phil Collins and Tony Banks. Photograph: Will Ireland/Genesis

Fri 17 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

‘Genesis have always been slightly below the radar,’ says keyboardist Tony Banks. ‘We’ve never been part of a current trend; we don’t tend to get awards; we’re just sort of ... *there*. People that like us *really* like us, though, and that’s all we care about.’

“Below the radar” may be a strange way of describing a band who have sold more than 150m albums. But, then, Genesis have always been peculiarly self-effacing. From their early-70s, Peter Gabriel-fronted iteration, where they quickly ascended to the upper echelons of progressive rock with a combination of theatrical whimsy and fiendish technical complexity, to their slicker, poppier, staggeringly successful 80s years, they remain a wildly popular – yet pleasingly eccentric – proposition.

Rehearsing for the band’s The Last Domino? world tour (their first since 2007, and twice delayed by the pandemic), the band are in a warehouse studio in a London industrial estate. Amid black drapes and hundreds of flight cases, lights are set up for a BBC TV interview that is interrupted comically frequently by hammering and drilling from building works outside. After about half a dozen false starts, a bearded roadie is dispatched to “make it stop”. Beeb interview duly in the can, I am ushered into a side room to meet Banks, [Phil Collins](#) and guitarist-bassist Mike Rutherford.

Collins has suffered a well-documented period of extended ill health over the past few years: dislocated vertebrae led to nerve problems that have stopped him drumming, and he is diabetic. He is frail and seems slightly distracted, walks with the aid of a stick, but is in good spirits. Banks and Rutherford are self-deprecating and relaxed.

Formed at Charterhouse school in 1967 by Gabriel, Banks, Rutherford and guitarist Anthony Phillips, the band started out making fey acoustic pop, unrepresentative of what was to come. Their 1969 debut LP, From Genesis to Revelation, tanked (supposedly, copies often ended up in the religious

section of record shops) and various lineup changes followed before the stronger second album, *Trespass*. Needing a drummer who could drive their increasingly complex material, the band found a young Collins, in 1971, along with virtuoso guitarist Steve Hackett, in time to record the bona fide prog classic album *Nursery Cryme*. Typified by the heavy 10-minute epic *The Musical Box* – a macabre tale involving croquet, decapitation and a haunting – *Nursery Cryme* had a keenly chiselled dynamic range and fantastical lyrics.

Subsequent albums such as *Foxtrot*, *Selling England By the Pound* and *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* positioned Genesis at the top of the progressive tree alongside the likes of Yes, King Crimson and Emerson, Lake & Palmer. By 1974, relations with Gabriel had become fraught. After he informed the band that he was leaving during the *Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* tour, Genesis auditioned more than 400 potential singers, with Collins taking on the arduous task of guiding them through the melodies. Eventually, it dawned on everyone that he had a better voice than the lot of them. Did he actually enjoy singing, though?



Winging it ... Peter Gabriel fronts the band in Newcastle in 1972.
Photograph: Michael Putland/Getty Images

“I did enjoy it,” he explains. “I set out what I would do and what I wouldn’t do. I personally felt that some of the visuals, the costumes and so on, were getting in the way of the vocals.” Gabriel had variously dressed up as a flower, fox, bat and the fascinatingly pustular creation Slipperman. “I didn’t think I’d be very good at doing that theatrical stuff anyway. So I said: ‘Look, I can *sing* the songs, but anything else will be a bit of a question mark.’” Collins did get in on a bit of Gabrielian horseplay in the end. “I was on stage running around and talking to the audience … the only [costume] I did was Robbery, Assault and Battery. I put on a jacket and a hat and became the Artful Dodger.”

The first Collins-fronted LP – 1976’s *A Trick of the Tail* – was well received, while next, *Wind & Wuthering*, saw a conscious taming of some of Genesis’ more fantastical elements. More turbulence was on the cards, however, as Hackett left in 1977 to pursue a solo career. Collins, Rutherford and Banks recorded *And Then There Were Three* the following year.

With punk, the thing was, I didn’t like a lot of the bands that they didn’t like

Phil Collins

Banks remains surprisingly sanguine about Hackett’s departure. “Mike suddenly had to play more lead guitar so there was a moment or two of getting that together.” He turns to Rutherford: “I think you did a good job, actually!” Collins pinpoints 1980’s *Duke* as “the more progressive change. And then [the 1981 LP] *Abacab* was where there was a really conscious change. But the comings and goings of the various musicians? It didn’t affect our trajectory as much as all that. After all, a large percentage of the group – us three – was the same. And we were all writers.”

But how, exactly, did Genesis move from being titans of prog – famed for 20-minute epics, lofty concept suites and bizarre costume changes – to stadium-filling 80s everyman popsters? The band remain adamant that the punk and new wave explosion of the late 70s had next to no impact on them, despite the fact that prog was – almost overnight, and with serious critical venom – deemed passé.



And Then There Were Three ... (left to right) Mike Rutherford, Tony Banks and Phil Collins in 1980. Photograph: Chris Walter/WireImage

“The thing was, *I* didn’t like a lot of the bands that *they* didn’t like, too,” says Collins. “I always saw us as slightly separate from all of that. And when punk happened, we were away an awful lot – three American tours and three European tours. I used to get Melody Maker and all those papers every single week, but I wasn’t getting them any more. The short periods that I *was* at home, I don’t think I heard a single Clash record or Damned record. It just passed me by.”

“I always felt we were lucky to be the last ones left standing,” adds Banks. “Our competitors – people like Yes and ELP – had faded by that point. So we were the last of that prog bastion. We actually had our first hit record – Follow You Follow Me – during the height of punk. It kind carried us through that time.

“It’s funny, I remember walking down Wardour Street one day and saw this guy in full punk kit: ears pieced, pins, leather jacket. He ran up to me and said: ‘Tony Banks! I really need your autograph!’ And he pulls out this copy of Pretty Vacant for me to sign. It actually showed what I’d always known: that people have multiple tastes, people aren’t stuck in a rut. They like a bit of this and a bit of that.”

Duke and Abacab were markedly different – the trio entered the studio without any pre-written material, improvising in a spirit of equal collaboration. The former was punchier and rockier than anything that had come before; the latter colder and synth-led. Both were – by comparison to their 70s material – polished to a fine sheen. They also, however, became overshadowed by the profile of Collins who had – by 1981 and the release of his album *Face Value* – embarked on a phenomenally successful solo career (Banks and Rutherford also released significantly more leftfield solo work around this time). Immediately suited to the transatlantic AOR FM dial, the Collins solo sound was slick, emotive, personal – a different animal to Genesis, with more overt R&B and pop influences.

“Phil was on a roll in the 1980s,” Rutherford says. “*Everything* that he touched came good – everything. His first solo album went ballistic just when we were about to release Duke – it was good timing!”

I always feel like a bit of spectator. It's not real, in a way ... The fame thing doesn't interest me at all

Tony Banks

“It helped us,” agrees Banks. “Most band members start solo careers because they aren’t happy with the band or they’re frustrated. We did it for variety and change. It made us look forward to coming back to Genesis. We’d come in with no idea and just see what happened. The drum machine might come on; I’d play a riff. We’d improvise.” Citing Land of Confusion from 1986’s *Invisible Touch*, he says: “I was amazed by how concise we could be.”

Invisible Touch remains Genesis’ biggest album, the title track reaching No 1 in the US. It is this iteration of Genesis that became a byword for slickly efficient pop, far removed from the Gabriel era. Genesis gained a younger, MTV-generation audience, many of whom were completely unaware of the band’s leftfield past. Bret Easton Ellis ended up including an entire chapter dedicated to the band – and the solo works of Collins – in *American Psycho*, with Patrick Bateman dissecting them in disturbingly forensic detail, making this era of Genesis a byword for 80s excess (needless to say, Bateman dislikes the Gabriel songs).

“Everything just kept getting bigger,” says Collins. “It just caught fire, and my solo records were doing very well in America, too – it all converged.”

“I don’t think we felt much pressure,” adds Banks. “We were confident. You have to remember: it had been *such* a slow trajectory for Genesis. It was 10 years before we even had anything played on radio!”

But what about pressure today? In the aforementioned BBC interview, Collins mentioned, as he frequently has in the past, his inability to play the drums; his 20-year-old son Nic will play them on the forthcoming tour. But what, I wonder, about singing? A three-hour arena show is a serious physical undertaking – what does he do to stay vocally fit?

“I don’t do anything at all,” says Collins, as Banks and Rutherford look on, uneasy for the first time. “I don’t practise singing at home, not at all. Rehearsing *is* the practice. These guys are always having a go at me for not, but I have to do it this way. Of course, my health does change things, doing the show seated changes things. But I actually found on my recent solo tours, it didn’t get in the way; the audience were still listening and responding. It’s not the way I would have written it, but it’s the way that it is.



Genesis rehearsing, with Phil Collins's 20-year-old son Nic on drums.
Photograph: Will Ireland/Genesis

“Playing with Nic, though? That’s been easy,” he continues. “He started playing with me when he was 16. If I feel that he should concentrate on something to make it better I’ll mention it and he’ll come back the next day and he will have done it. He doesn’t need constant nudging; he pulls it together with remarkable ease. I used to take him and his younger brother to school in the car, and they’d put on a Genesis live CD, so he’s been around it for a long time. I’d just let him play down in the playroom and I’d hear his progress; he’s been playing well for as long as I can remember. I’ve got videos of him from when he was five years old just standing and playing. He pretty much taught himself – occasionally I’d nudge him in the right directions.”

As *The Last Domino?* is likely to be the final major Genesis tour, do the three feel a sense of nervous energy? “A little,” says Banks. “But I always feel like a bit of spectator up there. It’s not real, in a way ... You just do it. It’s gratifying to hear the songs you’ve written getting a great response but I’ve never ...” He pauses. “The fame thing doesn’t interest me at all.”

“We’ve been doing this for 50 years now,” concludes Rutherford, slightly wistfully. “It’s just ...” and he pauses, too. “It’s what we do.”

The *Last Domino?* tour begins at Utilita Arena, Birmingham, 20 September; US dates begin at United Center, Chicago, 15 November. An accompanying best-of compilation, *The Last Domino?*, is out now

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Miriam Margolyes

Driving Ms Margolyes – A hilarious road trip through Europe in lockdown

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[TV review](#)[Sex Education](#)

Sex Education season three review – the spark has gone



Phenomenal ... Connor Swindells as Adam Groff in season three of Sex Education. Photograph: Sam Taylor/Netflix



[Lucy Mangan](#)

[@LucyMangan](#)

Fri 17 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

The third series of [Sex Education](#) (Netflix) opens with a montage as celebratory/disgusting as its predecessor in season two (delete according to taste, though if you're in the latter camp, you're probably better off not watching a show called *Sex Education*). Then, it was Otis (Asa Butterfield) discovering the pleasures of onanism. This time, it's everyone discovering the pleasures of everything from alien cosplay to VR porn. Miss Sands is even doing it with Colin on drums.

All seems to be well, as this glorious opening suggests that the various elements the show has always held in perfect balance will be happily united once more. Affection, ribaldry and humour laid over a responsible seriousness towards the lives and loves of its adolescent characters and a fearlessly unhip honesty about issues that face them has always been the USP of Laurie Nunn's wonderful creation.

But the formula is so precise that its blending amounts almost to alchemy, and this series doesn't work quite as well as the previous two. There is still much to love. Eric (Ncuti Gatwa) and Adam's (Connor Swindells)

relationship is the spine of the eight-episode run, and this part of the programme doesn't put a foot wrong across all the emotional terrain it covers. The two actors, in a uniformly brilliant cast, are phenomenal.

Elsewhere, though, the tone is increasingly off, the magic diminished. The script is less fleet, less funny and the therapy-speak that was once Otis's province (for credible reasons, being the son of a sex therapist) seems to have infected the whole student body. Every momentary miscommunication is almost immediately identified, interrogated and resolved, which is nice for them but unrewarding for the viewer. There are several points at which the pedagogy the programme has avoided for so long creeps in – Amy's vulvar education and passing on of her new wisdom being the most obvious. Every episode used to speed by but now each one feels very much its full hour long. The various sexual escapades, which were once just the gateway to exploring character and mining deeper truths, increasingly seem like an end in themselves.



Bonding ... Kedar Williams-Stirling as Jackson Marchetti and Dua Saleh as Cal. Photograph: Sam Taylor/Netflix

The focus is wider (Jean and Jakob's is one of the many adult relationships given more attention, and there are more students introduced too) and perhaps as a result the strokes are broader. New headteacher Hope (Jemima

Kirke) is virtually a Disney-style villainess whose unconvincing – and even in non-Sex Education terms, unoriginal – backstory does nothing to humanise or complicate.

All that said, a sub-par Sex Education is still a good and joyful thing. Apart from the Eric-Adam storyline, other highlights include the developing relationship between Maeve (Emma Mackey) and Isaac (George Robinson, another standout performer since he joined in season two). There's also the introduction of trans student Cal Bowman (Dua Saleh, in one of the most assured debuts I've ever seen) with whom Jackson (Kedar Williams-Stirling) feels an immediate bond but must work out for himself exactly what that bond comprises.

The series covers a lot of ground – as well as the emotional and hormonal journeys we also see how disability and poverty hamper people's ability to use their talents and intelligence to the full, the importance of heritage and racial identity and the difficulties of navigating so many streams as they cross, and much more. Still, it's hard to avoid reluctantly crossing out the A* and giving this term's effort a B+.

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[Rap](#)

Interview

Rapper Tion Wayne: ‘Police don’t want us to win, they want us in jail’

[Christine Ochefu](#)



Tion Wayne: ‘I’m not one of them rappers that puts on this persona they’re some bad boy.’

Fri 17 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

Dennis Junior Odunwo, AKA [Tion Wayne](#), is a hard man to pin down. After a short wild-goose chase from our intended meeting point, we meet at a friend's house in Lower Edmonton, London, where Odunwo has just finished getting his hair cut, to discuss his debut album, *Green With Envy*. Odunwo's often menacing delivery on the mic contradicts his in-person demeanour; he's polite and friendly, almost bashful. He's still coming to grips with the vulnerable nature of interviews, he admits. "I'm not all the way there yet. I don't really like giving away all of myself."

Green With Envy is his first album, although the 28-year-old has long been an emergent star in the UK rap scene, first cropping up on YouTube in 2010 and gaining further hype with his Wayne's World mixtape trilogy. His use of melody marks him out, with punchy staccato rhythms and sing-song delivery meshing perfectly with the hi-hats of drill. He has had a string of Top 10 hits including *I Dunno* – featuring guest stars Stormzy and Dutchavelli – and two catchy, cheeky tracks with Russ Millions: 2019's *Keisha & Becky* and 2021's *Body*. Each was further enhanced with posses on remixes, and the latter became the drill genre's first No 1 in May (and won him two gongs at this week's Rated awards). The disbelief still tickles him. "I was expecting it to take off, but not like that, no," he laughs. "I don't think anyone could anticipate that."

Odunwo has been framed as a drill star ready to cross into the mainstream, but it would be wrong to pigeonhole him within that particular style. His cross-genre appeal is evident on his strong album, where tracks such as *Loyal* are laced with languid, Afro-swing rhythms, while *Road to Riches* excels at detailing struggles in the rap industry. His chart success comes from purposefully club-friendly and lighthearted singles, featuring one-liners designed, he says, "to be controversial" and get ears pricking. *Body*'s "you wanna get smoked, cigarette?" is brilliantly economical, both a diss and threat to an adversary; "I got blond girls coming to my shows / Even though their dad is a racist," he raps on his latest Top 10 hit, *Wid It*.

“I was thinking: is this going to trigger anyone? And I thought: the only people this can trigger is racist people,” he laughs. “I’m not one of them rappers that every second puts on this persona [that] they’re some bad boy. Like, when I’m with the mandem and we’re licked [drunk], we’re all just dancing around. When I’m in a studio, I can put that vibe into my music.”

Being a bad boy, of course, is still a part of his image he’s having to contend with. Odunwo is the middle child of three. Though his parents were music fans, with his mother a lover of gospel, he was pushed towards accounting, banking and business. He summarises his relationship with his parents: “Conflict. It’s gone from conflict to understanding.”

That friction is detailed on Green With Envy with tracks such as Homecoming, where he talks of his strict Nigerian household and getting into trouble with the police in his younger years. He had been musically gifted and inclined to storytelling as a child, writing and emulating the flows of artists such as 2Pac that he would see on TV; his mother would take him to concerts (he vaguely recalls seeing Michael Jackson). But he had his first arrest at 15, and stints in prison culled his musical ambitions. It’s only now that Odunwo is starting to re-experience live music; a legacy of the police banning him from events such as Notting Hill carnival when he was in his early teens. “I got kicked out of my house bare times when I was young,” he notes. “Obviously, the vision [my parents] had for me, I weren’t really following it. I was out every day, wasn’t coming home and then I got caught up doing what I was doing.”



‘It’s gone from conflict to understanding’ ... Tion Wayne.

Was he a hothead growing up? “Yeah, I was a bit of a hothead,” he says slowly, toying with his answer. “But only when I thought me or my people would be at risk. I wouldn’t just snap for no reason.” It was the norm in Edmonton, he says, a deprived part of north [London](#) with few opportunities. “Everyone’s just on some survival mode ting. People judge you off the person you’re forced to be and that’s not the guy I’ve ever wanted to be. More people that grew up round here, they’ve just been changed into someone that they had to be.”

In 2017, he was charged with affray after being involved in a brawl outside a Bristol nightclub. He was filmed on CCTV kicking the victim in the head, and given a 16-month sentence. “I went from being someone to no one. The Bristol moment reminded me that I can’t be doing them kinds of things,” he says. “Back in the day I might have thought it was cool but now as I’ve grown up, it’s just dead – it’s not worth it. It was a reminder: I don’t want to be a nobody. But I’m just hoping that I’m not ever put in a position that can draw me out.

“People might look at me and think: ‘This guy’s a bad guy,’ but they ain’t been in the positions I’ve been in,” he continues. “You know when you’re backed into a corner? It’s like people who are in a war. It’s gonna bring out a

side of them that's not really them." And in the Bristol case? Odunwo is regretful, but feels as though his sentencing is part of a wider issue, where pathways out of a dangerous lifestyle are blocked. "I feel like they made an example of me. I had like 14 co-defendants and I'm the only one that went [to] jail, because I was the headline," he says.

"[Police] don't want us to win, they want us to go to jail," he continues, meaning people from his background. "That's why they want the rapper so much; we're the platform to the people they don't like." Fellow rappers J Hus, Headie One and Digga D have all been arrested and convicted after a first flush of fame, and he argues that "it can tear down a whole community" if its figurehead rapper is silenced, and that his friends "would be in jail" if he hadn't been able to employ them in his music career. "There's people that have been with me doing music and they haven't been in trouble since. Take down a rapper, it takes down like 10 people. The police are making it a thing – they're trying to take out the genre."

His passion emphasises an often overlooked element of British rap: its nature as a community enterprise for people from his background. "It's not for me any more, it's for my people," he says. "I feel like God sent me to be that guy. Because I've had so many messes-up on my way here, people have never actually deeped [realised] what I'm capable of. This is my first chance to show that in the eyes of the public."

His eyes are also on superstardom. Odunwo wants to work again with the likes of Ed Sheeran – he helped keep Sheeran's recent single Bad Habits at No 1 by creating a drill remix – and to serve as an entry point for British listeners who aren't familiar with homegrown rap. "When rappers blow [up] in America they go straight into the mainstream, but I feel like there's a big gap between the UK mainstream and the streets. Our country is more white. It's harder to blow in this country as a black artist because there's not a lot of us, you need all communities to listen. I'm trying to push the UK rap scene into a place where we're recognised as mainstream music straight away, not 'urban'." A catalysing force who knows what it is to make change, he acknowledges that shift might be happening already.

Green With Envy is out now on Atlantic Records

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Coronavirus

Long Covid in children and adolescents is less common than previously feared



A child has her temperature checked before entering a preschool in Spain. The five most common long Covid symptoms reported in children and adolescents are headache, fatigue, sleep disturbance, concentration difficulties and abdominal pain. Photograph: Pablo Cuadra/Getty Images

*[Donna Lu](#)
[@donnadlu](#)*

Thu 16 Sep 2021 18.00 EDT

Children and adolescents who are infected with Covid-19 rarely have symptoms that last for longer than 12 weeks, according to a review of international research.

The review, published in the Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal, suggests that long Covid in children and adolescents is less common than previously

feared.

The review analysed 14 international studies involving 19,426 children and adolescents who reported long-term symptoms after Covid-19 infections.

Study co-author Prof Nigel Curtis, a paediatric infectious diseases specialist at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, said more research was needed to determine the exact risk of long Covid in young people, particularly to inform decisions about vaccinating children under 12.

“When you’re balancing the risk-benefit of vaccines, you always want to make sure the harms of the disease are more than the potential harms of the vaccine. Because the risk of the disease in children is so low, long Covid becomes an important factor.

“We don’t in fact have an accurate determination of the risk of long Covid, but it’s likely to be considerably less than many ... headlines have been suggesting.”

Long Covid is a syndrome with more than 200 documented symptoms, but as a new condition, there is not yet a standardised clinical definition for diagnosis – including for how long symptoms should persist.

Curtis, who is also a professor at the University of Melbourne and head of infectious diseases at the Royal Children's hospital, said: “Because there’s nothing we can measure and there’s no test for it, it makes it very difficult particularly when you’re trying to separate it from symptoms just due to lockdown or other indirect effects of the pandemic.”

Researchers acknowledged more work needs to be done as the review found almost all the existing studies had limitations.

In the reviewed studies, the five most common long Covid symptoms reported in children and adolescents were headache, fatigue, sleep disturbance, concentration difficulties and abdominal pain. But in studies that included control groups, the proportion of people who reported such symptoms was similar among individuals who had been diagnosed with

Covid and those who hadn't. In the majority of studies, symptoms did not last for longer than 12 weeks.

Other studies had a low response rate, which may have skewed the data. "People who respond to surveys are much more likely to be those with symptoms, so therefore you will exaggerate the rate of the risk of long Covid," Curtis said.

Curtis sought to reassure parents without downplaying the individual impact of long Covid. "No one's underplaying the fact that it exists ... we do need to know how better to diagnose and treat the condition."

A separate research brief produced by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute on Covid-19 in children suggests that the Delta variant has not caused more serious disease in children than previous strains, although its transmissibility has led to higher infection figures.

"Hospitalisation remains rare, and the need for intensive care is exceedingly rare in children," Curtis said. "The majority of children admitted to hospital [with Covid] do very well and go home, and often they are just admitted as a precaution."

The research brief also found, however, that children and adolescents with pre-existing health conditions – including obesity, chronic kidney disease and immune disorders – were 25 times more likely to have severe Covid.

To date, no Australian children have died of Covid-19. There has been one adolescent death, in a Sydney teenager who also had meningitis.

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Scotland

Scottish government requests military support for ambulance crews



Nicola Sturgeon and Humza Yousaf, Scotland's health secretary, during first minister's questions in Holyrood, Edinburgh, on Thursday. Photograph: Andy Buchanan/PA

PA Media

Thu 16 Sep 2021 13.17 EDT

The Scottish government has officially requested support from the military to deal with pressure in the ambulance service that has extended waiting times, the [Ministry of Defence](#) has confirmed.

On Thursday, [Nicola Sturgeon](#) told MSPs during first minister's questions the possibility of asking for aid was "under active consideration", but the request came just a few hours later.

The MoD has said the request related to support of the mobile testing units deployed by the Scottish ambulance service, which would free up resources within the service.

Sturgeon apologised to people who had endure long waits for ambulances, including the family of 65-year-old Gerald Brown, the Glasgow man who died after waiting 40 hours for treatment.

A spokeswoman for the MoD said: “The Ministry of Defence has received a request from Scottish government under the military aid to civilian authority process. We are working hard to identify where we can most effectively assist other government departments and civil authorities.”

A Scottish government spokesperson said: “As the first minister set out, targeted military assistance for the Scottish ambulance service is being requested.

“This support is being sought to address acute services. In addition, a separate request has been submitted for military assistance to support staffing of mobile testing units (MTUs) to help them run at increased capacity.”

Speaking in Holyrood earlier, the first minister said: “I apologise unreservedly to anyone that has suffered or is suffering unacceptably long waits.

“Military assistance is already being provided to ambulance services in England, and of course we have had military assistance for other aspects of the pandemic over the past 18 months.”

The health secretary, Humza Yousaf, who said on Wednesday that people should “think twice” before calling for an ambulance, will make a statement to parliament next week setting out measures being taken by the Scottish government to ease the crisis.

The Conservative leader, Douglas Ross, criticised Yousaf’s comments, calling them “dangerous and reckless”, and urged Sturgeon to apologise on Yousaf’s behalf – which she did not.

Instead, the first minister said people should “never hesitate in calling an ambulance if that is the intervention they think is required”.

Ross said: “This shouldn’t be happening in [Scotland](#) in 2021 … Last week, the first minister wouldn’t accept the ambulance service is in crisis. Surely the last seven days will have changed her mind?”

Sturgeon refused to say there was a crisis, instead saying: “I don’t challenge the extent of the pressure that’s on our ambulance service and indeed on all parts of our national health service.”

Pressure because of coronavirus, Sturgeon said, was driving the problems being seen in the sector. She added: “The fact that anyone in our country waits an unacceptable period of time for an ambulance when they need urgent care is not acceptable to me and it’s not acceptable to anyone, and that is why we will work closely and intensively with the ambulance service to support it to meet those challenges, which I would expect to continue for a period as the Covid pressure continues and as we go into the winter months.”

She continued: “I do not, in any way, underestimate the extent of the challenge facing the ambulance service and by extension people across Scotland.

“This is the latest in a number of significant challenges posed to us as a result of this pandemic. Our responsibility is to take the action to support the service to meet that challenge and that’s what I’m focused on, what the health secretary is focused on, and what the entire government is focused on.”

Speaking specifically about Brown’s case, a spokeswoman from the Scottish ambulance service said: “We have started an investigation into the circumstances relating to the delay in reaching Mr Brown and will be in contact with Mr Brown’s family directly to apologise for the delay in response and pass on our sincere condolences.

“We are really sorry for their loss and our thoughts are with them at this difficult time. All findings and lessons learned will be shared with Mr

Brown's family as part of the investigation process.”

Brown's death has been reported to the procurator fiscal, who said an investigation was ongoing.

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Canada

Alberta reverses hands-off approach to Covid to tackle ‘crisis of unvaccinated’



A person looks at the emergency alert by public health services displayed on a monitor in Edmonton as new temporary health measures come into effect in Alberta. Photograph: Artur Widak/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Leyland Cecco in Toronto](#)

Thu 16 Sep 2021 11.55 EDT

Alberta’s premier has announced sweeping new restrictions to combat the spread of the coronavirus, admitting the Canadian province was gripped by a “crisis of the unvaccinated”.

The new measures marked a major reversal from Jason Kenney’s hands-off approach to the pandemic previously, and come amid warnings from frontline medical workers that the province’s healthcare system is [on the verge of collapse](#).

Kenney admitted as much when he outlined the province's new restrictions, telling the public that Alberta may run out of intensive-care beds and staff to care for ICU patients within 10 days.

Alberta currently has the worst coronavirus outbreak in [Canada](#).

Kenney, whose government consists of moderate and far-right conservatives, has previously resisted vaccine passport systems, citing privacy concerns. But on Wednesday evening, he admitted he had little choice.

"The government's first obligation must be to avoid large numbers of preventable deaths. We must deal with the reality that we are facing. We cannot wish it away," he said. "Morally, ethically and legally, the protection of life must be our paramount concern."

Beginning late this month, Albertans must show proof of vaccination or a negative Covid test for restaurants, bars and indoor organized events. Businesses that choose not to ask for vaccination status will have a separate, more strict set of regulations they must follow. For example, if restaurants opt out of the vaccine passport system, they must close their indoor dining rooms and limit outdoor service to tables of six people, all of whom must be from the same household.

"No one will be compelled to get vaccinated against their wishes, and a negative test option will be offered as an alternative," Kenney said. "But with unvaccinated patients overwhelming our hospitals, this is now the only responsible choice that we have."

The rules apply to anyone above the age of 12.

In his remarks, Kenney also apologized for treating Covid-19 as something that was not an immediate threat to the lives of Albertans. In July, officials had said Alberta was "open for summer" and the governing United Conservative party [began selling hats](#) proclaiming 2021 was the "Best Summer Ever". Those hats are [no longer for sale](#).

"It is now clear that we were wrong – and for that, I apologize," said Kenney.

The Alberta Health Services head, Verna Yiu, had dire warnings for the province on Wednesday, saying that her agency will soon ask other provinces if they have ICU space to care for Albertans. AHS will also ask other provinces if they have frontline medical staff who could be deployed to assist in Alberta.

The province has already cancelled surgeries to increase ICU capacity. As of Tuesday, 270 people were in Alberta's ICUs, far more than the limit of 173. More than 90% of patients in the ICU are unvaccinated or partly vaccinated.

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[**Opinion**](#)[**Boris Johnson**](#)

In the past, chaos brought down governments. Why not this one?

[Andy Beckett](#)



Illustration: Eleanor Shakespeare

Fri 17 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

Voters punish governments that lose control. That has been one of the ruling assumptions of British politics and political commentary since the 1970s. In that infamous decade, Tory and Labour governments alike fell largely because they allowed everyday life to be seriously disrupted – first during the 1974 [three-day week](#), then during the 1978-9 “winter of discontent”.

Boris Johnson has presided over more disruption than any prime minister for decades: in education, agriculture, construction, the courts, manufacturing, exports and imports, the hospitality industry, retail and, above all, public health policy. He has rarely been able to present himself as in control of

events. And unlike the crises of the 1970s – which led to almost no loss of life – his premiership has seen tens of thousands of unnecessary deaths.

The pandemic has been partly responsible for the chaos, of course, and has given the government a great alibi. But Johnson's own policies, including the hardest possible Brexit, and his careless governing style have greatly contributed to the disorder. Yet, as this week's [sweeping reshuffle](#) suggested, his prime ministerial confidence seems undented.

So why has all the chaos not left his administration seriously damaged? One explanation is that Johnson has made chaos his brand, from his artfully ruffled hair to his deliberately rambling speeches. He embodies the idea that success can be achieved by messy spontaneity – however rehearsed his spontaneity actually is – rather than careful planning. To many English people who believe that their country has always been a rebel in a rule-bound Europe, this version of Johnson is very appealing.

Similarly, many of his policies are meant to be disruptive. Brexit, [culture wars](#) and “levelling up” are intended to upset the status quo – or at least to appear that way. In an anti-establishment age, with Johnson's the third Tory government in a row, creating turbulence may be the only way to make Conservatism seem fresh and exciting. It also distracts from the fact that the right's closeness to many powerful English institutions and interests, from [the press](#) to [big property developers](#), remains complacently intact.

But the public's apparent tolerance for chaos may also have deeper causes. Since at least the 2008 financial crisis, daily life and its wider backdrop have become more disorderly for many people. [Erratic employment](#), extreme weather, political shocks, [the constant flux of life online](#): even for some privileged Britons, a degree of turbulence has become the modern condition. By contrast, the crises of the 70s occurred in a country that had been relatively stable since the end of the second world war. When this calm was disturbed, many voters were alarmed and angry. They believed that it was the job of government, through the paternalistic institutions of the welfare state, to keep them safe and help give their lives a pattern.

One of the dubious achievements of Conservatism since has been to erode those expectations. From Margaret Thatcher onwards, Tory prime ministers have rarely shrunk the state, despite many promises to do so, but they have shrunk Britons' confidence about what the state can do. So when the state fails – as it has done so regularly and spectacularly under Johnson – the government's poll ratings may dip, but they do not collapse.

There is also a political edge to how Johnson's chaos is distributed. Benefits claimants, key workers and the young are more exposed than property owners and pensioners. As Thatcher did, Johnson and his ministers talk about Britons [taking more responsibility](#) for their lives while quietly making sure that the social groups inclined to vote Tory are cushioned by state subsidies and [tax advantages](#). For these groups, the government offers not chaos but continuity: endlessly rising house prices, old-fashioned English nationalism, near-perpetual Conservative rule.

Given all these political tranquillisers, is there any way that a widespread sense of public outrage at the state of the country could be awakened? For his first year and a half as Labour leader, [Keir Starmer](#) has been attacking Johnson for his “incompetence” and lack of “grip”. Starmer has delivered detailed critiques of Tory U-turns. He has expressed outrage at government calamities. But nothing has really resonated. Increasingly, he has sounded exasperated and baffled, at both Johnson's lack of interest in cohesive government and many voters' apparent contentment.

Starmer's frustration has spread to his colleagues. After the latest Tory U-turn [on vaccine passports](#) last weekend his deputy, Angela Rayner, said: “This is the culmination of a summer of chaos from ministers and they urgently need to get a grip before winter.” Rarely has an important political truth sounded so tired and robotic.

One of Labour's problems is that it does not have access to the same machinery as the [Conservatives](#) for turning attack lines into widely believed narratives. The idea that the “winter of discontent” was purely about weak Labour government and overmighty trade unions – rather than workers reacting against low wages and high inflation – has been sustained by generations of rightwing journalists and historians, as well as by Tory politicians. Labour simply does not have as many storytellers on its side.

In opposition, both Harold Wilson in the early 1960s and Tony Blair in the mid-1990s managed to convince a decisive number of voters that Conservative governments were no longer coping with the country's problems. But Blair and Wilson were helped by the fact that a lot of Britons were already coming to that conclusion, paying closer attention than they are now to Tory policy malfunctions and scandals. Starmer has neither his predecessors' way with words nor their fortunate timing.

That the Conservatives seem more focused on internal power struggles and personnel matters than on effectively governing the country suggests great confidence. But they will not be chaos-proof for ever. One of the lessons of early 21st-century western politics is that parties can seem impregnable, and then suddenly be in freefall. So much has happened since Johnson became prime minister, it's often forgotten that his government has existed for barely two years. It has not kept up its gravity-defying act for that long. And this month, heading towards winter with the virus spreading again, the economy slowing and increasingly acrimonious battles over the public finances, the government is already starting to sag in the polls. The reshuffle is an acknowledgement that it has problems.

Yet whether Starmer can pin all the disasters since 2019 on the Tories, and how that affects the next election, are not the only issues that matter. An equally important question is how this lethally incompetent government is remembered in decades to come, and what influence that has on more distant elections, on the long-term reputation of the Conservative party and on the national story that Britain tells itself. For a long time, the Tories won the war over the meaning of the 70s. The wars over the Johnson years have only just begun.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist.

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OpinionSupply chain crisis

The empty shelves crisis isn't just down to Covid and Brexit – it's been decades in the making

[Felicity Lawrence](#)



‘The crisis of labour across the UK is now so deep that better wages alone will not dig us out of it.’ Photograph: Jon Super/AP

Fri 17 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

The retail phenomenon of 2021 is not a new fashion craze, electronic gadget or children’s toy. The most discussed items in today’s shops are “[empty shelves](#)”. And as the problems have grown, the arguments have raged: was it Brexit? Is it the pandemic? Is it a UK problem or a worldwide issue?

In fact, though both the pandemic and the new restrictions on EU trade and free movement have contributed to shortages on the shelves and to

companies cutting their production despite demand, the roots of this market failure predate both by decades.

Worse, the crisis of labour across the UK – affecting businesses from haulage to food, farming, retail and construction – is now so deep that better wages alone will not dig us out of it.

To understand the underlying causes, take a look at the informal lorry parks just off our motorway network, or the laybys along the main roads to England's ports. I visited one such HGV parking place just off the M25 last year to interview hauliers making deliveries for major transnational retail and e-commerce businesses. The “park” was a rough field of grit and mud laid out around a block of open-air showers with cattle-trough sinks and a small transport cafe. The signs were in Russian as well as English, acknowledging the fact that more than half of the scores of lorries parked there were driven by migrants from Ukraine and Belarus, working for Lithuanian-registered EU companies.

Some of the drivers had been on the road, far from home, for six months or more. They slept in their trucks week after week, washed themselves and their clothes by the roadside, and often went to the toilet by the roadside too. Cooking a meal over the naked flame of a camping gas stove in the lee of a juggernaut with 800 litres of diesel in its tank counted as a rest. Their pay was pitifully low and the cost of a proper trucking hotel not accounted for in it.

HGV driving work is highly skilled and used to be characterised by direct employment and strong unionisation. It is also highly regulated, for good reason – a fully laden 44-tonne truck with a driver who has not been properly rested can quickly turn into a killing machine. Rules to protect both drivers' and public safety may exist, but in the truckers' experience enforcement is lax, particularly in the UK. One Ukrainian driver told me he feared being stopped and fined when forced to break the rules in Germany, France or Austria, but “not so much in the UK”, which he believed “closes its eyes”.

British haulage companies, still trying to run on the old-fashioned principle that a driver ought to get home for a couple of days of family life at least

once a month, told me they could not compete. They are increasingly required to bid for haulage contracts on new Uber-style platforms run by e-commerce sites that set the price and precise timeslots for warehouse collection and delivery in a one-way auction.

The technological revolution in the 1980s and 1990s, with its electronic tracking and advanced traffic-control software, led to dramatic upheavals. It enabled industries to switch to a globalised system of just-in-time ordering with hugely extended supply lines. The jobs have also been made to bend to the iron brutality of 24/7 computer-controlled efficiency.

The pattern is the same in other sectors now suffering acute labour shortages. Harvesting crops has always been tough, dirty work; gangs of workers used to do it for relatively contained hours over short periods of the year or in shifts around school hours. Now rolling 12-hour-plus shifts, seven days a week, are common.

Meat factories used to treat working late or at weekends as optional overtime for extra money. Now workers are expected to sweat at an abattoir's capital intensive plant, for as long as it takes the owners to supply supermarket orders, for a flat hourly rate.

Conditions, as much as pay, underlie the refusal of British workers to do these jobs. They are not, as some cabinet ministers would have us believe, idlers who prefer their paddleboards to a bit of graft, but industry has made these vital jobs incompatible with any normal settled life. Only desperate people, from poorer countries, will take them, and then only long enough to earn what they need to establish a better life back home, or long enough to learn English and move up the employment ladder in Britain.

These conditions have depended not just on migration but on an unending cycle of new migration, drawing people in from ever-further east, as successive eastern European nations improve their living standards and their workers no longer seek what hauliers call "tramping". Recruiters are now finding their new cheap HGV drivers not in Poland, Hungary or Romania, but in the former Soviet Central Asian states of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Greater automation has always been held up as the answer to labour problems. Short of HGV drivers? Don't worry, driverless trucks are round the corner. Not enough workers to harvest your crops or slaughter your pigs? Invest in machines to do it. Experience gives the lie to this wishful thinking.

Walk behind a state-of-the art lettuce or leek-harvesting rig – all gleaming investment with computerised grading systems, integrated veg-washing conveyor belts, and dazzling floodlights – and you will still find dozens of workers, bent double from before dawn to well after dusk, pulling food from the earth. Stand in a supermarket packhouse and watch arrays of digital cameras calculate in seconds the percentage of blush to green on apples as they pass down an automated line (so those not rosy enough are thrown into a bin), and you'll still find armies of tired people operating the system.

New technology has indeed created a distribution system that is miraculous in its sophistication and in the returns it gives to capital, but it is built on a fatal flaw. Workers are not automata in some Fritz Lang Metropolis-type dystopia. And automation itself doesn't eradicate the mindless jobs but has a way of creating new forms of drudgery with every leap forward.

This is not a world in which the market keeps labour supply and demand in balance. It is a dysfunctional market in which a handful of large companies dominate each sector. Their buying power is so great that suppliers faced with a need to pay higher wages cannot pass the cost on. Successive governments have used immigration as a wages policy, to put downward pressure on earnings rather than tackle this tendency to oligopoly. Now the government wants immigration to stop, the problems it papered over have been exposed.

Decades of anti-union legislation has tilted what was always an unequal relationship between workers and capital even further in the latter's favour.

The solution requires a breaking of the structures which reinforce and accelerate this power imbalance, and an overhaul of the relationship between labour and capital, so that work not only pays but is human too. Yes, it will reduce corporate profits. But ignore the social costs of a hyperlean supply

chain, and you may find you have created a system so economically efficient for business that it collapses altogether.

- Felicity Lawrence is a special correspondent for the Guardian. She is the author of [Not on the Label](#) and [Eat Your Heart Out](#)
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[**Opinion**](#)[**Conservatives**](#)

Johnson is reshuffling away from culture wars to firm up the commuter belt

[**Gaby Hinsliff**](#)





Labour posters in Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire, ahead of local elections in May. Photograph: Tom Wall/The Observer

Thu 16 Sep 2021 09.55 EDT

Populism is never quite as popular as it looks. Or at least, people can only take so much of it before needing a break.

That's one lesson to draw from the slow-motion car crash of GB News, which had lost much of its audience long before [losing](#) its star presenter, Andrew Neil. Being angry round the clock is exhausting, to the point where even the most committed cultural warrior sometimes just wants to relax with a nice episode of Countdown. GB News seemingly failed to recognise that in time. But the Conservative party, judging by the last few weeks, is more alert to the problem.

Remember [Chesham and Amersham](#) – that brief flicker of hope for progressives back in June, after the Tories lost the byelection to the Liberal Democrats right in their Buckinghamshire heartlands? All the talk of a liberal-left alliance smashing through a “blue wall” of seats where soft Tory voters had started to feel taken for granted seems a long time ago now. Boris Johnson, however, hasn't forgotten. The Lib Dems are at best stagnating in [national polling](#). But they remain a potential threat to him in relatively

prosperous commuter towns whose resident Tories voted remain, don't like [picking fights](#) with Marcus Rashford over free school meals, and worry that culture wars are making their party look toxic.

This breed of Tory wouldn't take the knee but rather warmed to Gareth Southgate, especially when England started winning. They grumble about the BBC or political correctness gone mad but they're not on Twitter (too shouty), they diligently wear their masks in Waitrose, and they're at least trying to understand why their teenage children think they're wrong about everything.

On holiday in Cornwall they always buy something from the RNLI shop to support those volunteer crews going out in all weathers, so whatever their views on immigration they thought [Nigel Farage was wrong](#) to attack lifeboat crews for rescuing drowning refugees from the Channel.

Their views on the big issues can seem hopelessly inconsistent, even incoherent by standard party measures. They want more money for public services but not the tax rises to pay for it; they worry about their children being unable to get on the property ladder but ferociously resist housebuilding in their own backyards; and they combine surprisingly radical views on some social issues ([recent polling](#) shows older people are just as worried as Generation Z about the climate crisis) with conservative views on others. But, over the summer, Downing Street has been fine-tuning its approach towards what are sometimes described as "[cross-pressured](#)" voters, hard to pigeonhole ideologically. And this reshuffle was, at least in part, about delivering for them.

