

# The Guardian

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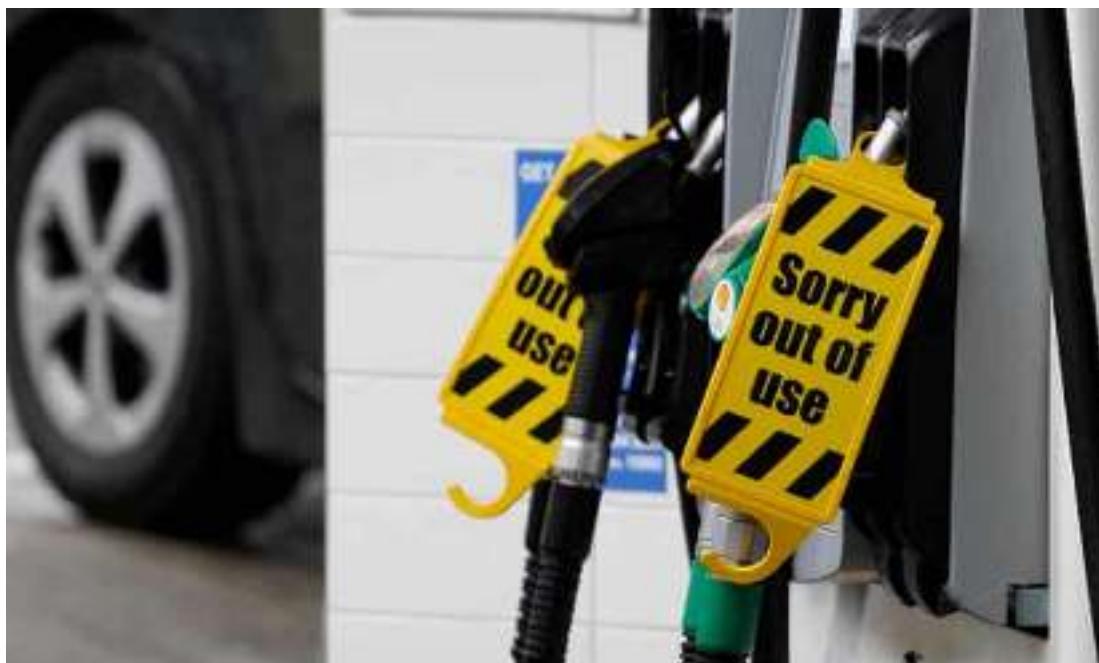
## 2021.10.03 - Opinion

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## Panic at the pumps could herald a brave new Brexit order. I have my doubts

[Will Hutton](#)



'Out of Use' signs are displayed on fuel pumps at a filling station in central London. Photograph: Niklas Halle'n/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 3 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

Driving across France last Thursday was like driving in Britain used to be – no worries about petrol and no queues. Returning to London was a brutal tipping into another reality. One of the first duties of a government is to ensure that citizens can go about their daily business without hassle and anxiety. With abundant petrol in the refineries there was never need for this pain – we are living through an abject failure of governance.

Brexit is plainly one of the reasons for the shortage of drivers and for the troublesome frictions at our borders spilling over into problems in the food and supermarket supply chains. More crucially, it was ministers' very fear that early action would be seen as proof positive of Brexit's frailties that so paralysed them.

Thus road haulage chiefs met junior transport minister Baroness Vere on 16 June to urge temporary visas for overseas drivers, a campaign to attract retired drivers back to work and one to address the driving test backlog. But transport ministers don't trust the "Remoaner" road haulage lobby, loud in its early criticism last winter of how hard Brexit's new border controls has made it to move goods in and out of Britain. On top, every minister recalls the ruthless withdrawal of the Tory whip from 21 colleagues in September 2019. To have any pro-EU sympathies is a mark of Cain.

Vere knew that, as a former executive director of the Conservatives In campaign, she is viewed with suspicion and No 10 wanted the line held. The industry should pay better and recruit and train more British drivers. Part of the point of Brexit was to shift from a low-wage, low-skill economy dependent on EU migrants. She closed the June meeting by telling executives the government "did not want to create panic", leaving unsaid that any panic six months after Brexit would be politically toxic.