On education, Tory voters' biggest worry now is their children and grandchildren missing school again because of Covid; fighting about cancel culture in universities can wait. So Gavin Williamson's replacement as education secretary isn't Kemi Badenoch, the pugnacious equalities minister heavily backed by Downing Street's culture-warrior faction, but [Nadhim Zahawi](#), the former vaccines minister, with a soothing radio manner and reputation for getting things done.

Even the new culture secretary, Nadine Dorries, is a more complex proposition [than her views](#) on tearing down statues (which she doesn't like)

and bashing the BBC (which she does) suggest. She made unexpected friends in her old Department of Health job by focusing on neglected women's health issues, including menopause. Now she must deal with the planned privatisation of Channel 4, which, instead of delighting the kind of Tory who hates the news presenter Jon Snow, seems to be alarming the kind who loves Kirstie Allsopp, the Location Location Location presenter campaigning vigorously to save the channel. (Three-quarters of Tory voters oppose privatisation, [according to a survey](#) commissioned by Channel 4, with many worrying about it falling into foreign hands.) Dorries's predecessor, Oliver Dowden, in turn, becomes chief fixer at the Cabinet Office, with a brief not to pick fights but to make them go away.

Meanwhile, it's out with the unsubtle Robert Jenrick, whose plans for a housebuilding free-for-all were just what No 10 thought it wanted (and certainly what frustrated would-be first-time buyers did) until it [cost the Tories council seats](#) in Surrey, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Michael Gove, who represents a Surrey seat, is now charged with finding some magic compromise that unites all these conflicting desires.

It's not by any stretch of the imagination a shift back to the centre – not with Priti Patel still occupying the Home Office – and it's barely any clearer what the prime minister actually wants to do with his huge majority, except not lose it. This cabinet is ideologically difficult to read, a mishmash of those personally loyal to Johnson and those who know which side their bread is buttered on. But in that, it may mirror its target voters surprisingly closely.

The Conservative party exists to mutate and evolve, to be both intensely ideological and intensely pragmatic depending on what the situation requires, and shameless about ditching anything that isn't working. What [Boris Johnson](#) does unusually successfully and Keir Starmer does not – unfortunately for everyone concerned, given it's a good strategy for campaigning and a rotten one for governing in situations where real lives are at stake – is focus on two or three things that stick in ordinary voters' heads enough to blind them to the surrounding mess. More money for the NHS; vaccines will save us; life in commuter-belt England will continue much as it always has. The glaring inconsistencies in all this will start catching up with them eventually, which is why most Tory MPs now expect an early

election. But for now, the left shouldn't underestimate how quickly the battleground is shifting beneath its feet.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
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From crackpot Covid theorists to antivaxxers, hubris and fear haunt the wellness community

[Brigid Delaney](#)





‘There is the belief that we can control our bodies and that a powerful natural immune system is the best defence against Covid, not a vaccine.’
Photograph: Lisa-Blue/Getty Images

Thu 16 Sep 2021 13.30 EDT

It’s not unusual to meet people with alternative beliefs at a Sufi meditation course on a rooftop in Ubud. But when a mild, vaguely apologetic Australian woman in her mid-50s explained to me that she was responsible for her own breast cancer because she had repressed her needs and her sexuality and this repression had manifested itself as cancer in her breast, I thought: “Far out.”

It was 2014 and the woman had been staying at a retreat centre nearby, submitting to a range of alternative therapies in a last-ditch attempt to stay alive after her cancer had spread.

Her belief that she had caused her own cancer made her feel regretful and guilty, but conversely, as she explained, it also meant she might be able to reverse her diagnosis if she worked on her emotional problems.

That emotional problems caused physical illness was a common belief in the nascent wellness industry of the 1980s and 90s. Louise Hay, the mega seller behind You can Heal your Life, pushed the line that various diseases signified a personal defeat – for example, [rheumatoid arthritis meant](#) “feeling victimized. Lack of love. Chronic bitterness. Resentment” and asthma was a result of “feeling stifled. Suppressed crying.”

Such obviously crackpot theories could be dismissed with a laugh, except Hay’s books were wildly popular, selling more than 30m copies worldwide.

Years later I still think of the terminally ill woman in Bali and feel angry that she had signed up for such bullshit – and that she had wasted what was likely to be the final months of her life blaming herself for her illness.

You don’t hear much about Louise Hay today, but trace elements of her philosophy survive when it comes to the wellness industry and Covid.

There is the belief that we can control our bodies and that a powerful natural immune system is the best defence against Covid, not a vaccine.

After resisting the notion that Covid is even real (the so-called “scamdemic” or “plandemic”), now those who push conspiracy theories are holding their nerve, this time [arguing that vaccines are](#) either dangerous, part of a plot by Big Pharma to increase profits, or not for well people who have strong immune systems.

When this corner of the wellness industry refuses to be vaccinated, it is not primarily out of fear of the vaccine’s side effects or because it was developed too quickly, but more likely comes from a place of arrogance: those who are well don’t need the vaccine because they have Rolls Royce immune systems. Instead the only people who get sick and die from Covid have a pre-existing illness, or are in some way physically deficient, or have succumbed to the immune system-weakening emotion of fear.

A theory sharing some of these tenets found popular expression recently [on the \(now deleted\) LinkedIn post of](#) the head of a US salad chain, who said he was vaccinated himself and supportive of people being vaccinated: “78% of hospitalizations due to Covid are obese and overweight people. Is there an

underlying problem that perhaps we have not given enough attention to? ... no vaccine nor mask will save us.” That is, eat enough salad (take personal responsibility FFS!!) and you won’t need a vaccine. After a public backlash, he first apologised to his staff and then in a new LinkedIn post.

In the unedited version of an [interview with 60 Minutes posted to YouTube in 2020](#), chef Pete Evans, a notable antivaxxer, also touted the sovereignty of a pure immune system: “And am I fearful of Covid-19, if I came into contact with anybody [who has it]? No I’m not, because I believe in who I am and my ability to stay as healthy as I can through anything.”

More recently a Byron-based wellness influencer came under fire for a post published on the day of anti-lockdown protests that argued “Remember science is a THEORY, just like magic.”

Instead she advised to, “look after your physical health and optimise your immune system with herbs, breathing exercises, organic foods. Start to grow your own food. Learn about soil.”

Dr James Rose, a social anthropologist at the University of Melbourne, [told me last year](#) that a sense of superiority can pervade the identity of conspiracy-based communities. He said identity can be reinforced when you position yourself above others “and Pete Evans and his community are very explicit about it – they believe they are better, more pure, that they are fitter and more active than other people.”

The feeling of superiority can also mean that people who attack the ideals of the group are dismissed as unevolved or “sheeple”, an arrogance which prevents meaningful debate or dissent.

But from Hay to the current crop of social media wellness influencers, there is a common thrum of neurosis underneath the bravado: that is the need to feel in control.

The ultimate irony is that fear is running their show. It is frightening to think you can get cancer regardless of how healthy your diet is, or that you can get Covid, no matter your BMI. The randomness of illness – and the ultimate

certainty of death – is far too frightening for some to contemplate. So they rely on a fiction which makes them feel safe, superior and unconsciously immortal. Hay’s fiction is this: stop acting like a child and you’ll cure your kidney problems. Her wellness counterparts today say eat organic food, do yoga, don’t consume the mainstream media, and you won’t get sick from Covid.

They think they’re special, and that we – the vaccinated – are the ones that are afraid; but fear runs deep through these communities.

Ben Lee - an Australian musician who straddles both worlds - put it well. “The arrogance of some antivaxxers is just a grasp for control. One of the epiphanies the Buddha had when he left the palace is that people get sick and they die. It’s a reality – we get sick and we die, and we cannot handle that. And so people often prefer to think: good people don’t. The good people eat good organic food and have strong immune systems and don’t get sick.”

[The overseas experience shows](#) that Covid is becoming a pandemic of the unvaccinated. The disease doesn’t care if you eat organic or not.

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Faroes PM pledges dolphin hunt review amid outcry at carnage



Carcasses of white-sided dolphins lie on a beach after the slaughter of more than 1,400 of the animals in the Faroe Islands this week. Photograph: AP

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Regin Winther Poulsen in Tórshavn, Faroe Islands

Fri 17 Sep 2021 00.00 EDT

In a parked car overlooking the ocean sit two of the biggest whale killers in the Faroe Islands. They look exhausted, but not from hunting. Ólavur Sjúrðaberg, 75, and Hans J Hermansen, 73, have been on the phone constantly since a mass killing of 1,428 white-sided dolphins in the Faroe Islands on Sunday sparked international outrage and led the Faroes prime minister to announce on Thursday that the government would [review the dolphin hunt](#).

Neither Sjúrðaberg nor Hermansen participated in the killing, but they are the current and former chairman of the Faroese Whalers Association, founded in 1992 to explain and defend the traditional killing of whales in the islands, known as the “grind”, and ensure it is as efficient and respectful as possible.

But while more than 83% of the 53,000 islanders still support the killing of pilot whales – which are also a species of dolphin – 53% are opposed to killing the white-sided dolphin, according to a poll published on Monday by the broadcaster Kringvarp Føroya.

“We’re fighting on one more front now,” said Sjúrðaberg as Hermansen fields another call, referring to the fact that so many Faroese are against the killing of white-sided dolphins. “We have to evaluate the killing every time, including when it may not go according to plan.”

Faroese people have been killing whales and dolphins since Viking times, and the practice was even regulated in the [oldest preserved Faroese law, dating from 1298](#). Practically all whaling in the modern era has involved pilot whales. Pilot whales are the [second largest species of oceanic dolphin](#), surpassed in size only by the orca. All killings of pilot whales have been officially recorded since 1584, and [since 2000, an average](#) of about 660 pilot whales and 211 white-sided dolphins have been killed every year in the islands.



Sea Shepherd released this image of a white-sided dolphin lying dead in blood-stained shallows after Sunday’s slaughter in the Faroe Islands. Photograph: AP

The hunt has been adapted in recent years, including a special tool designed to make the killing as humane as possible, and a law that requires everyone who kills an animal to take a course on how to do it properly and be licensed.

But in essence it remains the same: if a group of pilot whales is spotted, a flotilla of boats sails out and herds them into one of 28 legally approved bays. Then, any islander who wants to can help get the whales on land. For pilot whales they use the special harpoon-shaped tool, which severs the spinal cord, killing the animal immediately. Afterwards, the meat is shared between the hunters and the local community.

Sunday's hunt, however, shocked many Faroese: the scale of the kill – 1,428 in one day – is more than six times the number usually killed in an entire year.

Some locals have criticised the slaughter because there were too few people to handle the dolphins, and say it took too long.

Also, the more humane harpoon used to kill pilot whales was not used as it is too big for the smaller white-sided dolphin. Instead, they slaughtered the creatures with knives.

Eyðstein Zachariasen was one of the hunters. He said the pod was estimated at 600 dolphins, and claimed the killing would not have gone ahead had the hunters known there were more than 1,400 animals. “I don’t think we will stop killing white-sided dolphins because of this,” Zachariasen said. “But I also think this killing will go into history as the biggest one. I don’t think that many will be killed again.”

Even if they did underestimate the numbers, it remains unclear why the hunters made the decision to kill such a large group. Some Faroese argue the leaders of the hunt showed poor judgment, perhaps out of inexperience.

Regardless, the outcry has crystallised a growing debate in the islands about whether to kill the smaller dolphin at all. On Thursday, [the Faroes government said](#) it would “start an evaluation of the regulations on the catching of Atlantic white-sided dolphins”, noting that white-sided dolphin hunts “have not been a part of Faroese tradition to the same degree” as pilot whales.

The prime minister, Bárður á Steig Nielsen, said: “We take this matter very seriously. Although these hunts are considered sustainable, we will be

looking closely at the dolphin hunts, and what part they should play in Faroese society.”



A picture released by Sea Shepherd of some of the white-sided dolphins slaughtered on Sunday. Fewer Faroese people eat these dolphins, raising questions about the practice. Photograph: AP

Jóan Pauli Joensen, a professor of cultural history and author of several books on Faroese culinary traditions, said: “The tradition for killing pilot whales in the Faroes doesn’t include killing white-sided dolphins. Although the killing of white-sided dolphins was registered in 1872, the numbers have never been comparable with pilot whale hunting – and it happened usually only when a stray got mixed in with the pilot whales.

“The white-sided dolphin is smaller and faster, and it isn’t until modern times with speedboats that it has been killed in greater numbers,” said Joensen. Because only a fraction of Faroese eat the smaller dolphins, few support or have a relationship with the hunt, he said.

Most people don’t eat the blubber of the smaller dolphins either. Blubber is one of the most essential parts of the pilot whale. “People eat blubber with both dried and fermented fish,” said Joensen, referring to two key parts of traditional Faroese cuisine.

Criticism of Sunday's slaughter has been fierce, both locally and internationally. The conservation group [Sea Shepherd](#) said Sunday's hunt was "the largest single killing of dolphins or pilot whales in the islands' history". It noted that more animals died on Sunday than in an entire season at Taiji, Japan, which is notorious for its dolphin hunt.

The largest company in the Faroe Islands, the salmon-farming firm Bakkafrost, issued a [statement](#) decrying the "slaughter", saying the company "condemn this episode and find it totally unacceptable". The chief executive, Regin Jacobsen, told Faroese radio that the company had fielded complaints from customers around the world.

Some locals took to social media to express their displeasure, including one commentator on the Kringvarp Føroya Facebook page saying: "[I'm embarrassed to be Faroese.](#)"

Schandorff Vang, 63, a retired policeman, witnessed the massacre. "There were not enough people on land for the killing," he said. "Some whales were stranded for too long before they were killed."

He also questioned the white-dolphin hunt. "I have nothing against killing pilot whales, but I don't think there has been any tradition for killing dolphins, and I don't like the fact that much of the blubber is not eaten," he said.

Although the hunters are used to criticism, the reaction seems to have taken some by surprise. Zacariasen said he was baffled by the debate. "I understand that foreigners have a more special relationship with the dolphin than with the pilot whale," he said. "But to Faroese people, the two animals should have the same value."

"To me, the only difference is that the white-sided dolphin meat tastes better." He argues that although the white-sided dolphin population is less well understood than that of the pilot whale, the killing is still sustainable in terms of numbers.

Sjúrðaberg and Hermansen think Sunday's kill went poorly. Sjúrðaberg grew up in Klaksvík, where he says that hunters only killed white-sided dolphins when they were caught in a group of pilot whales; Hermansen is from Hvalvík, where he remembers some dolphins being killed when he was a boy. But they both agree that as long as the hunt is done correctly, all parts of the animal are eaten and the numbers are sustainable, then killing white-sided dolphins is fine.

But they are also aware that, although Sunday's massacre is unlikely to stop the dolphin hunt, the writing may be on the wall. "We're killing both whales for food consumption," Sjúrðaberg said. "But if a majority of the population turns against killing the white-sided dolphins, it will stop naturally as people won't want to eat it."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/sep/17/faroes-pm-pledges-dolphin-hunt-review-amid-outcry-at-carnage>

[Italy](#)

Eitan Biran: the cable car crash survivor at centre of custody battle



The crashed cable car after it collapsed in Stresa, near Lake Maggiore, in Italy in May. Photograph: Alpine Rescue Service/Reuters

[Angela Giuffrida](#) Rome correspondent

Fri 17 Sep 2021 04.14 EDT

That a single person survived when a cable car crashed in northern [Italy](#) was nothing short of a miracle.

Eitan Biran, aged five at the time of the accident, is believed to have been saved by the protective embrace of his father, Amit, as the [cable car plummeted to the ground](#).

The tragedy has been one of the most heartrending stories in Italy so far this year.

Fifteen people were inside the cabin when it set off from the town of Stresa, by Lake Maggiore, for the 20-minute ride to the summit of Monte Mottarone on 23 May.

It was the first weekend of sunshine since Italy started easing coronavirus restrictions in late April, including opening up to travellers from Israel.

Just seconds before the cabin reached Monte Mottarone, popular among families for the Alpyland amusement park, a lead cable snapped, causing it to hurtle backwards before falling 20 metres into a wooded area below.

All but two of the passengers, including Eitan's parents, two-year-old brother, Tom, and great-grandparents, who had been visiting from Israel, were killed upon impact. The bodies of some of the victims were found trapped in the crumpled cabin; others had been thrown into the woods.

Eitan was flown by air ambulance to a hospital in Turin suffering from injuries to his head and legs. Agitated and calling out for his mum, doctors had to sedate him. Mattia Zorloni, who was the same age as Eitan at the time of the accident, was also airlifted from the crash site and taken to the same hospital but died from his injuries soon after.

The next day, as people [in Stresa](#) absorbed the shock of the tragedy, they kept returning to Eitan – “the little boy saved by his father’s arms” – asking themselves what kind of life he would now have.

The crash not only killed Eitan’s parents, brother and great-grandparents, but has torn the rest of his family apart amid a vicious custody battle, which last week led to the boy being [allegedly abducted](#) by his maternal grandfather and taken to Israel.

Eitan was born in Israel but had been living in Pavia, a city in the Lombardy region, since he was 18 months old. His father was a doctor and his mother, Tal Peleg-Biran, was a graduate of psychology.

In the days after the accident, a Turin court granted temporary custody to Eitan’s paternal aunt, Aya Biran-Nirko, also a doctor living in Pavia. The speedy custody decision was needed so that Eitan, who has an Italian and an

Israeli passport, could continue to be given the necessary medical care. But the move was contested by relatives on his mother's side in Israel, and as Eitan settled into his aunt's home, where he had been living since being discharged from hospital in June, tensions between the two sides of the family escalated.

In August, it was announced at a [press conference in Israel](#) that Eitan's maternal aunt, Gali Peleg, had begun proceedings for his adoption. Her lawyer, Ronen Dlayahu, accused relatives in Italy of holding Eitan "hostage". He claimed: "Eitan was taken away by a family that did not know him, that had not been close to him in any way previously."

Eitan's grandfather, Shmuel Peleg, who this week was put under five days of house arrest in Tel Aviv as part of an investigation into the alleged abduction, is reported to have moved to Italy after the tragedy. He was given visitation rights to Eitan, who in recent months had been undergoing treatment for his physical injuries and mental trauma caused by the crash.

Peleg was also in possession of Eitan's Israeli passport and refused to renounce it, despite being given a 30 August deadline by a judge due to fears that Eitan might be taken out of Italy.

Despite Peleg missing the deadline, there was no revocation of his visitation rights.

In the morning of 11 September, Peleg picked Eitan up, saying he would take him out to lunch and shopping for toys. As he left the house with his walking frame, Eitan said goodbye cheerfully, promising to buy toys for his cousins, too.

He was not brought home by early evening as agreed. Instead, he was reportedly taken across the border to Lugano in Switzerland before being flown by private plane to Tel Aviv. Gali Peleg denied that Eitan was abducted. "We will not use that word," she told Israeli media. "What happened is that we brought Eitan home."

Biran-Nirko, who has submitted a petition to a Tel Aviv court for Eitan's return to Italy and is preparing to travel to Israel, spoke for the first time to

the press the day after his alleged abduction. She said Eitan could only fall asleep if she held his hand and that whenever she left the room, she would give him her glasses to reassure him of her return. Biran-Nirko denied accusations that she was an “unknown” to Eitan before the tragedy. “This is false – our families shared each other’s lives,” she said.

Last Monday Eitan had been due to start school, the one at which his parents had registered him before they died. The Italian press published photos of his empty school desk. With the custody battle far from resolved, Eitan’s desk could remain empty for some time.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/17/eitan-biran-the-cable-car-crash-survivor-at-centre-of-custody-battle>

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Russia

Russians head to the polls amid anger over economy and Covid



A store worker rolls a cart with groceries past election posters depicting candidates for the State Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament.
Photograph: Dmitri Lovetsky/AP

[Andrew Roth](#) Moscow correspondent

Fri 17 Sep 2021 00.00 EDT

Russians will head to the polls beginning on Friday for parliamentary elections that could serve as a platform for popular anger over the economy, a crackdown on dissent and the government response to the coronavirus pandemic. But the ruling party, United [Russia](#), is likely to find a way to maintain a stranglehold on its control of the State Duma.

While stifling political opposition and independent media, the Kremlin is trying to solve a simple maths problem: how can it prop up the numbers of

United Russia, which is [polling at near-historic lows](#), without provoking the kind of protests that broke out over widespread incidents of crude voter fraud in 2011.

Before the vote, which will be held over three days, there has been increasing support for the Communist party, while other opposition behind [Alexei Navalny](#), the jailed Kremlin critic, has sought to consolidate through a “smart voting” effort that mainly identified Communist candidates as the strongest challengers.

“There are a lot of people who are unhappy,” said Anastasia Bryukhanova, an independent candidate from one of the country’s most opposition-minded districts in north-west Moscow. “The biggest problem remains a lack of belief in our own power, a lack of belief in the elections themselves. The biggest battle is to get people out to the polling station and at least try to resist.”

Russia’s Communist party has seen its polling rise above 19% in recent weeks, in large part because of stagnant wages and rising prices. It has also sought to broaden its appeal, bringing in younger candidates from the party’s youth wing or running outsiders in first past the post (FPTP) votes in local districts.

But the party has often aligned itself with United Russia and is still led by the same leader, Gennady Zyuganov, who ran against Boris Yeltsin in 1996. While it did oppose Vladimir Putin’s proposal to renew his presidential terms during last year’s constitutional referendum, it has often been derided as a “pocket opposition”.

“Many people say that, in their view, the leadership of the Communist party often compromises … they don’t trust them,” said Mikhail Lobanov, a candidate for the party in a district in western Moscow, in a television interview this week. “I think that the Communist party and its leadership should change: it should become more radical, more decisive. Not give in to pressure. And then it can return the support of people who have turned away from it.”

United Russia, meanwhile, has seen its support bottom out, with fewer than 30% of Russians telling state pollsters that they would vote for the ruling party. To maintain its current constitutional majority (it has 336 of 450 MPs in the current Duma), the party will rely on winning FPTP districts, an elections format that has been expanded in recent years to 225 of the Duma's 450 open seats.

In Moscow, United Russia has put up candidates from popular grassroots initiatives, like the search-and-rescue nonprofit Liza Alert, to attract votes. Putin also signed off on cash handouts to families and members of the military ahead of the vote, and local governments are offering prizes such as new apartments, cars and gift certificates to those who sign up to vote online.

Top opponents of the government have been jailed, disqualified or run out of the country, including Dmitry Gudkov, a former member of the Duma. It has also sought to divide the opposition vote, in some cases running doppelgangers who can siphon off precious ballots in tight races. Two opponents of Boris Vishnevsky, a veteran St Petersburg lawmaker critical of the Kremlin, even [changed their names and appearances](#) to fool voters on the ballot. "I have never seen anything like it," he said in an interview.

Past votes, particularly in 2011, have been marred by ballot-stuffing and other crude efforts to deliver not just a United Russia victory, but a landslide for the ruling party. The biggest change to this year's vote is that it will take place over three days and also online, maximising turnout and making it extremely difficult to confirm that the number of ballots matches the number of voters. Golos, an elections NGO that has been named a foreign agent by the Russian government, has said just 50% of the country's precincts will have independent monitors.

When all else fails, United Russia will hope for opposition infighting to divide the protest vote and deliver victory to a friendly candidate.

Bryukhanova, a rare independent on the ballot in Russia, was recently backed by Navalny's smart voting scheme, snubbing another liberal candidate from the established, if somewhat ineffective, Yabloko party.

“I consider the decision in our district a big mistake,” wrote Marina Litvinovich, her opponent. “But it would be wrong to decide for [voters]. If you wanted to support ‘smart voting’, then vote for the candidate it suggests. If you want to support me, then vote as your heart tells you.”

Those who do make it through will find themselves outmatched in the Duma. But Bryukhanova said it was worth it. “First of all, it is about symbolism. To show that it is possible. To show that a politician like me with my views ... can win in these elections, even with all their violations.”

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[New Zealand](#)

Woman aged 40 charged with murder after three children found dead in New Zealand home



New Zealand police say they found a woman at the address where three children were found dead in the South Island town of Timaru. Photograph: Hagen Hopkins/Getty Images

Associated Press in Wellington and Guardian staff
Fri 17 Sep 2021 06.54 EDT

A woman has been charged with murder after three young children who had just moved to [New Zealand](#) from South Africa died at a home on the South Island.

The incident occurred late on Thursday at a home in the town of Timaru. Police said emergency services found a woman at the address who had been hospitalised in a stable condition.

Police said two of the children were aged two and the other victim was a six-year-old. They were all siblings. All those involved had recently moved from South Africa to New Zealand, police said, and had moved out of a mandatory coronavirus quarantine facility within the past week.

In a brief news conference, police said the investigation was in its early stages and they couldn't yet release many details, including the names of the children or how they died.

Insp Dave Gaskin, the Aoraki area commander, said the deaths would be "incredibly distressing" for residents of Timaru, particularly after five teenagers from the town were killed in a car crash last month.

Later, police said in a statement they had arrested and charged a 40-year-old woman with murder in relation to the death of the three children.

"The woman is due to appear in the Timaru district court tomorrow [Saturday] morning," Det Insp Scott Anderson said. "Police would like to reassure the community that this was a tragic isolated incident and we are not seeking anyone else."

The Stuff news organisation said neighbours Karen and Brad Cowper called police just after 10pm when they heard a man screaming and crying. The neighbours said they asked if he was OK but he didn't respond other than to say: "Is this really happening?"

Stuff reported the family was living in accommodation for hospital staff and both the man and woman were medical professionals.

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[Netherlands](#)

Dutch foreign minister resigns over Afghanistan debacle



Kaag speaks to the press on Thursday after announcing her resignation.
Photograph: Sem van der Wal/EPA

Associated Press in The Hague

Thu 16 Sep 2021 15.31 EDT

The foreign minister of the Netherlands, Sigrid Kaag, has resigned after the lower house of parliament passed a motion of censure against the government over its handling of [evacuations from Afghanistan](#) amid the Taliban takeover.

In a parliamentary debate on Wednesday, Kaag acknowledged that the government's slow or muddled response to warnings about the situation in [Afghanistan](#) meant some local staff and people who had worked as translators for Dutch troops in the country had not been evacuated.

After the motion was passed on Thursday, Kaag immediately said she would tender her resignation, saying parliament had decided “that the cabinet has acted irresponsibly”.

“I can only accept the consequences of this judgment as the minister with ultimate responsibility,” she said.

Earlier on Thursday, Don Ceder, a member of the faith-based Christian Union party, had said it supported the motion against Kaag and a similar one against the defence minister, Ank Bijleveld – a move that secured majority backing for the censures.

Ceder said the government “failed to show decisiveness, to show compassion, to pick up on signals and ultimately to take responsibility for people for whom we bear responsibility”.

Kaag was a minister in a caretaker Dutch government in power amid drawn-out negotiations to form a new ruling coalition following a [general election in March](#). The leader of the centrist D66 party, she has been closely involved in those talks along with the caretaker prime minister, Mark Rutte, whose conservative People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy won the most seats in the election.

It was not immediately clear what effect her resignation would have on the negotiations. The Dutch broadcaster NOS reported that Kaag said she would remain D66 leader and continue to participate in the coalition talks.

In her resignation speech, she said D66 ministers would remain in the caretaker government.

It came a day after the British prime minister, Boris Johnson, [demoted his foreign secretary, Dominic Raab](#), as part of a cabinet shake-up. Raab had faced criticism for [failing to return immediately from his holiday](#) in Greece as the Taliban took over Afghanistan last month.

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No 10 dismisses claims Aukus deal has damaged relations with France – as it happened

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Boris Johnson

John Whittingdale and Nick Gibb go as reshuffle continues



The media minister, John Whittingdale, said he was sorry to be stepping down. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

[Heather Stewart](#) Political editor

Thu 16 Sep 2021 06.19 EDT

Boris Johnson is continuing to reshuffle his government, sacking longstanding ministers in moves expected to make way for ambitious younger MPs.

The media minister, [John Whittingdale](#), and the veteran schools minister, Nick Gibb, first appointed to the education department by David Cameron, have both been removed.

Whittingdale [tweeted](#) that he was sorry to be stepping down, and sad to say goodbye to officials.

Neither man's replacement has yet been named, but Downing Street sources have made clear the prime minister is keen to refresh the government with MPs who have arrived in the House of Commons more recently.

Junior ministerial appointments continue to be announced, as the reshuffle rolls into its second day. [Penny Mordaunt](#) – a staunch Brexiter, popular among backbench colleagues – has been moved from the Treasury to be minister of state at the Department for International Trade, under its new boss Anne-Marie Trevelyan.

In a wide-ranging reshuffle of the cabinet on Wednesday, [Gavin Williamson](#) was fired as education secretary after his handling of the exams fiasco during the coronavirus crisis, while Robert Buckland lost his job as justice secretary.

Buckland was replaced by [Dominic Raab](#), who was demoted from foreign secretary after widespread criticism of his handling of the Afghanistan crisis, during which he was on holiday in Crete while Kabul was falling to the Taliban.

Liz Truss succeeded him as foreign secretary, the first time a woman has held the post in more than a decade.

Oliver Dowden was replaced as culture secretary by [Nadine Dorries](#), and he instead was made the Tory party co-chairman before quickly readying Conservative staff for the next general election which is expected to take place in 2024, or potentially earlier.

“You can’t fatten a pig on market day,” he was understood to have said. “It’s time to go to our offices and prepare for the next election.”

Michael Gove succeeded a sacked Robert Jenrick as housing secretary and was entrusted with a further key position in the post-coronavirus agenda by taking responsibility for “levelling up”.

On Thursday the defence secretary, [Ben Wallace](#), who remained in his role in the reshuffle, has said Boris Johnson did not sack or demote MPs from the cabinet because of their incompetence.

Wallace said characterisations of Williamson, who was sacked as education secretary, have been “unfair” and said Raab was not demoted from foreign secretary because he was holidaying while Kabul was falling to Afghanistan.

Wallace told BBC Breakfast the prime minister had removed people from government “not because they’re incompetent, not because they weren’t loyal enough” but because he had to “refresh his team”.

Wallace said of Raab: “Dominic is by trade a lawyer, he started his life in the Foreign Office as a human rights lawyer and he’s gone to the Ministry of Justice, which is actually a very, very important role and a role he desperately understands.”

Wallace also said that improving women’s representation in the cabinet was key in Johnson’s thinking. Speaking on Sky News, he said: “The prime minister wanted to bring forward a number of women MPs, he’s determined to both level up not only in the country but also in my party’s representation around the cabinet table.”

He defended the appointment of Nadine Dorries as secretary of state for digital, culture, media and sport, saying: “I think Nadine Dorries is actually a bestselling author … She’s sold thousands and thousands of books and now if that isn’t part of culture, media and sport, I don’t know.

“What’s great about Nadine Dorries is she produces culture that people buy and actually want to see rather than some of the more crackpot schemes we’ve seen being funded in the past by taxpayers’ money.”

Meanwhile, the former head of Ofsted, Sir Michael Wilshaw, has said the new education secretary, [Nadhim Zahawi](#), has a “big job on his hands”.

Wilshaw told Radio 4’s Today programme: “I think it’s really important we shouldn’t underestimate the damage and disruption that Covid caused to schools, teachers and students.

“The new secretary of state has a big job on his hands to stabilise the education system and restore confidence amongst head teachers and teaching staff, which has been badly damaged.

“He’s got to be a powerful voice in cabinet. When I was a head teacher, I was inspired by strong secretaries of state.”

He said the government should have listened to Sir Kevan Collins, who was appointed as an “education recovery” tsar but quit in June after a row over funding.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/sep/16/williamson-and-raab-not-sacked-due-to-incompetence-says-defence-secretary>.

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Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson lays groundwork for general election with ruthless reshuffle



Boris Johnson has increased the number of women in his cabinet to seven.

Photograph: Alberto Pezzali/AP

[Heather Stewart](#) Political editor

Wed 15 Sep 2021 15.32 EDT

Boris Johnson has laid the groundwork for the next general election with a ruthless cabinet reshuffle, designed to clear out failing ministers and hand Michael Gove the key job of making “levelling up” a reality for sceptical voters.

On a day of dramatic developments in Westminster, Johnson sacked three cabinet ministers including the gaffe-prone education secretary Gavin Williamson, and shifted Dominic Raab from the Foreign Office to the Ministry of Justice. Liz Truss, the media-savvy darling of Conservative

grassroots members and champion of free markets, will replace Raab as foreign secretary.

Johnson kicked off the reshuffle by inviting ministers set to be sacked or sidelined to his House of Commons office, as MPs began a debate called by Labour over the £20-a-week cut to universal credit coming into effect next month.

Williamson had been widely expected to be offered an alternative role – perhaps his old post as chief whip – but was instead dispatched straight to the backbenches.

Raab managed to wrest the consolation title of deputy prime minister from Johnson after fraught negotiations but the move to justice secretary was widely seen as punishment for his role in the chaotic evacuation from Afghanistan last month.

No 10 also appeared to signal its determination to continue prosecuting the culture wars, with the surprise appointment of Nadine Dorries as culture secretary. Dorries is a longstanding and vehement critic of the BBC, arguing against the continuation of the licence fee and labelling it institutionally skewed. In 2018 she called it “a biased leftwing organisation which is seriously failing in its political representation, from the top down”.

Downing Street sources insisted the former I’m a Celebrity contestant had not been put in place to pursue an “anti-woke” agenda, describing her as a “rising star” who could communicate well with the public and who had been consistently loyal to the prime minister.

In the Department for Education, Williamson will be replaced by Nadhim Zahawi, an Iraqi-born entrepreneur who arrived in the UK as a child speaking no English. Zahawi is viewed as a safe pair of hands in Downing Street after his management of the Covid vaccination programme.

Gove emerged from the reshuffle as the secretary of state of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) with

responsibility for enacting Johnson's levelling-up agenda across government.

In July, the prime minister gave a speech on levelling up that was widely derided as lacking in concrete policies, and Tory MPs in so-called "red wall" seats are anxious about whether they can make good on their promises to former Labour voters.



Michael Gove has been given key job of making 'levelling up' a reality for sceptical voters. Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

Gove will also have the job of defusing the row over radical planning reforms, which have sparked a backlash in traditional Tory seats like his own in Surrey Heath. He will also remain in charge of protecting the union and fighting elections.

Johnson's official spokesperson said the reshuffle was the second part of the plan to relaunch government strategy following the [winter plan for Covid](#) announced on Tuesday.

"The PM set out his plan for managing Covid during the autumn and winter," he said. "But the government must also redouble our efforts to deliver on the people's priorities. The PM will be appointing ministers [on

Wednesday] afternoon with a focus on uniting and levelling up the whole country.”

Gove will take on the role from Robert Jenrick, who was an unexpected victim of Johnson’s removal of unpopular ministers.

Ryan Shorthouse, chief executive of the Conservative thinktank Bright Blue, said Johnson appeared to be “rewarding those who are good at publicity and removing those that have had overwhelmingly negative or no media for their work.

“Raab has been demoted for Afghanistan. Williamson departs because of exams and assessment. Jenrick for planning reforms. Buckland for relative silence,” he said.

Graphic

Robert Buckland, the former justice secretary who was moved aside to make room for Raab, stressed in his resignation letter that the justice system was suffering from “years of underfunding”. “Justice is beyond price, and as a government we should always be prepared to invest in it,” he said.

Oliver Dowden, who is trusted by Downing Street, has been given the job of overhauling the Tories’ election-fighting machine as party co-chair after recent byelection defeats in Chesham and Amersham and Batley and Spen.

Several high-profile ministers who had been tipped for a move, including the home secretary, Priti Patel, the leader of the House of Commons, Jacob Rees-Mogg, and the Welsh secretary, Simon Hart, will remain in their posts.

Patel’s allies had signalled in advance that she would resist any attempt to move her into a less prominent role. Johnson frequently touts her tough-on-crime stance – [joking at a recent lunch](#) for business donors that she was turning the UK into “the Saudi Arabia of penal policy”.

The wide-ranging reshuffle barely improved the gender balance in Johnson’s cabinet, with the number of women increasing from six to seven. However, with more junior posts to be filled on Thursday, Downing Street sources insisted the full picture would look more balanced.

The junior education minister Michelle Donelan was being tipped for promotion to a new role covering skills, which could see her given the opportunity to attend cabinet, modestly boosting diversity. Late on Wednesday night, it was announced that Greg Hands had been moved from the Department of International Trade to a new brief as business minister, while Kemi Badenoch has been given a junior minister role at MHCLG jointly with the Foreign Office.

Raab tweeted that he was “delighted” to have been offered the post of justice secretary but allies said he was deeply frustrated to have missed the opportunity to announce a new security alliance between the UK, US and Australia he has been involved in developing for months. Truss is now expected to join the prime minister in travelling to the US for talks next week.

Sir Bob Neill, a Tory MP who chairs the Commons justice select committee, criticised Buckland’s firing, saying he “deserved better” and was “shabbily treated”. “I can see no good reason for it at all,” he said, adding that Buckland was “doing a good job as justice secretary and, crucially, understood the constitutional importance of the lord chancellor as a guardian of the justice system – and he was entirely loyal to the prime minister”.

The reshuffle came as Johnson and his team hope they have emerged from the worst of the Covid pandemic and can focus on domestic reform – though the autumn and winter plan they published on Tuesday included “plan B” contingency measures to come into force in the event that the NHS appears at risk of being overwhelmed, amid warnings that the country is at a “pivot point”.

With the next general election due in 2024 or potentially sooner, Johnson must find a way of reassembling the coalition of traditional Tory voters and former Labour switchers that coalesced behind his “get Brexit done” message in 2019.

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[Conservatives](#)

Reshuffle compared to Margaret Thatcher's 1981 'purge of the wets'



Boris Johnson has sacked 27 cabinet ministers in his two years as prime minister.

Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

*[Jessica Elgot](#) Chief political correspondent
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Wed 15 Sep 2021 15.02 EDT

For a man often said to be a people pleaser and conflict avoider, in his two years as prime minister Boris Johnson has sacked 27 cabinet ministers. His three reshuffles so far have been brutal, rejecting any attempt at a broad church.

Whitehall sources said the casualties were intended to put his ministers on notice about the prime minister's strength of position. Robert Buckland, the

justice secretary, lost his job despite no discernible wrongdoing. Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, was unceremoniously fired despite fears he could be a threat on the backbenches. One government source said all ministers “would know they are dispensable”.

One Tory compared the reshuffle to Margaret Thatcher’s 1981 “purge of the wets” – a brutal show of authority after 18 months of rebellions and U-turns. “Boris has shown people he’s in charge,” they said. “People won’t mess around now. Anyone can get chopped.”

A senior aide said the prime motivator for the changes was the qualities Johnson prized most highly: loyalty and delivery. “That’s what the promotions are intended to show – that’s encapsulated in [the new culture secretary] Nadine Dorries, incredibly loyal, and in [the new education secretary] Nadhim Zahawi, incredible delivery.”

But one former Conservative cabinet minister called Johnson’s new top team “a cabinet of short poppies”, saying he does not like to be surrounded by potential rivals. “Who are the big beasts?” they asked, claiming the prime minister could have brought back heavy-hitters such as Jeremy Hunt.

Tory MPs from former Labour “red wall” seats are also wondering what message the reshuffle sends to their voters. Despite promises from a No 10 source that there would be a “focus on uniting and levelling up the whole country” there is little new geographic diversity in the cabinet. “Tell me one cabinet minister who understands my voters,” a northern Tory complained.

Late in the evening, Johnson answered that question by promoting one of his most loyal red wallers, Simon Clarke, MP for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland, to chief secretary of the Treasury – perhaps a signal to the chancellor Rishi Sunak of his future spending priorities.



The prime minister promoted one of his most loyal red wallers, Simon Clarke, MP for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland. Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

The sackings were intended to be done swiftly after prime minister's questions on Wednesday lunchtime. But no matter how many times Post-Its are moved around a whiteboard in Downing Street, there is always a cabinet minister who can kick up a stink and make the unexpected happen.

In the prime minister's office in parliament, tucked behind the Speaker's chair, Dominic Raab point blank refused a straight demotion from the Foreign Office to the Ministry of Justice despite coming under fire for the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan last month.

During a tense negotiation, Raab extracted the title of deputy prime minister – a job that did not exist in Johnson's cabinet, though Raab had often been described as de facto deputy, and one that will arguably give him more right to attend vital strategy meetings.

One source close to Raab claimed it as a victory, saying "he's the Rayner of the reshuffle" in a comparison with Keir Starmer's botched demotion of his deputy Angela Rayner, where she emerged with a more powerful role.

Another of Raab's allies dismissed that idea. "It took Angela Rayner all day – Dom did it in 45 minutes."

It is hard to argue, however, that a move to become justice secretary is not a demotion. Raab left parliament on Wednesday afternoon with his future still uncertain before negotiations moved to Downing Street where his new title and department were confirmed. As he headed to the Ministry of Justice in Victoria, his team left to pick up the pieces of a planned US trip next week which Raab would now not be attending.

Though his departure had been widely briefed, sources close to Raab believed he could survive the damaging stories about his absence on holiday during the Afghanistan withdrawal.

"He's been treated abysmally," one MP close to Raab fumed, recalling how the de factor deputy prime minister took charge when Johnson was in intensive care with Covid last year. "This is the man who [stepped up as the PM was dying](#), he ran the country and he never used it to burnish his own image. He's been loyal to a fault, it's outrageous."

Of the sacked ministers, it was Buckland – Raab's predecessor as justice secretary – for whom ministers voiced the greatest sympathy. "What has he done wrong in the last two years? Nothing," one said. Another said he was "very competent and popular and will be missed".

Graphic

Few MPs had any sympathy for Gavin Williamson, who is said to have given an early leaving speech to his department on Wednesday, so certain was he that his fate was sealed. Sources said he had asked in previous months to be given the job of chief whip or leader of the House. Johnson did not seem to think it necessary.

"Gav's always seen as this big organiser of MPs but I think his star has diminished too much to be any kind of real threat," a former minister said. Another minister said Williamson's removal came "two years too late".

The appointment of Liz Truss to the Foreign Office will delight many of the party faithful – some MPs had wondered aloud if Johnson would really promote a minister more popular than himself. But it has dismayed many soft Tories who see it as another sign that the UK's foreign policy ambitions are diminishing.

“Surely there must be a limit to how far Truss can be overpromoted?” one senior MP grumbled. Another said: “Our wing of the party has suffered quite a few indignities over the past two years but every time you wonder how bad things can really get, you find Liz Truss in the Foreign Office and Nadine Dorries in the cabinet too.”

As well as Priti Patel keeping her post as home secretary, there is one great winner of the reshuffle – Sunak. Cabinet ministers have only just delivered their submissions arguing for funding in the spending review next month.

Now new cabinet ministers will be awkwardly bound by their predecessors, and unable to marshal any significant change of direction. As ministers start to grapple with their new briefs, many decisions will already be out of their hands. “It’s the first rule of government: the Treasury always wins,” a senior aide joked.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/sep/15/reshuffle-compared-to-margaret-thatchers-1981-purge-of-the-wets>

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Global development

‘He saw the panic’: the Afghan men who fell from the US jet



Zaki Anwari, a 17-year-old footballer with the Afghan national youth team, died after falling from a US air force plane on 16 August. Photograph: Facebook

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

Ruth Michaelson and Sayed Tariq Majidi

Thu 16 Sep 2021 02.30 EDT

When Zaki Anwari scaled the fence of Kabul airport, he was determined to escape. The [17-year-old footballer](#) with the Afghan national youth team had taken a break from studying maths for his exams to accompany his brother as he tried to catch a flight. Zaki had always told his family he was not interested in going abroad, unless he could return to Afghanistan.

But the Taliban takeover had changed things. Zaki did not have a passport but, as night fell on Kabul after the [Taliban took control of the city](#), he told his brother Zakir that he wanted to leave. Zakir did his best to talk him out of it, but he would not let go of the idea.

Zaki was one of at least a dozen men who clambered onboard the outside of a US air force C-17 Globemaster transport [plane as it taxied on the runway](#) the following day. None of them made it to the plane's destination, the Al Udeid airbase in Qatar.



Panicked men run alongside the US transport plane on the runway at Kabul airport in a desperate attempt to get onboard. Photograph: AP

The plane had landed a short while earlier to deliver equipment to US forces. The night before, another aircraft had [evacuated 823 people](#) fleeing the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, and Zaki joined the new arrivals on the airport runway, hoping for a similar escape.

Monday 16 August was clear and bright, and the young athlete was supposed to be guarding the family's car with Zakir while their older brother, Naser, jostled among people outside the airport clutching documents to leave.

Just before 11am, Zaki called Ahmad, the only brother still at home, to tell him he had jumped over the perimeter wall around the airport. "I'm close to the airplane now, they'll register our names after they put us in the plane, and then I'll lose [the] phone signal. I'm going to throw my phone away," he said.

Ahmad shouted at him to come home until Zaki hung up. Twenty minutes later, Zaki called his mother to speak to his sister, telling her that he felt he had a chance to board the plane, and asking her to pray for him. His mother

put him on speaker to scream at him to come home, chiding him that he had no passport or travel documents.

Seeing the crowds rushing towards the plane, the crew decided that they had to take off. The hulking grey aircraft began taxiing as throngs of people ran alongside it. Amid the chaos, a small number climbed on to a wide fairing above the wheels and a smooth broad area above the wheel well.

[Video shared by Asvaka](#), an Afghan news agency, shows the men smiling nervously and waving to others gathered next to the tarmac, with at least 12 onboard. Some waved excitedly, the wind whipping their hair as the plane picked up speed. Two jumped off and made a dash back into the crowd before the plane took off.

He just said goodbye to us like on any normal day when he went to work. He said nothing about the airport or travel

Payenda Mohammad

Shocked bystanders looked up at the sky, some filming on their phones, as at least two bodies fell from the plane as it flew south over Kabul. Afghans commenting online drew comparisons to the “Falling Man”, photographed falling from the twin towers on 11 September 2001, a grim bookend to the US presence in [Afghanistan](#). The men who fell were barely children, some not even born, when the US and its allies invaded Afghanistan 20 years earlier.

Fada Mohammad, 24 , was born into a world of civil war and [Taliban](#) rule four years before the US invasion in 2001. The young dentist had long dreamed of leaving, but lacked a plan or the financial means. His father, Payenda Mohammad, said Fada had been looking for ways to find money since getting married last year.



Fada Mohammad, a 24-year old dentist, was one of the men who fell from the plane as it left Kabul airport on 16 August. Photograph: Family Photo/Family photo

“Fada had talked about wanting to travel, but financially things were bad here. Anyone looking at the situation in this country would want to be elsewhere, and Fada was no different,” Payenda said. Fada was the family’s breadwinner, supporting 13 others.

Fada left as usual for work on the morning of 16 August. His wife and family had no idea he was heading to the airport. “He said goodbye to us just like any normal day, when he left for work at 8.30am,” said Payenda. “He didn’t say anything about the airport, or travel.”

Even in his grief, Ahmad tried to understand why Zaki clung to the plane. “He saw the panic, he saw the Taliban – anyone would be scared,” he said.

What happened next is the subject of an investigation by the US air force. Its spokeswoman, Ann Stefanek, said the plane was surrounded by civilians who had breached the airport walls before it could offload its cargo. “Faced with a rapidly deteriorating security situation around the aircraft, the C-17 crew decided to depart the airfield as quickly as possible,” she said.

American helicopters flew in front of the plane to clear space on the runway to take off.

The official account and videos indicate that the pilot was either unable to see the men clinging to the plane after takeoff, or was unwilling to stop the plane. The flap the men had used to climb on to the wheel well folds under the aircraft as the landing gear are retracted. Those who did not fall were probably crushed to death.

Those men thought the pilot would stop and transfer them to the inside of the plane

Afghan health ministry official

“In addition to videos seen online and in press reports, human remains were discovered in the wheel well of the C-17 after it landed at Al Udeid air base, Qatar. The aircraft is currently impounded to provide time to collect the remains and inspect the aircraft before it is returned to flying status,” said Stefanek.

Authorities in Kabul maintain that the US crew could have acted differently. “Those men thought the pilot would stop and transfer them to the inside of the plane,” said an Afghan health ministry official, who tried to identify some of the men after they fell to their deaths. The official has not been named for his own safety.

One of the men fell inside the airport perimeter, while two more hit rooftops in a neighbourhood close to the airport. A resident who heard a body land on a roof described it as sounding “like a bomb”.

The Anwaris said that, not long after the plane had taken off, someone called Zaki’s sister from his phone to tell her they had found his body. The family believe Zaki was crushed under the wheels of the plane as it departed, or possibly in the landing gear as it retracted into the wheel well.

Fada’s wife grew concerned after her husband did not call as usual at 10am to say he’d arrived at work. “Then at 2pm, we got a call from a stranger asking if we know Fada Mohammad,” said Payenda. The stranger said they

had found Fada's body, and that he had been thrown from the aircraft. Payenda rushed to collect his son's body.

The brother of another victim, 15-year-old Mateen, [told the Pajhwok news agency](#) that the family had been unable to find him after spotting Mateen in a video showing the group sitting on a tyre on the plane. "There were 21 men sitting on the plane, two jumped before it flew, yet we only saw 12 bodies in the hospital," he said. "We didn't hear from [Mateen], we couldn't find his body – we went everywhere. The bodies fell in so many areas."

The official, whose time at the health ministry predates the Taliban, said knowing precisely how many men died falling from the aircraft, and identifying them, became almost impossible in the aftermath of the fall of the government.

"Their bodies were so badly damaged by the fall, it was hard to identify them. There was no government to investigate the incident," he said. "If you knew the Taliban, then you'd understand why the men did this."

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Dating

‘Now I know love is real!’ The people who gave up on romance – then found it in lockdown



Lizzie Cernik and her boyfriend Bart.

[Lizzie Cernik](#)

Thu 16 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

When the country first went into lockdown, I – reluctantly – reloaded my dating app. With the world on pause and friends navigating the choppy waters of home schooling, I needed something to pass the time. I had never had much luck with the apps but, this time, I connected with Bart, a Dutch PR manager who lived in Windsor. To begin with, I assumed our conversation would follow the same pattern as most of my chats on the apps – last a few days, then fizzle out. To my surprise, this time was different. Instead of ending in the great bin-fire of Hinge matches lost, a friendship

grew. We began to have regular Zoom cinema nights – watching the same film online and chatting about it afterwards. As we got to know each other, I began to notice how kind and thoughtful he was, and I appreciated his interest in my life. Slowly I found myself opening up, something that had not happened for years.

Before the world turned upside down, I was happy with my single life. I have never wanted children, and spent my time with friends, occasionally dipping my toes into the murky pool of online dating. The process was always the same. Dates lasted an hour or two, before I would slink off home to catch up on [Love Island](#). Every few years I would find that elusive spark but it was always with a charismatic, gym-honed banker who would allude to a string of heartbroken ex-girlfriends and send me aubergine emojis at 3am. I knew this penchant for unavailable men was unhealthy, but despite my efforts, I somehow never managed – or bothered – to break the cycle.

At 35, I had been single most of my adult life and come to accept that love probably wasn't for me. Yet suddenly I had time on my hands and few distractions – except for the apocalyptic headlines. That may be why, for the first time, I did not write off this “match” when he didn’t tick the arbitrary list of “boyfriend check boxes” mapped out in my head.

In June, Bart went back to his home town of Helmond, in the Netherlands, for the summer, but two months later, we agreed to finally meet for a long weekend in a beach town near Rotterdam. I arrived drenched in pesto I had spilled on the journey, but instead of being judgmental, he laughed. It has been 18 months and we are still going strong. He’s the first man who makes me feel comfortable to be myself – which I hadn’t noticed was missing in previous relationships. Lockdown made me realise I had been searching for a unicorn instead of seeing what a real relationship could bring.

I am not the only one. So many people have found their priorities shifting since the pandemic began and changed their lives dramatically: from quitting unsatisfying jobs to swapping the city for the country. With bars, parties and social distractions of single life off limits, it has also prompted a desire for deeper connections in many of us. Another dating app, eHarmony, which helps users to find lasting love, saw a staggering 85% year-on-year increase in registrations from January to June 2020. And according to Hinge,

a third of users discovered more about themselves and what they want from a relationship during the pandemic.

Lynn Anderton, 60, a life coach from Wirral, had been single for nine years. The end of her marriage, followed by the breakdown of a subsequent three-year relationship dented her confidence, and it took time to rebuild her self-esteem. Despite a few attempts to date online, she found the apps frustrating and had given up on the idea they would lead to love. Instead, she built a life she enjoyed, and grew comfortable in her own company.

Then came lockdown and suddenly Anderton longed for physical contact and intimacy. “The loneliness really kicked in,” she says. “I quite liked my own space but it was too much during the pandemic. I was able to continue my work with homeless people, which was a blessing. But it was still a lonely time. I missed hugging.”

In the summer she downloaded Tinder and was quickly matched with her current partner. “He had the same outlook on life as I did. It was very important for me to be with someone I could be myself with,” she says. They took things slowly, and fell in love during the winter lockdown. “It has developed over time. When we’re together it’s very comfortable and fun. We just laugh all the time.”

Many people assume that young people find it easier to date and find love, but that is not always the case. Chad Teixeira, 25, a marketing entrepreneur, who lives between London and Portugal, had never had a serious, long-term relationship before the pandemic. He admits he is afraid of dating. “I was cynical about love. It’s so easy to go on Grindr and have one-night stands, I never thought I would need anything more. When people tried to connect, I shut down.”

He had been hurt by a relationship when he was younger and felt that had closed him off to the possibility of love. But in the first lockdown, when casual hook-ups became impossible, he turned to other dating apps to pass the time. Without no-strings sex to distract him, he found himself starting a real conversation with a man for the first time in years. Like me, Teixeira realised he wanted more. “There was a moment where something clicked.

Without all the parties and friends and hook-ups, I didn't really have anything. Suddenly I was craving love."

As the country opened up, he stayed in touch with his new love interest, but they never managed to meet up. "We both had very busy schedules. I think, deep down, I was still scared too," he admits. Nevertheless, the two finally met in May 2021, after a year of online romance. "We've been inseparable ever since. We built a friendship before we even met and it has blossomed into so much more. I never used to believe in love and now I know it's real," Teixeira says.



Dave and Louise Williams.

While online dating continued through the pandemic, people looking to meet someone in real life have found it harder. For frontline worker Dave Williams, 57, from Hertfordshire, finding love seemed impossible. After retraining as a mental health nurse in his 40s, he regularly moved around the country for different jobs, so dating was difficult. He had had several relationships, but none lasted. "I'd always wanted to meet someone but nothing ever worked out. It wasn't worth the heartache," he says. "I'd been single for five years and had given up the ghost." When the UK was in lockdown, he didn't see anyone except patients and colleagues for months.

But in January his work moved him to Hitchin, and when Louise, 51, joined his team as a receptionist, his luck changed.

Williams found excuses to say hello every day, and they bonded over a shared love of [Thunderbirds](#) – and tinned sausages with beans. “We had so many random things in common,” he says. “One day in March I clumsily asked her if she’d like to go out. I cooked her a meal – hotdogs and beans – and we’ve never spent a day apart since.”

It was a whirlwind romance. Just a few days after this first date, Louise proposed and they married last week, surrounded by friends, family and colleagues. “At our age, I think you just know when something feels right,” says Louise. “It’s the first time in my life that a relationship has really clicked. It’s an intimacy and connection neither of us have had before. We’re 100% comfortable being ourselves with each other.”

The couple have spent the past few days on their honeymoon, travelling around the north of the UK. Williams loves the way they laugh all the time, and each puts the other first. “It took me a long time to get to this point and I’m so happy we’ve found each other.”

Nyasha Daley, 44, a marketing and creative specialist from Coventry, had also experienced years of heartache before she found love last year. Through counselling and training as a life coach, she learned to focus her energies on her own wellbeing and find happiness within. When her last relationship ended 18 months before the pandemic, she felt she had settled into single life. She dated casually, but wasn’t looking for anything more serious.



Nayasha Daley and Dwaine married last March.

But again something changed when the coronavirus threw everything into sharp relief. As well as the loneliness of lockdown, Daley found the debate around racism sparked by the Black Lives Matter protests challenging to cope with on her own. “It was a hard time to be a Black person,” she says. “It made me realise that although I’d built a happy single life, I didn’t want to be alone for ever.”

She downloaded Bumble in the hope of finding a more serious relationship. But at the same time, she started to re-evaluate what she wanted from a partner. “The BLM protests raised a lot of awareness about Black self-image. I knew that I wanted to meet a partner who would find me attractive in my natural state.” That summer, a friend suggested she look into astrology to help her find a match. “I’ve always been religious but I was very sceptical,” she laughs. “But by that point I was willing to try anything.”

She began to do more research into her own heritage too, and learned about African spirituality. It struck a chord and became an important part of her life. “I realised that some of the things I’d been looking for in a relationship – like money and status – were very superficial,” she says. “Instead I meditated and did daily manifestations to find what I really needed in a partner – someone warm, honest, with a shared sense of spirituality.”

In mid-July she exchanged numbers with Dwain and they chatted on Zoom. “On the first call it was as if I had known him for ever,” says Daley. “He is very spiritual, too, and we talked about star charts, life paths and manifestations on that first call. It turns out he had been looking for me too. Anyone else might have thought I was mental, but he really got me.”

When they met in person they were just as smitten. After getting engaged in December, they married in March in the first wedding after the winter lockdown at Coventry register office. “We had both been on our own journeys of self-discovery. Dwain is kind, funny, talented and strong-willed. He’s everything I asked for and more.”

For Teixeira, Daley and Anderton, difficult lockdowns provided an unexpected opportunity to reflect on what they had been missing, while Williams and Louise believe luck and timing also played a big role in finding love. Before meeting this year, they blamed themselves for their unsuccessful relationships. “There had been so much heartbreak, I just thought it was my fault. I was bad at relationships and wasn’t destined to find love,” says Louise. “Meeting Dave made me realise that it wasn’t me and there is someone out there – some people just wait a bit longer to find the right person.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/sep/16/now-i-know-love-is-real-the-people-who-gave-up-on-romance-then-found-it-in-lockdown>



‘Category is: winner!’ ... MJ Rodriguez. Photograph: Mike Ruiz/Headpress/eyevine

MJ Rodriguez on Pose and making Emmy history: ‘I want to play anything: trans, cis, superhero, alien’

‘Category is: winner!’ ... MJ Rodriguez. Photograph: Mike Ruiz/Headpress/eyevine

by [Chitra Ramaswamy](#)

Thu 16 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

MJ Rodriguez can see me but I can’t see her. This is not the sort of existential issue that afflicted pre-pandemic interviews, but minutes before my Zoom encounter with the actor and singer I get an email from Rodriguez’s rep saying she will no longer be appearing on camera. This comes hot on the heels of another message saying Rodriguez, who this year became the [first trans actor in history to be nominated for an Emmy award in](#)

[a lead acting category](#), for her fantastic performance in [Pose](#), would rather I didn't ask her about the ballroom scene. Which is basically the entire world of Pose, Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk's era-defining drama, set in the New York [underground vogueing culture](#) of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

I take from this nervy preamble two things. First, constantly being seen as the living embodiment of the importance of representation is exhausting, and curiously diminishing. And second, Rodriguez is ready to walk out of the shadow of her character on Pose: Blanca Evangelista, the no-nonsense "house mother" who takes all of queer New York under her wing, has a seemingly never-ending supply of wise words for them, and a heart bigger than any disco ball.

"Please don't be mad at me," Rodriguez begins. I'm not mad, I tell her, just disappointed as I was looking forward to talking to her face-to-face. "I'm feeling under the weather ... on a personal level," she says. "I've been in a bit of a funk personally and I have no problem saying that. I'm human." Is she OK to proceed? Her reply is as well-mannered and Blanca as it gets: "Yes ma'am."

It's not that Rodriguez isn't blown away by the Emmy nomination for her performance in Pose, which went from strength to strength over its three increasingly operatic series, culminating in a finale which saw Blanca and Pray Tell lip-syncing to Diana Ross's Ain't No Mountain High Enough. In shimmering capes. Beneath a rain machine. Pose changed everything for Rodriguez, and for a lot of LGBTQ+ people. Still, she doesn't want to be reduced to any one aspect of her identity. "It's crazy to think that just before Pose none of this was even a thought in anyone's mind," she says. "We had never been in these spaces, on those sets, in Hollywood. So it's amazing, and honey, I'm living for it. But I do wish there was more of it so we didn't have to constantly be the educators. Some of us just want to be the artists."

[Pose's power](#) lay in its commitment to representation. That's why, even when it wasn't perfect, it was so good. Five of its leads were played by trans women. It featured the largest trans cast, most of them black, in scripted television history. Perhaps that's why its characters seem fused to the people who played them. Does it feel this way to Rodriguez? "I think I've moved

on from Miss Blanca,” she says tentatively. “I’m glad, girl, that those words from the scripts came to life in my mouth because I don’t think I’d have been able to have an understanding of what my life is without those pages. These are firsts for a lot of us, especially for women of colour, and I make sure I keep Blanca on my shoulder, in my pocket, or purse. Wherever I need her, I bring her out.



‘It’s amazing and, honey, I’m living for it’ ... Rodriguez as Blanca, with Billy Porter as Pray Tell, in a scene from Pose. Photograph: Eric Liebowitz/AP

“I want to be seen as a human being first,” she continues. “What comes after is my being African American, Latina, a trans woman. I just want people to see me as a performer. An actress. When you keep reading ‘She’s the first trans performer to do this, the first trans woman to be nominated for that’, I wonder how people start to perceive me. I would love it if my trans-ness was not always the leading cause of why I am celebrated. When people watch me singing on stage I don’t want them to be thinking about my trans-ness. I want them to be thinking ‘Who’s that girl up there? She’s turning it!’” She sighs. “That’s what I wish, but I also know the world.”

Her next role, co-starring with [Maya Rudolph](#) in an Apple TV+ comedy created by Alan Yang (*Master of None*) and Matt Hubbard (*30 Rock*), is a

complete departure, she's happy to report. "My character, Sofia, is a real no-nonsense type. Almost like a politician. Very dry and strait-laced. I don't think she is trans. Maybe people who know I'm trans will see her that way but she's not identified as either cis or trans. I want to be able to play anything. It's about whether I'm the right person to tell the story of this character, whether she's trans, cis, gender non-conforming, a monster, superhero or alien." She looks forward to a time when she, or another trans actor, gets to play the lead in a mainstream romcom. Ideal leading man? "Ryan Reynolds!" she says without hesitation. "He's funny. Or Colin Farrell. He still on the scene?"

With her new single, Something to Say, Rodriguez returns to her first love: singing. Which she can really do – as anyone who recalls the Pose scene in which Blanca and Pray Tell belted out Home from [The Wiz](#) for patients dying on an Aids ward will know. "This is what I've always dreamed of doing," Rodriguez says of the single, an upbeat slice of retro pop she co-wrote with Earth, Wind and Fire bassist Verdine White. How did she find working in the music industry? "It's all about how you demand your space," Rodriguez replies. "I made it very clear the kind of dancers I wanted [in the video] and the team around me. For so long it's been nerve-racking within my community, because you never know how the specific forms of oppression are going to be deflected back on you. Honey, I tell you I've been surprised, especially by the music industry, because I could have been in spaces that were misogynistic and controlling, but these strong men of colour are loving on me in a way I never thought I would be loved on."

Rodriguez grew up in Newark and Jackson, New Jersey. Her mum worked in a hospital and her dad for UPS. Both parents, who later divorced but remain good friends, instilled a strong work ethic in their only child. "My mum is a strong, hardworking, African American woman. My father comes from a background of working-class Puerto Rican immigrants. I feel like working hard is genetically ingrained in me. This girl likes to keep her engines running."



‘Working hard is genetically ingrained in me’ ... Rodriguez at the Met Gala in New York this week. Photograph: Jeff Kravitz/FilmMagic

When Rodriguez was seven, her mum came to watch her perform in a school recital. It was a Damascene moment; the kind you can imagine being exquisitely directed by [Janet Mock](#). “I remember it like the back of my own hand,” Rodriguez recalls. “I was so nervous, then the music came on and I just started singing, using my hands, expressing it all. I saw my mom look at me, *really* look at me. And she smiled. I was like, *she knows*. There’s a little girl right here who lives for this.” What did Rodriguez sing? “The Greatest Love of All by Whitney Houston,” she sighs. “I swear to god Whitney Houston is my whole life. She’s from New Jersey, too. I hear you, Whitney. I see you, girl.”

By the age of 11 Rodriguez was studying at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and performing professionally. Her godfather became her vocal coach, she found the ballroom scene and her own [house father](#), and won a scholarship to attend Berklee College of Music. In 2011, she landed the role of Angel in an off-Broadway revival of Rent, but then, just like that, the work dried up. For four years. “I felt like I let everyone down,” she says. “Oh girl, it was dreadful. There was a point where I got completely depleted. I said to my mom: ‘I’m not doing this any more. They’re never going to accept me as a trans woman so I may as well go under the radar, live a

stealth life, move through the world saying nothing about my trans-ness.’ My mum said: ‘Don’t stop, something is about to happen.’ I was on the verge of quitting, and that’s when Pose came along.”

Our time’s up, and I tell Rodriguez I have one last question. Would she consider turning her camera on now? “Yes ma’am,” she replies softly. “I’m a little sweaty so I’m just going to wipe my face real quick.” Seconds later, she appears on my screen. It’s mid-morning in the Tri-state area and Rodriguez is sitting at home on a sofa. Her hair is long and straight. She’s wearing a stripy top, a locket round her neck, and no makeup. She looks shy, a little tired, herself. Does she have anything to add? “Don’t be concerned with other people’s opinions about you,” she says, reverting to pure Blanca wisdom. “Keep on the path you know is best for you. And make sure you keep the people who love you in your pocket – like I keep Blanca in mine.”

- [Pose is on iPlayer](#). The Emmy awards ceremony is on Sunday 19 September.
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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2021/sep/16/pose-mj-rodriguez-emmy-trans-leading-actress>



Young York fans celebrate a goal at Bootham Crescent.

[The Guardian picture essay](#)

Goodbye Bootham Crescent: the end of an era for York City

Young York fans celebrate a goal at Bootham Crescent.

by Tony Cole

Thu 16 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

For well over 30 years I've supported [York City](#) with varying degrees of enthusiasm or indifference that have almost always led me to miss the occasional achievements and witness long periods of mediocrity, or worse. I've watched an ever-changing cast of players who, with some honourable exceptions, have left an indelible blank on my memory. Leagues have come and gone. Relegations have outnumbered promotions. My club's fortunes have risen and fallen, and fallen further still. But there was always one constant: Bootham Crescent, home of York City since 1932.



Matchday, Bootham Crescent

- Buying a programme outside the ground.





- Bootham Crescent still sits among rows of terrace houses on the edge of the city's historic centre.



- Fans around the ground



Sadly, however, the football club vacated Bootham Crescent in 2021 and now play in a shiny new all-seater community stadium on the outskirts of the city. How that came to pass is another story. But for the time being, at least until the housing developers move in, Bootham Crescent still sits among rows of terrace houses on the edge of the City's historic centre. Bordered on two sides by a barracks and a primary school and with a railway running close by.



- A woman negotiates a turnstile.

It is, to me, the epitome of a traditional English football ground from the period between the wars. Functional rather than beautiful perhaps but built on a human scale and, for 88 years, welcoming home and away fans at the end of the curving street whose name it bears.

Many of the ground's original features survived right to the end thanks to the usual lower league mix of endemic financial problems and neglectful owners inhibiting development – plus more recently a long delay in planning, building and opening the new stadium. Bootham Crescent wasn't exactly a time capsule but there were aspects of a visit that certainly harked back to simpler times for football when cash was king, seats were for posh people and sanitary toilets were considered a luxury beyond the need of the ordinary football supporter.



Even the players' changing rooms retained their communal baths though long-since beyond practical use.

Most importantly for me while many grounds were “upgraded” to include seats for all supporters, Bootham Crescent kept two standing terraces. One at the Grosvenor Road End (away) and the other at the Shipton Street End (home).

The “Shippo”, as I knew it as a kid, was once entirely open to the elements but after the tragic death of York player David Longhurst during a match against Lincoln City in 1990 the terrace was roofed over and renamed in David’s memory.



Oh to be a Yorkie

For me the David Longhurst Stand became a space free of the concerns of the outside world. Here in the comforting gloom I could meet old friends, make new ones, sing, chant, laugh, and now and then, almost incidentally, enjoy watching a game of football.

When, in 2017, it became clear our days together were numbered I began to take my camera to games with an idea to capture why this place meant so much to me and why maybe we should all value these places more than we currently do.

What I photographed and collected together in two photo-books is almost entirely focused on the supporters. The sporting media rarely turns backward to the crowd.

What happens behind the home goal dictates the atmosphere in the entire ground.





There's a very particular uncontrollable joy when a terrace erupts into bouncing pandemonium at a goal





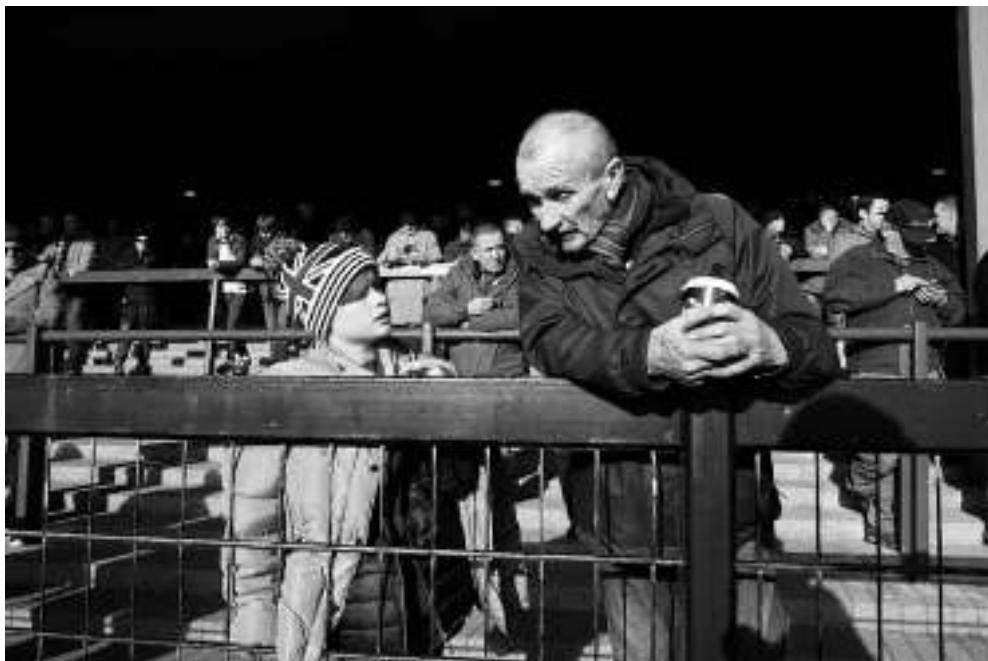
- Fans on the David Longhurst Terrace, named after the former player who died after suffering a heart attack on the pitch in 1990.



The football industry naturally likes to place the match and the players at the centre of the matchday experience – that's the entertainment product they sell at the top of the game I suppose. But down here there was often little to

photograph on the pitch. All the interest was on the terrace behind me and out in the surrounding streets.

Triumphs and disasters are amplified and emotions transmitted from person to person



- An older fan passes on some words of wisdom to a younger supporter.

Bootham Crescent, fraying at the edges from years of neglect, gave me an attractively grim backcloth to picture the characters and crowds around me.

In my experience the real soul of a football club grows out of the crowd and a standing terrace allows that crowd the freedom to express itself. Being free to congregate with like-minded enthusiasts, planting my feet squarely on my home terrace, in the usual spot and among familiar faces, has a galvanising effect. It's a community.



- Fans exit the David Longhurst Terrace.

That community might change from week to week, season to season, but it somehow retains an identity. There's even a visible process of kids growing up on the terrace, moving from the edges of the crowd where they stood with their families toward the more raucous area directly behind the goal and, like me, eventually moving off again to the periphery as you introduce your own kids to the mixed blessings of football fandom.



Ghost stand



- ‘Cold Corner’ and transfer box.

There's a terrible beauty in ruin, that adds significance to the memories I hold of the place.





- Broken seats and a discarded tactics board sit on the communal bath in the changing room.



- Weeds and wreckage have replaced the fans on the David Longhurst Terrace.

Standing behind the goal these youths are here, I sometimes think, to learn how far the boundaries of authority and good taste can be pushed before the consequences, usually wearing hi-vis, arrive to restore order. This really is the engine of the terrace.

What happens behind the home goal dictates the atmosphere in the entire ground. The songs or the silence here can be deafening. Triumphs and disasters are amplified and emotions transmitted from person to person. We respond involuntarily sometimes, part of a larger organism. Anger, apathy, frustration are all part of the experience. But what we pay for is the joy.



There's a very particular uncontrollable joy when a terrace erupts into bouncing pandemonium at a goal. There is, I swear, an almost inconceivably brief but absolute silence as a goal-bound shot crosses the line. Then everything is subsumed into a collective and spontaneous chaos of noise and limbs. A beautiful thing.

That this happened so rarely, and will now never happen again in that place, feels like a grief, of sorts.

To have perhaps caught that feeling once or twice in a photograph was my aim and privilege. Covid brought the final season at Bootham Crescent to an untimely end in March 2020, typically with a 4-1 defeat for York. Bootham

Crescent now lies empty and stripped of its saleable assets. Already overgrown but still very recognisable – in fact newly attractive to me as a photographer as there's a terrible beauty in ruin, that adds significance to the memories I hold of the place.

This is where generations of the citizens of York stood and sang and laughed and talked and shared and dreamed, and I was one of them.



Tony Cole's photographic books All Gone Away and Home End are available from [Yorktone](#) books.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2021/sep/16/goodbye-bootham-crescent-the-end-of-an-era-for-york-city>.

2021.09.16 - Coronavirus

- [UK Why end of furlough will lay bare Britain's twin-speed recovery from Covid](#)
- [UK More than 4m stopped wearing masks this summer](#)
- [Cities Fears London and Paris would die due to Covid 'are unfounded'](#)
- [US One in 500 Americans have died of Covid](#)

UK job furlough scheme

The end of furlough will lay bare Britain's twin-speed recovery from Covid



Torquay marina. Staff shortages in the Devon resort were so acute this summer that some hotels were unable to reopen. Photograph: Education Images/UIG via Getty Images



[Richard Partington](#) Economics correspondent

[@RJPartington](#)

Thu 16 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

There are signs outside almost every pub, restaurant and hotel dotting Torquay's harbour: Staff wanted.

"It's been packed solid busy, you can't get a table anywhere," said Brett Powis, owner of three hotels in the area including the Riviera and Lincombe Hall. For the hotelier, staff shortages made it harder to take full advantage of the busiest summertime boom in the Devon resort for decades.

"We struggled, but got through by paying higher wages, bonuses, and said, 'Can you do as many hours as you can?' We had just about enough, but there are other hotels who weren't able to open because they couldn't get the staff," he said.

furlough jobs

The contrast with the depths of the pandemic, when lockdowns starved the resort of tourists and left it a ghost town, could not be starker. In Torbay, the local authority that includes Torquay, the number of workers on furlough has dropped to one of the lowest rates in Britain, at just 5%.

Yet for every Torbay, there are areas such as Hillingdon, which neighbours [Heathrow airport](#) in west London, where the pioneering job retention scheme remains a lifeline, with one in 10 workers still on furlough and receiving up to 80% of their wages from the government. That twin-speed recovery leaves chancellor Rishi Sunak facing a dilemma when the scheme – on which about £68.5bn has been spent so far to protect almost 12m jobs – finally ends this month.

Severe shortages of workers and materials have [dragged Britain's economic recovery from lockdown to close to stall speed](#). Yet faced with the [worst supply chain crisis since the 1970s](#), ministers are reluctant to act, betting the [end of furlough this month](#) may help plug the gaps. Reflecting a vast potential labour supply as firms struggle to hire chefs, baristas, butchers, lorry drivers and builders, [about 1.6m jobs were still furloughed at the end of July](#), according to the latest available figures from HMRC.

However, business leaders warn removing the scheme at the end of September will have little impact on job vacancies, due to [mismatches in the workforce](#). Turning an airline pilot into a butcher or trucker is unlikely overnight, as is the movement of thousands of workers from job-bereft cities to labour-starved towns like Torquay.

Tony Danker, the director general of the CBI lobby group, said: “The thing that I’m concerned about with the end of furlough is that government believe the labour shortage problem will be corrected. And I think they are completely wrong about that.”

The lobby group is calling for a relaxation of post-Brexit migration rules to help firms hire EU workers, after a sharp fall in their numbers during the pandemic. Longer term, investment by government and business in training schemes and higher wages are required.

[furlough crawley and hounslow](#)

“The idea that you slam the brakes on now, and that the market corrects itself in the short run, that is completely unfounded,” he said.

For Powis, it is personal: his sister works as a steward for British Airways, and is still on furlough. “I feel for her and what they’re going to do. The government has to look at it sector by sector. If they’re withdrawing furlough for airlines, I have no idea what BA are going to do. What can they do?”

His story exemplifies the problems, showing how the end of furlough will be smooth and bumpy at the same time, depending on where you work and where you live. Close to [Heathrow](#) airport where Powis’s sister lives, rates remain stubbornly high as aviation remains under severe pressure from Covid restrictions.



Brett and Joanne Powis, the directors of Powis Hotels in Torquay. He doubts any hotels locally still have staff on furlough. Photograph: Powis Hotels

“I cannot imagine a single hotel in Torquay that has any staff still on furlough,” said Powis, who hasn’t had any of his 150 workers on the scheme since May and doesn’t think the end of the programme will help him to hire more staff. “We’ve been very lucky in the south-west where we’ve been packed, in London I can imagine they’re still struggling.”

In Torbay, numbers on furlough have halved in two months from 5,200 to 2,700 at the end of July, dropping from 10% of the local workforce – above

the national average – to 5%, among the lowest rates nationwide, according to official statistics.

furlough air transport

In the London boroughs surrounding Heathrow – Hillingdon and Hounslow – the rate is twice the national average. The story is similar in Gatwick's hinterland, where [Crawley has among the highest rates of furlough in the country.](#)

More than half (51%) of all air passenger transport workers in Britain were still on furlough at the end of July, the highest of any industry. More than a quarter of travel agents and tour operators are in the same position, in a stark contrast to the 5% average for all sectors.

Mark Legg, who works in the terminal at [Gatwick](#) for a contractor, is among employees whose hours will be cut by 25% to save jobs when the scheme ends, as flights and passengers have not returned sufficiently to cover wages.

“I don’t think the reality has set in yet for some staff who’ve been at home,” he said. Travelling to work under empty skies, along quiet roads and past desolate departure halls has been an eerie experience for the Unite union member.

“It’s just been devastated. Eighteen months ago we knew it would be the workers paying for Covid. And here comes the trumpets: we’ve got an increase in taxation on low earners,” he said.

John McDonnell, the Labour MP whose Hayes and Harlington constituency includes Heathrow, said targeted economic support for aviation was required beyond the end of furlough to support whole communities. [Cuts to universal credit benefits](#), just as thousands face unemployment, could make matters worse.

“We’re facing a tough time and government has to step up to the plate. What they are doing effectively is pushing people off the edge of that cliff [the end of furlough], and below them what faces it? Real hardship,” he said.

The former shadow chancellor said his final phone call with [Rishi Sunak](#) before leaving the Labour frontbench was to warn him of the unique risks facing aviation.

“I can have whole families dependent on airport work in my constituency, it’s like a mining town with dependency on one sector. Of course there are longer term climate concerns, and we need a programme to rebalance the economy; investing in training, redeployment, technology,” he said. “But we’ve had a policy of crossing fingers and hoping for the best, turning a blind eye and looking away.”

Executives at Gatwick and Heathrow are calling on ministers to [relax international travel rules](#) to help the sector. They want bespoke financial support to avoid severe damage to workers’ livelihoods and the wider economy while the travel industry takes time to recover.

In the shadow of the UK’s busiest airport, Hounslow council has sent £20 vouchers direct to every household from the start of this month to spend in local shops, theatres and restaurants, aiming to boost high street activity as thousands of workers lose out from the end of furlough and cuts to universal credit benefits.

“People are naturally having to watch their pockets,” said Shantanu Rajawat, cabinet member for finance on the Labour-run council. For each of the thousands of aviation workers in the local area, thousands more benefit from their spending in the supply chain and wider economy.

“When you look at that high number, if those jobs are no longer deemed to be viable then local economic activity is going to be depressed. You worry what will happen.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/sep/16/the-end-of-furlough-will-lay-bare-britains-twin-speed-recovery-from-covid>

Coronavirus

More than 4m stopped wearing masks this summer in Britain, ONS data shows



Face masks are advisory but no longer mandatory in shops. Photograph: Maureen McLean/REX/Shutterstock

[Robert Booth](#), [Hannah Devlin](#) and [Gwyn Topham](#)

Wed 15 Sep 2021 13.07 EDT

More than four million people stopped wearing face coverings in public this summer, official figures have revealed as a senior government scientific adviser warned [Tuesday's maskless cabinet meeting](#) would be “toxic” to already falling public adherence to guidance.

Use of face coverings has been dropping since its peak at the beginning of May, when 98% of people said they had worn one in the past week when leaving the house. That dipped to 89% this month, implying 4.5 million

people in Great Britain stopped wearing masks at all, [Office for National Statistics](#) data showed.

ONS does not gather data on regular mask-wearers, whose numbers will be lower. YouGov asked if people had “worn a face mask when in public places” in the past fortnight and found only 61% said yes, a fall of 10 percentage points from mid July to 9 September.

In London, where [masks remain mandatory](#) on Transport for London services, compliance was at about 82% in August, implying hundreds of thousands of people were not wearing masks. However, officers had excluded only 221 people from using services and directed 53 to leave in the seven weeks since 19 July, when wider UK law on masks changed and passengers no longer faced the threat of prosecution.

Finn Brennan, an organiser for the trade union Aslef, said there were “fewer and fewer people wearing masks and … no obvious sign of enforcement … staff are feeling much more at risk”. Train passengers have also complained of patchy usage.

Behavioural scientists and Covid bereaved this week voiced anger at the message sent by images of Boris Johnson and his cabinet gathering closely around the cabinet table without masks, as average weekly fatalities from Covid rose to the highest level since March.

Rules requiring masks in shops, restaurants, on public transport and in other confined public spaces in England were dropped on 19 July, but the government’s [Covid winter plan](#) suggests people “wear a face covering in crowded and enclosed settings”. Large numbers of MPs have also been seen in the House of Commons chamber not wearing face coverings.

Prof Stephen Reicher, a member of the Sage subcommittee advising on behavioural science and a psychologist at the University of St Andrews, said images of a meeting of maskless cabinet ministers appearing to disregard their own advice could be “truly toxic” for public trust and adherence.

“Messaging is not only what you say, it’s what you do and what your policies convey,” he said. “If those images create that sense of ‘them and us’, which I think they pretty clearly do, it is a very caustic thing.”

Lobby Akinnola, who [lost his father to Covid](#) in the first wave and helps organise the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice group, which is [calling for an urgent public inquiry](#), said: “Many of us that have lost loved ones are extremely distressed to see packed train carriages, parliamentary chambers and indoor spaces with very few masks in sight.

“The government has always claimed to be following the science so why is it now ignoring the advice of Sage?”

David Heymann, a professor of infectious disease epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and head of the Centre on Global Health Security at Chatham House, said: “Masks are a precautionary measure and we should be willing to use precautionary measures if there’s any evidence that it’s useful. The rule is: if you can’t physically distance, you should wear a mask.”

Lyn Jones, 69, whose husband, Gareth, died of Covid on 1 March this year, has been confined to bed with Covid in recent days and said mask-wearing must become mandatory again.

“My husband would be here if we had proper lockdowns before Christmas and again they are trying to appeal to people by saying you don’t have to wear a mask when it is the simplest thing to do,” she said. “I am angry about it all. What an example when they were all in the Cabinet meeting with no masks on. I caught this since ‘freedom day’ and it doesn’t feel like freedom when you can’t get out of bed.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/15/more-than-4m-stopped-wearing-face-masks-this-summer-ons-data-shows>

London

Fears London and Paris would die due to Covid are unfounded, finds survey



Old Compton Street, Soho earlier this month. Among Londoners, 60% thought the city would recover from the pandemic. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

[Jon Henley](#) Europe correspondent

[@jonhenley](#)

Wed 15 Sep 2021 12.51 EDT

Reports of a “death of the city” due to the Covid crisis have been greatly exaggerated, according to a survey of Parisians and Londoners that found little change in people’s satisfaction with urban life or plans to move out in the near future.

[The report by King's College London and the Université de Paris](#), based on polling carried out in April and May, found that cafe, club and restaurant

closures, lockdowns and home working had not dented inhabitants' enthusiasm for the two capitals.

Compared with a pre-pandemic survey in 2019, the study found little change in the share of Londoners and Parisians planning to leave, greater satisfaction with local services and majorities believing their capital will bounce back, albeit slowly.

"The pandemic has forced a change in the way we live our lives, and that has had a particular impact on cities, with offices left vacant or only minimally used for long periods of time," said Kelly Beaver of pollsters Ipsos Mori.

"The 'decline of the city' doesn't seem to take enough account of the views and beliefs of the people who live in them – who are mostly happy with where they live. The future of London and Paris as powerhouse capital cities seems secure."

The survey showed 56% of Londoners were satisfied with their local services such as schools, transport and police, a large increase from the 37% recorded in 2019, while satisfaction levels with services in the greater Paris area rose from 41% to 51%.

People's satisfaction with their local area as a place to live was almost unchanged in Greater London at 63% from 64% two years ago, and higher in Paris (59% from 53%). While slightly more Londoners said they planned to leave in the next five years (43% against 37%), the proportion of Parisians was almost unchanged (45% against 44%).