Over the summer, the line held even as problems mounted. On the evening of 23 September, just as news that BP was closing some petrol stations because of tanker driver shortages, the home secretary, Priti Patel, was

celebrating with 25 other self-styled “Spartans” – the Tory MPs who voted three times against Theresa May’s compromise Brexit deals – at the Carlton Club. They congratulated themselves on the hardest of hard Brexits they had achieved, along with Patel’s visa policy excluding low-paid immigrants. Boris Johnson, urged to create at least 20,000 visas to bring in foreign drivers to have a chance of tackling the crisis, knows how strongly his political base supports Patel’s stance on immigration. He did the least possible, announcing 10,500 [temporary three-month visas](#) for tanker drivers and poultry workers, keenly aware of the impending [turkey shortage](#) about to blight Christmas.

It was “the equivalent of throwing a thimble of water on a bonfire”, as Baroness McGregor-Smith, president of the British Chambers of Commerce, memorably said. Now, belatedly, comes the news that 100 [army tanker drivers](#) begin on Monday, to be joined by 300 overseas drivers fast-tracked in on a visa especially extended to February. Vere has finally written to a million holders of HGV licences urging them to return to the industry. The thimble of water has grown into a bottle, but the bonfire shows every sign of burning out only slowly and already at the cost of a collapse in business confidence. Panic buying and lost trust are hard to reverse.

Of course the government should have acted far more decisively, far sooner – and provided the public with accurate information. Accuracy and honesty are the best ways of calming fears. But there is remarkably little outcry about its dithering and its bluster: a [YouGov poll](#) reports that only 23% of the population blame it and nearly half blame the media.

One reason is that Labour cannot lay into the Brexit-induced dither as authentically and strongly as it could and should; it backed the treaty and judges that the public is not yet ready to hear advocacy for the EU. Despite everything, most Leavers continue to back Brexit. They might feel they voted for a higher-wage, higher-skill economy propelled by lower immigration and that, however bumpily, it’s now in train. Advertised pay rates for HGV drivers have risen 12.8% this year alone, while working-class Leave voters might like the spectacle of Tory ministers urging employers to pay and train people better.

Without free movement of EU workers or a liberal visa policy, Britain has a manpower, mobility and skills crisis

And yet HGV drivers are only one sector. Immigration was always more a manpower than a wages game. For example, the Bank of England found that all EU immigration between 2004 and 2011 reduced semi- and low-skilled service sector wages by less than 1% a year. Any impact was on the lowest 10% of wage earners and then only slight. But what immigration did was to expand the economy: an economy's annual output represents the number of average hours worked multiplied by the output per person hour, multiplied by the working population. Immigrants don't change investment or productivity, but they increase the numbers able to pick fruit, kill pigs, rear turkeys and drive lorries.

Without immigrants, the economy grows less quickly or shrinks. A quarter of all UK firms, including half of all transport businesses, say they can't fill vacancies because [EU applicants no longer apply](#). Their scope to pay higher wages is capped by how much they can sell on profitable margins; if they can't employ people at an affordable wage, then supermarket shelves aren't stocked and tanks in petrol stations aren't replenished.

Without free movement of EU workers or a liberal visa policy, Britain has an intertwined manpower, mobility and skills crisis: there are not enough people in the right places with the right skills to sustain the output we are used to. The mismatch will eventually be solved, the solution delayed by our chronically weak training system and housing shortage; the economy will be smaller, people will gradually acquire the necessary skills, but the dislocation will involve shortages, queues, even rationing and very low growth.

Meanwhile, surveys show a growing majority in favour of immigration. The open question in British politics is whether Brexit can even half work before the public gives up on it. The government's actions betray its anxiety over the answer. My guess, after this week, is that the moment when the public begins to stop believing is approaching and faster than anyone thinks.

Will Hutton is an Observer columnist

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[Opinion](#)[Metropolitan police](#)

## The Observer view on institutional misogyny in the Metropolitan police

[Observer editorial](#)



The Metropolitan police commissioner, Cressida Dick, failed to announce any actions in her statement after Wayne Couzens's sentencing. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

Sun 3 Oct 2021 01.30 EDT

The arrest, then kidnapping, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving Metropolitan police officer have irrevocably shaken public confidence in the police. Last week, as her murderer was sentenced, her family read out their statements in court. "She was caring, she was funny. She was clever, but she was good at practical things too. She was a wonderful daughter... She was a good person. She had purpose to her life," Susan Everard, Sarah's mother, [told her murderer](#).

An unbearable agony has been inflicted on her family and loved ones. And women have watched in horror as the details of her murder have become public and the response of the Met has been to put more emphasis on how women can keep themselves safe from dangerous police officers than on the deep-seated reform needed to address its own institutional misogyny.