Most Londoners (66%) and Parisians (57%) said they thought it likely their city would bounce back from the Covid crisis, although most also expected the recovery to be slow rather than fast (57% in London and 58% in Paris).

"At a time when the pandemic has brought the future of urban life into question, it's reassuring to see that the 'death of the city' feared by some has not manifested," said Jack Brown, a lecturer in London studies at King's College.

The survey also revealed “shared and specific challenges” for the two cities, Brown said. “London seems to be viewed as a place of great economic opportunity but harsher for the less well-off, elderly, families and women. Parisians feel social cohesion remains an issue in their city and are more negative about immigration.”

More than 60% of greater London residents said they thought immigration from outside the UK has had a positive impact on the capital, compared with 27% of greater Paris residents who said the same about immigration from outside [France](#).

However, London was seen by 84% of its residents as largely a place for the rich; only 63% of Parisians said the same of their city. By contrast, Parisians (34%) were more than twice as likely as Londoners (14%) to say their capital was good for poor people.

Similarly, 53% of people in greater Paris said they felt their city was a good place to live for families, compared with 43% of Londoners, and 50% of Parisians said their city is good for older people, compared with 31% of Londoners.

Among people who do not own their own home, Londoners (89%) were more likely than Parisians (76%) to agree property was too expensive for them – but 73% of Londoners thought their city was a good place to start a career, against 51% in Paris.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/sep/15/fears-of-the-death-of-london-due-to-covid-unfounded-finds-survey>.

US news

One in 500 Americans have died of Covid – and some hospitals reach capacity



An unvaccinated Covid-positive man, 83, was examined before he was taken to a Houston hospital. Photograph: John Moore/Getty Images

Eric Berger

Wed 15 Sep 2021 18.16 EDT

America has passed another grim Covid-19 milestone, as data shows that one in 500 people living in the US have died from the virus since the pandemic began.

Almost 664,000 people had died of the virus in the US by Tuesday evening, according to data from [Johns Hopkins](#) University, following a surge of cases and hospitalizations, particularly in southern states, caused by a combination of the Delta variant and low vaccination rates.

About one in four US hospitals have intensive care units that are at least 95% full, [according](#) to the New York Times.

Christina Salazar, a registered nurse in an Orlando, [Florida](#), hospital where patients have been stalled in the emergency room, was recently diagnosed with compassion fatigue. The mental health problem occurs when providers take on the stress or trauma of their patients.

She is not alone at AdventHealth Altamonte Springs hospital, which until recently did not have enough inpatient beds and canceled non-emergency surgeries because of a surge in Covid-19 cases. She said many of her colleagues have called in sick recently.

“We’re given incentives to come into work and not call out or take time off but it’s not always worth your mental health,” Salazar told the Guardian in a text message. She works in the progressive care unit and has been a nurse for just one year.

The strain on the Florida hospital and its staff is not unique, particularly among southern states. In Alabama, only 40% of the state has been vaccinated and there are no available beds in intensive care units, [according](#) to Johns Hopkins University.

Staff at Cullman Regional Medical Center, located 50 miles north of Birmingham, Alabama, called 43 hospitals in three states to find a cardiac ICU bed for Ray DeMonia, a 73-year-old who spent most of his life in the antiques and auctions business, according to his [obituary](#).

The staff finally found a bed 200 miles away from Cullman, in Meridian, [Mississippi](#), and DeMonia was airlifted there. He died on 1 September.

“In honor of Ray, please get vaccinated if you have not, in an effort to free up resources for non Covid related emergencies,” his family wrote in the obituary.

Dr Scott Harris, head of the Alabama Department of Public Health, [told](#) the Associated Press last week that the state faces a “real crisis” because of an

overwhelming number of patients who are not vaccinated and needing intensive care.

“Our biggest concerns are our low vaccination rates,” Harris [told](#) the New York Times. “That’s the reason we’re in the situation that we’re in. Virtually all of our deaths are people who are unvaccinated.”

The problem is not limited to the south. Southern Ohio Medical Center, located about 80 miles south of Columbus, [posted](#) a statement on Facebook on 11 September alerting the community that its ICU was at capacity and that it may not have enough beds available for people with chest pains, who have suffered a stroke or been in a car accident.

“Like many hospitals, including others in our region, we are being stretched to the breaking point,” read the statement, which also included a plea for people to get vaccinated, wear masks and socially distance.

States with mask mandates and vaccination rates higher than Alabama’s are also feeling ripple effects from states where people have not taken as many precautions against Covid.

For example, hospitals in Washington state, where more than 60% percent of the population is vaccinated, has taken in patients from neighboring Idaho, where the vaccination rate is only 40%. Even without patients from Idaho, Washington hospitals were already delaying some procedures because of an increase in Covid cases, the New York Times [reported](#).

“We certainly need our friends in [Idaho](#) government to do more to preserve their citizens’ health, because we know that their crisis is becoming our problem,” Washington Governor Jay Inslee, a Democrat, said. “I’m asking the people of Idaho to adopt some of the safety measures – like masking requirements – like we have in Washington, so we can help both of our states reduce this horrible pandemic.”

In Florida, the number of new Covid cases dropped for a second week in a row, the state department of health [reported](#) on 10 September.

That's welcome news to Salazar, who has seen patients suffer at her hospital. The Orlando Sentinel [reported](#) that a 41-year-old who had chest pain after a recent open-heart surgery spent seven hours in a wheelchair outside in 90-degree heat to avoid a crowded waiting room filled with patients who had Covid-19 symptoms. He was unable to get the pain medication he said he needed.

"It's stressful because I'm sitting here, I'm in pain," Harris told the Sentinel. "If you're in pain, you're not going to get any pain medication [while waiting to be seen]. Doctors' hands are tied, people are upset with the doctors, but it's the law of the hospital ... they're doing their best."

Salazar works to keep patients calm, which she stated is particularly important among people with Covid, who often have difficulty breathing.

"I think it's becoming all about patience with each other," said Salazar, who received the Pfizer vaccine and plans to get a booster shot in October. "It's what we need more than ever."

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[**Opinion**](#)[**Conservatives**](#)

Boris Johnson is stealing Labour's clothes? He'll sell you a bridge too

[Aditya Chakrabortty](#)



Illustration: Bill Bragg/The Guardian

Thu 16 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Naughty Boris! You know the line and its intonation. There goes the prime minister, tearing into the tenets of Toryism with the same puppyish ferocity as his Bullingdon pals used to set about [restaurant windows](#). Ripping up his party's rules for keeping taxes low and the state small. Pumping billions into health and social care, and risking a mutiny by the very MPs who owe him their seats in parliament.

Boris Johnson: the clothes-stealing, fox-shooting, tank-parking Conservative who can out-Labour Labour, fling loyal allies [out of his cabinet](#) and realign British politics.

For the past week, since his taxation and spending announcement, big-money donors to the party have been whining that this isn't the government they paid for. "Boris will win every election but it won't be a Tory party that he's leading by the end," sniffs fund manager [Crispin Odey](#), who not only bankrolled a Brexit campaign but also made multimillion-pound bets [against the post-Brexit economy](#) and thus assured his place in the public imagination as a huge Janus. Meanwhile, [rightwing newspapers](#) fulminate about the "death knell for Conservatism".

It all makes for a lovely story. It also bears as close a resemblance to reality as a Filet-O-Fish does to a sea bass, being greasily askew in history and policy and politics. Tellers of this tale claim Johnson "[leans left on economics and right on culture](#)", as if leftwing politics was solely about raiding the Treasury, rather than sharing out power and reducing inequality. As if spaffing cash while bashing migrants was a feat of multitasking never before attempted at Westminster. As if Margaret Thatcher hadn't herself [raised the general level of taxes](#) over her 11 years in power, the Iron Lady always being far less of a Thatcherite than her fanboys.

But the greatest problem of all is that this framing of the prime minister as the "non-Tories' Tory" ignores just how rightwing he really is when choosing whom to tax, as well as how to spend their money. As the electorate is about to see.

The single biggest reason why Johnson has shelled out so much can be summed up easily: Covid, where he has had little choice and plenty of company. The UK is a very rich country and, faced with a lethal pandemic, it spent like one. According to [IMF analysis](#), the UK's budgetary response was in line with that of Canada and Japan, while lagging way behind those socialist vanguards of Scott Morrison's Australia and Donald Trump's US.

The immense surprise is that Johnson and the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, are tightening belts well before the final act of this disease – a move both economically rash and electorally foolish, yet which is being launched upon voters with scarcely any softening up. It will have much more of an impact on this government's fortunes than what happens to no-marks such as Gavin Williamson and Robert Jenrick. It may indeed prove the great unforced error of the entire parliament.

If Tories on the backbenches and in the papers are mewling now, wait until next spring – when the national insurance rise is added to the increase in corporation tax rates and the freezing of income tax thresholds to make a combined eventual [tax hike of £37bn](#). Couple that with next month's spending review, which is likely to make further cuts to local government and prisons, and you have two big contractionary forces acting on the economy.

It will feel like that most Tory of things: austerity. It will also be a gift for Keir Starmer. From next April, the Labour leader can start each interview by pointing out that Johnson has landed the public with the biggest tax bill (as a share of national income) [in 70 years](#) – while giving them fewer teachers, barer libraries and longer waits for hip replacements.

These tax rises bear the same hallmarks of dangerous haste and traditional Tory targeting. When, in 2001, Gordon Brown was readying himself to raise taxes for the NHS, he appointed the ex-boss of NatWest [Derek Wanless](#) to lead a review that lasted over a year. Only then did he nudge up national insurance by one percentage point. Twenty years later, Sunak has made a bigger tax rise, with his only real preparation being to brief a couple of journalists. Sooner or later, such drive-by budget announcements will have their own electoral aftermath. Yet in picking national insurance, the Tory chancellor continues the tradition established by Thatcher of putting levies

on your payslip or on your purchases, while making it cheaper for you to hoard wealth.

“It’s a tax system that shafts the working class,” says Alex de Ruyter at Birmingham City University. A labour market economist of 25 years’ standing, he notes that, even as more and more wealth is held by fewer and fewer people, British politicians have done little to make things fairer. Indeed, over the past 10 years, Conservative-led governments have set about making the tax and benefits system more unequal. Stripping [£20 from universal credit](#) payments next month is not cruel and unusual punishment by an otherwise redistributive prime minister – it is classic Tory political economy.

Whatever No 10 claims, not a single penny of this cash is going into the frontline of social care. That is not just because most of it is going to the NHS: it is because whatever is left over will go towards helping a small number of households pay less towards their care bills. The plan Johnson has adopted is essentially that presented to David Cameron by the economist [Andrew Dilnot](#). At the time, civil servants conducted an impact assessment of the policy. I have not seen it mentioned once in the past few days, yet [the report](#) makes eye-opening reading. It shows that most of the billions spent on the plan would go on testing families for their eligibility and other bureaucracy. The number of people who would benefit was “almost 100,000 individuals”. In other words, most of the £5.4bn promised for social care in this package will go on paperwork and 100,000 homeowners.

This plan will do nothing about those 15-minute visits made by carers on zero-hours contracts. It will not put a penny extra in care workers’ pockets. It will do nothing about how the sector has been squeezed by multinational private equity consortiums. It is not intended to: it is a very expensive insurance policy for a [tiny number of people](#).

Last summer, as Britons gathered on their doorsteps to clap for carers, I spent some time talking to care workers about what their jobs were actually like. Most had been deprived of personal protective equipment; some had been bullied by managers when they raised the subject. And if they fell sick, none stood to get more than the statutory minimum sick pay of £96 a week.

As one carer, Grace, told me, this forced her to make a choice: either go sick and go into debt, or keep working while ill and infect, and possibly kill, her own patients. Despite many months of protests, this government has refused to fix that rotten system.

I caught up with Grace again this week. She has given up care work, part of an exodus from a sector that has seen carers sign on with Amazon as warehouse pickers for more money. Grace is now a nursing assistant in a hospital, doing tasks she did while a home care worker and working similar hours – but for a 50% wage increase and with readily available equipment. What did she make of the new care levy? “They’re asking people like me, people who work all hours for nearly minimum wage, and who will never be able to buy our own home, to pay more to keep rich families in their homes,” she said. “This government is milking us.”

Sometimes all the political fantasy about the shape-shifting powers of one gifted politician is worth nothing against a working woman who watches her own payslip.

- Aditya Chakrabortty is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Climate crisis](#)

Children already have the facts. Now they need the tools to fix the climate crisis

[Zoe Williams](#)





'It ought to continually surprise us to see very young teenagers engage in direct climate action, yet political awakenings now happen earlier and earlier.' Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

Thu 16 Sep 2021 03.00 EDT

There was a rare nugget of hope in the assorted news and polling on the climate crisis last week: 18- to 24-year-olds in Britain are the most optimistic that the planet is still salvageable, with [73% agreeing](#) with the statement presented by YouGov: "We are still able to avoid the worst effects of climate change, but it would need a drastic change in the steps taken to tackle it, and fast." Only two-thirds of older cohorts held the same view.

Young people's positive outlook stands in contrast to the actual state of the environment, to which they are extremely attuned: sure enough, the under-30s are much more worried about the climate than any other generation. While, overall, the differences don't look stark – three-quarters of the young versus two-thirds of those over 65 fall under the umbrella "worried" – twice as many young people as any other cohort described themselves as "very worried". We should note one quirk of the fieldwork: "very" was the strongest word in the poll. Who knows what depths of anxiety would have been uncovered if the poll had included "extremely worried" or "climbing the wall". This generation, lacking a retiree's capacity for denial, has the

clearest sense of what its crisis-ridden future might look like. So these young people have to believe that environmental collapse can be averted. The alternative is despair.

It ought to continually surprise us to see very young teenagers engaging in direct climate action, such as school strikes across the globe, and even younger children trying to change their diets to minimise their carbon footprints. Yet political awakenings now happen earlier and earlier. This is not an accident or a consequence of “wokeness”: these anxieties are the unremarkable result of education, of curricula that diligently scope anthropogenic climate crisis and chart its course.

It was only during lockdown that I got a sense of how powerfully dominant, in education, the drumbeat of climate catastrophe is. I call it “homeschooling”, but realistically, with 12- and 13-year-olds, it was more a case of having their live lessons on in the background while I tried to concentrate on more important things, like whom to believe, Meghan Markle or Prince Charles. It was not unusual for them to have four consecutive classes that inevitably were about the environment: a geography lesson on the crisis in the oceans; design technology on the devastating life-cycle of the plastic bag; a science lesson on the feedback loops that accelerate CO₂ emissions; and, finally, some post-apocalyptic literature in English.

This, unsurprisingly – and I suppose we have to tip our hats to the emotional impact of a global pandemic at the same time – caused a lot of anxiety, to the extent that I started writing a book, just for my son, on why we weren’t necessarily doomed.

I sought 10 reasons for optimism, and found five. First, it may look as though the adult world is incapable of action, and technically we have known about carbon emissions for decades, but the consensus on fighting climate breakdown is relatively recent, and this era of global political will is quite new. Even if you look back to 2009 and the frustrated outcome of the Copenhagen Cop summit, you can see how different the context was when nations weren’t in accord on the nature and urgency of the challenge.

Second, there is a huge amount that we now know: how to end fossil fuel dependency; how to build houses carbon neutrally and live carbon-neutral

lives in them; [how to rewild](#) landscapes and greenify deserts; how to harness the power of the sun and wind. Discovery was the slow bit; enactment will be faster.

Third, look at the modelling of the geophysicist Brad Werner, described in Ann Pettifor's [Case for a Green New Deal](#). Analysing resource depletion across the world, Werner concluded that, in an unrestrained capitalist system, such actions were "so rapid, convenient and barrier-free that 'earth-human systems' were becoming dangerously unstable in response". Yet there was one source of potential interruption: mass resistance movements. Extinction Rebellion, student climate strikes – we notice these things because they make the news for disrupting traffic, but they are also among the few factors that shake up the modelling that otherwise points to accelerating environmental degradation.

Fourth, if you look at action on climate change as restriction, a necessary curtailment that will deplete our quality of life, like a diet, then it does start to look rather unlikely. Yet if you look at it instead as something that will improve our lives greatly, both directly (in the liberation from the worst consequences of the climate crisis) and indirectly (in the greater equality that a different distribution of resources will inevitably bring about), then it all starts to look more practical and probable.

Fifth, you can say what you like about politicians and billionaires, about boomers and the inept Generation X, but one thing is true of all of us. We don't want our children to perish, or theirs for that matter, and this ought to be our guiding principle, obliterating all other concerns.

I want to say these notions changed the mood of the household, but I was missing the point. If kids are going to be presented with the facts of the climate crisis, as they must be, that cannot be counteracted with loving boosterism. You need to teach them how to harness and act on their own political power. You need to teach them how to build those resistance movements that are all that's standing between us and Earth's galloping instability. You cannot educate a generation on the dangers posed to them without giving them the political tools to respond.

The education secretary who periodically pledged to “depoliticise” the curriculum has now been sacked, but that’s probably not the end of silly, attention-seeking skirmishes in a conflicted culture war. The urgent, meaningful work is to politicise the curriculum.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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[Australian foreign policy](#)

Diplomacy dialled up to 11: Australia saddles up with US as Indo-Pacific heads for cold war

[Katharine Murphy](#)





Australian prime minister Scott Morrison during a remote press conference with Joe Biden and Boris Johnson to announce their trilateral defence pact.
Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

Thu 16 Sep 2021 05.40 EDT

Ever flexible, ever the pragmatist, Scott Morrison started thinking about [his new “forever partnership”](#) with the United States and Britain 18 months ago while Australia was still tied to a \$90bn contract with France to build submarines.

Australia looked to America because of a practical consideration. If the Morrison government was going to jettison the troubled French proposal, and countenance the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines, the US possessed the technology that would suit Australia's purposes.

Officials say US technology removes the need to switch out reactors during their operating life. If the reactor lasts as long as the submarine, then Australia would not need to develop a domestic nuclear industry. That step-change, like magic, cleared a political obstacle in a nation that bans nuclear power.

Even though Morrison started mulling Australia's options 18 months ago, he did not flag his thinking with Donald Trump.

Morrison once prided himself on [having a functional relationship](#) with an erratic and dangerous president that many world leaders were at pains to avoid. But when it came to this, Australia waited until Joe Biden ended the Trumpocalypse.

Just for a thought experiment – imagine how unveiling a nuclear-powered submarine deal with Trump (as opposed to Biden) would have played for Australia's prime minister domestically, months out from an election.

Just imagine how that would have gone. The short version is not well.

Implicit in this thought experiment is a critically important point about the permanence of “forever partnerships” that I’ll return to shortly. But for now, let’s continue to unspool the backstory.

Morrison worked up the concept with his friend Boris Johnson. We are told the proposal advanced into the US political system in April. By June, there was [that famous trilateral meeting at the G7](#) between Morrison, Johnson and Biden at Carbis Bay.

This was mysterious at the time – why did Boris crash Scott’s first ever face-to-face with Joe? Why did everyone apart from Biden look awkward in the official photo? Cue hot takes and earnest tea leaf reading. Thursday solved that mystery. That preliminary discussion in Cornwall firmed over the ensuing few months into the conceptual framework that would become [Aukus](#).

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After the G7, Morrison travelled on to Paris and had a conversation with Emmanuel Macron. Australian officials insist the government has dealt with

the French in good faith throughout. But it is unclear just how candid Australia's prime minister has been.

Obviously Australia has been engaged in old-fashioned two-timing. Morrison needed the original deal with France's Naval Group to remain on life support until the exact moment Australia was ready to kill it (at a cost to Australian taxpayers of \$2.4bn and counting). Are those conditions really conducive to candour? The official version in Australia is of course the French are disappointed, but everyone here is a grown up. We all know the stakes. *C'est la vie*. And so on.

Once Aukus the partnership was safely locked in, Morrison set about sharing the news. His first call was to Jacinda Ardern. Given the fraught history of nuclear issues in New Zealand and the Pacific, [one can imagine the spectrum of feelings](#). There were calls to Japan and India and to regional partners. Labor was also briefed.

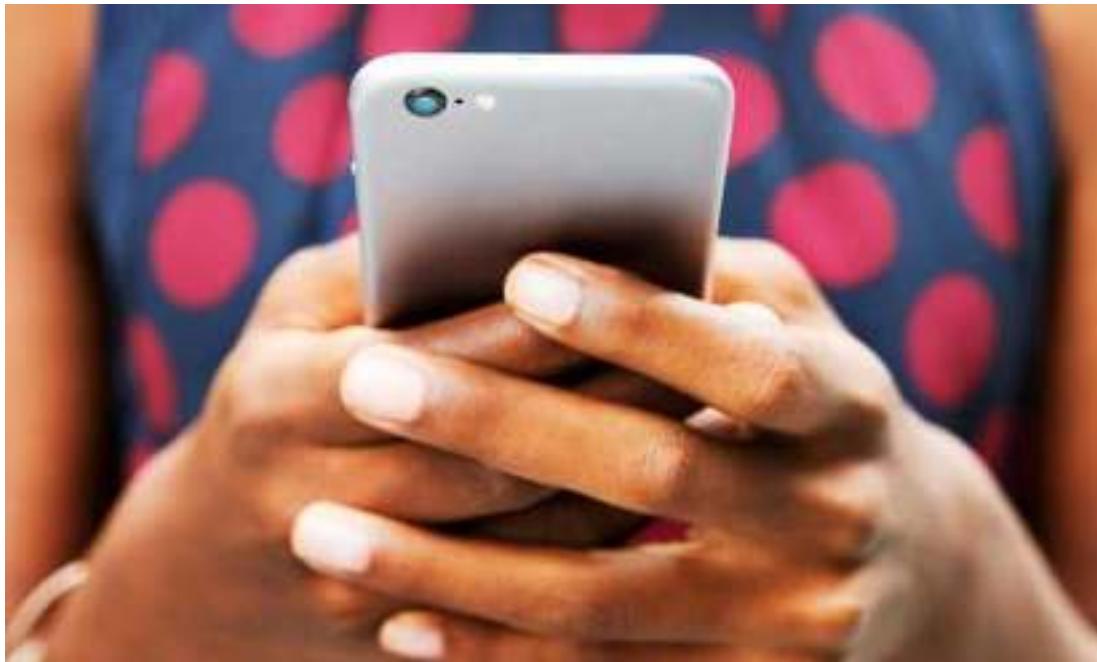
The government backbench didn't get a look in until Thursday morning.

Hours after the deal had been proclaimed to the world on live television, Morrison fronted his party room via teleconference. Thursday's party room briefing was scheduled, then delayed, and then it foundered because of technical difficulties – although I gather, before the link dropped out, the prime minister acknowledged there would have been colleagues who might have appreciated more candour.

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Photograph: Tim Roberts/Stone RF

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

It was a similar story on the Labor side. After a shadow cabinet discussion, Anthony Albanese signalled publicly Labor was broadly on board before the question went to caucus. Albanese has been one of the leading anti-nuclear voices in progressive politics for a couple of decades. We feel a long way from Simon Crean [opposing the Iraq war](#).

Now we've covered mechanics, we need to consider the implications.

They are profound.

This is more than a submarine deal, yet another Australian government starting the clock on yet another multibillion-dollar defence procurement screwup.

In strategic terms, this is crossing a Rubicon.

This is performative diplomacy dialled up to 11.

The backdrop to this agreement is obvious. Escalating militarisation in the Indo-Pacific has thrust the region into a new cold war, and rather than trying to ride that out, or hedge our bets, Australia has saddled up with the United States. China's hegemonic provocations which imperil US interests in this region have [forced this choice](#).

Australia's choice to ride out the coming century in the company of like-minded liberal democracies rather than seeking transactional accommodations with sharp-elbowed autocracies is hardly a new or surprising alignment, obviously. This is a choice Australia would always make.

But the assertive projection of a strategic call always has consequences.

As well as any fallout in the region, this is also a blank-cheque agreement.

Literally.

Australia has signed up to build at least eight nuclear-powered submarines between now and 2040, but we have no idea how much that will cost.

If there's a back-of-the-envelope calculation hiding in a secret filing cabinet in the Defence Department, the government has zero interest in sharing it. Whomever wins the next election will get back to us in 18 months. And added to this is the cost of the divorce with the Naval Group.

Then there's the nuclear question.

It is, frankly, ludicrous to suggest that Australia can maintain sophisticated nuclear submarines over their operating life without support from a highly

skilled domestic nuclear industry. This contention beggars belief.

Given we have crossed this threshold, either because Australia wants to – or believes we have to – it is negligent for the Coalition to rule out developing sovereign nuclear capability.

Officials say the current Aukus proposal is we build submarines, and import the reactors that power them. But if Australia does not develop sovereign nuclear capacity, we are a client state of the US and Britain.

11:50

Watch in full: Biden, Johnson and Morrison announce Aukus and nuclear-powered submarine deal – video

Thursday's decision has been sold as a boost to Australia's defence capability. But the absence of indigenous capacity actually renders us vulnerable, dangling precariously at the end of a supply chain.

I can only assume Morrison is intent on softening up the Australian public in bite-size chunks, because in the real world, where assets with lethal capability get built and maintained, this proposal makes no sense.

The final implication we need to consider is about “forever partnerships”.

Just the obvious point. They are *forever*, particularly when they involve integrated defence systems.

Morrison didn't expedite this arrangement with the US while Trump was in office. This seems a sound judgment. Will Australia pursue it if Trump returns at the next presidential election?

Nuclear-powered submarines is a domestic political threshold that can probably be crossed with a benign-looking Biden as commander-in-chief, flanked by a beaming Boris.

But given the cancerous polarisation in the US, given the country presents to the world as an open wound, is there any guarantee that an adult can

maintain a tight grip on the White House, and steer a strategy that will avoid a confrontation with catastrophic consequences?

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Opinion[Emma Raducanu](#)

Must Emma Raducanu become a brand? Let's just enjoy her genius

[Adrian Chiles](#)



Richly rewarded ... Emma Raducanu with the US Open trophy on Saturday night. Photograph: Ella Ling/Rex/Shutterstock

Thu 16 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

There was, to my ears, one discordant note in the awards ceremony for [the US Open women's tennis final](#). It came when Andrea Lisher, JP Morgan's head of Americas, client – whatever on earth that job title is about – presented Emma Raducanu with a cheque for \$2.5m (£1.8m).

This number was read out, loud and proud. I don't recall Sue Barker ever presiding over any mention of money at Wimbledon. Until that moment, I don't think anyone on this side of the Atlantic, nor our Emma, had given the prize money a second thought. It had all been about an apparently humble young woman – her mesmeric sporting excellence and a triumph for the ages.

We are a bit squeamish about the money stuff; it's not very British to bang on about it. There is a time and a place, of course, but not right there and then. Sadly, though, it didn't take us long to start banging on about the big bucks with the best of them. As early as Monday afternoon, I was listening to someone called Tess O'Sullivan on a Radio 4 news bulletin singing hosannas about [the money to be made](#), every bit as loudly as the rest of us had been shouting from the rooftops about Raducanu's staggering tennis. Fair enough, this is O'Sullivan's line of work – and she must be good at it if she has, as was billed, brokered commercial deals for David Beckham and Usain Bolt.

This is what she said: "I think, quite quickly, her sponsorship earnings off the court will dwarf her prize money on the court. She is the most marketable British athlete since David Beckham, because she is the complete package: she's young; she's already winning millions of social media followers, which increases her influence as a brand; she has a multicultural background; and she won her grand slam in America, one of the most important consumer markets in the world."

Dear God, is this what Raducanu must become: a brand? A brand, moreover, the purpose of which is to promote other brands? Never mind the glorious

shots on the big points; this girl can shift product.

Already, I'm sure, her management will be fielding unrefusables offers to have her photo taken sporting, let's say, an extraordinarily expensive watch. Why wouldn't she do it? After all, one of the greatest tennis players of all time is among the many to have shown her the way. Roger Federer's advert for the Rolex Perpetual asks: "How exactly do we measure greatness?" Helpfully, to assist us in figuring out this puzzler, an answer is suggested: "The number of grand slams?"

Ah yes, that would be it. Cheers. Wait, though, there is more: "Maybe, but not only ..." the voiceover teases. What else could it be, pray? His personality? His work ethic? Mere numbers, it is explained, "won't show that this man plays tennis more beautifully than anyone before."

By now, my toes are curling beyond the point at which they can be straightened again. We know what is coming, don't we? Brace yourselves: "Federer's legacy will prove more perpetual [aaaaargh] than any number."

The great man supplies a quote: "I wore it at the trophy shot when I won my 15th grand slam title, which was a record at the time." Of Federer, I ask respectfully, so effing what? As for Raducanu, I hope the corporate warriors can leave her be for a while to fight her battles on the court. Matching the dizzying standards she has set herself won't be easy; she has plenty of tennis to be getting on with. That way, we will all be able to enjoy the sight of her unalloyed, unexploited genius commanding the game for a while longer, with not a thought to what she is wearing on her wrist.

Adrian Chiles is a Guardian columnist

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Islamic State

France says it has killed Islamic State leader in Greater Sahara



French soldiers in the Sahel where they claim they have killed local Islamic State leader Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi. Photograph: Michele Cattani/AFP/Getty Images

[Jason Burke](#) and agencies

Thu 16 Sep 2021 04.39 EDT

Emmanuel Macron has said French military forces have killed the leader of [Islamic State](#) in the Greater Sahara, Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, claiming “another major success” in the fight against terrorist groups in the Sahel.

The French president, who recently moved to reduce French troop deployment in the troubled sub-Saharan region amid broad consensus that the intervention was not achieving its aim, gave no further details in his statement on Wednesday night, though he mentioned French casualties.

“This evening, the nation’s thoughts are with all its heroes who have died in the Sahel for France … with the grieving families, with all its wounded. Their sacrifice has not been in vain. With our African, European and American partners, we will continue our efforts in this battle.”

Sahrawi was the historic leader of Islamic State in the Sahel region of west Africa and his group targeted US soldiers [in a deadly attack in Niger in 2017](#), Macron’s office said.

In August 2020, the extremist leader personally ordered the killing of six French charity workers and their Nigerien driver, it added.

Sahrawi pledged allegiance to Islamic State in 2015, and was accepted as its leader in the borderlands of Mali and Niger the following year.

Macron recently said France’s deployment of more than 4,000 troops in [Mali](#) would soon be dramatically scaled down, with the remnants merged into a broader international mission. The force has been stationed in the country for almost a decade and has struggled to stem the expansion of the territory contested by groups linked to IS and al-Qaida.

Mali has been destabilised in recent months by political turmoil in Bamako, where soldiers took power in May in the second change of government this year. The deployment has become increasingly unpopular in [France](#).

The death of Sahrawi, if confirmed, will be a blow to IS but comes after a series of significant recent victories for the group’s local affiliates and a shift in strategy that has reinforced its position across much of the continent.

Following recent gains in Nigeria, the Sahel, in Mozambique and the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#), IS propaganda published by the group’s leadership in its heartland in the Middle East is increasingly stressing sub-Saharan Africa as a new front which may compensate the group for significant setbacks elsewhere.

The recent takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban is likely to embolden Islamist militant groups across the continent, especially those which are

committed to local goals and currently eschew long-range attacks on the west.

Detailed accounts of recent internal debates in Nigeria, where Islamic State West Africa Province recently routed [Boko Haram](#), suggest a new emphasis by IS in Africa on providing security and basic services to local communities.

Though strategies differ according to local conditions, the new bid by the group to create zones of “jihadi governance” could pose a major challenge to weak, corrupt and inefficient national authorities, analysts fear.

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[SpaceX](#)

SpaceX launches world's first 'amateur astronaut' crew to orbit Earth

01:58

SpaceX makes history with first all-civilian crew launched into orbit – video

[Alexandra Villarreal](#) and agencies

Thu 16 Sep 2021 14.11 EDT

SpaceX has launched the world's first crew of "amateur astronauts" on a private flight to circle Earth for three days.

Wednesday night's successful launch marked the most ambitious leap yet in space tourism. It's the first chartered passenger flight for Elon Musk's space company and the first time a rocket streaked toward orbit with a crew that contained no professional astronauts.

"It blows me away, honestly," the SpaceX director, Benji Reed, said on the eve of launch from Nasa's Kennedy [Space](#) Center. "It gives me goosebumps even right now to talk about it."

Leading the flight is Jared Isaacman, 38, who made his fortune with a payment-processing company he started in his teens. Isaacman is the third billionaire to launch this summer, following flights by [Virgin Galactic's Richard Branson](#) and [Blue Origin's Jeff Bezos](#) in July.

[Bezos congratulated Musk and SpaceX on the successful launch](#). "Another step towards a future where space is accessible to all of us," he tweeted on Thursday.

Isaacman is joined by Hayley Arceneaux, 29, a childhood cancer survivor who works as a physician assistant at St Jude children's research hospital in

Memphis, Tennessee. Isaacman has pledged \$100m of his own money to the hospital and is seeking another \$100m in donations.

[Auction items](#) to benefit St Jude's are going to space in the capsule, too, [the New York Times reported](#).

Also along for the ride are the sweepstakes winners Chris Sembroski, 42, a data engineer in Everett, Washington, and Sian Proctor, 51, a community college educator in Tempe, Arizona.

Arceneaux is set to become the youngest American in space and the first person in space with a prosthesis, a titanium rod in her left leg.



From left to right, Christopher Sembroski, Dr Sian Proctor, Jared Isaacman and Hayley Arceneaux. Photograph: SpaceX/UPI/Rex/Shutterstock

The passengers will spend three days orbiting Earth at an unusually high altitude of 357 miles (575km) – 100 miles higher than the International Space Station – before splashing down off the Florida coast this weekend.

“It was an honor to wish you Godspeed before you left for orbit!” [Musk tweeted](#), replying to a photo of him with the four-person crew.

While Nasa has no role in the process, its managers and astronauts are rooting for the flight, dubbed Inspiration4.

“To me, the more people involved in it, whether private or government, the better,” said the Nasa astronaut Shane Kimbrough, who is nearing the end of his six-month space station stay.

The larger astronaut community is also watching, with some already welcoming Arceneaux, Sembroski, Proctor and Isaacman to the pack. “Congratulations to the world’s 4 newest astronauts!” [tweeted the Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield](#).

Isaacman, an accomplished pilot, persuaded SpaceX to take the Dragon capsule higher than it’s ever been. Initially reluctant because of the increased radiation exposure and other risks, SpaceX agreed after a safety review.

“Now I just wish we pushed them to go higher,” Isaacman told reporters on the eve of the flight. “If we’re going to go to the moon again and we’re going to go to Mars and beyond, then we’ve got to get a little outside of our comfort zone and take the next step in that direction.”

Isaacman is picking up the entire tab for the flight but won’t say how many millions he paid.

Though the capsule is automated, the four Dragon riders spent six months training for the flight to cope with any emergency. That training included centrifuge and fighter jet flights, launch and re-entry practice in SpaceX’s capsule simulator and a grueling trek up Washington’s Mount Rainier in the snow.



A plush dog floating in the capsule of a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket carrying the Inspiration4 crew. Photograph: SpaceX/AFP/Getty Images

Four hours before liftoff, the four emerged from SpaceX's huge rocket hangar, waving and blowing kisses to their families and company employees, before they were driven off to get into their sleek white flight suits. Once at the launch pad, they posed for pictures and bumped gloved fists, before taking the elevator up. Proctor danced as she made her way to the hatch.

The launch [created a breathtaking effect in the night sky](#), where clouds and rocket exhaust illuminated to look much like a jellyfish, [AccuWeather reported](#).

With the addition of Inspiration4's crew, there are now a record 14 people in space, [according to the New York Times](#).

SpaceX's next private trip, early next year, will see a retired Nasa astronaut escorting three wealthy businessmen to the space station for a weeklong visit. The Russians are launching an actor, film director and a Japanese tycoon to the space station in the next few months.

Once opposed to space tourism, Nasa is now a supporter. The shift from government astronauts to non-professionals "is just flabbergasting", said the

former Nasa administrator Charles Bolden, a former space shuttle commander.

“Someday Nasa astronauts will be the exception, not the rule,” said Cornell University’s Mason Peck, an engineering professor who served as Nasa’s chief technologist nearly a decade ago. “But they’ll likely continue to be the trailblazers the rest of us will follow.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/sep/15/spacex-launch-amateur-astronauts-passengers>

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Kansas

Kansas boy's insect entry at state fair wins prize – and triggers federal inquiry



A spotted lanternfly at a vineyard in Kutztown, Pennsylvania. The insect has ravaged the US north-east in recent years. Photograph: Matt Rourke/AP

[Alexandra Villarreal](#) in Austin

Wed 15 Sep 2021 14.15 EDT

A young contestant's proud entry at the [Kansas](#) state fair caused a flap when a judge saw the specimen submitted in the boy's exhibition box – and it prompted a federal investigation.

The show item was [a dead spotted lanternfly](#) the boy had discovered at his home – an invasive moth-like bug that has been causing massive damage to plants in US eastern states but had [not previously](#) been thought to have reached Kansas.

The boy won a prize at the fair and correctly identified the insect but the creature itself was flagged for attention by the US Department of Agriculture's animal and plant health inspection service. The agency will now investigate how the invasive species made it to Kansas, [the Hutchinson News reported](#).

Since arriving in Pennsylvania, probably [via a shipping container from Asia, spotted lanternflies](#) have ravaged the US north-east in recent years.

The pests feed on [trees and fruits](#) and excrete waste called "honeydew" that [promotes fungal growth](#) – behavior that threatens devastating damage to plants, vineyards and agricultural produce as it prevents photosynthesis.

The insect's sudden appearance so far west immediately set off alarm bells – and its novelty helped the Kansas competitor win [a blue ribbon](#). He correctly identified his specimen as a spotted lanternfly, though he didn't know it was invasive or rare in the state.

The boy, who lives in north-west Kansas's Thomas county, discovered the lanternfly on his patio in May.

But it was "worn and desiccated", which could mean it died last year, Erin Otto of the inspection service [told the Washington Post](#).

Lanternflies don't fly very far but can be carried long distances via unsuspecting vehicles.

"They're very good hitchhikers," George Hamilton, department chair of entomology at Rutgers University, [told USA Today](#). "Most people don't even know they've got them until the adult form comes out."

Besides reporting any sightings, officials haven't minced words about what Americans should do in the midst of a spotted lanternfly invasion.

"Kill it!" the Pennsylvania department of agriculture [says on its website](#). "Squash it, smash it ... just get rid of it."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/sep/15/kansas-state-fair-lanternfly-triggers-federal-investigation>

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[Ryanair](#)

Ryanair plans to carry 225m passengers by 2026 in Covid rebound



Ryanair has said it expects to exceed pre-Covid passenger numbers by 2022.
Photograph: Nicolas Economou/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Jasper Jolly](#)

[@jjpjolly](#)

Thu 16 Sep 2021 05.53 EDT

Ryanair plans to fly an extra 25 million passengers a year by 2026, as the no-frills airline tries to take advantage of the industry's slow recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

The Irish airline said it hoped to carry 225 million passengers annually by March 2026, 25 million higher than its previous target of 200 million, as it prepared for its annual meeting in Dublin on Thursday.

Airlines have been among the sectors most affected by the coronavirus pandemic amid [extended restrictions on international travel](#), even as domestic economies including the UK have opened up, and are jostling for position for the recovery.

Ryanair earlier this month said it expected to exceed pre-Covid passenger numbers – 149 million passengers in 2019 – by 2022. It will then expand rapidly as it takes up airport slots vacated by collapsed or struggling rivals. Thursday's increased forecasts equated to 50% growth over five years, compared with an earlier prediction of 33%.

The expansion will also mean an increase in staff. Ryanair on Tuesday said it would hire 5,000 people, including pilots, cabin crew and engineers, across Europe over the five-year period.

Ryanair will take delivery of 210 Boeing 737 Max aircraft over the next five years. It calls the 737 Max a “gamechanger” because of increased reliability and lower fuel consumption. The 737 Max only [returned to service at the end of 2020](#) after being grounded for almost two years after a fault caused two crashes, killing 346 people.

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Michael O'Leary, the Ryanair chief executive, highlighted lower carbon emissions from the newer planes. However, the company has not set a target to reduce overall emissions, meaning its carbon footprint could rise significantly as it expands.

Ryanair in 2016 said it would reach the 200m passenger mark by 2024, suggesting that the pandemic has not knocked its long-term growth plans too far off course. Other airlines have been forced to retrench: shares in Ryanair's main UK rival, easyJet, last week slumped after it said it would [raise £1.2bn to see it through](#) the recovery.

O'Leary said: “The Covid-19 pandemic has delivered an unprecedented blow to Europe's aviation and tourism industries. Only Ryanair has used this

crisis to place significantly increased aircraft orders, to expand our airport partnerships, and to secure lower operating costs so that we can pass on even lower fares to our guests, so that together with our airport partners, we can recover strongly from the Covid pandemic and deliver higher than expected growth in both traffic and jobs over the next five years.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/sep/16/ryanair-passengers-covid-rebound-jobs>

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[The Pegasus projectSurveillance](#)

EU commissioner calls for urgent action against Pegasus spyware



Didier Reynders told MEPs that the European commission ‘totally condemned’ alleged attempts to illegally access information on political opponents through their phones. Photograph: Yves Herman/EPA

[Daniel Boffey in Strasbourg](#)

Wed 15 Sep 2021 11.49 EDT

The EU must swiftly legislate to further protect the rights of activists, journalists and politicians following the [Pegasus spyware scandal](#), and the perpetrators of illegal tapping must be prosecuted, the bloc’s justice commissioner has told the European parliament.

Didier Reynders told MEPs that the [European Commission](#) “totally condemned” alleged attempts by national security services to illegally access information on political opponents through their phones.

He said: “Any indication that such intrusion of privacy actually occurred needs to be thoroughly investigated and all responsible for a possible breach have to be brought to justice. This is, of course, the responsibility of each and every member state of the EU, and I expect that in the case of Pegasus, the competent authorities will thoroughly examine the allegations and restore trust.”

He added that the EU’s executive branch was closely following an investigation by Hungary’s data protection authority into claims that [Viktor Orbán’s far-right government had been among those targeting](#) journalists, media owners and opposition political figures with invasive Pegasus spyware.

Reynders said that it was already the case, as confirmed by the European court of justice, that governments could not “restrict the confidentiality and integrity of communications”, except in “very strictly limited” scenarios.

But he added that a pending EU privacy regulation would further tighten the rules, and called for MEPs and the member states to urgently agree on the details of that new law in light of the spyware scandal.

Reynders said: “Various reports have shown that certain national security services used Pegasus spyware, to have direct access to citizens, equipment, including political opponents and journalists.

“Let me say right at the start that the commission totally condemns any illegal access to systems or any kind of illegal trapping or interception of community users communications. It’s a crime in the whole of the [European Union](#).”

A consortium of 17 media outlets, including the Guardian, revealed in July that global clients of the Israeli surveillance firm NSO Group had [used hacking software to target](#) human rights activists, journalists and lawyers.

The investigation was based on forensic analysis of phones and analysis of a leaked database of 50,000 numbers, [including that of the French president, Emmanuel Macron](#), and European Council president, Charles Michel, along

with other heads of state and senior government, diplomatic and military officials, in 34 countries.

Reynders, a former Belgian justice minister, was speaking at the start of a debate in the European parliament on the scandal.

Sophie In ‘t Veld, a Dutch MEP in the liberal D66 party, said the parliament’s civil liberties, justice and home committee, of which she is a leading member, would launch an investigation into the use of Pegasus within the EU.

“We want total clarity and honesty now,” she said. “The European Commission denies having had any contacts with the company, but I find that hard to believe. At our initiative, [the committee] will start a quick investigation into the allegations.

Last month Hungary’s data protection authority, the NAIH, said it had launched an official investigation into allegations about the Hungarian government’s use of the Pegasus software.

At least five Hungarian journalists appeared on a leaked list reviewed by the Pegasus papers consortium. Also on the list was the [number of the opposition politician György Gémesi](#), the mayor of the town of Gödöllő and the head of a nationwide association of mayors.

Hungarian law provides that in cases where national security is at stake, the intelligence services can order surveillance with no judicial oversight, only the signature of the minister of justice.

Hungary’s justice minister, Judit Varga, has declined to comment, but said “every country needs such tools”.

In ‘t Veld said: “Journalists, politicians and activists must be able to do their work without being spied on by an increasingly authoritarian government. If proven otherwise, this constitutes a massive infringement of civil liberties.”

Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield, an MEP in the Europe Ecologie Les Verts party, said: “So far, the Hungarian government still hasn’t reacted to the

Pegasus project revelations. Neither transparency nor accountability has been brought to the public debate.”

NSO has denied that the inclusion of a number on the leaked list was indicative of whether it was selected for surveillance. “The list is not a list of Pegasus targets or potential targets,” the company said. “The numbers in the list are not related to NSO Group in any way.”

A number of MEPs from Catalonia also highlighted the alleged targeting of local politicians with spyware, claiming involvement by the Spanish government.

Current and former leaders of Catalonia’s pro-independence government have called for an inquiry over what has been described as a “possible case of domestic political espionage” in Europe.

Last year, a joint investigation by the Guardian and El País determined that the mobile phones of at least five members of the regional independence movement – including the speaker of the Catalan parliament – were targeted.

NSO is an Israeli surveillance company regulated by the country’s ministry of defence, which approves sale of its spyware technology to government clients around the world.

The company says it sells only to military, law enforcement and intelligence agencies in 40 unnamed countries for the purpose of terrorism and crime investigations.

It further claims to rigorously vet its customers’ human rights records before allowing them to use its spy tools. NSO says it “does not operate the systems that it sells to vetted government customers, and does not have access to the data of its customers’ targets”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/sep/15/eu-poised-to-tighten-privacy-laws-after-pegasus-spyware-scandal>

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- [Society Sharp rise in acute medical beds occupied by children with nowhere else to go](#)
- ['No mental health bed' Why children end up on acute wards](#)
- [Coronavirus Vaccinating teenagers against Covid is priority, says UK epidemiologist](#)
- [Politics live UK Covid vaccine passports 'not ruled out forever', cabinet minister stresses](#)

Children's health

Sharp rise in acute medical beds occupied by children with nowhere else to go



An NHS hospital ward. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

[Helen Pidd](#) North of England editor

Mon 13 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

A third of all children's acute hospital beds in parts of [England](#) are being occupied by vulnerable children who do not need acute medical care but have nowhere else to go, safeguarding experts have warned.

Doctors say they feel like very expensive "babysitters" for vulnerable children, many of whom are in care but whose placements have broken down because of their violent and self-harming behaviour. Others have severe neurodevelopmental or eating disorders and need specialist treatment

not available on ordinary children's wards, where they get "stuck", sometimes for months at a time.

Police are increasingly called to help restrain the children, or to bring them back when they run away. Paediatricians told the Guardian they have had to deal with vulnerable children who were not physically ill but displayed such challenging behaviour that they could not be looked after in children's homes.

"It is estimated that roughly a third of acute hospital beds at the moment are full of these vulnerable young people, many who are subject to child protection plans, or they are already children in care, living in a residential placement that's falling apart," said Dr Emilia Wawrzkowicz, a paediatric consultant who is the assistant officer for child protection at the Royal College of Paiatrics and Child [Health](#) (RCPCH).

Such children do sometimes need acute medical care – for example, if they have taken an overdose or self-harmed. "But usually, we're not providing any acute medical care. The way we understand it, as acute paediatricians, we are babysitting, fundamentally. And the children are stuck," Wawrzkowicz said. "It's a desperate situation."

Though many of these children are in extreme distress, they often have no diagnosable mental illness and do not qualify for a psychiatric "tier four" bed. Those who do qualify often cannot get one, as the beds are limited. Those who need specialist care placements can't get them easily either, as they are both rare and expensive, sometimes costing as much as £10,000 a week per child.

"Some children have such extreme emotional and behavioural issues or are at risk of exploitation that they can't get back to their residential placements or their foster parents. They can't obviously go back to their homes, and we've got to keep them safe. So they sit in the hospital because there's nowhere else to go. There are children sitting on our wards for months," said Wawrzkowicz.

"When I first started as a paediatrician, you might have one case like this once a month or maybe even once every three months. Now it's on a nightly

basis.”

Charlotte Ramsden, president of the Association of Director of Children’s Services, warned that a failure to increase the suitable provision for traumatised children would lead to more child suicides and more children ending up in custody after harming others. She said children were being evicted from children’s homes at less than 24 hours’ notice because of their violent behaviour, and some had tried to kill themselves.

In July [a judge ordered the release of a 12-year-old boy](#) from Wigan who was detained in hospital. The boy’s behaviour was so difficult that at one point 15 police officers were on the ward to help restrain him, and seriously ill children had to be transferred to other hospitals for their own safety.

A paediatric consultant in the south-west of England, who asked not to be named to maintain patient confidentiality, said a recent vulnerable patient was just eight.

Police have been called to the paediatric ward at her hospital in order to help staff, she said. “Many children displaying distress do not warrant sectioning under the mental health act but cannot return home either because parents cannot cope or the environment is not suitable. It is not just the looked-after children and children on child protection plan cohort. Children with autism are a big group.”

Dr Vicki Walker, a consultant paediatrician who is the looked-after children’s representative on the RCPCH’s safeguarding committee, said the detention of vulnerable children on acute wards was a sign of multiple societal failures. “It is the end point of a very traumatic life. We need to look at what has happened in the run-up to see what support they and their family received,” she said. “This is a whole-societal issue, and it ends up with these very vulnerable children feeling that no one else wants them.”

Dr Peter Green, chair of the National Network of Designated Health Professionals, which brings together doctors and nurses who work in children’s safeguarding and looked-after children, said the hospital setting, coupled with police involvement, made the situation worse.

“If you sit down, shut the door and keep the police officers out of the way and have a caring, relational approach, then suddenly all the anger disappears and the tears start because they are very, very unhappy, and very tragic characters. And they need all the love and care and support we can give them,” Green said.

In the year to March 2020, English councils applied to the high court to deprive 327 children of their liberty, often because a child needed a place in a secure children’s home but none was available. That was a sharp increase from 215 in the year to March 2019 and 103 the year before that, [according to figures collected by the Children’s Commissioner](#).

A government spokesperson said: “The government is providing an extra £2.3bn a year to mental health services by 2024. Our funding will open up NHS services or school and college-based support to an additional 345,000 children and young people every year to 2024.

“At the same time, over £1bn of additional funding for social care has been given to local authorities for 2021-22 to maintain care services – including support for autistic people with care needs.”

In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123, or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is [1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255). In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at www.befrienders.org.

The main picture on this article was changed on 13 September 2021 because the original did not comply with our guidelines for illustrating articles related to mental health.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/sep/13/sharp-rise-in-acute-medical-beds-occupied-by-children-with-mental-health-issues>

Children's health

‘No mental health bed’: why children end up on acute medicine wards



‘Sometimes we’ve had them stay for months waiting for an appropriate bed on an inpatient mental health unit,’ said a senior paediatric consultant.
Photograph: HRAUN/Getty Images



Interviews by [Helen Pidd](#)

Mon 13 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Charlotte Ramsden, director of children's services in Salford and the president of the Association of Directors of Children's Services:

A number of us are increasingly making deprivation of liberty applications to courts – sometimes for hospitals, sometimes linked to a children's home or another placement – in order to keep children safe.

It is often done out of desperation, such as when a residential placement breaks down because of the extreme behaviour of the child and the provider gives very short notice – which can be 24 hours – and you have nowhere for them to go. Children can end up in hospital due to mental distress or self-harm and stay there just to keep them safe because there are no immediate alternatives.

These are very traumatised children. We see examples of children being very self-destructive: swallowing glass, swallowing batteries, running into traffic, trying to hang themselves. These children are so distressed, and we need better ways of reaching them in a very therapeutic, supportive, but contained environment. We know a hospital is not necessarily the right place for them, but there is a real gap in specialist

provision between a “tier 4” psychiatric bed or welfare secure placement, which are both in short supply, and existing residential or foster care provision, where these children can receive bespoke, wraparound support.

Currently, these specialist placements are very hard to come by and very expensive. You can end up doing 200 national placement searches and find nowhere suitable that is willing to care for some of these children. What we end up doing is creating crisis solutions.

We are always working on options to meet the needs of these children better, and the consequences of nothing changing are stark: an increased risk that children seriously harm themselves or worse, or them harming other people and ending up in the criminal justice system.

Senior paediatric consultant in Manchester who wished to remain anonymous:

Over the last five years there has been a gradual increase in the number of children admitted on to our acute paediatric unit who don’t need the kind of medical treatment we offer. Consistently this summer, 20% of our beds have been occupied by children who need either a specialist mental health bed or a specialist residential placement in the community.

Not long ago we had a looked-after child of primary school age with serious behavioural issues who ended up stuck on our ward for several weeks because the local council couldn’t find them an appropriate placement in Greater Manchester. It was heartbreakng because they ended up 100 miles away, far from anyone they knew.

Many of these patients are not getting the care they need because neither I, my colleagues or the nursing staff are trained to provide the level of psychiatric care they require. We are trained to deal with medical problems. The mental healthcare teams don’t have the capacity to provide the level of daily input that these children need.

Some of the children, the ones with eating disorders, do need medical care because of problems resulting from their condition. But for many we are just keeping them safe, often with the help of agency nurses who offer one-to-one supervision. They can be very difficult to manage, and we do sometimes have to restrain them, physically or with medication.

We've had children who have been brought in after almost killing themselves. It was correctly deemed that they weren't safe to be looked after in the community because there was a high ongoing risk of self-harm, but they were admitted to us, an acute paediatric ward, because there wasn't a mental health bed for them. Sometimes we've had them stay for months waiting for an appropriate bed on an inpatient mental health unit.

These problems have certainly been exacerbated by the pandemic, but it's a problem that's been several years in the making due to cuts in psychiatric services. There's also the knock-on effect for the other children we look after. We are already really busy in paediatrics. It's like midwinter with the types and numbers of respiratory illnesses we are seeing.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/sep/13/no-mental-health-bed-why-children-end-up-on-acute-medicine-wards>

Coronavirus

Vaccinating teenagers against Covid is priority, says UK epidemiologist



Neil Ferguson: ‘The faster we can roll out additional vaccination, the better in terms of stopping people getting severely ill.’ Photograph: Antonio Olmos/The Observer

[Jamie Grierson](#)

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Mon 13 Sep 2021 03.53 EDT

The scientist whose modelling was instrumental to the UK going into its first lockdown has backed vaccinating teenagers as a priority.

Prof Neil Ferguson, from Imperial College London, and a member of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage), told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme levels of immunity in the UK were falling behind some European countries that had inoculated teenagers faster than us.

His comments came as the prime minister was expected to address the country on Tuesday to underline how vaccinations would be a central part of the response to coronavirus in the coming months.

The UK's chief medical officers are also drawing up advice to government on whether children aged 12 to 15 should be vaccinated, after the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation said the margin of benefit from vaccinating healthy children was too small to say they should receive a jab.

Asked if vaccinating teenagers was the way forward for boosting immunity levels in the UK, Ferguson said: "That's the initial priority, just because it's going to take six to eight weeks to start before those teenagers have had two doses."

He told Today experts were seeing "slow increases in case numbers, hospitalisations and deaths" and he was supportive of booster shots.

He said in the absence of social distancing measures, which he agreed with, "we are reliant on immunity building up in the population".

He added: "That happens two ways – one through vaccination, and one through people getting infected and so the faster we can roll out additional vaccination, the better in terms of stopping people getting severely ill but also in reducing transmission."

He said the UK had been leading in Europe on vaccination until recently but other countries such as Spain, Portugal, France, Italy and Ireland "have got higher vaccination levels than us and that's largely because they have rolled out vaccination of 12- to 15-year-olds faster than us.

"They also vaccinated more recently, and we know now that vaccine effectiveness decays over time, we always expected that, and so they have more immunity in the population," he continued.

"They also principally used the Pfizer vaccine which against Delta is somewhat more effective than the AstraZeneca vaccine, so there are a set of countries in Europe with considerably more population immunity than us

and I think if we want to stop the risk of a large autumn and winter wave we need to boost immunity in the population.”

Government data up to 11 September shows that of the 92,414,463 Covid jabs given in the UK, 48,422,588 were first doses, a rise of 27,229 on the previous day. The number of second doses was 43,991,875, an increase of 96,435.

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

UK Covid: jabbing 12- to 15-year-olds will reduce impact of school disruption on children's mental health – Whitty

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2021.09.13 - Spotlight

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Interview

‘I would never spend that much on a kitchen!’: Grand Designs’ Kevin McCloud on money, ambition – and expensive mistakes

[Emine Saner](#)



Kevin McCloud at the Brockhampton estate owned by the National Trust in Herefordshire. Photograph: Sam Frost/The Guardian



[@eminesaner](#)

Mon 13 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

The first couple of episodes of the current series of *Grand Designs* have already aired, but – as if it was itself an over-running building project – [Kevin McCloud](#) is still filming. When we speak over Zoom, from the small studio he set up “in a cupboard”, he has only just got home from filming; and as soon as we finish, he will be recording a line or two of his famously lyrical thoughts for an episode that goes out this week. It sounds stressful and I feel every bit as on edge as I do watching one of his couples race to finish a house before the weather closes in, or the woman gives birth, or the money runs out, but McCloud looks relaxed. He has, after all, been doing this for more than 20 years.

The current series of *Grand Designs* is the 22nd. McCloud says he is always coming up with new reasons for its popularity. “The oldest explanation is I think it’s the last great big adventure that we can all go on and, therefore, we all connect to the idea of that,” he says, of the huge task that is building a house. “Also, we connect to the idea of home, because the notion of home is not simply a concept, it’s a place of psychological dependency.” Watching

someone else create a home “strikes at something very primal within us”, he reasons. The characters are fascinating, of course – how do they have so much money? Why does this man (it’s almost always a man) think it’s a good idea to turn a nuclear power station or a sewage plant into a family home? And there is something deeply satisfying in the end result – an imposition of order on a quagmire of a building site, overcoming supply issues and dwindling funds. Finally, despite McCloud’s scepticism early on in the episode and the occasional barbed comment, his climactic monologue will be celebratory. At the very least, he will find something to praise. It is not a cynical show.

Is it hard to be nice about buildings that end up being awful? “Yes,” he says immediately, deadpan, then laughs. “You fall back on the narrative, on the story of the people.” There is always something positive to say, he adds, “even in the worst possible case, and I’m very mindful that we all come to judge very quickly. Social media is fraught with negativity and judgmental attitudes.” He advises contributors not to look at social media when their episode airs “because you will be hurt, and it will last, that pain”.



Kevin McCloud in 1992, teaching sophisticated decorative finishes and soft furnishings to pupils at a design school in west London. Photograph: Alex Lentati/ANL/Shutterstock

I wonder if McCloud lies awake at night, worrying about his self-builders' disputes with their neighbours or whether that giant bit of glass manufactured in an obscure German town will make it in time, but he says he is too busy, adding that he follows up to 30 building projects at a time – as well as Grand Designs, there are its spin-off shows such as House of the Year and The Street, which follows 10 households building their own homes. “I cannot and should not become emotionally involved.” What about the man with the lighthouse? ([Edward Short](#) demolished his family home on a Devon clifftop, then spent 10 years creating an art deco-style lighthouse which wrecked his marriage and put him £4m in debt; apparently it is nearly finished and should go on sale this year). It must be hard not to feel for him? “Of course. We do email. I mean, I’ve got a heart,” says McCloud.

Is he ever shocked by the final cost of things? “Yeah,” he says, then adds, “I am shocked by the cost of everything: petrol … the weekly shop.” He seemed visibly appalled – as were the hordes on Twitter – by the £125,000 one couple spent on a kitchen in the first episode of the new series. “My shock is just sort of an expression of moral indignation, really,” he says, smiling when I mention it. “I was brought up as a Methodist and I would never spend that money on a kitchen. I just couldn’t do it, I can’t see the value. I can see the value of insulating the building, and of giving yourselves zero-carbon technologies, and reducing your bills and environmental impact. I can see the ethical value of that. But what I can’t see is the ethical …” He pauses. “I can’t see the justification for gross spending on what are essentially basic requirements.”

Surely, it is especially wrong, when we’re in the midst of a housing crisis, to spend so much? McCloud softens a bit. The house was – in terms of scale, ambition and cost – on another level. The handmade kitchen “was a piece of craftsmanship, and it was beautifully assembled. I’m all for spending money on high levels of craftsmanship and individuals who are really talented, but …” He pauses and smiles. “It’s a hard thing, isn’t it?”

McCloud is always asked whether he would ever do his own grand design. “To which I say: how do you know I haven’t? I have built, and restored and repaired and I’ve extended and remodelled. I’ve done it all off camera, very carefully in order to keep my life private, but also to preserve the myth.” He smiles, then adds he is only half-joking. “It’s important that I should remain

a cipher. I should be the conduit for ideas, I shouldn't be colouring things too much." Which might happen if we all knew he lived in a wattle-and-daub cottage, or a modernist masterpiece. I can see what look like ancient beams behind him. "It's an unfinished house," he concedes. "It was unfinished in 1650."

McCloud grew up in an unfinished 60s house, which his dad finished, then extended. His father was an electronics engineer "so he was always mucking about with stuff," says McCloud. He would replace the boiler, then give his three sons the old one to take apart and reassemble. All three have become involved in buildings in some way or another, and one of McCloud's four children is now an architect. McCloud may have spent his childhood and youth in a Bedfordshire village, but it had a range of architecture that interested him – 1930s semis, a row of 40s bungalows, a 50s estate. His first school was Victorian while a later school was a modern 60s building. "All these kind of archetypes were just there, you could reach out the window almost and touch them," he says.



'All these kind of archetypes were just there, you could reach out the window almost and touch them.' Photograph: Sam Frost/The Guardian

His parents met in the chapel choir, and music was an important feature of home. After A-levels, he went off to Italy to spend a formative year working

on an organic farm in Tuscany, while also studying singing at the Florence Conservatory of Music. When they offered him a three-year place, he wrote to his father to tell him he wouldn't be returning to start his degree at Cambridge University. "And he wrote me the only letter he ever wrote to me, which was pretty stiff – rightly so, because he'd come from a very challenging background, and so for him to actually go to university was a big thing." A place at Cambridge therefore seemed the pinnacle. So he returned.

He had been to a grammar school that turned comprehensive. Did he feel out of place at Cambridge? "I felt immensely urbane because I'd been in Italy for a year and a half," he says. "I was surrounded by boys who'd come straight from boarding schools. I'd gone off and done all this stuff. But of course, that was a mask [to] cover my insecurity about the fact that I didn't know how anything worked. You know, the idea of going to hall for dinner. This was an antiquated, medieval institution, venerated, venerable, and I still support it. It was hugely formative for me, but I didn't fit in." Although, he adds, "to go to lectures by [the art historian] Ernst Gombrich or [the moral philosopher] Bernard Williams, this was mind-bendingly good".

McCloud, who studied history of art and architecture, was drawn to design – he did the sets and scenery for Footlights, and then worked as a theatre designer for several years. He was running a lighting design company when he was approached to be on TV in the mid-90s – it was the era of the home improvement show – and from this, Grand Designs was born in 1999 (the TV producer, now writer, Daisy Goodwin spotted McCloud's potential for something more epic than mere makeovers).

He is a great talker: engaging, self-deprecating and passionate about the things that interest or anger him. He finds it "iniquitous and hugely corrosive" that land values in the UK are so high because companies hoard land and drip-feed it into the market. "What's really needed is a complete radical state-controlled distribution of land and a removal of land profit from the equation. That sounds nuts and Stalinistic, but it's exactly what happens in Germany," he says. "Since the war, our planning system unwittingly has worked in cahoots with capitalism to create an unsustainable development economy." We're "pretty much", he says, the only country in the world to have so few major construction companies dominating the market. And they

build the most [cramped houses in Europe](#). “If you’re a housebuilder, the only way you can make some money and sell a house people can afford is to build really small ones. It’s awful.”

McCloud has long talked about social and environmental sustainability – the kind of housing that works for communities, and also has a low carbon footprint – and says those working in the [social housing sphere are doing interesting work](#), but the big developers aren’t. “They build stuff that looks good in the brochure. We’ve had a series of governments who have been hellbent on diluting policies and giving the market more freedom and not clamping down on performance standards. All that does is encourage a libertarian attitude in the market to do stuff which is competitive and looks the business and sells. But no, I don’t think we’re anywhere near achieving [net zero emissions].”



McCloud with two contributors from Grand Designs' 20th series.
Photograph: Channel 4 / Stef Kerstall

Alongside his TV career, McCloud built up a property business, HAB Housing, with a mission to design and build sustainable housing that was more inspiring than the identikit estates made by the major construction companies. There have been successes and failures. In 2019, two of the sister companies he had been a director of [went into liquidation](#) and the

investors, from whom £2.3m had been raised through an unregulated minibond scheme, are facing a loss. According to Jackie Porter, a county councillor in Hampshire, one of [HAB Housing's developments](#) – Lovedon Fields near Winchester – was meant to have been completed in 2018 but only got its road resurfaced recently. Porter, who has been familiar with the scheme from the start, adds that residents have had to fund their own repairs to their new houses and promised amenities, such as allotments, are still to materialise. McCloud hasn't been a director of the company since early 2018, and his publicist says that he has not had any control or connection with the delivery and performance of the site since that time.

I am told before we speak that McCloud will not talk about any of this because of ongoing proceedings. Will he say how it has affected him, personally? He looks pained, but gamely tries to answer. “Well, in two ways. I’m enormously proud of the work that we did,” he says. The developments *are* interesting and different; Lovedon Fields has a wildflower meadow, and is protected in perpetuity in partnership with the charity Fields in Trust. It may still be lacking streetlights, but still. (Porter says the development is “really innovative”.) “I’m immensely proud on the one hand, and on the other, I’m very poor,” he says, mildly sardonic. “I invested a vast amount of my money and earnings into that business. So for me, it was a personal thing, and we employed great people, and did some wonderful schemes and got some great things going. And it’s a shame that not everything in life can be as successful as you want it to be. I’m not one ever to say ‘if only’...” He pauses. “Events like that, like successes, we’re all governed by the influences of, it seems, the stars.” [In a 2019 statement](#), he blamed, among other things, rocketing construction costs and skills shortages. To me, he says: “It’s very, very difficult to build in the UK, and very hard to achieve schemes where you actually do more than build houses, where you build community.”

He’s deeply grateful for Grand Designs “because that’s been an enormous success, and it’s led me to places, to meet people and do things which I would not have dreamed of doing. So I must not be negative about the failures, because in a way they build you as much [as the successes].”

He says he has always defined himself through his work. Did he worry the whole thing had damaged his credibility? “I don’t worry about it. I think it’s

...” He pauses. “I did worry about it, but I’m of the view that it hasn’t changed what I do, which is to provide ideas and to try to be inspirational and to communicate.” Being on TV, says McCloud, is where you project “a larger version of yourself, and the private personal self is underneath; they should be representations and reflections of the same individual [but] beneath it all, all of us are the same. We all feel vulnerable at times.”

How long does he think he will be doing Grand Designs for? That, he says wryly, “is dependent entirely on health and joints. Directors get me to bend down a lot and climb ladders, and wander all over building sites.” McCloud, who is 62, says he looks after himself a bit better now. “I used to just keep going. As you get older, you can’t do that, but it doesn’t stop me from trying.” This is the point where, if he were on screen in stylish outdoor gear while uplifting music soars in the background, McCloud might say something poetic about passion and hard work, but also mistakes and misfortunes along the way.

The new series of Grand Designs airs on Wednesdays at 9pm on Channel 4. Grand Designs airs on ABC and Binge in Australia.

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Labia liberation! The movement to end vulva anxiety for good



‘I was more shocked by how different everyone’s insecurities are’ ... the artist Lydia Reeves, who had made a series of casts of women’s vulvas.
Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian



Zoe Williams

@zoesqwilliams

Mon 13 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

When Florence Schechter opened [the Vagina Museum](#) – the world's first museum dedicated to gynaecological anatomy – in London in 2019, it was partly a response to a dramatic rise in labiaplasty surgery. Instances of such surgery more than doubled in the first decade of this century, then carried on climbing. Zoe Williams, the spokesperson for the museum (who shares my name), says part of the problem is that most women have not seen other vulvas. “Quite a lot of people have never even seen their own, so it’s hard to have a concept of what’s normal. Certainly, throughout art history, the pictures of nude women very seldom had any protruding labia; you just had a neat little cleft.”

Labiaplasty is surgery to alter the appearance of the vulva – generally by trying to reduce the size of the labia minora, the inner genital lips, so that they don't hang below the labia majora, the outer ones. The reasons for such surgery are not solely cosmetic – they could be related to childbirth, [or chafing during sport](#) – yet the rise is staggering. The number of labiaplasty surgeries in 2016 was up 45% on 2015 – the biggest growth of any cosmetic

surgery procedure, according to the [International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery](#).

Now, however, a nascent movement is fighting back. It is rejecting the whole idea of genital perfection and reclaiming difference as part of being human – or, for brevity, celebrating what is becoming known on social media as an [“outie labia”](#).

This is most noticeable on TikTok, where Ying Lee ([@sativaplathe69](#)), who is 24 and uses the pronouns they/them, got a huge number of hits on a post about their “phat coochie” (phat means fat; coochie means vulva), then more still (6.4m) for a witty and complicated piece to camera about “gatekeeping phat coochie culture”.

I get frustrated that women’s bodies are only acceptable when they’re on trend

Ying Lee

“When I was making that post, there was a trend of talking about big, juicy coochies,” says Lee over the phone from Vancouver. “And you could apply this to any body part. There was a time when it wasn’t ideal to have big thighs or have a big ass – and then it suddenly was. I guess I get frustrated that women’s bodies are only acceptable when they’re on trend. A trend can normalise you – but only for as long as that’s the trend. And whether you’re in trend or not, you’re still going to have this body.”

Another TikToker, Jennifer Prentice ([@jenniferprentice](#)), makes the point deftly that, if you start a conversation about labia with anyone whose labia protrude, “it is like fireworks go off in their brain … I’m not weird? I’m not ugly?” Elsewhere on the site, sincere, social-savvy gynaecologists – such as Jennifer Lincoln ([@drjenniferlincoln](#)) and Jen Gunter ([@drjengunter](#)), the author of *The Vagina Bible* – explain the vast spectrum of what is normal, while campaigners share labiaplasty horror stories and myriad women turn the full beam of their scathing humour on a world that doesn’t understand how varied vulvas can be.

It is a movement that is sorely needed. In a poll of more than 3,600 readers, the online women's magazine Refinery29 found that [almost half \(48%\) had concerns about the appearance of their vulva](#). Of those, 64% were worried about the size and 60% about the shape of their vulva, with almost one-third (30%) worried about the colour of their genitals. But what is driving this shame and disgust that has become so profound that women have been moved to correct it surgically – and could this bold generation Z labia liberation front overturn it all?

Cabby Laffy, the founder and director of the Centre for Psychosexual Health in London, says it is not a new problem; it is one [the late feminist sex researcher Shere Hite](#) pointed out years ago. "Little girls look down at their genitals and they're told they don't have them: boys' are outside, girls' inside," says Laffy. This is reflected in confusion around the language of female pudenda at the most basic level – many people say "vagina" when they mean "vulva". "We don't name the external genitals," Laffy continues. "That non-naming is part of the shame, part of the disgust."



'Praise your petals' ... a floral vulva installation at the Vagina Museum in Camden, north London, in February. Photograph: PinPep/Rex/Shutterstock

The psychotherapist Julia Bueno ties this in with a wider unease about the way we see female bodies. Our culture still expects them to be smooth,

controlled and aesthetically pleasing; the reality of the “unruly female body – discharge, breastmilk”, becomes something “shadowy and stigmatised”, she says, and this cultural disgust is internalised. “Quite often, in my practice, women will talk to me about STIs in euphemistic terms, or they’ll say: ‘Sorry if it’s too much information.’ They’re talking to their therapist and they’re embarrassed about talking about their bodies. I’ve even come across midwives who refer to ‘down there’, or nurses in fertility clinics using euphemisms.”

This is true of vulvas even more than, say, breasts. Into this lacuna created by non-naming come degrading, disgusted terms for labia – “beef curtains”, “fanny flaps” – that reinforce the sense that squeamishness is warranted.

Laffy says: “We have this idea that sex is supposed to be spontaneous, it all just happens, it’s outside my agency. That’s about trying to overcome shame.” Added to that are the contradictory expectations of femininity, commonly expressed as Madonna and whore. I always understood that to be about sexual morality, that women had to be simultaneously the unwilling gatekeeper to sex and the seductive initiator. But there is also something much more prosaic going on: women are supposed to be sexy, but we are also supposed to breastfeed and produce humans from our vaginas – and those things are the opposite of sexy. We have to use the same apparatus for dichotomous purposes and the world finds it best to square this circle by blanking the apparatus.

Second-wave feminists addressed this explicitly, with consciousness-raising women’s groups where everyone would examine their vulva with a hand mirror. That fell out of fashion in the 90s and 00s – surfing a post-ironic, anti-earnest wave, feminism was suddenly fine with the hidden, private vulva. Any public notion of what a vulva looked like was created by pornography, starting with complete hairlessness. As Williams notes: “This is a reinforcing wheel – hangups come from all sides and feed each other. If you remove your hair, you can see a lot more of the vulva; if you can then see protruding labia, that can lead to cosmetic concerns that you didn’t have before.”

We don’t name the external genitals. That non-naming is part of the shame, part of the disgust

Cabby Laffy

The world greeted the vajazzle – where you glue fake jewels to your pubis in place of pubic hair – with much lightheartedness in 2010, but increasingly the genital model coming from pornography wasn’t bling, but childishness – hairless, without visible labia minora. And pornography was often the only place people saw other’s genitals up close.

Lydia Reeves is a Brighton-based feminist body-casting artist and the author of [My Vulva and I](#), which is published next week. At 29, she is squarely in the digital native generation that has seen enough pornography to remember thinking: “‘Oh my God, that is not what I look like.’ I just assumed that that was what everybody else looked like and I was the only one who looked the way I did. So, of course, I wasn’t going to talk to anyone about it, because that would be mortifying.”

When Reeves started casting women’s vulvas, what surprised her was not the anxieties many had about the way they looked. “I was more shocked by how different everyone’s stories have been, how different their insecurities are. In my naive head, I just assumed everyone’s insecurities would be the same as mine.”

When Reeves was young, she says, there was no such thing as a vulva-positive online community, so she is thrilled that, while such communities are not ubiquitous, “there are definitely those spaces: so many Instagrams, so many people talking about it now. I’m hopeful that we’re turning a bit of a corner.” She is keen to underline that pornography was not the problem, per se – it was that there was no visual or cultural representation other than the very particular aesthetic of pornography.

As Reeves has seen first-hand, there is a lot that women can hate about their vulva, from the relative difference in size between labia minora and majora (56% of women have visible minora, but often this is why they think they are abnormal) to shape, colour, shade and a tautness that doesn’t make sense in labia, but some people (pornographic actors) embody nonetheless.

The artist Jamie McCartney produced [The Great Wall of Vagina](#) – 400 plastercast vulvas – in 2011, five years after starting the project. He was

inspired by a previous commission to create art with male and female genitalia for a sex museum. (He knows that the casts he has made are of vulvas, not vaginas, but the word play doesn't work so well.)



'It became the de facto vulva library' ... a section of The Great Wall of Vagina by Jamie McCartney. Photograph: Jamie McCartney

McCartney says: "While casting, I discovered that loads of women had anxieties about their vulvas, particularly their labia. They would look at other casts and say: 'This one's so neat,' or: 'I wish mine looked more like that.' I was incredulous – there really wasn't any sense in my mind that some were good and some were defective. And this ideal was created in my name, apparently, because that's what men like. I just thought: 'Fuck that.'"

As he says, all anyone has to provide comparison is "porn and medical textbooks". His art offered a counterpoint, which is how he accounts for its impact. "Because it's cast, it sort of manages to sneak through in a way that photographs can't. You can never escape photographs looking like pornography. It became the de facto vulva library."

On social media, even the most conceptual works of feminist visual representation often have to be taken down due to nudity or "community" guidelines. Lee says TikTokers often self-censor their language to avoid

violating the guidelines, “even though most of the time it is nonsensical to me. Friends have had them [TikTok] censor medical diagrams”.

Williams’ experience has been similar. “The Vagina Museum worked in partnership with [the tampon brand] Callaly, commissioning some realistic drawings of vulvas in all their glorious diversity,” she says. “We posted these on Instagram and they immediately got banned.” The post has since been reinstated, but it shows that, for all that social media has made space for bold new voices, those voices are often tightly policed – it is hard for an algorithm to tell the difference between an emancipated feminist and a pornographer when it comes to pictures of genitals.

What is the impact of such a negative self-image combined with shame? Laffy suggests it is that you will get less from sex. She uses a food analogy to make the point: “If you’ve got shame and difficulty connected around foods, it’s hard to take pleasure in them.”

In her practice, she gives people homework tasks: “Basic things, being with your naked body in a bath, looking at your genitalia in a mirror, imagining that they are the perfect, the prototype. A lot of our work is how to see yourself as sexy, rather than how to look sexy.”

She has seen a lot of positive change over her career: “When I was teaching this 20 years ago, people had no idea what I was talking about.” Now, she says, “young women feel empowered, they seem surer of their right to exist, the right to be. Issues like trans and non-binary have opened up people’s belief that there’s more right to be the unique person that I am.”

Ying Lee elaborates: “I’m a non-binary person who’s bisexual. That was such a big hurdle for me to come out about that everything else looks smaller in comparison. It became a lot easier for me to be open and explicit about other aspects of my life.”

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[Emma Raducanu](#)

‘Our girl’: club where Emma Raducanu played as a child toasts US Open win



Fans at the Parklangley sports club in Beckenham celebrate Emma Raducanu winning the US Open final. Photograph: David Parry/PA



[Robert Booth](#) Social affairs correspondent

Sun 12 Sep 2021 12.46 EDT

It took less than 12 hours for Chanel Borland to feel the Raducanu effect after the British player's [stunning US Open victory](#) on Saturday night. As the seven-year-old and her mum crossed London for tennis coaching on Sunday morning, a stranger stopped them in the street. "She's going to be next after Emma Raducanu," they said.

It was some coincidence, because Chanel's destination was the Parklangley sports club in Beckenham where Raducanu herself trained from age six to 11 and where as recently as June she warmed up for Wimbledon in relative anonymity. While some club members nursed tender heads after a late night in the club bar watching "our girl" create history in straight sets in New York, Chanel was being drilled in her already impressive groundstrokes by her coach Greg McNally. "Gotta be better than that," he shouted as one forehand ballooned out of play. But more often he called "Good girl" as she rifled a double-handed backhand.



Seven-year-old Chanel Boreland sometimes eats and does her homework on the two-and-a-half-hour journey to Parklangley from their home in east London. Photograph: Helen William/PA

"I want to be a champion one day and I want to win a medal because I haven't got any medals yet," she told the Guardian before delivering a verdict on Raducanu that after Saturday night at Flushing Meadow few could disagree with: "She's good at tennis."

Like Raducanu, the Canadian-born daughter of Chinese and Romanian parents, Chanel has a diverse background – in her case Lithuanian and Jamaican – and she is the daughter of a trainee nurse. She is the kind of young Briton who sports administrators now hope will be attracted to watch and play tennis in greater numbers after Raducanu's charismatic victory.

Nurturing that talent will fall to clubs like Parklangley, a well-funded complex of 16 crisp grass, clay and indoor courts nestled among rows of mini-mansions in this affluent suburban area of south-east London. Harry Bushnell, head of performance and Raducanu's former coach, who used to train her in 7am pre-school sessions, was among those packed into the clubhouse on Saturday night to watch his former charge. She is believed to be the club's first professional, never mind grand slam winner.

“We were playing every shot with her, so at the end of the match we were pretty exhausted,” he told the Guardian. It was “insane, like an out-of-body experience”, because as the tension rose in New York, he was having flashbacks to a neverending tie-break she played in a match for Kent against Sussex at the age of 10, which she ultimately lost.



Harry Bushnell – who coached Emma Raducanu between the ages of 6 and 10 – gets ready to watch her in the US Open final at Parklangley sports club. Photograph: David Parry/PA

“But last night I had the feeling the stars were aligned and she was going to do it.”

What set her apart when she was younger was “work rate and determination”. “You never had to speak to her about messing around and trying hard – she always did it well,” he said. “Her movement and her shot-making back then was pretty spectacular.”

The club is now braced for a surge in interest in membership off the back of Raducanu’s win, even though it already has a waiting list of around 400 people.

“We’re going to try and get as many children as we can through the pathway and produce a few more Emma Raducanus,” Bushnell said. “I like to think

we are more diverse than we have ever been and I think she will be a breath of fresh air for the country.”

But two key problems in boosting participation and diversity in UK tennis are capacity and cost. “There is a huge capacity issue, which we are trying to address,” said Dave Cooke, club manager. “It’s access to courts, floodlights, indoor courts, infrastructure.

“[Our waiting list] is 20% at the moment. What is that going to be in the coming weeks? We want to do more, but we’re finding space to do that.”



Youths in practice at Parklangley Club. Photograph: Anselm Ebalue/The Guardian

He cautioned against thinking that Raducanu’s success could result in a huge change in the social makeup of tennis players. “With anybody going through to that level, a lot of investment is required, and the majority of that comes from parents. As a club we have looked at ways of making sport cheaper for people to engage in.”

He said families on the “performance pathway” that Raducanu took could “easily” expect to pay tens of thousands of pounds a year in fees for coaching, strength and conditioning, equipment, travel and accommodation.

“There are always going to be some people who fall away because they can’t afford it.”

Rob Dagwell, 24, who knew Raducanu from the club, said: “If anyone was going to make it, it was going to be her – you could see the natural raw talent.” But he added that her new status as a grand slam champion was “so weird”.

Christine Harris, 61, who celebrated Raducanu’s victory with sparkling rosé wine in the clubhouse, said “people were jumping up in the air at every point”. It was extra special because she had been watching at Wimbledon in June as Raducanu retired having suffered a panic attack in the fourth round.

Joining her for lunch was Jo Brown, 53, who toasted the win with more sparkling wine. “Ooh, we’ve got a great girl,” Brown said. “She’s local and we’ve expectations of a Wimbledon win now. No pressure.”

This article was amended on 13 September 2021 to site Beckenham’s Parklangley sports club in south-east London instead of in Kent.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/sep/12/our-girl-club-where-emma-raducanu-played-as-a-child-toasts-us-open-win>

[Emma Raducanu](#)

Emma Raducanu victory sparks debate over multiculturalism in the UK



Emma Raducanu with the US Open Women's Singles trophy she won on Saturday. 'Her victory illuminates the reality of Britishness,' says one commentator. Photograph: Ella Ling/Rex/Shutterstock



Alexandra Topping

Sun 12 Sep 2021 13.14 EDT

The Twitter bio of [Emma Raducanu](#), whose victory in the US Open on Saturday has sent much of the UK into an extended state of joyful delirium, contains only four words: london|toronto|shenyang|bucharest.

It's a reflection of her pride and ease in her rich heritage which – thanks to 111 thrilling minutes in New York – has opened a debate about multiculturalism in her home nation, where she arrived as a two-year-old from [Canada](#).

After the success of a fresh wave of sporting stars in 2021 – from the Olympics' [BMX rider Kye Whyte](#) and [weightlifter Emily Campbell](#) to Marcus Rashford, Bukayo Saka and other stars of the [Euro finalists football team](#) – Raducanu is being hailed as the face of a new proudly diverse era.

On Sunday Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London, tweeted that Raducanu – who was born in Canada to a Chinese mother and a Romanian father – reflected “London’s story”, writing: “Here in London, we embrace and celebrate our diversity. And if you work hard, and get a helping hand, you can achieve anything.”

Raducanu, who soon after [her victory](#) over the Canadian teenager Leylah Fernandez tweeted a picture of herself holding the union flag in one hand and her newly acquired trophy in the other with the words “We are taking her HOMEEE”, was congratulated by everyone [from the Queen](#) to Nigel Farage.

The latter came in for a barrage of criticism, as critics noted that in an interview the former Ukip leader described crime statistics relating to offences committed by Romanians as “eye-watering”, adding: “I was asked a question if a group of Romanian men moved in next to you, would you be concerned. If you lived in London, I think you would be.”

Match of the Day presenter and former captain of the England football team Gary Lineker couldn’t resist a swipe. “He won’t be able to afford to live next door to Emma Raducanu, so he needn’t worry,” he said, alluding to Raducanu’s £1.8m US Open prize money.

But Sport England board member Chris Grant said he welcomed the comments from Farage, and the wall-to-wall positive coverage of the 18-year-old’s achievements in parts of the media that are openly hostile to asylum seekers legally seeking refuge from danger.

“Her victory illuminates the reality of Britishness and the delusion at the heart of their other pronouncements,” he said. “A girl who has one Chinese parent, one Romanian parent and was born in Canada but came to Bromley at the age of two is such a normal story in this country, and one that we should be proud of.”

But Grant, speaking in an individual capacity, said the focus should be on Raducanu herself rather than on anything she does or doesn’t represent.

“We have to be mindful about what we place on the shoulders of individuals,” he said, adding that Raducanu’s mental health had already been the [subject of intense speculation](#) following her withdrawal from Wimbledon. “As of today, there’s going to be a massive spotlight on her from the point of view of immigration. That’s another burden for her to carry, and it’s probably not one she wants.”

Sunder Katwala, of British Future, a thinktank that promotes debate about immigration and integration, said Raducanu's ease with her heritage was typical of her generation. But he warned people with liberal views on immigration using her as a "gotcha" argument.