As a male-dominated institution, the police are vulnerable to societal cultures. Abusive and violent men are attracted to professions that offer power and control. And the state confers huge powers on the police in order to maintain law and order and protect victims of crime. To learn of a police officer using those powers to kidnap and murder a woman – using his warrant card to arrest her, his police-issued handcuffs to restrain her so she cannot fight back – fatally erodes the principle of [policing by consent](#), the idea that police authority is contingent on public approval and on the police's ability to maintain public respect. In the [words of the judge](#) who sentenced him: “If that is undermined, one of the enduring safeguards of law and order in this country is inevitably jeopardised.” Red flags about this officer – several allegations of indecent exposure, including one just days before he murdered Everard; the fact he was reportedly nicknamed “the rapist” by colleagues; the lewd and misogynistic messages he and other officers allegedly shared via WhatsApp – were either ignored or not picked up.

The leadership of the Met had months to prepare its response to the sentencing. It needed to acknowledge its devastating failings, request an independent inquiry into institutional misogyny within the force and announce changes it has made to vetting and safeguarding in light of Sarah’s murder. Instead, the Met commissioner, Cressida Dick, failed to announce any actions [in her statement](#), and the deputy commissioner, Steve House, insisted there was “zero tolerance” for misogyny in the force even as it transpired that two Met officers who allegedly swapped misogynistic and racist messages with Everard’s murderer have been [left on duty](#).

The Met has issued utterly inappropriate guidance to women on what to do if they suspect the motives of a lone police officer, including flagging down a bus, challenging the officer and calling 999 to verify their identity. This further contributes to the erosion of policing by consent: the only thing that

will reassure women will be if the Met demonstrates it can trust police officers wielding an arrest warrant as a result of changes it has made to its own vetting and safeguarding processes.

Restoring faith in the police requires an inquiry of the sort that followed the murder of Stephen Lawrence. There are undoubtedly many frontline police officers who show immense bravery and dedication to public service. But they and the public are being failed by a rotten leadership culture that has not addressed the numerous signals that the Met and other forces still have an issue with institutional [misogyny and racism](#). Undercover Met officers stole the identities of dead children to trick women into having long-term relationships, [and even children](#), with them; last week, judges ruled this was a gross [violation of human rights](#). The Centre for Women's Justice has filed a [super-complaint](#) about police failures to investigate police officers accused of violence and abuse against women. Two Met officers have pleaded guilty to misconduct after taking and sharing photos of themselves with the bodies of [Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry](#), two sisters who had been knifed to death. A report by the police watchdog has found "[problems, unevenness and inconsistencies](#)" in the way forces address male violence against women.

These failings of the police have occurred against a backdrop of a broader societal failure to address and prevent male violence against women and girls. A woman is killed by a man every three days in this country. These femicides are the tip of the iceberg of the epidemic of male violence against women and children, yet refuge and support services for abused women have been cut, abuse victims are shunted towards [women's prisons](#), and falling rape and [domestic abuse convictions](#), which have arisen partly as a result of government cuts to the police, prosecution service and courts, are effectively decriminalising male violence against women.

All the emphasis is on women changing behaviour to protect themselves but there is an overwhelming lack of strategy to prevent male violence by working with perpetrators of domestic abuse and fostering healthy attitudes towards women and girls among boys. [Male politicians](#) apparently feel empowered to carelessly advocate for the end of the single-sex safe spaces that are protected by the Equality Act without acknowledging the consequences for women traumatised by male violence.

Male violence against women should be treated as of the same order as other ideologically motivated violence against a class of people: as terrorism. This would mean far more resources going into preventing the deaths of more than 100 women a year and the abuse of many, many more women and children. But the Met's dreadful response to Sarah Everard's murder shows this cannot happen without an independent inquiry into the institutional misogyny of Britain's largest police force. This must be announced without further delay by the prime minister this week.

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[Opinion](#)[Keir Starmer](#)

## The Observer view on Keir Starmer's Labour conference speech

[Observer editorial](#)



Sir Keir Starmer delivers his keynote speech at the Labour party conference in Brighton on 30 September. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

Sun 3 Oct 2021 01.30 EDT

Labour has a mountain to climb to get back into government. In 2019, the party suffered its [worst election defeat](#) since 1935, the product of the deep unpopularity of its leader, its difficulty in producing a credible Brexit position that chimed with all voters and long-term decline in its support among working-class voters. But at his party's annual conference last week, Keir Starmer showed that the party is starting to inch forwards on the long road back to power.