"These are exceptional stories, which don't answer the broader public questions about if we are good at identity integration, equal opportunity and shared identities," he said. "They do give a popular image of the positive contribution of migration and integration, and that has that positive element, as long as it's not overplayed."

Wanda Wyporska, executive director of the Equality Trust, said as a "half-Bajan, quarter-Polish, quarter-English" British woman, while she delighted in celebrating Raducanu's success and talent, she was wary of holding her up as an example of successful immigrant integration.

"The more that people get used to the idea that Britishness is a very varied thing has to be positive," she said. "But my concern is that the valuing immigrants and refugees in the UK is sort of predicated on being successful and giving back a contribution rather than just being human. That's not good for us either."

Grant said he was most heartened by the images of celebration beamed from Raducanu's tennis club, which included families of colour. "That a tennis club is a diverse place is socially significant in this country, and that's happening quietly and inexorably. That's why the Farage thing ultimately becomes irrelevant, because it's happening anyway. If that integration has figureheads like her, that's brilliant."

This article was amended on 13 September 2021. The executive director of the Equality Trust is Wanda Wyporska, not "Wyporka" as an earlier version said.

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Emma Raducanu

A-level student to US Open champion: Emma Raducanu's journey to the top

00:55

'A dream': Emma Raducanu comes to terms with first major title at US Open – video

Simon Cambers

Sun 12 Sep 2021 12.01 EDT

Nothing about what [Emma Raducanu](#) has achieved over the past three weeks in New York is normal. Qualifiers do not win grand slam titles; 18-year-olds do not win slams without dropping a set; teenagers do not waltz to US Open triumph on their debut.

But as she showed in 10 glorious performances, in heat, humidity and wind, Raducanu is not a normal teenager. In three months, she has gone from being a student waiting for her A-level results to reaching the last 16 at Wimbledon and then, in unprecedented fashion, to winning 10 straight matches to first qualify for the main draw at the US Open and then go all the way to the title to become the first British woman to win a grand slam since Virginia Wade at Wimbledon in 1977.

If any more evidence was needed that Raducanu offers much that is different, then it came not too long after [her thrilling win over Leylah Fernandez](#) on Saturday night, when she issued a message in Mandarin to all her friends and family in China, the homeland of her mother, Renee, thanking them for all their support.

Both Renee and her Romanian father, Ian, were unable to get to New York to see their daughter become a grand slam champion. Ranked 150 going into qualifying, there was no guarantee she would go far; by the time she made

the fourth round, it was too late to sort out the waiver needed to expedite travel to the US. Instead, they watched on TV, safe in the knowledge that everything they had instilled in their daughter would give her every chance to perform well. “I would have loved them to be here [so that] we could all celebrate together … and experience the same things,” Raducanu said. “But they’re watching from home very proud.”

Born in Toronto, when Raducanu was two the family moved to England, settling in Bromley, south-east London. But it is her parental combination, it seems, that instilled a work ethic, belief and calmness that has taken her to grand slam glory. “I think the confidence comes from just inner belief,” Raducanu tells October’s edition of Vogue. “My mum comes from a Chinese background, they have very good self-belief. It’s not necessarily about telling everyone how good you are, but it’s about believing it within yourself. I really respect that about the culture.



Billy Jean King hands the trophy to Emma Raducanu after Saturday's final.
Photograph: Corey Sipkin/UPI/Shutterstock

“I think that the calmness and the mental strength definitely comes from my upbringing,” she said in New York. “I think my parents have both instilled in me from a very young age to definitely have a positive attitude on court, because when I was younger, it was definitely an absolute no-go if I had any

sort of bad attitude. So from a young age, I definitely learnt that, and it's followed me until now."

Raducanu's parents, who both work in financial services, always wanted her to finish her education. Even when the WTA tour resumed after a [five-month coronavirus shutdown](#) in August 2020, she stayed at home to focus on school, a decision that paid off last month when she received an A* in maths, the best mark possible, and an A in economics. Those grades were achieved at Newstead Wood school in Orpington, the alma mater of another British sporting superstar in [Dina Asher-Smith](#).

Raducanu's athleticism, too, was boosted by sensible choices. Introduced to tennis by her parents at the age of five, she enjoyed ballet, horse riding, swimming, go-karting and motocross, and her love of cars helped her relax between matches at the US Open. She watched the Dutch Grand Prix on the middle weekend and was doubtless cheering on her favourite driver, Daniel Ricciardo, on his way to victory in Sunday's Italian Grand Prix in Monza.

Raducanu says she likes "a little bit of rap, but sometimes it makes me sleepy so I won't listen to it pre-match. I quite enjoy something with a beat, but I also love jazz. I think it's a really cool vibe, love to switch off to some jazz music." And when she played a WTA event in Chicago just before the US Open, Raducanu revealed her love of architecture, finding time to visit "the Bean", [Anish Kapoor](#)'s CloudGate sculpture, in the city between matches.

Quick Guide

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For many players, it can be easy to forget that there is life outside the tennis bubble, other things to keep your mind occupied and settled besides hitting a little yellow ball back and forth over a net. Life on tour can be lonely and as Naomi Osaka's troubles have shown, mental health can be fragile. But Raducanu's secret seems to be to embrace everything, from culture to food, friends and family to travel, music to Formula One. It's something that has been instilled in her from a young age and something she intends to continue.

"I definitely think it's the time to just switch off from any future thoughts or any plans, any schedule," she said after her win on Saturday, when asked where she would be playing next. "I've got absolutely no clue. Right now, no care in the world, I'm just loving life."

This article was amended on 13 September 2021 to site Bromley in south-east London rather than in Kent.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/sep/12/from-a-level-student-to-us-open-champion-emma-raducanus-triumphant-journey>.

2021.09.13 - Coronavirus

- [Live UK epidemiologist warns over third wave; Philippines facing 'learning crisis', says Unicef](#)
- ['We will not accept return to pre-pandemic NHS' BMA to issue damning critique of government over Covid crisis](#)
- [UK Tory MPs fear return of vaccine passports plan in England](#)
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UK and EU urged to stop blocking vaccine patent waiver – as it happened

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Coronavirus

BMA to issue damning critique of government over Covid crisis



Hospital staff spend last New Year's Eve turning surgical theatres and recovery departments into intensive care wards for Covid-19 patients.
Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

[Ian Sample](#) Science editor

[@iansample](#)

Sun 12 Sep 2021 19.01 EDT

Chronic neglect of the [NHS](#), poor pandemic preparedness and flawed government policies have contributed to the appalling impact of the Covid-19 crisis in the UK, according to a damning assessment from the British Medical Association.

More than 130,000 people in the UK have died from coronavirus since the pandemic began, with [non-Covid excess deaths](#) up 12,000 last year, making

the country one of the hardest hit among comparable nations, the doctors' body said.

In a speech on Monday, Dr Chaand Nagpaul, the BMA's chair of council, will warn that the country and NHS staff have never faced such a crisis before and urge ministers to take action to ensure the health service is better prepared to respond to pandemics in the future.

"We will not accept a return to the old pre-pandemic NHS, which was so patently understaffed and under-resourced, where nine in 10 doctors are afraid of medical errors daily," he is expected to say. "We will not accept an NHS running at unsafe bed occupancy and without spare capacity."

Before the pandemic, NHS bed occupancy was regularly above the 85% considered a reasonable safe threshold. While the NHS had 7.3 critical care beds per 100,000 people, Germany had nearly 34 per 100,000 as the crisis unfolded.

Further planning failures left the NHS with inadequate stockpiles of personal protective equipment (PPE) for frontline staff, leading to last-minute orders of masks, visors and gowns that in some cases turned out to be unsafe or unusable.

Years of underfunding, inadequate facilities and nearly 90,000 staff vacancies meant the NHS was in crisis before coronavirus emerged, leaving it ill-prepared for the demands of the pandemic, Nagpaul is to argue at the BMA's annual representative meeting.

He will criticise ministers for dismissing calls for a rapid inquiry into the crisis, before the second wave of infections struck last year, meaning that crucial lessons from the previous six months were not learned. He will add that the ministerial mantra of "living with Covid" belies the reality that thousands of people continue to need hospital care for coronavirus with hundreds dying each week.

Despite warnings from senior doctors at the time, Boris Johnson's decision to lift coronavirus restrictions this summer contributed to almost 40,000

being admitted to hospital and more than 4,000 deaths since so-called “freedom day” on 19 July, the BMA said.

“We will not accept an NHS in crisis every summer, let alone every winter,” Nagpaul will add. “We will not accept a nation bereft of public health staff, facilities and testing capacity, with ministers then paying billions to private companies who were unable to deliver.”

In the past week, ministers [announced substantial extra funding](#) for the NHS, including money specifically targeted at easing backlogs in treatment. While welcoming the funds as an important first step, Nagpaul will urge the government to provide realistic projections as to how far the money will stretch and to acknowledge that the amount will not address the drastic shortage of NHS staff. The BMA estimates that the NHS has 50,000 fewer doctors than the EU average.

More than 4 million people were on the NHS waiting list in England in March 2020, the month the country went into its first Covid lockdown. That number has since risen to 5.61 million. The Nuffield Trust has said [waiting lists could top 15 million people](#) in four years without a significant increase in NHS trust capacity.

Last week, GPs in England said they were finding it “increasingly hard to guarantee safe care” for patients, as the shortage of doctors meant they could not keep up with the surge in demand. Prof Martin Marshall, the chair of the Royal College of [General Practitioners](#) (RCGP), warned of a [crisis in primary care](#) after a 4.5% decrease in the number of GPs across England led to a risk of mistakes being made.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/13/bma-issue-damning-critique-uk-government-covid-crisis-pandemic-nhs>

[Coronavirus](#)

Tory MPs fear return of Covid vaccine passports plan in England

01:00

Plans for vaccine passports in England scrapped, says Sajid Javid – video

[Aubrey Allegretti](#)

[@breeallegretti](#)

Sun 12 Sep 2021 14.38 EDT

Plans to introduce vaccine passports across [England](#) next month have been shelved in a dramatic U-turn by the government, but Conservative opponents fear they could still be made mandatory later this year amid a warning the NHS faces “the worst winter in living memory”.

Just weeks after Boris Johnson announced the controversial documents would be necessary for fully vaccinated people to go to nightclubs and other crowded venues, [Sajid Javid](#), the health secretary, said the policy had been suspended and would not go ahead from 1 October.

Government sources said dire warnings at the start of summer about Covid cases, hospitalisations and death levels as a result of the almost total lifting of restrictions had not been borne out, and that the success of the jabs rollout meant vaccine passports were not needed imminently.

Johnson will confirm the move on Tuesday, when he is expected to make a Commons statement and hold a press conference to [prepare people for a difficult winter](#), with measures such as mask-wearing and social distancing possibly being reintroduced at a national or local level.

A senior Whitehall insider told the Guardian: “The prime minister doesn’t want any new measures but we can’t rule it out. If we don’t want another

lockdown, we may have to use other options – the question is how explicit we want to be about what those will be.”

With schools in England having just returned and the dual threat of Covid and flu filling hospitals, a start date for the programme of [booster vaccines](#) for people aged over 70 and frontline health and social care workers is also expected to be announced imminently.

The UK’s medicines regulator last week granted emergency approval for the Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/AstraZeneca jabs to be used as third shots to tackle potentially waning immunity. However, the vaccine rollout advisory body is yet to say whether it has approved boosters, and if so on what scale.

Separately, ministers are also planning to scrap the requirement for travellers from some countries to [take a PCR test](#) on arrival to the UK, given the costs and knock-on effect it is having on the aviation and tourism industry, and instead allow them present a lateral flow result. The next review point of all rules governing international travel is 1 October, so a decision will be made closer to that point.

Speculation is still building in Westminster that a cabinet reshuffle is imminent, with the chief whip, Mark Spencer, and Jack Doyle, No 10’s head of communications, spotted in Downing Street late on Sunday afternoon.

Despite [Scotland pressing ahead](#) with introducing vaccine passports from next month, Javid said on Sunday he “never liked the idea” but that it had been “right to properly look at it”.

In an extraordinary volte-face, the health secretary had told Sky News he would not “rule it out” before declaring an hour later on the BBC: “What I can say is that we’ve looked at it properly, and while we should keep it in reserve as a potential option, I’m pleased to say we will not be going ahead with plans for vaccine passports.”

He added: “I think it’s fair to say most people instinctively don’t like the idea. I’ve never liked the idea of saying to people, you must show your

papers for ... what is an everyday activity. But we were right to properly look at it, to look at the evidence.”

Some Tory MPs had assumed it was an empty threat, designed to drive up levels of [vaccination uptake among young people](#). More than 40 of Johnson’s own backbenchers had publicly vowed to vote against making such documents a condition of entry to some venues – enough to wipe out the Conservatives’ substantial Commons majority.

Labour branded the backtrack the latest example of how the government’s approach to vaccine passports had been “shambolic from the start”. Angela Rayner, the party’s deputy leader, said ministers had never been clear about what they were meant to achieve, how they would work and how businesses should prepare to implement them. “This is the culmination of a summer of chaos from ministers and they urgently need to get a grip before winter,” she said.

Industry figures also welcomed the news. Sacha Lord, the founder of Parklife festival and night-time economy adviser for Greater Manchester, called vaccine passports “untenable and illogical”, while the Music Venues Trust said there were serious issues of “deliverability, practicality, equality and potential discrimination”.

However, Conservative MPs remained wary that the government was simply pausing its introduction of vaccine passports. Mark Harper, the chair of the Covid Recovery Group of Tory MPs, said: “They shouldn’t be kept in reserve – they are pointless, damaging and discriminatory.” Another backbencher said: “The very concept of vaccine passports needs to be ruled out for good, as they are fundamentally unconservative, discriminatory and would lead to a two-tier society that I am confident no one actually wants to see.”

Stephen Reicher, who advises the government on behavioural science, told the Guardian he hoped ministers had shelved the vaccine passports plan based on the scientific arguments against it, but admitted: “I don’t believe that, sadly it’s probably politics.”

He said it may have quickened vaccine take-up among those already inclined to get jabbed, but would have had the adverse effect of alienating those who were hesitant. Reicher added: “If you don’t use vaccine passports, you’ve got to have something better. It really concerns me that the government haven’t done anything to make venues safe. There seems to be a lack of a winter plan.”

Jonathan Ashworth, the shadow health secretary, urged Johnson to provide details on Tuesday. He said: “We know that winter is going to be difficult. The NHS is fearing the worst winter in living memory. We know we’re going to have more flu, more respiratory problems, norovirus. So we need to prepare our NHS for winter.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/12/plans-for-vaccine-passports-in-england-ditched-javid-confirms>

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[Republicans](#)

Republican backlash against Biden's Covid vaccine mandate grows



The Arkansas governor, Asa Hutchinson, speaks in Texarkana in July.
Photograph: Kelsi Brinkmeyer/AP

[Richard Luscombe](#)

[@richlusc](#)

Sun 12 Sep 2021 14.44 EDT

The [political sparring match](#) over Joe Biden's new vaccine mandate continued on Sunday with one Republican governor blasting the measure as "counterproductive" and the White House insisting it was necessary to end the coronavirus pandemic.

Asa Hutchinson, the governor of Arkansas, added to the [growing Republican backlash](#) on NBC's Meet the Press, telling host Chuck Todd that the

president's directive to make the Covid-19 vaccination compulsory for businesses of greater than 100 employees was "an unprecedented assumption of federal mandate authority".

Several other red-state governors, including Ron DeSantis of Florida and Greg Abbott of Texas, have threatened to sue the federal government, arguing that Biden was acting unconstitutionally when he imposed the mandate, which will require the Covid-19 vaccine for millions of American workers, health workers and federal employees.

"It really disrupts and divides the country," Hutchinson said. "It divides our partnership between the federal government and the states and it increases the division in terms of vaccination when we should all be together trying to increase the uptake."

As hundreds of Americans continue to die each day from the virus, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [reported Sunday](#) that 178.3 million people in the US were fully vaccinated, accounting for 53.7% of the population, while 209.1m (63%) had received at least one dose.

Biden showed frustration with the figures when he [announced the mandate](#) at the White House on Thursday, stating: "Many of us are frustrated with the nearly 80 million Americans who are still not vaccinated even though the vaccine is safe, effective and free."

His message was echoed by the US surgeon general, Vivek Murthy, in his own appearance on Meet the Press, who said that the US had needed to move to "the next phase" of pandemic response because of the highly contagious Delta variant.

"From the beginning the president and all of us have said we've got to use every lever we have in order to fight this pandemic," Murthy said.

"The business roundtable has said that this is the right move. The American Medical Association, certainly on the health side, has said this is the right move. It will help more places do what they want to do, which is to make workplaces safer so that people can feel more secure coming back to work and we can keep our economy strong.

Asked about the political opposition to the mandate, and governors claiming the regulation was unconstitutional, Murthy said: “One of the things that we cannot afford to do during this pandemic is allow the Covid-19 experience to turn us against each other. Our enemy is the virus. It is not each other.”

In a later appearance on CNN’s State of the Union, Murthy was questioned about the resistance from Hutchinson and Ohio’s Republican governor, Mike DeWine, who have both partnered with the Biden administration over Covid.

“From time to time there will be disagreements on policies, but that doesn’t mean that we don’t stop dialoguing and working with one another,” he said.

“The reason that we’re pursuing some of these requirements is, again, we know a lot of businesses have welcomed it.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/sep/12/joe-biden-covid-vaccine-mandate-republican-backlash>

2021.09.13 - Opinion

- Sometimes it's hard to remember what life as a Muslim was like before 9/11
- I know how it feels to live under the Taliban. This time, the west must not turn its back
- Climate activists are being killed for trying to save our planet. There is a way to help
- Emma Raducanu's US Open win was a glorious aligning of the fates

OpinionIslam

Sometimes it's hard to remember what life as a Muslim was like before 9/11

Nesrine Malik



'I feel as if, before, there was a time when a Muslim was a much more complicated, much roomier thing to be.' Muslim women in Beirut, April 2021. Photograph: Hassan Ammar/AP

Mon 13 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

I try to remember what it was like to be a Muslim before 9/11. It is hard. It gets harder every year. I think I remember that being a Muslim didn't mean much to others, and was mostly a private identity, one that different people wore in different ways.

I feel as if, before, there was a time when a Muslim was a much more complicated, much roomier thing to be – inflected with local culture and individual circumstances. Today, you can only be a good Muslim or a bad

one. Either a “moderate” or a “radical”. Either a Muslim who needs to be saved or a Muslim you need to be saved from.

There was also a time when we could fight and resolve our issues as Muslims, whatever that categorisation meant at any given point, without the west gawping, judging us as messed up individuals or societies. On 9/11, many of us became distracted from that inner work, and lined up against a more urgent external, retributive threat. We couldn’t focus on keeping our own house in order because it was on fire, or about to be.

When I try to remember what it was like before, what I am really doing is attempting to piece together when Islam went from being a multidimensional, personal identity to a flat, political one, and 9/11 feels like the day it happened.

But I am sure it wasn’t that neat. My life was bisected by 9/11, which happened exactly halfway through it, and so there is a false symmetry to my recollections. If I reach back further, I am just able to recall Salman Rushdie’s Satanic Verses in 1988 and how the fuss seemed very far away, even though all the reports I saw and read were telling me it was about us and how we had reacted disgracefully. But I was a child then, and so that moment crystallises in my memory as history, rather than experience.

On 9/11 I was in Saudi Arabia, where al-Qaida and the majority of the hijackers were born. At the time the kingdom was in the grip of its hardline religious clergy, at once fostering and battling the same extremism that had reached all the way to New York. To me, 9/11 seemed like something the Saudis had failed to contain – Islamic terror as an epic industrial leak, a reactor meltdown, that meant thousands beyond its borders had perished. And now all of us were going to have to pay the price.

Yet there had been other attacks before 9/11, other retributions. There had already been a Gulf war that established US military in the Middle East permanently, and skirmishes between the US and Iran since the 1980s. American missiles had already been dispatched towards random targets in Muslim countries in response to al-Qaida bombings in east Africa. Things were already beginning to change. By the time the twin towers fell, we were on a war footing: everything just accelerated after that.

The world we live in now seems to have been forged in a day. Events and moments tumbled and settled into hard daily realities and attitudes that became impossible to undo.

A vast political, military and media machine mobilised to create favourable conditions for group punishment. First there were the invasions and occupations in [Afghanistan](#) and Iraq; then came surveillance and criminalisation by counter-terrorism schemes. The Muslim became a person to question, to doubt, to suspect and, sometimes, to frame.

Over the past decade, the energy we spent on the burqa, faith schools, halal meat and other cyclical moral outrages about Muslims all served to establish an Islamophobia that, as Sayeeda Warsi described, passed “[the dinner table test](#)”.

Perhaps these things had already been happening to some lesser degree, and I had been insulated from them by youth and innocence. But I remember it getting worse. The security screenings, the media savagings, the normalisation of attacking Muslims in the public eye by associating them with radicalism. The novelist Martin Amis said in a [2006 interview](#): “There’s a definite urge – don’t you have it? – to say, ‘The Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order.’ What sort of suffering? Not letting them travel. Deportation – further down the road. Curtailing of freedoms. Strip-searching people who look like they’re from the Middle East or from Pakistan.”

That definite urge spilled over into the hounding of women in hijabs, the rise in [hate crime in Britain](#), the “[Muslim ban](#)” in the US, and in both countries the flourishing of a political right that exploited the fear of Muslims. Over the past two decades I witnessed what Edward Said called the turning of the Muslim into “this lesser breed”, a creature that only “understand the language of force ... Unless you give them a bloody nose, they won’t understand.”

The result for me was a dissociation from Islam as a faith and rich cultural heritage, and in its place the forging of an iron solidarity with other Muslims. I regret the former and take comfort in the latter. But there is also a

sort of defeat in that solidarity, an acceptance of being categorised as an outsider.

Toni Morrison said that the “[function of racism is distraction](#). It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being.” The function of Islamophobia has worked in the same way. The Muslim diaspora in the west, and in Muslim countries at the sharp end of this new world, have for so long now been explaining their reasons for being. In so doing, they further reinforce the very dynamic that victimises them by becoming one bloc, defined only by the threat they are told they represent. Sometimes I pause and force myself to remember that it wasn’t always like this, and I find that the older I get, I can’t quite believe that it was never like this.

And maybe it wasn’t. Maybe the “war on terror” and the [Islamophobia](#) it established are just the latest assaults in a longer siege. Maybe it has long been the fate of Muslims to be born into a world that is all too ready to take the actions of the few to confirm the pathology of the many.

Maybe this is how it happens, how it becomes acceptable to dehumanise an entire group of people based on nothing other than a flimsy label. You keep it up for so long that they themselves don’t remember a time when it was any different.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
- Join Guardian journalist Johana Bhuiyan with a US panel, Moustafa Bayoumi, Naz Ahmad and Dr Debbie Almontaser, in a livestreamed discussion on how perceptions of Muslims in the US have shifted since 9/11. On Thursday 16 September, 8pm BST | 9pm CEST | 12pm PDT | 3pm EDT. Book tickets [here](#)

[Opinion](#)[Afghanistan](#)

I know how it feels to live under the Taliban. This time, the west must not turn its back

[Sana Safi](#)



A Taliban fighter walks past shoppers in Mandawi market in Kabul, 1 September 2021. Photograph: Hoshang Hashimi/AFP/Getty Images

Mon 13 Sep 2021 03.00 EDT

With my phone in hand, I walked up and down the fifth floor of New Broadcasting House, the BBC headquarters in London. It was mid-August and I was trying to get in touch with my sister in [Afghanistan](#). The phone kept ringing but there was no answer – she never misses my calls, even when she's working.

On the seventh attempt, I heard the noise of the rush hour in Kabul, followed by her: “*Guly*”, – or “Hi hon”, as we might say in England. “Where have you been?” I asked.

“Baheer and I went to take some more stuff to the pregnant woman in the park I told you about,” she said, apologetically.

Baheer is her colleague, and the pregnant woman in the park had been displaced from one of the northern provinces after the [Taliban](#) took control of her city.

“It’s late in the evening. Are you home now?” I asked.

“No, stuck in traffic.”

“Are you dressed appropriately? Have you got your mask on?” I asked her. By “appropriately” I meant conservatively, and my concern about a mask wasn’t for Covid reasons, but to avoid being recognised.

I had every right to be worried because her face is on the billboards across the city: a campaign for women’s rights here, a poster for coexistence and minority rights there, and a striking picture in which she doesn’t have a scarf on and is promoting Afghanistan’s artistic heritage.

“Please don’t go to your place, stay at Wadir’s for the night,” I said. Wadir is our brother.

Afghanistan has been transformed in the past 20 years, albeit in an uneven manner. My sisters, the youngest in particular, have been working in the arts industry since the age of 16 and have lived on their own in one of Kabul’s many newly built apartment blocks.

But 15 August was not the time to be living as a “strong independent woman”. On that day, my sister needed the protection of men because, two decades after they were driven out of power by US-led forces, the [Taliban had taken over Afghanistan](#), their forces had entered Kabul and the president had fled the country.

I said a hesitant goodbye to my sister and walked to the old part of Broadcasting House. For some reason, its wartime history made it feel like a welcoming place. I sat on the concrete stairs in the dark, in absolute silence. My heart was racing. I was weeping. The first 10 years of my life flickered in front of my eyes.

I was born in 1989, when the last of the Soviet soldiers had left and the western-backed mujahideen forces were besieging Kabul – desperation, food shortages and an uncertain future were all that Afghans knew. As part of President Najibullah's security reshuffle my father, who had a public sector role, was transferred to the southern city of Kandahar when I was 18 months old.

At the time, Kabul was divided between Islamist factions – cities were full of armed militias, each loyal to their own leader. Homes were looted, including ours and my aunt's and uncle's, and summary executions were carried out. All of that happened away from the public eye and the media.

In fear of their lives, my parents fled Kandahar to take refuge in Helmand, in my aunt's house. Somehow they escaped mujahideen atrocities. It was only after the Taliban had taken control of Kabul that they returned to Kandahar, starting over. They soon discovered that life under this new regime was unlike anything they had ever known.

I was seven years old and on my first day at school I was met by an old lady guarding the door. "Taliban say girls can't come in," she said.

My parents had to find me somewhere to get an education. They talked to family, friends and trusted contacts to try to find an "underground" fee-paying school. Eventually they found one: a husband and wife had converted their family home into classrooms to educate boys and girls like me.

It was short-lived. The Taliban found out, and arrested and imprisoned the couple; on their release they sold everything and left the country. My parents had to start the search again. In the five years that the Taliban were in power I went to three different underground schools, just to be able to read and write.

My mother, a midwife, became an unofficial counsellor in the neighbourhood. Child marriage had rocketed, domestic violence cases went through the roof; young women my mother knew burned themselves to death; and infant malnourishment became commonplace. As for the Taliban, they were busy hosting their mostly Arab and Chechen guests, [stoning women](#) for what they called “moral crimes” and terrorising the public about everything that brought joy to life.

Between underground schools, I was a prisoner in my home. I spent time with the few adults I knew. I didn’t have friends. This, and what was happening outside the walls of our family home, had taken a toll on my parents’ mental health and on their relationship. My mother started to withdraw.

As I write these words, there are tens of millions of Afghans living in a similar situation to the one my family found themselves in in the 1990s. On top of that, Afghanistan is facing an impending [humanitarian catastrophe](#).

The international community must not repeat the mistakes of the past. It must engage with the Taliban not just to hold them accountable and pressure them to stand true to their promises, but also to help those already on the brink of destitution. Aid must get through to the poorest, for instance.

If the west and its allies choose to turn their backs on the people living under the Taliban of 2021, then it must be prepared for the refugees who will make their way to the borders and shores of Europe and beyond; the drugs that will flood the streets of European cities; and the possibility that the Taliban will offer safe haven to terror groups with designs on attacking the west.

As these words of my late mother ringing in my ears demonstrate, “if unchecked, extremism coupled with deep-seated misogyny can easily metamorphose into something you cannot control”. As for my sister, she has since managed to leave the country that was our home; she was evacuated at the 11th hour. Last time I spoke to her and asked her how she was feeling she said she was numb and couldn’t feel anything. I think she’s still in shock.

- Names have been changed
 - Sana Safi is a journalist. Her radio documentary [Afghanistan and Me](#) will be broadcast on BBC World Service on 18 September
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Climate activists are being killed for trying to save our planet. There is a way to help

[Bill McKibben](#)



‘We need to defend strong local people who see their role as defending terrain and ancestral territory.’ Members of the Munduruku indigenous tribe protest at the construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Tapajos River in the Amazon rainforest, 2014. Photograph: Mario Tama/Getty Images

Mon 13 Sep 2021 05.35 EDT

Each year, we learn more about the climate crisis. The data flows: ever-rising heat, [unprecedented deforestation](#), record [rainfall](#). And once a year, we also learn more about the human impact of the crisis too, as data is released on the killings of land and environmental activists, the very people highlighting and protesting at the breakdown of our climate. As Global

Witness' annual [report reveals](#), in 2020, that number rose to a record 227 killings worldwide.

Every time, the data hits me like a blow to the face. I've spent much of my life as an environmental activist and journalist, and so if I haven't actually met the people sadly on this list, I've met hundreds exactly like them. Strong local people, attached to place and community, seeing their role in defending terrain and ancestral territory. Every person like this around the world is at risk.

And they are at risk, in the end, not so much because of another local person who pulls the trigger or plunges the blade; they're at risk because they find themselves living on or near something that some corporation is demanding. Like [Fikile Ntshangase](#), the South African grandmother who led a spirited campaign against a coalmine in KwaZulu-Natal province and was shot dead in her home last year. Or [Óscar Eyrraud Adams](#), the indigenous activist who, during Mexico's worst drought in 30 years, vocally advocated for his community's right to water, as the authorities denied them and granted corporations ever more permits. Oscar was shot dead in Tecate last September.

The demand for the highest possible profit, the quickest possible timeline, the cheapest possible operation, seems to translate eventually into the understanding, somewhere, that the troublemaker must go. The blame rarely if ever makes its way back up to a corporation's HQ. But it should. Especially since the people who inhabit these places never really share in the riches produced there: colonialism is still running strong, even if it's dressed up with corporate logos or hidden with offshore bank accounts.

Meanwhile, the rest of us need to realise that the people killed each year defending their local places are also defending our shared planet – in particular our climate. The activities that flood our atmosphere with carbon – fossil fuel extraction and deforestation – are at the heart of so many of these killings. When people stand up to block a pipeline, or an illegal mine, or a new plantation slated for an old forest, they are also standing in the way of the activities that threaten us all. They make life harder for the oil companies and the timber barons, and in so doing strive to safeguard all of us from incessant temperature increases.

And as we try to head off that rise by moving to more benign technologies, such as solar panels and electric cars, we'll need to do so in ways that don't create the same kind of sad sagas – [cobalt mining](#) or [lithium production](#) can be exploitative, too. If we took seriously the stories told in the [Global Witness](#) report, we surely would be able to better design these emerging industries.

Great respect is due to those who are working to develop corporate codes of conduct, or industry-wide standards, or government regulations – those are the tools that can help rebalance power, so that people can stand up to exploiters with less fear of being killed. But since we live in a world where [greenwashing](#) is a constant threat, let's be clear: the worth of those codes and standards and regulations is not the words themselves, or the promises their sponsors proudly make. Their worth is measured entirely in outcomes, like reducing threats against land and environmental defenders.

What does progress on the climate crisis look like? One wants so badly to pick up this annual report some year and see that the answer to that question is: fewer killings. That violence is trending dramatically down, that the deaths have begun to fall – it would be as satisfying as watching Covid cases drop in the spring. Since there's no vaccine for the greed of the wealthy, it may be years before that happens. But we can still speed the day: you and I, armed with the stories of those lives lost, are capable of putting enough pressure on the culprits that they find it necessary to change.

None of that will bring back those defenders of the planet who have been killed. That we have to fight simply to get our leaders to pay attention to science is frustrating, but there's a big difference between fighting and dying: the names of these activists should be on our lips and in our hearts. We owe them debts that can't be repaid – only paid forward.

- Bill McKibben is the Schumann distinguished scholar at Middlebury College, Vermont, and leader of the climate campaign group [350.org](#)

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Emma Raducanu's US Open win was a glorious aligning of the fates

[Jonathan Liew](#)



00:55

'A dream': Emma Raducanu comes to terms with first major title at US Open – video

Sun 12 Sep 2021 12.39 EDT

So: that happened. As [Emma Raducanu](#) emerged from Arthur Ashe Stadium clutching the US Open trophy to her chest, the blood on her knee still visible from where she had fallen, it was possible to feel a little dazed, a little concussed, to feel the edges of the night dissolving a little. In this new unreality an 18-year-old qualifier from Bromley is tennis's newest star, a figure of adulation and idolisation well beyond the wet island for whom she has just claimed a first grand slam women's title in 44 years.

You could lose yourself in the records and the milestones: the first qualifier to win a major title in the Open era, the youngest slam winner since Maria Sharapova, the first woman to win a major at only her second attempt. You could seek out historical context. But comparing Raducanu to the 17-year-old Boris Becker winning Wimbledon in 1985 doesn't quite work, because Becker was a top-20 player at the time.

You could compare it to Tiger Woods at the 1997 Masters, but everyone knew how good Woods was, if not quite how good he would be. And so perhaps the first reaction to Raducanu's victory is also the most genuine: the paranormal state it seemed to generate, the sense of walls and floors shifting, a vague and confusing happiness that you could neither pin down nor fully explain.

All this will, as Raducanu herself admitted, take a while to sink in. You hope that once the photographs have been taken and the obligatory media rounds completed, she gets the time and space she needs to process this violent and spectacular detonation of her world. But *out there*, where Raducanu's win was already creating its own electronic blast radius, time and space were already in short supply.

And so the parlour games could begin in earnest. Was it the biggest shock in tennis history? Was it the greatest underdog story in British sport? The most incredible sporting achievement by an individual athlete? Was it the greatest achievement in sport, ever? What do any of these questions even mean? Do the answers even exist? And what do we really mean by asking them?

There is a certain paradox at work here: a product not just of the triumph itself, but of the expectations it violated, the orthodoxies rewritten, the jaws loosened. We are told that her win is an astonishing, unprecedented triumph that nonetheless proves she was always destined for this level. But these things can't really be true at once: part of the surprise is that, based on what we knew about Raducanu and about tennis, this shouldn't have happened.



Emma Raducanu has shocked the world of tennis with her ascent to US Open champion, only her second grand slam tournament. Photograph: Timothy A Clary/AFP/Getty Images

Unlike other teenage prodigies like Coco Gauff, Denmark's Clara Tauson or the beaten finalist Leylah Fernandez, Raducanu had virtually no pedigree to speak of: she has still never won a match on the WTA Tour, much less a title. In part this was a product of the pandemic, and her team's decision to limit her travel and prioritise her education. Even so, before we all climb aboard the hype train, it's worth considering: are we really measuring the achievement here, or simply the shock?

These questions matter because if Raducanu is to enjoy any sort of a fair crack at success in the coming months and years, we owe it to her to put her achievement in perspective: to at least admit the possibility that this was a glorious aligning of the fates, a happy confluence of form and feel and freedom enabled by a kind draw and a sport in flux.

Raducanu did not have to play a single top-10 player or previous grand slam finalist. All the seeds, including world No 1 Ashleigh Barty, were cleared from her section of the draw. None of which should detract from the scale of her accomplishment, the stunning cleanliness of her groundstrokes, her

seeming immunity to pressure. But it should at least inform what it is realistic or reasonable to expect from her in the immediate future.

Iga Swiatek won last year's French Open in similar circumstances: a new teenage star sweeping all before her (including grand slam winners Simona Halep and Sofia Kenin) without dropping a set. As Poland's first ever grand slam winner, she found herself imprisoned in a cage of expectations that left her drained, exhausted, seeing tennis balls when she closed her eyes at night.

Raducanu is her own woman and will process this success in her own way. Even so, she will soon be forced to grapple with the dilemma that awaits all precocious young athletes: the burden of outrunning that initial inferno of success, of placating a public that wants to keep being shocked, to keep seeing miracles. And so, after we have all justifiably revelled and shared in her triumph, perhaps the best thing we can do is leave her alone for a bit.

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[India](#)

India weighs up new security risks in wake of Taliban takeover



An Afghan refugee pushes a wheelchair through a market in New Delhi, India. Photograph: Altaf Qadri/AP



Hannah Ellis-Petersen *South Asia correspondent*

Mon 13 Sep 2021 00.00 EDT

As the Taliban last week announced the cabinet set to now govern [Afghanistan](#), 600 miles away in Delhi, the mood was sombre. Of the 33 men who were given key posts, almost all have been with the Taliban since the group emerged in the 1990s, and – aside from five who had been held in Guantanamo Bay until last year – all had spent the past 20 years in hiding in Pakistan.

The Haqqanis, a faction of the Taliban known for their close ties to [Pakistan](#) and hardline belief in global jihad, were particularly well represented in the cabinet.

For many in India, it both diminished any hope that this could be a different, more progressive and less dogmatic [Taliban](#) than that which ruled in the 1990s, and seemed to secure the influence of Pakistan, India's arch-nemesis, over Afghanistan's future.

“It’s a massive strategic victory for Pakistan to have a Taliban administration over which they have quasi-control,” said Kabir Taneja, a fellow at the Observer Research Foundation in Delhi. “It’s a platform now for Pakistan to

build whatever it wants to build. This presents a very significant challenge for [India](#) in the next couple of years.”

The fall of the US-backed government of Ashraf Ghani, which was considered an ally to New Delhi, and the swift takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban present multiple problems for India. First and foremost, India has long viewed the Taliban as nothing more than a proxy for its rival, Pakistan. The Taliban was nurtured and gained power in the 1990s with the help of Pakistan’s powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency, and after the fall of the government in 2001, when the US invaded, Taliban leaders found sanctuary over the border.

Since then, Pakistan has remained crucial to the group; it was where they lived, trained and regrouped, enabling them last month to take back Afghanistan by force and bring down the government.

Pakistan has denied direct ties to the Taliban. However, before the announcement of the cabinet last Tuesday, the ISI’s director general, Faiz Hameed, landed in Kabul, amid suggestions he was there to smooth over cracks among the group and make sure they could form a government.

“Pakistan’s involvement in Afghanistan and its interference in the new Taliban regime has been very visible – for once they are not trying to hide it,” said Rajiv Dogra, an Indian former ambassador who served as consul general to Pakistan. “Naturally, if the whole process becomes ISI-driven and ISI-controlled, then this is a huge cause of concern for India.”

India’s second, closely related concern is over the regional and domestic security risk that a Taliban regime poses. For decades, India’s Muslim-majority region of Kashmir has been embroiled in a separatist insurgency with an allegiance to Pakistan. Two of the main Islamic militant groups operating in Kashmir, Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba, have historical ties to the Taliban, and according to a recent UN report, between 6,000 to 6,500 members of Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad have been active on the Afghan battlefield.

In the past, very few Afghan militants have travelled into Kashmir for jihad, and most consider it unlikely that they will start flooding in now in great

numbers, partly because of India's draconian military counter-insurgency in the region.

For India, however, the palpable fear is that the Taliban's victory will embolden similar Islamist groups and individuals across the region, boosting the insurgency. There is concern that Afghanistan will provide a regional hub for militants who may carry out jihad on Indian soil and provide a flow of weapons and explosive materials over the border.

"That entire geography, from the Afghan-Iran border stretching up to the border of Kashmir, is now susceptible to jihadist groups," said Taneja. "This outcome in Afghanistan is very detrimental to India's security."

Since they took power, the Taliban's own messaging on this has been mixed. They have vehemently pledged that they will not allow Afghan soil to be used for any foreign terrorist groups, stating that they want "strong and healthy relations with our neighbours" and describing Kashmir as a "bilateral issue" between India and Pakistan. But Taliban leaders then said they would "raise their voice" for Kashmiri Muslims, and a recent statement by the Taliban supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, made a reference to all the Muslims and mujahideen who helped them win victory, which many took to include Kashmiri liberation groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad.

Douglas London, the CIA counter-terrorism chief across south and southwest Asia until 2019, said he had little faith in the Taliban's pledges to prevent militant Kashmiri separatist groups from operating on Afghan soil.

"I would expect the Taliban to allow those groups to maintain their sanctuary in Afghanistan and I would expect them to facilitate their activities," said London, who recently authored [The Recruiter](#), about his 34 years in the CIA. "In an unfortunate way, the Taliban is in a much better position today than it was before 9/11 to provide support to any of the regional jihadist groups it wishes to."

London said that India's security position has been made particularly precarious as a result of the Hindu nationalist politics of the ruling Bharatiya

Janata party, led by the prime minister, Narendra Modi, under which Muslims across the country have faced attacks and discrimination.

“Modi is essentially helping the recruitment of these jihadist groups by taking such a hard, repressive line against the Islamic community in India, who are now being forced to see themselves being repressed,” he said. “That narrative will extend the jihadist threat to India beyond just Kashmir.”

Yet, like many analysts, London emphasised that the Taliban’s relationship with Pakistan has never been linear, and that Pakistan was far from the puppet master it has often been presented as. The expectation among many is that now the Taliban has its own state, there will be a concerted effort to distance itself from its ISI patrons.

Certainly, when the Taliban were last in power, they did not do the one thing that Pakistan pushed for most, recognising the so-called Durand Line as the official border between the two countries. Today, among the Afghan population, there is huge suspicion and resistance to Pakistan, who are often viewed as imperialist and interfering in Afghan sovereignty, as demonstrated by anti-Pakistan signs at protests in Afghan cities last week. The animosity is also present within the Taliban: many leaders now in the cabinet spent years in Pakistani jails, arrested on the instructions of the US.

“There’s no real love lost between Afghans and Pakistan and I don’t believe Pakistan has the level of control over the Taliban that is attributed to them,” said London. “I still believe there’s a codependent relationship, but I think the Taliban will seek to exercise greater independence, and will not do whatever ISI tells them to do.”

In London’s view, this poses an even greater threat to India. He sees Pakistan keeping some modicum of restraint over the Taliban, preventing them from taking actions that could destabilise a region where both Pakistan and India are armed with nuclear weapons. But Avinash Paliwal, deputy director of the the South Asia Institute at London’s School of Oriental and African Studies, said it offered India an opportunity.

Paliwal agreed that India’s greatest concern over the resurgence of the Taliban was the “larger regional geopolitical lurch to the Islamist right”.

I think a powerful driver for the Taliban is to have India as a counterbalance to Pakistan itself

Avinash Paliwal

However, Paliwal emphasised that the Taliban had wanted a relationship with India since 1996, when they first took over in Afghanistan, and that back channels had existed on and off since 2005, though it was not made public because of the Taliban's dependence on Pakistan.

Now there has been a visible shift to ensure the world knows that India and the Taliban are talking. A few months ago the Indian government leaked information that it had been speaking to the Taliban through back channels, and last week an Indian diplomat publicly met with a Taliban representative in Qatar.

"I think a powerful driver for the Taliban is to have India as a counterbalance to Pakistan itself," said Paliwal. "Across the board, Afghan popular opinion is very critical of Pakistan and what it has done over the past two decades, and the Taliban is not immune to that public pressure. Having India on board would be helpful for them to utilise public opinion and sends a clear message to ISI."

He added: "The relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban is more of a coercive one than a consensual one. And so there is a lot of space there for India to operate as well."

Indeed, India has a lot more to offer economically than Pakistan. It built up two decades of goodwill as one of the biggest investors in development, spending over \$3bn (£2.2bn) to build schools, colleges, hospitals, electricity grids, dams and a parliament building, something Pakistan has never had the resources to do. The Taliban have made it clear they want India's projects to continue.

While Modi is considered repressive to Muslims domestically, India now enjoys a strong international relationship with the Islamic states of the Gulf, ensuring that it is not considered a pariah state in the Islamic world. It is also seen as likely that the Taliban would prefer economic ties with regional

powers such as India and China than the west, as they are less likely to sanction the regime for human rights abuses.

The Taliban are also pushing for the unfreezing of Afghan assets held in the US, for sanctions on the travel of Taliban leaders to be removed, and development assistance and funding to continue coming into the country at the level that Afghanistan has had for the last 20 years – all of which is conditional on strong guarantees on counter-terrorism.

“I think simple self-interest is going to temper their feel for remaining in the global jihad business,” said Ashley Tellis, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “The Taliban have recognised that they cannot go back to the old model of simply exporting jihad if they want their regime in Kabul to be successful. The face of moderation is the only thing that will get them what they want – at least for now.”

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Global development

‘A very cruel exit’: UK’s aid cuts risk rapid return of treatable diseases



Sightsavers has been working in Nigeria to eliminate the blinding eye infection trachoma using antibiotics donated by Pfizer that cost 35p per person per year to distribute. Now funding has stopped. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Lizzy Davies](#)

Mon 13 Sep 2021 01.29 EDT

A chandelier sparkling in the background, the grandeur of Downing Street gleaming behind him, Boris Johnson looks into the camera and speaks with solemnity. He is marking World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day, he says, to raise awareness of these “terrible afflictions … which impose an immense burden of suffering in developing countries”.

Huge progress has been made, he says, in the fight against the diseases, not least as a result of British aid to some of the poorest parts of the world. But there is more – much more – to be done: more than a billion people are still at risk, he warns, and that is why the UK “fully supports” the World Health Organization’s [big elimination push](#) over the next decade.

“There’s nothing inevitable about this weight of suffering. It can be avoided,” the prime minister intones, for the video broadcast at the end of January.

However, just three months later, as part of swingeing cuts to the aid budget, staff working on the government’s flagship programme to fight neglected

tropical diseases were told it was going to be brought to a premature end. Known as Ascend (Accelerating the Sustainable Control and Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases), the £200m project had been divided into two, one in west and central Africa, the other stretching across eastern and southern Africa and parts of south Asia. Both had been due to continue until 2022. Instead they ended a fortnight ago.

Boris Johnson speaks of the need to tackle neglected tropical diseases in January 2021.

The move, say experts, has jeopardised years of slow, steady progress towards the elimination of NTDs, meaning that countries that could have realistically looked forward to stamping out a disease in the near future may no longer be able to do so. And with that comes millions of people suffering, in Johnson's words, "the pain, disfigurement and poverty" of diseases that are – on paper at least – easily treatable.

"You can't eliminate a disease in a year. You can't do it in two," says Simon Bush, director of NTDs at Sightsavers, the NGO that ran Ascend in west and central Africa. "It's a very long-term approach, but we've proved it's entirely possible: we've got countries like Ghana who have eliminated trachoma [an eye disease that can cause blindness]; Togo has eliminated lymphatic filariasis [a parasitic disease causing severe disfigurement]."



A banner in Nigeria celebrating the billionth treatment for river blindness by Sightsavers and its partners. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

“So it’s not just airy-fairy sort of stuff; it can actually happen. The UK government has invested in neglected tropical diseases for a number of years now, which is great. Now they’ve just pulled the rug, the carpet has been taken. We’re on the journey to elimination. Some countries have proved they can do it. But now that elimination is compromised.”

Bush says he had no reason to expect such a move from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), even as it prepared to slash the aid budget from 0.7% to 0.5% of GDP as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Ascend, a public-private partnership with pharmaceutical giants that provided the drugs, had always been regarded by the FCDO – and before that the Department for International Development – as “fantastic value for the UK taxpayer”, he says.

There was even the Johnson video message, which Bush sent to his colleagues on the ground: “We sent it around and said, ‘look, this is the prime minister! Our prime minister said this, you should be really proud.’”

Those staff, he says, are now “devastated and bewildered” by the abrupt end. He adds: “They know the impact that this will have on the communities that

they work in. Do they understand it? No. They don't understand the rationale."

Sightsavers says that, in its short lifetime, Ascend supported 256m drug treatments for neglected tropical diseases in 12 countries, among them Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

"If the project had continued as it was supposed to have done, around another 130m treatments would have been undertaken, covering five of the neglected tropical diseases. Around 30,000 health staff would have been trained to monitor and supervise the programme. But one of the key elements is around 450,000 community health workers who would have been trained to deliver the drugs," says Bush.



Local workers administer treatment to prevent river blindness in Nigeria, which affects about one in five people across the globe. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Drug delivery was the cornerstone of Ascend, with teams of trained and trusted volunteers going house to house to inform, cajole and administer the medication necessary to keep the diseases at bay. Pharmaceutical giants such as [Merck](#) and [GlaxoSmithKline](#) are willing to provide billions of dollars of drugs free of charge only as long as there is a viable means of getting them

to the people who need them, something that in the poorest countries often is not possible.

In Guinea-Bissau, for example, Bush fears that NTD targets will now not be met, including the aim of eliminating lymphatic filariasis by next year. He says: “There’s a very simple reason why they will not be met: the drugs that have been manufactured or are in the process of manufacture will not be delivered in that country. There’s no mechanism, there’s no funding now, for those drugs to be distributed.”

He is particularly worried about efforts to stamp out river blindness – a parasitic infection spread by flies that causes skin irritation, itching and, eventually, blindness. The path to eliminating this disease is longer than many others – about 15-20 years – but in west [Africa](#) measures to fight it have meant that cases do not generally lead to sufferers losing their sight. If several treatments are missed annually, however – it only requires between one and three pills a year – Bush fears the blinding will return.

“It’s not me just trying to instil horror in the situation; if you don’t treat, then there’s always going to be the risk of the return of the disease,” he says.



Surgeons perform trachoma operations at a makeshift operating theatre in a remote area of Turkana, Kenya. Photograph: Tommy Trenchard/Sightsavers

Sightsavers has been unable to fill the £38m funding hole left by FCDO, but this week a glimmer of hope in the global picture came from the not-for-profit international development company, Crown Agents, who were responsible for Ascend in eastern Africa. In a statement, it announced it had secured £10m of funding from the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF) for a new NTD programme in Kenya, Mozambique, Uganda, Tanzania and Zanzibar, and Zambia.

There is no replacement, though, for the behemoth that was Ascend. Bush fears his staff will spend the next months writing funding proposals rather than working in the field. And the clock is ticking. His "major gripe" is that the FCDO gave him too little time to prepare an orderly departure that could have tapered activities and enabled some of the most important drug treatments to be carried out. Instead, in panic, he had to send out teams in Liberia during the rainy season, and they got stuck in the mud.

"I consider it," he says, "a very cruel exit."

An FCDO spokesperson said: "The UK has made a significant contribution towards protecting millions of people around the world from such diseases, delivering treatment and care, and strengthening health systems. We will still spend more than £10bn this year on international development, including £1.3bn on global health.

"The seismic impact of the pandemic forced the tough decision to temporarily reduce the aid budget and exit some programmes, including Ascend."

This article was amended on 17 September 2021 to change the number of drug treatments Ascend has supported from 137m to 256m. The previous figure was given by Sightsavers.

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Germany

Scholz braves conservative attacks to win second German election debate



(L-R) Olaf Scholz, Annalena Baerbock and Armin Laschet attend an election TV debate in Berlin on Sunday night. A snap poll had Scholz as the winner. Photograph: John MacDougall/AFP/Getty Images

[Philip Oltermann](#) in Berlin

[@philipoltermann](#)

Sun 12 Sep 2021 19.39 EDT

Candidates representing the two parties that have governed [Germany](#) in a “grand coalition” for 12 out of the past 16 years tore into each other’s record on Sunday night, in a televised election debate that saw centre-left frontrunner Olaf Scholz declared winner despite swipes from his conservative rival.

In the second of three televised debates, hosted by Germany's two public broadcasters, conservative candidate Armin Laschet of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) tried to turn his fortunes around by attacking finance minister Scholz of the Social Democratic party (SPD) over his track-record on tackling money laundering and corruption.

Ahead of national elections in two weeks' time, polls predict Laschet's CDU crashing to historic lows as the tenure of its four-term chancellor, [Angela Merkel](#), comes to an end.

"If my finance minister were to work like you, then we would have a serious problem," said Laschet, who is the state premier of North-Rhine Westphalia.

Germany's federal finance and justice ministry were raided last week in order to obtain information relevant to an investigation into the government's anti money-laundering agency, though not to probe Scholz's ministry itself.

Scholz accused his CDU rival of being "dishonest" for suggesting he himself stood accused of wrongdoing, and boasted of his own effort to modernise the ministry he has led for three years.

Similar attempts to damage Scholz over his links to the Wirecard accounting scandal and the Cum-Ex tax fraud scheme failed to achieve the desired effect.

Laschet's line of attack was softened by the fact that financial scandals tend to be too complicated to be summarised in TV soundbites, and that questions about failed oversight duties could equally be asked about his own party.

A snap poll published after the debate showed Scholz repeat the clear victory he had achieved in the first debate, with 41% of viewers describing the SPD candidate as the most convincing, compared with 27% who said the same of Laschet and 25% who opted for Green party candidate Annalena Baerbock.

Baerbock cut a more relaxed and lively figure than in the first debate but found herself pushed into a moderator role as the two men got stuck in what

she mocked as *Vergangenheitsbewältigungen*, raking over the past of their coalition wrangles.

The Green candidate criticised the largest two parties for their unambitious carbon emissions targets, arguing that Germany needed to switch off its coal power plants significantly earlier than 2038, as planned.

She declined to rule out holding coalition talks between the SPD, the Greens and far-left outfit Die Linke. She said Die Linke was “of course a democratic party” that did not represent as extreme positions as the far-right Alternative für Deutschland on the other end of the political spectrum.

Scholz too declined to rule out coalition talks with Die Linke but accentuated his difference to the party founded in 2007 partly by disaffected Social Democrats. “An acknowledgement of transatlantic relations, Nato and the European Union are necessary for a good government,” he said.

Laschet, in turn, did not rule out the possibility that his party could continue to serve in a coalition with the SPD, but with senior and junior roles reversed in the case of a Scholz victory.

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North Korea

North Korea says it has test-fired long-range cruise missile



North Korea test-fires long-range cruise missile, in this picture supplied by state media outlet KCNA. Photograph: KCNA/Reuters

[Vincent Ni](#) and agencies

Mon 13 Sep 2021 07.04 EDT

North Korea has carried out successful tests of a new long-range cruise missile over the weekend, its state media outlet KCNA said, sparking fresh criticism from the US amid a protracted standoff over denuclearisation.

The missiles are “a strategic weapon of great significance” and flew 1,500km (930 miles) before hitting their targets and falling into the country’s territorial waters during the tests on Saturday and Sunday, KCNA said. The missiles travelled for 126 minutes along “oval and pattern-8 flight orbits”, it reported.

The latest development came just days after a military parade was held in the capital, Pyongyang, to mark the 73rd anniversary of the country's founding. In the past year, there have also been speculation outside the country over to what extent Covid-19 has affected its economy and the health of its population of nearly 26 million.

[Map](#)

The United States military said Pyongyang's latest missile tests posed "threats" to the country's neighbours and beyond. "This activity highlights [North Korea's] continuing focus on developing its military program and the threats that poses to its neighbours and the international community," the US Indo-Pacific command said in a statement.

North Korea's neighbour Japan said it had "significant concerns" about the latest development. The chief cabinet secretary, Katsunobu Kato, said Tokyo would continue to work closely with the US and South Korea to monitor the situation.

Pictures in North Korea's Rodong Sinmun newspaper showed a missile exiting one of five tubes on a launch vehicle in a ball of flame, and a missile in horizontal flight.

Such a weapon would represent a marked advance in North Korea's weapons technology, analysts said, better able to avoid defence systems to deliver a warhead across the South Korea or Japan – both US allies.

"This would be the first cruise missile in North Korea to be explicitly designated a 'strategic' role," Ankit Panda, a senior fellow at the US-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, told Reuters. "This is a common euphemism for nuclear-capable system."

Analysts say it is unclear whether North Korea has mastered the technology needed to build warheads small enough to be carried on a cruise missile, but the country's leader, Kim Jong-un, said earlier this year that developing smaller bombs was a top goal.

Kim did not appear to have attended the test. KCNA said Pak Jong-chon, a member of the Workers' party's powerful politburo and a secretary of its central committee, oversaw it.

The reported launches are the [first since March by North Korea](#). The regime also conducted a cruise missile test just hours after the US president, Joe Biden, took office in January.

North Korea's cruise missiles usually generate less interest than ballistic missiles because they are not explicitly banned under UN security council resolutions.

[A ballistic missile](#) is one that has a ballistic trajectory over most of its flight path, whereas a cruise missile is self-propelled for the most part of its flight, and it flies at lower altitudes and in a relatively straight line.

"North Korea is exploring new ways to add more bargaining chips on the negotiation table, but such a provocation will almost certainly dominate the current round of trilateral dialogue among the US, Japan and South Korea," said Prof Ramon Pacheco Pardo of Kings College London.

The unveiling of the test came just a day before chief nuclear negotiators from the United States, South Korea and Japan meet in Tokyo to explore ways to break the diplomatic impasse with North Korea.

China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, is also scheduled to visit Seoul on Tuesday for talks with his counterpart, Chung Eui-yong.

Talks aimed at dismantling the North's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes in return for US sanctions relief have stalled since 2019, despite Donald Trump's high-profile meetings with Kim Jong-un.

Last month, [the UN atomic watchdog said North Korea appeared to have restarted a nuclear reactor](#) that is widely believed to have produced plutonium for nuclear weapons.

Biden's administration has said it is open to diplomacy to achieve North Korea's denuclearisation, but has shown no willingness to ease sanctions.

Sung Kim, the US envoy for North Korea, said in August in Seoul that he was ready to meet North Korean officials “anywhere, at any time”.

With Reuters, Associated Press and Agence France-Presse

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US Capitol attack

Trump's White House chief of staff is target of Capitol attack records request



The then White House chief of staff, Mark Meadows, passes a note to Donald Trump in the cabinet room of the White House on 3 August 2020.
Photograph: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

[Hugo Lowell](#) in Washington
Mon 13 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

The House select committee investigating the 6 January attack on the Capitol has instructed telecom and social media companies in recent weeks to preserve records of Donald Trump's White House chief of staff, Mark Meadows, according to a source familiar with the matter.

The move positions the select committee on the doorstep of the Oval Office as it pursues a far-reaching inquiry into whether [Trump](#) and his White House

[helped plan or had advance knowledge](#) of the insurrection perpetrated by the former president's supporters.

House select committee investigators signaled their intention to examine potential involvement by the Trump White House and House [Republicans](#) when they made a series of [records demands](#) and [records preservation](#) requests for Trump officials connected to the Capitol attack.

In the records preservation requests, the select committee instructed 35 telecom and social media companies to avoid destroying communications logs of several hundred people, including the House minority leader, Kevin McCarthy, and 10 House Republicans, in case it later issues subpoenas.

But the previously unreported inclusion of Meadows on the list of people whose records the select committee wants preserved suggests the panel will seek more information on the most senior aide in the [Trump administration](#) and could upturn every inch of the West Wing in its inquiry.

The former chief of staff is among several top White House officials who may hold the key to unlock inside information pertaining to the extent of the former president's involvement in the Capitol attack that left five dead and nearly 140 injured.

Meadows remained at Trump's side in the weeks before 6 January as well as on the day itself, as the White House strategized ways to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election and ensure the then vice-president, Mike Pence, would not certify Joe Biden's victory.

The White House chief of staff started the day of the insurrection with Trump in the Oval Office, before attending the "Save America" rally that preceded the Capitol attack, according to a Trump administration official familiar with his movements.

Meadows then accompanied Trump back to the White House with a coterie of aides and advisers, from where the former president told the Republican senator Ben Sasse that he was "delighted" at the images of his supporters and domestic violent extremists storming the Capitol in his name.

He then also spoke to Marc Short, the chief of staff to Pence, as well as Kash Patel, the chief of staff to the then defense secretary, Christopher Miller, the official said.

Such proximity to Trump and the chiefs of staff to two key Trump cabinet members closely connected to the Capitol attack suggests Meadows is likely to be a prime witness for the inquiry, insofar as he can shed light on Trump's private thoughts as the violence unfolded.

A spokesperson for the select committee declined to comment on the preservation request for Meadows. But the chair of the House select committee, Bennie Thompson, previously told the Guardian that any conversations with Trump would be investigated by the select committee.

The inclusion of Meadows on the list, alongside McCarthy and 10 other far-right House Republicans, nonetheless provides a clearer picture of the sharpening contours of the investigation and its overall direction as the select committee ramps up its work.

It also echoes congressional investigations of eras past: Richard Nixon's White House chief of staff, HR Haldeman, came under scrutiny from the Senate select committee into the Watergate scandal and was forced to testify about the extent of Nixon's involvement.



The select committees interest in Mark Meadows brings the investigation into the 6 January Capitol attack to the doors of the White House. Photograph: Erin Scott/EPA

But it was not immediately clear which companies had received a records preservation request for Meadows from the select committee. Some telecom and social media companies – such as the online forum 8kun popular with QAnon conspiracy theorists – did not even receive a list of names, counsel for the forum said.

House select committee investigators are still in the evidence-gathering phase, but the committee is likely to schedule its second hearing before the end of the month, according to a source familiar with the matter.

The select committee said on Friday that investigators had received thousands of pages of documents, and that they understood the National Archives had started the process required by law for the review of presidential records.

Meadows's communications, meanwhile, may be of interest to the select committee in other aspects of the inquiry into the origins of 6 January, an area that falls under the panel's purview after it took charge of all congressional investigations into the Capitol attack.

The select committee subsumed several inquiries into the Trump administration's [efforts to subvert the 2020 election](#), including one by the House oversight committee that was examining how Meadows pressured the justice department to investigate baseless allegations of election fraud.

Top Republicans under scrutiny have embarked on [a campaign of threats and intimidation](#) in an attempt to thwart the inquiry.

The Republican House minority leader, McCarthy, two weeks ago lashed out at the select committee's records preservation requests and warned that the GOP would retaliate against companies that complied when his party retakes the House majority.

McCarthy argued, without citing any specific law, that it would be illegal for telecom and social media companies to comply with the records requests – even though congressional investigators have obtained phone and communications records without issue in the past.

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Coronavirus news as it happened: UK records a further 164 deaths and 30,144 new cases; anti-vaxxers protest in London

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Coronavirus

Half-term holiday bookings expected to surge after England scraps amber list

01:09

Grant Shapps explains reasons for changes to travel restrictions – video

[Peter Walker](#) and [Ben Quinn](#)

Fri 17 Sep 2021 13.45 EDT

Half-term holiday bookings are expected to surge after ministers unveiled a simplification of Covid foreign travel rules, replacing the traffic-light system with a single red list and bringing in a laxer regime for tests.

But while MPs and some travel groups welcomed the [new system](#), airlines voiced anger that fully vaccinated travellers returning to England will still have to take a test after they return, even if this will be changed to a cheaper lateral flow version.

Willie Walsh, the former British Airways boss who now heads the International Air Transport Association trade group, said that, while Friday's changes were a move in the right direction, it was time to scrap the entire "wasteful and ludicrously expensive" system of tests for fully vaccinated travellers.

The new system for arrivals in [England](#) set out by the Department for Transport was also less ambitious than expected in some areas. A great shortening of the red list had been forecast, but just eight countries were removed.

Under the new regime, the current designation of red, amber and green countries will be replaced by a smaller red list, with double-jabbed travellers coming from all other countries not required to quarantine.

The countries to be taken off the red list from 4am on Wednesday are Bangladesh, Egypt, Kenya, the Maldives, Oman, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Turkey.

But predictions that up to half the 60-plus countries on the red list would be removed proved mistaken, angering tourism groups. The Southern Africa Tourism Services Association, which represents about 1,350 South African businesses, called the decision “a kick in the teeth”.

If a country is on the red list, travellers there from England must quarantine inside an approved hotel for 10 days once they return at a cost of £2,285 per adult.

The new rules will simplify testing rules for travel. From 4 October, fully vaccinated travellers will no longer need to take a test before departing for England.

From the end of October, while people will still need to take a test within two days of returning, this can be a cheaper lateral flow test rather than a PCR.

Unvaccinated people returning from countries not on the red list will still need to take a pre-departure test, and PCR tests on days two and eight, with the option of leaving quarantine earlier via test-to-release, as before.

All travellers will still need to fill out a passenger locator form before coming to England.

In another change, from 4 October, people vaccinated in 17 countries and territories, including Israel, Japan, Singapore and South Korea, will be treated like domestic travellers.

Travel is a devolved matter, and it will be up to the other UK governments whether they follow suit. The Welsh government said it would “carefully consider” the new system.

On Friday evening the Scottish government announced that it will end its current traffic-light system for international travel but will not follow England in further easing Covid-19 testing for those entering the country.

Those arriving in Scotland will still need a negative pre-departure test – including from non-red list destinations – and a negative PCR test on day two after arrival, even if they are fully vaccinated.

The transport secretary, Grant Shapps, who unveiled the new system in a [series of tweets](#), said it was “a proportionate updated structure that reflects the new landscape” and would help the travel industry.

TRAVEL UPDATE[]: we’re making testing easier for travel [] From Mon 4 Oct, if you’re fully vax you won’t need a pre-departure test before arrival into England from a non-red country and from later in Oct, will be able to replace the day 2 PCR test with a cheaper lateral flow.

— Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP (@grantshapps) [September 17, 2021](#)

Huw Merriman, the Conservative MP who chairs the Commons transport committee, said he hoped the announcement, “timed ahead of October half-term, could have an immediate impact on the UK’s travel industry”.

He added: “The committee has called out confusing watchlists and quarantines, criticised the delay in reaping the benefit of the vaccine dividend and puzzled over the high costs and lack of sequencing of PCR tests.”

However, a series of airlines and aviation industry groups questioned the continued use of post-arrival tests for fully vaccinated travellers, with Sean Doyle, the British Airways head, saying the airline would “urge ministers to keep this policy under review, eliminating all testing for fully vaccinated travellers as soon as possible in the future, in line with most other European countries”.

Johan Lundgren, the chief executive of easyJet, said he welcomed the changes, but added: “Since 1 July there has been no testing at all for vaccinated travellers within the rest of Europe, and this is why the UK will continue to fall further behind the rest of Europe if this remains.”

Downing Street, asked before the changes, said that as with all Covid measures the rules would be kept under review in case the health situation changed.

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Health policy

No 10 accused of sidelining behaviour experts on latest Covid measures



‘As we segue away from restrictions and say “it’s up to you”, the behavioural issues become absolutely critical,’ said Prof Stephen Reicher. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

*Hannah Devlin Science correspondent
@hannahdev*

Fri 17 Sep 2021 14.00 EDT

Senior scientific advisers have publicly accused the government of sidelining behavioural experts and appearing unwilling to listen to “uncomfortable truths” on vaccine passports and masks during the pandemic.

The scientists told the Guardian that their input to the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) was apparently no longer wanted owing to

the expansion of in-house expertise.

They also warned of an absence of independent advice at a time when the virus's spread depends largely on individual behaviour and social norms rather than laws.

The intervention comes as ministers face criticism for mixed public health messaging on face coverings – including the [new cabinet meeting maskless](#) in a packed room on Friday – and a U-turn on vaccine passports in England, while [Scotland](#) and [Wales press ahead](#).

Prof Robert West, a behavioural scientist at University College London who participates in Sage's behavioural science subgroup, SPI-B, said that while the committee had not been formally stood down, he had the “strong impression it is no longer functioning”. “The sense I have is that there’s just no interest in evidence or science on the behavioural side,” he said.

Prof Stephen Reicher, also a SPI-B participant and a psychologist at the University of St Andrews, said: “I very much welcome the expansion of in-house behavioural science advice but … you want people who can speak uncomfortable truths and it’s very difficult to do that when your job depends on it.”

Reicher said the experts’ input appeared to have been phased out at a critical juncture, when the trajectory of hospitalisations and deaths hinges largely on individual behaviours.

This week England’s chief medical officer, Prof Chris Whitty, warned of a difficult winter ahead, saying: “Anybody who believes that the big risk of Covid is now all in the past … has not understood where we’re going.” He urged people to maintain cautious behaviours such as mask-wearing.

The same day, [27 ministers were pictured](#) without masks at a meeting of Boris Johnson’s cabinet, prompting claims of “one rule for them”. The cabinet met again without masks on Friday.

On Sunday ministers announced they would shelve immediate plans for vaccine passports, previously due to be brought in from the end of

September, while Wales and Scotland are introducing the measure for nightclubs and large events from next month.

Reicher said: “As we segue away from restrictions and say ‘it’s up to you’, the behavioural issues become absolutely critical. We’ve got the vaccines now. But vaccines are no good if people don’t get vaccinated.”

During the first year of the pandemic, SPI-B provided regular input on issues ranging from the likelihood of behavioural fatigue and public unrest to attitudes on vaccination. But during the past six months its activity has tailed off, with the most recent published evidence being a report dating to April.

Scientists said their offers to provide advice on the role of incentives in the vaccination programme had been declined on the basis that Public [Health](#) England and the government had recruited in-house behavioural experts. At the last full SPI-B meeting, in June, participants were told there would no longer be regular meetings.

Prof Susan Michie, the director of the Centre for Behaviour Change at University College London and another SPI-B participant, said: “Sage and many others are predicting rising rates of Covid and other respiratory viruses and serious NHS pressures, and there is considerable uncertainty [about] the scale of the problems we are going to see over the winter. Sage has pointed out that what happens will depend to a considerable extent on people’s behaviour.

“Now is not the time to lose independent behavioural scientific advice to government, whether or not they choose to use it.”

Some participants said the shift towards in-house expertise simply reflected an inevitable – and desirable – transition out of the emergency phase of the pandemic. They highlighted that subgroups, focused on specific questions, had continued to meet, including as recently as 13 September.

Prof James Rubin, a former chair of SPI-B and a psychologist at King’s College London, said: “In my view, it would be odd if a group intended to

provide rapid advice as an emergency measure was still the primary way the government was getting behavioural science input 18 months down the line.”

Others suggested that the shift had been more intentional. West said: “People on SPI-B would speak out in the media and tweet. Why have that little irritation out there if you don’t have to?”

West said independent advice could be critical for understanding complex social issues such as vaccine hesitancy and how government messaging would be likely to influence behaviour.

Prof John Drury, a social psychologist at Sussex University and a SPI-B member, speaking in a personal capacity, welcomed the hiring of more psychologists by Public Health England (PHE), who he said were producing excellent research. But he added that SPI-B participants tended to be senior academics, who could also speak more freely on some issues. “They are independent in a way that PHE psychologists – who must sign the civil servants’ code – cannot be,” he said.

A government spokesperson said: “Expert advice on behavioural science remains central to government policy and SPI-B are currently working on independent advice that is informing our handling of the pandemic.”

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NHS

Covid antibody drug Ronapreve to be given to vulnerable NHS patients



Ronapreve, which is known as Regen-Cov in the US, is the first drug designed specifically for Covid to be given UK approval. Photograph: Paul Hennessy/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

PA Media

Sat 18 Sep 2021 03.55 EDT

A drug given to the former US president Donald Trump when he had coronavirus last year is to be used to treat vulnerable [NHS](#) hospital patients.

Last month, the health secretary, Sajid Javid, [heralded Ronapreve](#) as the first treatment designed specifically for Covid-19 to receive regulatory approval in the UK.

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) said on Friday that it had the potential to benefit thousands of patients, with its introduction initially targeted at those who had not mounted an antibody response against Covid-19.

It will be used to treat patients without antibodies who are aged 50 and over, and those aged 12 to 49 who are immunocompromised.

The government has bought enough of the drug to treat eligible hospital patients across the UK from next week, the department said.

Javid said: “We have secured a brand new treatment for our most vulnerable patients in hospitals across the UK and I am thrilled it will be saving lives from as early as next week.

“The UK is leading the world in identifying and rolling out life-saving medicines, particularly for Covid-19, and we will continue our vital work to find the best treatments available to save lives and protect the NHS.”

In August, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) said the clinical trial data it assessed showed that Ronapreve could be used to prevent infection, treat symptoms of serious infection and cut the likelihood of being admitted to hospital.

Trials took place before widespread vaccination and before the emergence of virus variants.

The drug, a combination of two monoclonal antibodies, became the first monoclonal antibody combination product approved for use in the prevention and treatment of acute infection from the virus in the UK.

Monoclonal antibodies are human-made proteins that act like natural human antibodies in the immune system.

According to the MHRA, the drug, developed by the pharmaceutical firms Regeneron and Roche and previously known as REGN-Cov2, is given either by injection or infusion and acts at the lining of the respiratory system where it binds to the virus and prevents it from gaining access to the cells.

The DHSC said immunocompromised people included those with certain cancers or autoimmune diseases who had difficulty building up an antibody response to the virus, either through being exposed to Covid-19 or from being vaccinated.

Antibody testing will first be used to determine whether patients are “seronegative” – meaning they have not had a sufficient antibody response.

The treatment antibodies, casirivimab and imdevimab, will then be administered through a drip.

The health department said guidance would be sent to clinicians so they could begin prescribing the treatment “as soon as possible”.

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2021.09.18 - Coronavirus

- Universities Freshers' week drive to give jabs to students in England
- Most vulnerable Those with chronic conditions among most at risk even after jabs
- Australia Melbourne and Sydney anti-lockdown protests: violent clashes as police arrest demonstrators

Universities

Freshers' week drive to give Covid jabs to students in England



An Oxford Brookes University student receives a Covid vaccination on campus. Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

PA Media

Sat 18 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

Unvaccinated university students have been urged to get a Covid jab during freshers' week to protect themselves and their peers against the virus.

The NHS's top doctor has called on freshers to get the vaccine at pop-up clinics and walk-in centres set up by universities before their courses begin.

The plea comes as thousands of students arrive at university campuses across the UK over the next few weeks.

Prof Stephen Powis, the national medical director of NHS England, said: “Starting university is a really exciting time and getting your Covid vaccine means you will be armed with maximum protection against the virus. It is fantastic to see the enthusiasm from young people, with more than 3.4 million people aged between 18 and 24 already having their first jab.

“With many universities set to run pop-ups and walk-ins throughout the first weeks of term it has never been easier to get protected, so I urge anyone yet to be vaccinated to take up the offer as soon as possible.”

Alistair Jarvis, the chief executive of [Universities UK](#), said: “We welcome this reminder to students from Prof Powis, which echoes messages from universities to their students that they should make every effort to get vaccinated before the start of the university year.

“Universities will provide pop-up vaccination clinics, vaccine buses or easy access to local walk-in centres, GPs and pharmacies at the start of term to make getting fully jabbed as easy and convenient as possible.”

Many universities, including Liverpool Hope University and Queen Mary University of London, are setting up pop-up clinics during freshers’ week in an effort to get as many young adults vaccinated as possible.

It comes after Scottish universities were previously advised to postpone freshers’ week due to the risk of coronavirus spreading during “mass activities”.

In June, a Scottish government advisory group called for the activities to be delayed for a few weeks as they warned there would be a proportion of students arriving on campus having only had one vaccine dose.

Meanwhile, Hartpury University and Hartpury College in Gloucester, a specialist agricultural and veterinary nursing college, has banned unvaccinated students from living on site to ensure maximum protection against the virus.

The health secretary, Sajid Javid, said: “Starting university is one of the most significant moments in the lives of millions of people every year – and

having your jab could be one of the most important things you do to ensure you get the best out of it.

“I urge everyone who has not yet got the vaccine to do so as quickly as possible, to not only protect yourself but also your new university community.”

Last autumn, a number of universities were forced to move most of their classes online due to coronavirus outbreaks among students.

This term, students are being urged to book their second jab at a pharmacy, GP practice or vaccination centre in their new university town or city.

Everyone aged 18 and over is able to book an appointment through the National Booking Service, and the second dose can be given in a different location to the first as long as eight weeks have passed.

Hillary Gyebi-Ababio, the vice-president for higher education at the National Union of [Students](#), said: “It’s great to see the Covid vaccine being made easily available on campus for students – at NUS, we’ve been asking the government to do everything it can to make sure young people can access vaccines easily. I’d urge everyone who is able to get the vaccine so that we can have a safer time back on campus.”

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Coronavirus

People with chronic conditions among most at risk from Covid even after jabs



The study of more than 6.9 million vaccinated adults found that vaccination offers powerful protection against hospitalisation for almost all groups.
Photograph: Nick Moore/Alamy

[Hannah Devlin](#)

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Sat 18 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

People living with chronic conditions such as Down's syndrome and dementia remain among the most vulnerable to Covid-19 even after vaccination, research has found.

The study, based on data from more than 6.9 million vaccinated adults, 5.2 million of whom had received both doses, found that being vaccinated offers powerful protection against hospitalisation for almost all groups. However, a

risk calculator based on the data shows that some groups remain at particular risk and may benefit from booster vaccine doses and treatments such as monoclonal antibodies.

The research found that people with Down's syndrome had a roughly 13-fold increased risk of death from Covid-19 compared with the general population, even after vaccination, while those with dementia and Parkinson's disease had a twofold increase. Some of the increase in risk is thought to be down to exposure due to people having contact with carers, for instance.

Carol Coupland, professor of medical statistics in primary care at the University of Nottingham and senior researcher at the University of Oxford, said: "Overall the risks are much smaller than before vaccination, but it hasn't completely removed the differences between these groups."

Aziz Sheikh, professor of primary care research and development and director of the Usher Institute at the University of Edinburgh, said that for some groups the increased risk was due to increased exposure to Covid-19, but that it was possible those with Down's syndrome had an additional underlying vulnerability. "People need to look into this group as it remains a pretty major risk group," he said.

The study found that older members of the population and men are at greater risk as well as those from Indian and Pakistani backgrounds. Also at greater risk are those from a deprived background, the immunosuppressed and residents in a care home.

The findings, published in the British Medical Journal, will be used in an updated version of an NHS risk prediction tool, currently used by GPs to calculate patients' risk during consultations. The scientists, led by a team at the University of Oxford, will also make the tool available online for academics, but say this version will not be accompanied by clinical guidance.

The new algorithm predicts those most at risk of serious Covid-19 outcomes from 14 or more days after second vaccination dose, when substantial

immunity is expected to have developed.

Researchers hope the new tool will allow those who perceive risk to be high to make more informed decisions regarding shielding and potentially inform policy and clinical decisions on booster vaccine doses and monoclonal antibodies.

The scientists used national datasets from general practice, vaccination, PCR testing, death registries and hospital admissions data. This sample included 2,031 Covid-19 deaths and 1,929 Covid-19 related hospital admissions, of which 81 deaths and 71 admissions occurred 14 or more days after the second vaccine dose. Based on this, the researchers developed scores to calculate people's risk of hospital admission or death from Covid-19 after one, or two vaccination doses.

The study did not take into account factors that could have affected exposure to Covid-19, such as occupation and the number of people sharing a home.

Prof Hippisley-Cox said: "Individual risk will always depend on individual choices as well as the current prevalence of the disease, however we hope that this new tool will help shared decision making and more personalised risk assessment."

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Melbourne and Sydney anti-lockdown protests: violent clashes as police arrest demonstrators



Anti-lockdown protesters surge past Victoria police officers in Melbourne. The Australian state recorded 535 new coronavirus cases and one death on Saturday. Photograph: James Ross/AAP

Justine Landis-Hanley and Luke Henriques-Gomes

Sat 18 Sep 2021 04.43 EDT

Victoria police arrested 235 protesters and three officers remained in hospital on Saturday evening following violent anti-lockdown demonstrations in Melbourne's inner city.

As the state recorded 535 new cases and one death, around 1,000 protesters gathered in the north-eastern suburbs of Richmond and Hawthorn, forced to make a last-minute change of location after 2,000 police officers formed a "ring of steel" around the Melbourne CBD.

The Victoria police commander Mark Galliott told reporters on Saturday 235 protesters were arrested, including 193 people who would also be fined for breaching the public health orders.

He said the remaining group were arrested for a range of offences including assaulting police, riotous behaviour, weapons and drug offences.

Galliott said of the 10 officers injured, six were hospitalised and three remained there with injuries including torn muscles, broken bones and bruises.

Police said they had items including stones, bottles and other objects thrown at them during the protests, while others were injured when they were trampled on by demonstrators.

"What we saw today was a group of protesters that came together not to protest freedoms, but simply to take on and have a fight with the police," Galliott said.

"That's what we say, were angry, aggressive young males there to fight the police."

Galliott also defended the police operation, which aimed to keep the protesters out of the CBD, saying it was a "great preventative measure".

Public transport to and from the city was suspended between 8am and 2pm on Saturday, and police set up road checkpoints, barricades and roving patrols around the city in an effort to thwart the protest.

Barricades of police officers originally managed to confine protesters on Burnley Street in Richmond. That was until some protesters opened the locked gate to a residential apartment complex, allowing them to escape authorities on to Bridge Road.

Footage from the ground showed protesters clashing with police on several occasions.

At one point, protesters were filmed throwing objects – including water bottles and a traffic cone – at police, who had formed a human barricade, blocking the march. In response, police deployed pepper spray.

Trapped in a gorge formed by the road, protesters lob projectiles at police, who attempt to subdue the crowd by deploying capsicum spray
[@theage](https://pic.twitter.com/1upyP4tOsR) pic.twitter.com/1upyP4tOsR

— David Estcourt (@davidestcourt) [September 18, 2021](#)

Protesters were also filmed charging at and breaking through the police line. One officer fell to the ground and was trampled by demonstrators.

Multiple people who attended the rally have reportedly been arrested.

Protesters break through the police line, an officer gets assaulted and trampled by demonstrators, people are screaming and covered in capsicum spray [@theage](https://pic.twitter.com/qXX9lIAZRJ) pic.twitter.com/qXX9lIAZRJ

— David Estcourt (@davidestcourt) [September 18, 2021](#)

Victoria police chief commissioner Shane Patton told reporters this week that it would be the biggest Victoria police operation since the 2000 World Economic Forum was held in Melbourne.

Police were trying to avoid a repeat of what happened on the 21 August, when about 4,000 people attended a violent anti-lockdown protest in Melbourne.

Victoria wasn't the only state hit with anti-lockdown protests on Saturday.

In Sydney, police were out in force to deter planned protests and demonstrators were arrested for breaching stay-at-home orders as [New South Wales](#) surpassed 50,000 Covid cases since the start of the pandemic.

Between 200 and 300 demonstrators also took to the street in the northern NSW town of Byron Bay, with 11 people arrested.

NSW police said 32 people had been arrested across the state, 20 of whom were in Sydney. They said 265 infringement notices had been issued for a range of breaches including failing to wear a face mask, 232 of which were in metropolitan Sydney.

"I'm pleased to see that common sense has prevailed and the vast majority of people have complied with the existing public health orders," the police minister, David Elliott, said.

Some 1,700 officers were deployed across the state to manage the potential protests.

"Today's operation has been very successful. Our aim was to prevent the protest activity going ahead ... and if you have a look at the results you will see our actions have been well received by the public," the police assistant commissioner, Peter Thurtell, said.

Brisbane also saw a sizeable anti-lockdown protest take place, despite the fact that the state is not in lockdown.

Most attention has been on the Melbourne anti-lockdown protests today but Brisbane has also seen a large turnout. pic.twitter.com/p29cxflS34

— Eden Gillespie (@edengillespie) [September 18, 2021](#)

Victoria's announcement of 535 new Covid-19 cases is the state's highest recorded daily total this year and brings the total number of active infections to 4974.

Only 62 of today's cases were linked to known outbreaks.

Authorities said that a woman in her 70s from the greater Shepparton region had died from Covid-19.

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Kate Matson, from the Victoria Department of Health, said they were particularly concerned about 62 new cases in the northern suburb of Craigieburn, and 15 new cases in regional Victoria.

The Victorian health minister, Martin Foley, told reporters that the state's contact tracing system was struggling to keep up with the surge in daily cases, meaning it was taking longer for them to contact those who are testing positive for Covid-19.

"I don't think it indicates the system being overwhelmed, it indicates that the system clearly is under pressure," Foley said.



A man is arrested by police on Victoria Street, Richmond. Photograph: Darrian Traynor/Getty Images

“When you’ve got several thousand cases, that’s got to be dealt with in a different way than if there’s several hundred cases.”

Matson said that the department was instead starting to send text messages to advise people that they had tested positive, in an effort to speed up the process.

“We do expect that as case numbers rise throughout this week that we’ll be changing and adapting those processes further … We will also be moving to make phone calls first based on risk,” she said.

More than 70% of the eligible state population have received at least their first dose of a Covid-19 vaccine. Victorian government authorities are expected to outline a full roadmap out of lockdown on Sunday.

However, Foley warned that states and territories were advised by the commonwealth in national cabinet on Friday that there would be delays in Pfizer supply next month.

Asked if he was frustrated, Foley said “yes”.

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Photograph: Tim Robberts/Stone RF

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NSW recorded 1,331 new locally acquired cases and six deaths on Saturday.

In line with the Berejiklian government's decision to not host press conferences every day, Saturday's Covid-19 update for the state was

delivered by NSW Health's Dr Jeremy McAnulty and broadcast on Facebook. There appeared to be no journalists in attendance as no questions were asked or responded to.

Queensland only reported one new Covid-19 case overnight, who had been in quarantine for their entire infectious period.