Starmer's conference speech showed that he understands the predicament facing Labour and has taken on board criticisms of the first 18 months of his leadership. There were many reasons why Labour did so badly in 2019. First and foremost was the fact that voters did not warm to Jeremy Corbyn, the least popular opposition leader for decades; they saw him as unconvincing, unpatriotic and weak on issues of national security and unbothered about the extent of antisemitism in his party. But this dislike was underpinned by longstanding shifts in Labour's electoral coalition: its declining vote share among working-class voters, older groups and non-graduates, which particularly made itself felt after a Brexit that many Labour supporters backed as others rejected it.

Starmer achieved three important things last week. First, he continued to demonstrate a decisive break from Corbyn on antisemitism. Corbyn was suspended from the parliamentary party over his disgraceful response to the Equality and Human Rights Commission report on antisemitism in the Labour party and political groups associated with antisemitism were banned from the party this summer. Last week, conference delegates voted to accept the rule changes required by the EHRC, including an independent complaints process, in the face of opposition from left groupings such as Momentum. Louise Ellman, the Jewish former MP who left the party over the antisemitic abuse she faced from members, decided to "return to her political home" by rejoining the party.

Second, although Labour's agenda for government is far from fully fleshed out, Starmer signalled that he understands the everyday concerns of voters on issues such as education to crime: the fact that too many children are growing up in areas without a single good primary school and the number of rape victims who are denied the justice of their attackers facing any consequences.

He also spoke movingly about his patriotism and contrasted it to Conservative ministers encouraging the public to boo when English footballers such as Marcus Rashford took the knee to condemn racism in football. Few voters meaningfully engage with party leader speeches at conferences, but those who were polled having seen clips from the speech reacted more positively than those polled after both Boris Johnson and Corbyn's first conference speeches.

Finally, Starmer firmly indicated that, unlike Johnson, he is a leader who will put country before party factionalism and that Labour's emphasis will be on "changing lives" rather than "chanting slogans", as he told those from the left who heckled him during his speech.

This is evident in a series of party reforms passed last week that boost the influence of MPs in selecting the next party leader and reduce the power of unrepresentative groups of local members to get sitting MPs deselected. However, it is also apparent in Starmer's promise that under his leadership the party will never again present a manifesto that is not a serious plan for government, a clear indictment of his predecessor's 2019 manifesto, which was greeted with scepticism by the electorate.

Starmer still has huge barriers to overcome: Labour's dismal performance in Scotland; the challenge of how to unite an increasingly disparate coalition of voters around a unifying vision; reversing Labour's decline in working-class support; and convincing the electorate that he is a prime minister in waiting. But the achievements of last week suggest that Labour is not an entirely spent political force and offer a glimmer of hope for the future of the British centre-left.

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[Opinion](#)[Conservative conference](#)

## Tory triumphalism will anger voters facing empty shelves and a fuel famine

[Andrew Rawnsley](#)



‘The charge that his regime is fundamentally incompetent, so often made and with so much justice during the pandemic, is back and with a sting.’  
Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Sun 3 Oct 2021 02.30 EDT

If a week is a long time in politics, 24 months is an eternity. Tories are gathering in Manchester highly conscious that their party last met for an in-person conference two tumultuous years ago. Since [he last strutted](#) on a conference stage, Boris Johnson has divorced his second wife, married his third, won his party a fourth consecutive term and had what he says is his sixth child (other estimates are available).

He has bungled his way through a pandemic that almost killed him, in both the literal and political senses, before the vaccination cavalry rode to the rescue. He has wrenched Britain out of the EU after unlawfully proroguing parliament, purging Remainers from his party and beguiling opposition leaders into foolishly letting him have an early general election.

At their first non-virtual conference since that election, even the most Johnson-sceptical Tories will salute him for winning it large. Conservatives like power and they will forgive a lot in a man who secured their [largest majority](#) since Margaret Thatcher’s 1987 landslide. Talking of whom, some of Mr Johnson’s more overexcitable under-strappers hailed the ruthlessness of his [recent reshuffle](#) as evidence that he is in “[invincible mode](#)” and plans to outdo the Iron Lady’s 11 years at Number 10. Before they are entirely consumed by hubris, someone at that address ought to brush up on the classics. When victorious Roman generals paraded through the streets before worshipping crowds they were accompanied by a slave whose role was to continuously whisper an ego-checking message in the commander’s ear: “[Memento mori.](#)”

The Tories will be feeling pleased with themselves in Manchester, but they best be careful how much of that self-satisfaction they display to the public when many Britons have been unable to refuel their vehicles or have been forced to squander their time queuing for petrol. Even members of the government refer to an “EFFing” [crisis](#) because the [fuel famine](#) is being

accompanied by surging [energy prices](#) and food [shortages](#). The army has been put [on standby](#). And they used to say that Labour would turn Britain into a version of Venezuela.