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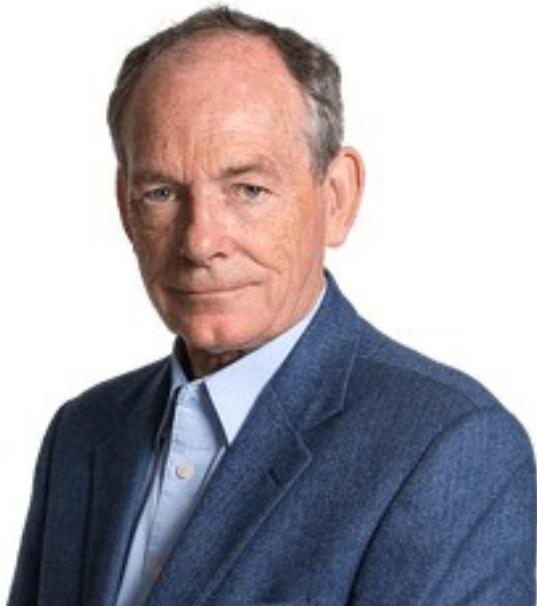
2021.09.18 - Opinion

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Jeremy Clarkson's Cotswolds farm is an ill omen for the countryside

[Simon Jenkins](#)



‘Clarksonville Comes to Chadlington is a vignette of a battle now raging in various forms across England’s countryside.’ Photograph: Clarkson’s Farm Amazon Prime Video

Sat 18 Sep 2021 04.30 EDT

In 2008 Jeremy Clarkson thought a little agriculture on the side might do him good. He bought a farm in fashionable Cotswold country, acquired a Lamborghini tractor and a handful of local workers and found the experience deeply satisfying. The farm was earning so little income – just [£140 last year](#) – that he named it Diddly Squat. With a [personal fortune](#) estimated in the millions, this seemed hardly to matter.

Clarkson is a man of irrepressible enterprise. Last year he turned the farm into a set for an [Amazon television series](#) about himself and his agricultural endeavours. Things have expanded dramatically since the series first aired. A farm shop run by Clarkson’s girlfriend, Lisa Hogan, has been doing a brisk trade. “What started with planning permission to build a small shop selling local produce, a lambing shed and 10 car parking spaces, has altered into hundreds of cars parking in a field, a cafe serving hot food and thousands of fans queueing for hours to buy branded T-shirts, caps and bags,” reports the Times. A licensing application envisages turning the farmyard over to shopping and a restaurant/entertainment venue for up to 150 people.

The neighbouring picturesque [village of Chadlington](#) finds itself facing a Disney-like invasion of Clarkson fans. The parish council said the proposed conversion of the old lambing shed in a planning application should not mean “change of use”. Clarkson may have other ideas. Residents, already [upset by the influx of visitors](#), were not pacified by a recent wine and cheese get-together hosted by the great man in a vague bid to pacify local dissent.

Clarksonville Comes to Chadlington is a vignette of a battle now raging in various forms across England’s countryside. Lockdown has hurled a tidal wave of hybrid commuters, home-workers and weekenders at tranquil havens once largely confined to “locals”. Rural tranquillity is assaulted by everything from soaring house prices to cohorts of big housebuilders and projects of blatant commercial vanity.

Country Life magazine's [Cotswolds special](#) issue in May was like a guidebook to the Klondike. Houses in discrete Chipping Campden now top £1m. The average [Zoopla price](#) of a property in the Chilterns' Turville village is currently £1.2m. The economic reality is that anywhere within an hour or so of west London is in effect Notting Hill. What gentrification once did to London's historic neighbourhoods it is now doing to the rural south and west of England and beyond.

Elsewhere, this summer the coastal villages of Cornwall, west Wales and the Lake District experienced an invasion of second homers, holiday rentals and Airbnb guests. Some villages have reported a 30% turnover of houses as residents realise their assets and move on.

This is naturally drawing in hungry developers attracted by the collapse of traditional town planning in the face of central dirigisme under John Major years before and Boris Johnson today. Nothing local people can say or do will stop Whitehall demanding that Jane Austen's Hampshire village of Chawton [build 1,200 new houses](#). Emily Brontë's romantic Wuthering Heights at Haworth in Yorkshire has been ordered to construct a [14-acre housing estate](#).

The irony is that such assaults risk destroying precisely the qualities that made the countryside so appealing: that they were stable, quiet and sparsely inhabited in natural surroundings. As the old Metroland ads used to plead: come out to beautiful rural Middlesex. And make it no longer rural, they might as well have added.

The reality is that much of rural southern England, long occupied by the relatively poor, is becoming the home of the relatively rich. The pleasure inherent in country places is being quantified, monetised and sent to market. Just as cities and suburbs follow economic cycles, so now does the country. Locals bewail that "our children cannot afford to live here," but then so do the residents of almost every inner borough of London. Social housing can do its bit, but cycles are a fact of economic life. The likes of [Jeremy Clarkson](#) can reasonably argue that they are not destroying the country, just using it in new ways and enabling new people to enjoy it.

The question is, can the old and the new live at some sort of peace with each other? Can the Chadlingtons cohabit with the Clarksonvilles through this period of disruption, and do so without wrecking the rural beauty and the tranquillity that is the unique selling proposition of the English countryside?

The answer can lie only in restoring clear and balanced local planning, and in harnessing the consent of local people, however “nimby”, to the process. Johnson’s wish to end local development control has infuriated rich and poor alike. It mocks his slogan of “take back control”. People do feel entitled to some right to sovereignty over their immediate environment.

As the Campaign for Rural Britain constantly points out, there is no problem in this. England has no shortage of brownfield housing land and it has a million unused housing permits. There isn’t an obvious reason to consume more countryside, other than that [Tory donors](#) seem to make most money building there. But if more people really are to live in rural areas, it will require sensitive and meticulous regulation. That will not come from Whitehall.

Any visitor to rural Ireland or Sicily or Portugal knows what happens when this sort of casual development is allowed free rein. Buildings go up at random. Landscape is spoiled. Nature is irreparably ruined. That is currently the prospect in England. The message of the recent Chesham by-election was that even Tory voters don’t like it. Will the new housing minister, Michael Gove, listen at least to them?

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
-

[Hadley Freeman's Weekend column](#)[Newspapers](#)

Opinion writing has changed a lot since I started out. It's time for something new

[Hadley Freeman](#)





‘Thank you all so much for letting me speak at you every Saturday morning.’ Photograph: Getty Images

Sat 18 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

For someone who never actually wanted to be a columnist, I have written a heck of a lot of [columns](#). I’ve been a Weekend columnist for five and a half years, and before that I was in the Guardian’s opinion section, and before that I was a columnist in the daily features section, G2, meaning I’ve foisted about 10 million of my random opinions on all of you. It has been a joy (for me, anyway), but now it is time to stop. I’ll still be doing interviews for the Guardian, but there is a tide in the affairs of man (all columnists love a random classic quote), and even an overly opinionated, 80s movies-obsessed, Jewish New Yorker (I’m WAWKIN’ here, I’m WAWKIN’!) knows when to step away from the table. So I’ll be banging on about fewer of my opinions, and writing more about those of others.

Like I said, I never wanted to be a columnist, but no one did when I started back in 2000. Sure, there were columnists around then, some of whom still write for the Guardian ([Jonathan Freedland](#), [Martin Kettle](#), [Polly Toynbee](#)), some of whom sadly don’t ([Martin Wollacott](#), [Hugo Young](#)). But column-writing was seen as something of a private members’ club: elitist, dusty and distant. Back then, young journalists wanted the fun, scrappy jobs:

investigative reporter, music reviewer, features writer. But ever since the rise of blogging culture in the 2000s, when anyone with an Apple PowerBook (RIP) could knock out a column, pretty much every aspiring journalist I've met has told me they want to be a columnist. Stating your opinion online has become the definitive way of saying who you are, so of course more people want columns. Yet, here's a funny thing: I can't recall a single day – and there were thousands – that I spent sitting at my desk writing a column. I can, however, recall [going to the Oscars to cover them](#), or the weekend I spent with Judy Blume [to interview her](#). Columns pump up the ego, but going out and finding stories is a lot more fun.

Something else has changed about column-writing in recent years. I wrote last week about [being in New York on 9/11](#) and the killing of my friend. Two days after the terrorist attacks, a [column](#) written by then Guardian columnist Seumas Milne ran with this headline: "They can't see why they are hated." America, Milne argued, had brought this on itself. It was jarring to read it at the time, but it never occurred to me to complain, and maybe some will see that as feeble or – gasp, horror – appallingly centrist of me. But I saw that article as Milne's opinion, so why shouldn't he write it? And Milne, I think, felt similarly of the things I wrote. Given that he went on to [become Jeremy Corbyn's spokesperson](#), and I'm an American Zionist who happily voted for Tony Blair, it's safe to say we disagree about quite a lot. But it was Milne who brought me on to the Guardian's comment section and he became one of the most encouraging editors I ever had. Ideological disagreements were just a normal part of life on the paper back then, and mixing only with those you agree with would have been seen by many journalists as embarrassingly partisan and unprofessional.

I don't know if that's quite so true any more. I've tackled some *highly* controversial subjects in my time, [from Israel](#) to – most controversially – [the ugliness of combat trousers](#), so I'm no stranger to heated debate. But where once people could argue with one another and then go out for a drink, now it feels as if people just argue. A difference of opinion becomes a seismic breaking of alliances, and certain subjects are verboten in social situations. I could blame Brexit for this – a difference of opinion that pretty much broke this country – but I noticed it before. In May 2016, I watched [a documentary about Corbyn](#), made by Vice, and in one scene Corbyn gets very angry about a column Freedland wrote in the Guardian, about [antisemitism in the Labour](#)

[party](#). He makes a call – to Milne, as chance would have it – and the two of them discuss Freedland: “He’s not a good guy at all. He seems kind of obsessed with me,” Corbyn rages.

I’ve thought about that moment a lot, because it felt like a turning point, a shift from when readers merely disagreed with a column to disagreeing and therefore assuming the columnist is A Bad Person. All newspaper columnists will have experienced degrees of that shift over the past five years, and this is not – as some have said – about holding them accountable for their opinions; it’s a refusal to accept that not everyone sees things the same way. Yet this, surely, is what columns are all about: revealing the variety of perspectives. So it’s ironic that at a time when column-writing has never been more desirable to so many, there is such an expectation of conformity of opinion.

None of this is why I’m stopping the column. It’s just time. Thank you all so much for letting me speak at you every Saturday morning, and thank you to those who spoke back, whether by email or stopping me in the street to tell me that combat trousers are great, actually (no, they’re not). Adhering to columnist tradition, I shall end with a classic quote: adieu, adieu, to yuh and yuh and yuh.

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OpinionGB News

Now Andrew Neil has left GB News, I'm selflessly volunteering to replace him

Hussein Kesvani



Andrew Neil at the launch of GB News, June 2021. Photograph: GB News
Sat 18 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

So it's farewell to [Andrew Neil](#). While the former chairman and lead presenter of GB News had decades of print and television experience, it was clear from the start of his latest venture that he was an analogue artefact struggling to break through in an extremely online world. GB News was attempting to take the boundless anger and energy of rightwing posting and turn it into television. But Neil, to put it bluntly, [is not a poster](#).

Despite the former BBC heavyweight's assurances that the channel would not "slavishly follow the existing news agenda", and would cover all areas of the country with the fairness and compassion to "reflect the views and

values of our United Kingdom”, it seems that Neil’s attempt to revolutionise British broadcasting has fallen flat on its face. This may be because [GB News](#) was chasing an audience that doesn’t really exist – trying to combine traditional elements of prestige news (BBC veterans, experienced TV producers) with the furious viral pace of online woke-bashing. The hated metropolitan elite – also known as Neil’s friends and colleagues – lost interest pretty quickly when it was clear not many people were watching. But the audience for rightwing rage-posting doesn’t necessarily want an old-fashioned TV channel, especially one that can’t keep pace with the rapid cycles of increasingly unhinged conversation on YouTube and Twitter.

Rumours of Neil’s departure had been circulating since his sudden decision to go on a three-month holiday less than a fortnight after the channel’s launch. Perhaps, like many of us who work in media, he was experiencing burnout, and went to the south of France to practise mindfulness. Neil, for his part, would do well to frame his departure as a personal decision – he was more interested in managing his media properties and grilling politicians than in sitting through [three separate segments](#) about whether the word “curry” is offensive, or listening to furious monologues declaring that “The Tiger Who Came to Tea [has been cancelled](#)”.

The real reason for Neil’s exit is simple. What made him a fixture in elite media circles – namely, his proximity to the rich and the powerful and the way he embodied a bygone era of print dominance – doesn’t count for much among an audience that would rather listen to Joe Rogan (or his dozens of YouTube imitators) than the BBC’s Brexitcast.

Indeed, even the channel is increasingly aware of where its audience is, and what they actually want. Only a couple of months ago, one member of the team described it as a “digital media business that has a TV channel attached”. Meanwhile, anyone who spends more than a few hours a day online will see how GB News’ recent output is less like a news organisation – were GB News reporters sitting through council meetings or poring over court records to break local stories? – than a visualisation of Twitter’s trending topics.

This also explains why GB News’ seemingly most popular correspondents aren’t journalists or big broadcast names, but commentators who came to the

channel with sizeable online followings, or, in the case of Woke Watch host Andrew Doyle, a brand built around a [fictional Twitter persona](#). Moreover, while GB News' TV viewing figures are low, its online footprint is more impressive, reaching [nearly 8 million people a day](#) on Twitter, and racking up hundreds of thousands, and sometimes millions of views on TikTok and Facebook.

What does this tell us? For a start, the age of the dispassionate, authoritative voice surmising the mood of the nation is over. Second, while being on TV still confers a kind of prestige and reach, it doesn't do much to attract new audiences – who have become accustomed to the feeling of *participating* in the day's many online outrages, liking and retweeting and reposting the latest half-true “cancel culture” shock. And third, any broadcaster who wants to survive in the age of YouTube shows, Twitch streams and longform podcasts – all of which exist readily on the smaller screen that is in front of people's TVs, in their hands – will have to learn how to cater to a constantly plugged-in audience.

As someone who spends close to 14 hours a day online and hosts [not one](#), but [two podcasts](#) about being addicted to the internet – I am delighted to offer my services to the undoubtedly panicked GB News investors as Neil's replacement. In fact, please consider this article my cover letter for the vacant post. Unlike Neil, I am willing to put in the extra hours to chase the truly important stories that the woke mainstream media is ignoring: how anime is feminising young working-class men and whether the social justice warriors at Adobe will ever be brought to justice for cancelling Flash Player. As chairman, I would also introduce a broader range of viewing for the audience – not just commentary shows, but [proper British TV](#): shows such as Dudes Rock, about the unique oppressions faced by divorced dads in family court, The Tarmac Review, a show about Britain's most beloved roads, and a documentary series fronted by Michael Portillo, revealing that the pyramids were, in fact, built by the Victorians.

Under my tenure, GB News will do more than report the national stories others ignore, it will also lay out a vision for what Britain could be: a place where you can smoke on live TV without being cancelled by the Leninists at Ofcom, where we don't “do Britain down” by examining its institutions or

history too closely, and above all, a place where the Tiger will always be welcome for tea – along with an imperially measured pint.

- Hussein Kesvani is a journalist who writes on digital culture and politics. He co-hosts Human Error on BBC Sounds
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Like herpes simplex, Johnson's ministers had begun to seem like a lifelong condition

[Marina Hyde](#)





‘Gavin Williamson now takes his bullwhip and office tarantula to the backbenches – which is not a sentence you can really imagine typing about a previous incumbent of his office.’ Photograph: Tayfun Salci/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Fri 17 Sep 2021 09.39 EDT

A huge week for the Westminster village and its many idiots, then, as Boris Johnson finally got around to [shuffling his cabinet](#). It’s always a thrill to see one’s ministerial bestiary gain some new entries – and, indeed, to rip out a few of its pages as certain featured creatures are deemed either too grotesque or cautionary to retain their spots.

We’ll start with the “in memoriam” reel. The media minister, John Whittingdale, was treated brutally, which he’d at least [have enjoyed](#). Robert Buckland’s culling was unexpected, with the now former justice secretary and lord chancellor finding out at the same time as everyone else that he was about as highly rated as an Airbnb with pubic hair in the soap and claw marks in the cellar.

Less of a surprise was the departure of Gavin Williamson, who has [finally been dethroned](#) at education. It was beginning to look like once you had Williamson, you had him for life. Like childhood trauma, or the herpes

simplex virus. He's been replaced by Nadhim Zahawi, whose [origin story](#) is being heavily pushed as more impressive than "found in a basket in a Scarborough fireplace". Gavin now takes his [bullwhip and office tarantula](#) to the backbenches – which is not a sentence you can really imagine typing about a previous incumbent of his office, such as Shirley Williams or Tony Crosland, but maybe we get the education secretaries we deserve. In which case, you have to wonder what this generation of schoolchildren were in their past lives. High-ranking Nazis? Lungworms?

Over at housing, the Robert Jenrick statue has been toppled – a reminder that no matter how many quarterwitted articles you write [about woke mobs](#), it's always possible that one day a snowflake prime minister will decide he simply doesn't understand your historic value. Jenrick will now be able to spend more time [looking at pictures](#) on Richard Desmond's phone, a sentence I typed wearing extra-strength hazmat gloves.

Anyway: Dominic Raab. I like the way Raab refuses to realise his cabinet career has the life expectancy of a woman who's just had her lonely hearts advert answered by Dominic Raab. I'm kidding, of course! In fact, when called in to hear that he was being demoted from foreign secretary, Raab is said to have denied to consent and fought back hard, words more normally associated with investigating officers honouring the victim. Dominic now has a full four job titles, which in newspapers is the moment they fit you with your occasional media column and anti-alcohol implant, and farm you out to "oversee" a mentoring programme they'll cut in six months.

Contrary to reports, meanwhile, Nadine Dorries's move to culture was predicted – unfortunately, by the Book of Revelation. Former [ostrich-anus gobbler](#) Nadine is as at home hallucinating mad cultural assaults – lefties are "[dumbing down panto](#)", she once said – as she is lashing out stingly at the opposition. "Nicky Morgan owns a £1,000 Mulberry handbag," [Nadine pointed out](#) during Theresa May's premiership, "but criticised PM's trousers. Rank hypocrisy." Nadine's handbags are all reasonably priced, and [useful for clobbering homosexuals](#).

Even so, I had to balk at [the Spectator's suggestion](#) that Nadine "will oversee a more punchy attitude to the culture war aspect of her brief". Sorry, but what culture war aspect of her brief?! Psychologists say that if you give

a child a present and they end up playing with the box, then the toy you gave them was too complicated for them. If you give a minister a brief that encompasses the entire media, the UK's data strategy, regulating big tech, 5G rollout, cyber-security, the charity sector, the whole of sport and the £100bn-plus creative industries, and they spend so much as ONE NANOSECOND fanning up some culture war nonsense about panto, that isn't so much playing with the box as taking a shit in it. And nobody, other than fellow infants, wants to see that.

Dorries replaces Oliver Dowden, who always looks like he's laughing nervously along with the bully's joke about him, making it hard not to see his move to party chairman as prime minister [Biff Tannen](#) giving him an as-yet-unclear form of wedgie. I guess it's fitting that Dowden's back in a party job. He has never had a proper job outside Westminster except for about five minutes at a PR firm, which has denied him the commercial experience that should have rung alarm bells as far as the [planned sale of Channel 4](#) is concerned.

If the government does push ahead with this culturicidal stupidity, they'll kill the very indie sector the channel largely built – which you'd think would be a massive bollock-drop, but will probably win them public support from Britain's vast and coveted no-clue-about-business demographic.

And so to the [supply chain crisis](#), a problem which this week was gifted by Johnson to his old backstabber Michael Gove, shortly before Gove was also moved to housing to solve that crisis too, and to work out what in the name of crap you just say to get elected the phrase "levelling up" actually means.

Who else? Ah yes: the [new foreign secretary, Liz Truss](#). No prime minister wants to look in their magic mirror and see that someone else is more popular. Truss is slightly more positive than Snow White, twice as likely to be involved in a musical number with some birds and squirrels, and generally adored by all the many denizens of the Conservative forest. Boris Johnson has moved her from signing trade deals with remote territories to visiting them.

For all the excitement-effect reaction, though, there were an awful lot of non-movers, from Priti Patel at the Home Office to negotiating masterbrain

Lord Frost. Many of them seemed to have spent the first part of the week playing not to get sold. Take Thérèse Coffey at work and pensions, whose Who's Who entry lists her interests as "delivering bad news", and who rushed out on Monday to defend the planned removal of the £20 universal credit uplift with some nonsense about it being just two hours' extra work, which indicated that the actual secretary of state had no clue about how the benefit is even designed. Of course, Thérèse knows that it doesn't matter if what you say is true or not; you just have to come up with any old mad cobblers to draw attention.

Whichever way you shake it, though, it was all taken very well by the Conservatives, who have spent much of the summer unable to work out if they're in the shit or in clover. This week was very much clover. As for the electoral black site to which Labour has long rendered itself, that shows no sign of being escaped. Shuffling ministers is vastly preferable, but it remains very difficult to envisage Starmer shuffling anything other than deckchairs.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist

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Australia ‘regrets’ France’s recall of ambassador as Aukus fallout predicted to last years



Australia said it valued its relationship with France but a recall of ambassadors to Paris from the US and Australia is likely to be the first in a series of protests over the Aukus military pact. Photograph: Australian Defence Force/Getty Images

[Ben Doherty](#)

[@bendohertycorro](#)

Fri 17 Sep 2021 23.15 EDT

Australia has said it “notes with regret” France’s extraordinary decision to [recall its ambassador](#) over the scrapping of a submarine contract – part of the Aukus military deal that experts said could damage relations for years and have serious broader consequences.

A spokesperson for Australia's foreign affairs minister, Marise Payne, said: "Australia understands France's deep disappointment with our decision, which was taken in accordance with our clear and communicated national security interests.

"Australia values its relationship with France, which is an important partner and a vital contributor to stability, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. This will not change."

The spokesperson said Australia and France share many issues of interest and "we look forward to engaging with France again".

However, observers said France's decision to recall its ambassadors to Australia and the United States was evidence of the depth of opprobrium felt by the European power, an anger exacerbated by the clandestine and clumsy handling of the announcement.

It is understood to likely be the first in a series of protests from Paris.

As the centrepiece of a new "Aukus" security pact between Australia, the US and the UK, dramatically announced this week, Australia will acquire nuclear-powered submarines using US technology, unilaterally tearing up a \$90bn contract with France to build 12 conventional-powered submarines.

The new alliance is aimed at countering China's rising military presence and influence in the Pacific, but it has infuriated the French, who were given almost no warning, and who have described the move as a "stab in the back".

Recalling the ambassadors, foreign affairs minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said the new deal, and the abandonment of France, was "unacceptable behaviour between allies and partners – the consequences of which affect the very conception that we have of our alliances, our partnerships and the importance of the Indo-Pacific for Europe".

The recalled ambassador, Jean-Pierre Thebault, said Australia's decision had "been a huge mistake, a very, very bad handling of the partnership, because

it wasn't a contract, it was a partnership that was supposed to be based on trust, mutual understanding and sincerity".

"I would like to run into a time machine, if possible, and be in a situation where we don't end up in such an incredible, clumsy, inadequate, unAustralian situation," Thebault said.

00:53

We found out from the press, says French ambassador on scrapped submarine contract – video

Hervé Lemahieu, director of research at the Lowy Institute, told the Guardian while Australia's submarine deal with the French state-owned Naval group had been plagued by delays, cost over-runs and "misaligned expectations", the manner of abandonment was "deeply humiliating to France".

"This was much more than just a commercial deal, this was France's flagship project in the Indo-Pacific. And the nature of the deal – an Anglospheric trilateral partnership – and the manner in which it was done, where it appears the French weren't consulted, was deeply humiliating to France," he said.

The Aukus announcement could also have immediate broader ramifications.

"We're having trade negotiations with Australia," France's European affairs minister, Clément Beaune, told France 24, referring to ongoing talks on an Australia-EU free trade deal. "I don't see how we can trust our Australian partners."

France and the US have had significant diplomatic disputes previously, notably during the Suez Crisis in 1956 and the Iraq war in 2003, though neither of those has resulted in ambassadors being withdrawn.

Lemahieu said: "The offence is most acutely felt from Australia, especially given how much energy multiple presidents, and in particular, [Emmanuel] Macron, has dedicated to this."

It could take years for the relationship between France and Australia to stabilise.

“The French have long memories,” Lemahieu said. “France has to be careful though not to overplay its hand. Their anger is legitimate and understandable but mustn’t be allowed to take control. But even once relations are normalised, this will leave a lasting legacy, an element of trust has probably irretrievably been lost.”

Paris regards itself as a significant power in the Indo-Pacific, with Pacific territories such as New Caledonia and French Polynesia giving it a strategic and military foothold unrivalled by any other European country.

“If Australia can alienate the major advocate for an EU Indo-Pacific strategy, what hope have we got in convincing Indonesia or other regional middle powers of the inclusiveness of the concept?” Lemahieu said.

Indonesia has already indicated its disquiet with Australia’s decision, saying it “is deeply concerned over the continuing arms race and power projection in the region”.

Prof John Blaxland, senior fellow at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at ANU’s College of Asia and the Pacific, said Australia needed to be working to repair the relationship with France.

“We owe them probably about \$3bn in penalties over the broken deal,” he told the ABC, and suggested Australia could propose leasing from France some of its Barracuda submarines to cover the capability gap before the new nuclear submarines arrive.

“Let’s do something creative and mend bridges with France. France is an enduring Pacific power, let’s not forget. It has French territories in not just New Caledonia, but in Tahiti and in the Indian Ocean. So we have to make that relationship work and it’s in our interests to make that work.”

Jean-Pierre Thebault, the French ambassador to Australia, and Philippe Etienne, his counterpart in Washington, will return to Paris for

“consultations”, France announced late on Friday. France has not recalled its UK ambassador.

The withdrawal of ambassadors, usually an action of last resort between countries during a crisis, and an exceedingly rare action between allies.

Australia’s leader of the opposition in the Senate, Penny Wong, said on Saturday: “This isn’t the first time [Australian prime minister Scott] Morrison has blindsided an international partner or failed to do the diplomatic leg work before an announcement.

“The Morrison-Joyce government must outline what steps it is taking to repair this important relationship.”

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[China](#)

‘China’s Lehman Brothers moment’: Evergrande crisis rattles economy



Evergrande is estimated to have 1.4m pre-sold homes still yet to be completed. Photograph: Greg Baker/AFP/Getty Images

[Martin Farrer](#) and [Vincent Ni](#)

Fri 17 Sep 2021 18.00 EDT

The crisis engulfing Evergrande, China’s second-biggest property company, is the greatest test yet of President Xi Jinping’s effort to reform the debt-ridden behemoths of the Chinese economy. It could also be the most significant test that China’s financial system has faced in many years.

As angry protesters occupied the headquarters of the troubled property developer in recent weeks, some analysts have described the Evergrande crisis as “China’s Lehman Brothers moment”. Only this time it’s a credit-fuelled housebuilder that suddenly can’t pay its \$300bn debts, rather than a

blue-chip investment bank that many assumed was too big to fail but was instead thrown to the wolves 13 years ago.

Although there may be some parallels, the more extreme prophecies of doom for China may be no more correct than the assumption that Beijing will simply step in and bail out Evergrande to make sure the fallout from the failure of a property giant does not spread to other areas of the Chinese economy.

“It seems that we may have already started the financial distress process. As the risk of insolvency increases, the behaviour of sales agents, homebuyers, suppliers and other stakeholders changes in ways that further undermine revenues and raise expenses,” said Michael Pettis, a professor of finance at Peking University. “Once that process begins, conditions can quickly spiral downwards unless someone like the government steps in to guarantee payments.”

As Evergrande’s turmoil continues to brew, the pressure on China’s real-estate sector is being felt far beyond a single developer. August data released on Wednesday suggested that national home sales by value had tumbled by 19.7% year-on-year, the largest drop since April 2020. Growth in home prices had slowed, too.

The question is how Beijing is to intervene – if it is going to do so at all. Some analysts think it will try to save part of Evergrande with a “politicised hierarchy” of creditors headed by the small investors and homebuyers who marched on Evergrande offices this week to demand their money back. Such public protest is rare in China and Beijing cannot risk it escalating into a narrative about the elites enriching themselves at the expense of ordinary people.



Protesters at the Evergrande headquarters building in Shenzhen, south-east China. Photograph: Noel Celis/AFP/Getty Images

Starting on Tuesday, when the firm founded by the former steel executive Xu Jiayin 24 years ago is widely expected to default on [two key bank repayments](#), big banks and financial institutions face the prospect of a drastic haircut of more than 75% as the price of saving the little guys.

But the key question is: will that work? The company shocked the market this week by admitting that it cannot offload its assets quickly enough to stop the bleeding. Its share price is collapsing and trade in its bonds has been suspended. It could get messy, analysts say.

“The nightmare scenario is a fire sale of Evergrande assets that transforms a healthy market correction into a rout,” said Gabriel Wildau, a China political risk specialist and a senior vice-president at the advisory firm Teneo.

The potential timebomb has been ticking for some years. China’s housing market has become hugely bloated by years of cheap credit and is reckoned by conservative estimates to account for 16% of GDP, although some estimates put that figure at 25% – far more than the proportion in western economies.

But the low-hanging fruit of debt-fuelled growth has long gone. In 2007-08, about 6.5tn yuan (\$1tn) of new credit was needed to raise GDP by about 5tn yuan a year, [according to the IMF](#). In 2015-16, it took more than 20tn yuan in new credit for the same growth.

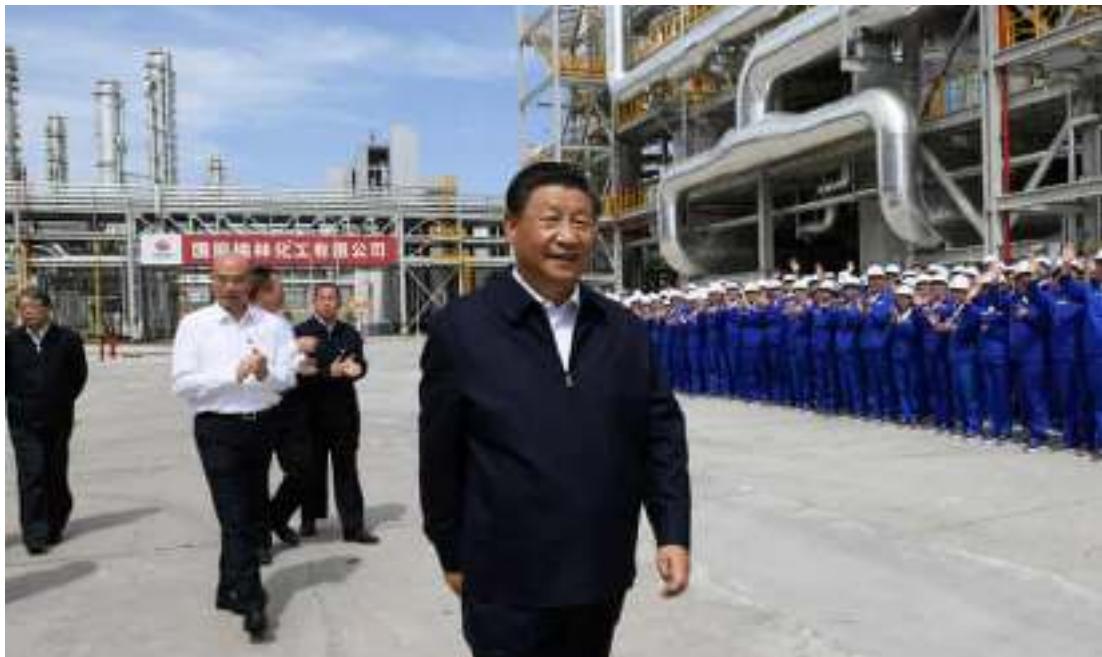
This means it is becoming much more expensive to repeat the trick, as more credit is pumped into the system for an ever-decreasing impact. In the end there has to be a reckoning and the crisis at Evergrande suggests that the cycle has finally caught up with the poster child of China's property-market miracle.

"It is an intractable problem. As long as Beijing for political reasons selects GDP growth targets that exceed the underlying growth rate of the economy, it needs surging debt to achieve those targets, and this surging debt requires implicit guarantees, or moral hazard," said Pettis. "They can't really get one without the other."

This is perhaps the biggest headache for Beijing when it tries to make a reformed economic model work. Shortly after he came to power in 2013, Xi said that China needed to "shift the focus to improving the quality and returns of economic growth ... to pursuing genuine rather than inflated GDP growth."

Since Xi's speech, a slew of regulations were introduced for various sectors of the Chinese economy, for example the so-called "[three red lines](#)" for selected developers in 2020 which severely limited their capacity to borrow.

Experts agree that this was where the rot finally set in for Evergrande because, as property prices began to cool in the wake of the regulatory crackdown, the company could no longer borrow so much to cover losses. Some say that the way Xi handles the implosion at Evergrande will be the "most serious test" of his determination to see through his reforms.



Xi Jinping's goal to reform China's economy comes with the risk of causing a debt crisis. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

James Shi and Simon Lee of the Hong Kong data analytics firm Reorg said Beijing's priority would be to keep Evergrande in business – even if its in a zombified form – in order to finish the estimated 1.4m homes the company has pre-sold.

"This is the top priority for them and the government," they said. "Nobody wants thousands of angry people demanding their money back."

"This means that other immediate creditors such as suppliers must expect that they won't get paid straight away. There is also a lot of anecdotal evidence that Evergrande has offered flats as payment in kind to suppliers and contractors."

They said bigger institutional creditors were a low priority and would most likely have to accept a [government-orchestrated restructure](#) of the company. Foreign holders of Evergrande's dollar-denominated bonds – which total around \$20bn – wouldn't have much say in what happened and would therefore face a wipeout, analysts say. They would probably pursue their money in international courts.

However, the big question hanging over this is how long such a process could keep a wide range of creditors at bay while the company continued to operate and meet its building obligations.

Damien Klassen, who manages millions of dollars at Nucleus Wealth in Melbourne, Australia, said Xi should be applauded for trying to make serious change to an unbalanced economy. The problem is that it could spiral out of control.

“Xi may be thinking that: ‘If I have to break a few eggs, I break a few eggs.’ I’m sure he would prefer if 25% of the economy was not devoted to the housing industry. Xi wants to change society, make property more affordable. That’s not a bad thing. But can he pull it off? He could end up with a debt crisis.

“The problem is that the banks have lent to every developer in the same way so you could see contagion across the whole sector. There will be uncertainty about who takes on the bad loans and then it will be the whole sector that won’t get any credit, not just Evergrande. No one knows what’s going on, so you don’t know which property companies will fall over next.”

Most observers agree that the state will be able to orchestrate a softer landing than western governments managed 13 years ago. Wildau points out that China’s banking system survived a stress test this month by regulators that factored in defaults on both home mortgages and developer loans in excess of the likely impact of an Evergrande collapse. Evergrande’s liabilities of \$305bn are around half of Lehman’s and the west did not have the kind of regulatory control at Beijing’s disposal to defuse the situation.

However, whatever happens, and even if Evergrande lives to fight another day, the Reorg analysts say that the Chinese property market is already in a crisis as companies race to offload debt.

“The impact is already being felt in industry – it is deleveraging very rapidly. Companies are finding it much harder to raise money which is shown by very high yields for their bonds,” they said.

Capital Economics agrees that even if a soft landing is engineered, the property sector that has driven China's growth for 25 years is entering a period of decline that could have a profound effect on the world's second-biggest economy.

Even reversing the red lines would not make much difference, they argue, because sales of land and homes were already falling, partly because China's slowing population growth is acting as a natural break on the housing market. There are fewer young adults than there were 10 years ago, something shown by a 31% drop in marriages from 2013 to 2019.

"Relaxation of regulatory controls on the sector wouldn't change this fundamental constraint," said Mark Williams, Capital's chief Asia economist. "Construction, a key engine of China's growth and commodity demand, will slow substantially over the next few years, whether or not the economy escapes the current crunch unscathed."

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[New Zealand](#)

Mother charged with murdering her three daughters appears in New Zealand court



Police search a garden near a house where three children were found dead in the New Zealand town of Timaru. Their mother has been charged with their murder. Photograph: George Heard/AP

Reuters

Sat 18 Sep 2021 01.26 EDT

A woman has appeared in court charged with murdering her three young daughters just weeks after the family arrived in New Zealand from South Africa.

Lauren Anne Dickason appeared in court on Saturday morning in the port city of Timaru, and a judge remanded her to a hospital for a mental health evaluation, a court spokesperson said.

Dickason, 40, is charged with killing her two-year-old twins and their six-year-old sister, police said. Their bodies were found on Thursday at a property where the family stayed.

“Police would like to reassure the community that this was a tragic isolated incident and we are not seeking anyone else,” the police said in a statement late on Friday.

Dickason is to appear in court again on 5 October.

The family came to Timaru, a city of 29,000 in New Zealand’s South Island, recently, police have said. They left the compulsory two-week managed isolation last week.

New Zealand media has reported that Dickason and her husband are doctors.

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Adelaide

Keep left: plan to direct Adelaide pedestrians to stay in their lane sparks unexpected culture war



Adelaide councillor Anne Moran's push for signs to 'help redirect pedestrian movement' has divided a city. Photograph: Morgan Sette/AAP

[Tory Shepherd](#)

Fri 17 Sep 2021 16.00 EDT

All Anne Moran wants is a civilised city where people politely stick to the left on the footpath.

The [Adelaide](#) councillor is tired of cyclists, scooters, smartphone zombies and meanderers ricocheting off each other, creating mayhem on the (ahem) thriving streets of her city.

So she put a motion to the Adelaide city council, calling for signs to nudge the unruly populace back to where they belong. To “help direct pedestrian movement”.

Occasionally mixing would be required when queues, outdoor dining and bus stops disrupted the orderly flow, she allowed, and of course searing heat and pouring rain would see people squidge together in the search for shelter.

Little did Moran know the next frontier of the culture wars was about to erupt on the wide, leafy, perfectly planned streets of this metropolis (population approx. 22,000) which takes in the central part of the South Australian capital.

It’s a “woke” plan, they told her. It’s “cancel culture”. I will walk wherever I like, people said.

In a state known for its food, wine, posh accents, ageing population and unemployment issues, opinions were divided.

On the local ABC station people talked fondly of the days when a strict, painted line divided left firmly from right. One man harked back to the days when gentlemen bodily inserted themselves between their ladies and the filthy detritus and danger of the streets. “In my day,” people cried, “there were rules!”

“What about in supermarkets?” one caller wanted to know.

“Are we going to punish people?” asked the man from the pedestrian council. “Non-enforcement of the law will encourage its disobedience!”

People say Adelaide wasn’t always so anarchic. Perhaps recent events have disrupted the locals’ orientation, leaving them directionally challenged. It’s not that long ago that the state’s main expressway only went one way – causing confusion when it was eventually duplicated.

A disproportionate number of drivers are found trying to drive up the O-Bahn busway, following buses that turn left only to magically levitate on special tracks. (The magic doesn’t work for cars).

A government election promise had to be ditched a couple of years ago when it proved impossible to allow trams [to turn right](#).

But Moran isn't giving up. She'll go back to council with more details on the problem spots in the hopes of surmounting the fierce backlash and restoring law and order to the streets.

"I was just asking for a few stencils on the footpath," she says.

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Robert Durst

Real estate heir Robert Durst found guilty of murdering his friend Susan Berman



The real estate heir Robert Durst in court this month during his murder trial.
Photograph: Étienne Laurent/AP

Guardian staff and agencies

Fri 17 Sep 2021 19.05 EDT

The multimillionaire New York real estate heir [Robert Durst](#) has been convicted of murdering his best friend Susan Berman more than 20 years ago, in a case that took on new life following the documentary *The Jinx*.

Durst was found guilty of first degree murder on Friday after a jury in [Los Angeles](#) deliberated for about seven hours over three days. Berman was shot

at point-blank range in her Beverly Hills home in December 2000 as she was prepared to tell police how she helped cover up the killing of Durst's wife.

Berman, the daughter of a Las Vegas mobster, was Durst's longtime confidante who told friends she provided a phony alibi for him after his wife vanished.

The verdict marked the first homicide conviction for a man suspected of killing three people in three states over nearly 40 years. Durst's strange story gripped viewers of the hit television documentary series *The Jinx: The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst*, which chronicled the disappearance of his wife Kathie in 1982, the cold-blooded murder of Berman in Los Angeles 18 years later, and the violent 2001 death of a roommate in Galveston, Texas, where Durst was living under cover as a deaf-mute woman.

Throughout the trial, prosecutors painted a portrait of a rich narcissist who didn't think the laws applied to him and ruthlessly disposed of people who stood in his way. They interlaced evidence of Berman's killing with Kathie Durst's suspected death and the 2001 killing in Texas.



A photo of Susan Berman, presented during opening arguments in the trial.
Photograph: Étienne Laurent/AP

The trial had been in the works for five years, since Durst's arrest on the eve of the airing of the final episode of [The Jinx](#). The HBO documentary included interviews with Durst that helped lead to the charges against him.

The conviction marks a victory for authorities who have sought to put Durst behind bars for murder in three states. Durst was never charged in the disappearance of his wife, who has never been found, and was acquitted of murder in Galveston, Texas, where he admitted dismembering the victim's body and tossing it out to sea.

Durst's evasion of justice has seen remarkable twists and turns. Durst ran from the law multiple times, disguised as a mute woman in Texas and staying under an alias at a New Orleans hotel with a shoulders-to-head latex mask for a presumed getaway. He jumped bail in Texas and was arrested after shoplifting a chicken sandwich in Pennsylvania, despite having \$37,000 in cash along with two handguns in his rental car.

He later quipped that he was "the worst fugitive the world has ever met".

Durst later came to deeply regret his decision to participate in *The Jinx* after it aired on HBO in 2015, calling it a "very, very, very big mistake".

In the documentary Durst made several damaging new statements on camera, particularly about the Berman case. One of the most incriminating pieces of evidence concerned the so-called "cadaver" note, an anonymous note sent to police directing them to Berman's lifeless body.

Durst, who was so confident he couldn't be connected to the note, told filmmakers "only the killer could have written" the note, which contained merely the address of Berman's house in Beverly Hills and the word "cadaver".

Filmmakers confronted him with a letter he sent Berman a year earlier. The handwriting was identical and Beverly Hills was misspelled as "Beverley" on both. He couldn't tell the two apart.



Durst in the courtroom in Inglewood, California. Photograph: Al Seib/EPA

The gotcha moment provided the climax of the movie as Durst stepped off camera and muttered to himself on a live microphone in the bathroom: “Killed them all, of course.”

During 14 days of testimony that was so punishing that Judge Mark Windham called it “devastating”, Durst denied killing his wife and Berman, though he said he would lie if he did. He tried to explain away the note and what prosecutors said was a confession during an unguarded moment.

Durst admitted on the witness stand that he sent the note and had been in Los Angeles at the time of Berman’s death. He said he sent the note because he wanted Berman to be found but didn’t want anyone to know he had been there because it would look suspicious.

He acknowledged that even he had difficulty imagining he could have written the note without killing Berman.

“It’s very difficult to believe, to accept, that I wrote the letter and did not kill Susan Berman,” Durst testified.

A prosecutor said it was one of the truest things Durst said amid a ton of lies.

Jurors began hearing evidence in March 2020 before taking a 14-month break during the pandemic. The case resumed in May.

Durst, 78 and frail, is likely to die in prison as the jury also found him guilty of the special circumstances of lying in wait and killing a witness, which carry a mandatory life sentence. Windham set a sentencing hearing for 18 October.

Andrew Gumbel contributed reporting

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