This gives fresh force to a familiar question about the character of Mr Johnson and his government. When Dominic Cummings described the man he worked with at Number 10 as “ludicrously” unfit to be prime minister, it was not just non-Tories who found themselves in sudden agreement with Mr Cummings. There are plenty of Tories who think Mr Johnson is just not up to it. “The trouble with Boris is that he’s not very interested in governing,” says one former Tory cabinet minister. “He’s only interested in two things. Being world king and shagging.”

The charge that his regime is fundamentally incompetent, so often made and with so much justice during the pandemic, is back and with a sting. One of the first duties of any government is to ensure that essential goods and services are available to the public. The fuel and food crises are the result of a failure to plan ahead, rooted in an unwillingness to listen to expert warnings about the consequences of a lack of HGV drivers. A senior Tory who was centrally involved in Brexit planning reveals: “They haven’t done the work. We were looking at driver shortages and what to do about them three years ago. Where was the bloody plan to prepare for this?”

Some of the disruption can be attributed to the stress put on supply chains by the pandemic, but business groups agree that it has been greatly exacerbated by the severe rupture in relations with Britain’s closest neighbours that has been Mr Johnson’s signature contribution to our recent history. Shortages both of key workers and essential goods are the result of Britain choosing to shrink its pool of potential labour while abandoning a smooth trading system for one with high and costly levels of friction. After initially denying that these many crises might have something to do with Brexit, ministers have since announced a limited ration of [short-term visas](#) for poultry workers and lorry drivers from the EU, a grudging concession to reality that is too late and too slight to put things right.

The acutest anxiety among Tory MPs is that Britain is heading into what one former cabinet minister calls “a bleak midwinter”, during which empty shelves in the shops will be accompanied by sharply rising food prices. That

will be compounded by [hefty increases](#) in home gas and electricity bills. Inflation has not been a [highly salient issue](#) in British politics since Rishi Sunak was a teenager and Mr Johnson was still married to his first wife. One thing inflation does is make all the decisions government has to make about taxation and spending that much more crunchy and contentious. As for the public, it is probably a decent assumption that they will respond in the same way as voters did when the cost of living was last a hot issue. Which is to say, it will make people unhappy with the government.

The households that will hurt most are the just-about-managing whose family budgets are already tight, many of them exactly the kind of working-class voter who delivered a majority to the [Conservatives](#) at the last election. This cohort, a lot of them first-time Tory supporters in 2019, will also feel the effects of the end of furlough, the hike in national insurance which will eat into pay packets from next spring and the cancellation of the £20 uplift in universal credit which will bite on Wednesday, the very day Mr Johnson makes his conference speech. Boosterish blather about “levelling up” will ring particularly hollow if the living standards of millions of people are being crunched down. This presents a serious test for the government and a significant opportunity for its opponents. Labour’s spokespeople are now under instruction to use the phrase “Tory cost of living crisis” at every available opportunity. This is a sign that Labour, which had a fractious but ultimately invigorating conference in Brighton, is sharpening up its act. “Starmer finally seems to be working out what his targets ought to be,” says one senior Tory who confesses to being mildly impressed by the Labour leader’s performance on the Sussex coast. “That should worry us a bit.”

Of the speeches in Brighton, two stood out as indicators that Labour is becoming more focused on the terrain where the outcome of the next election is most likely to be decided. In an impressive conference debut as shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves placed [her emphasis](#) on the “everyday economy” and the people whose lives and livelihoods depend on it. Her pitch was squarely aimed at the voters, many to be found in provincial towns and small cities, that Labour needs to attract from the Tories. Ms Reeves put her party on the side of hard-pressed workers against rotten employers, on the side of taxpayers against contractors who rip off the public purse and on the side of small and medium-size businesses facing unfair competition from tech giants who don’t make a fair contribution to the societies from which

they profit. It is a compliment to her that a pressure group of northern Tory MPs has since issued [a demand](#) that the government cut business rates in the high street after her pledge to abolish rates altogether.

In a [leader's address](#) that needed to be the best speech of his life and was, Sir Keir Starmer drew on his biography as the son of a skilled toolmaker and a dedicated nurse who rose from an unprivileged background to become director of public prosecutions. He used his life story to define himself as a champion of the dignity of work, the nobility of service and the value of education and against criminals, hard leftists mouthing empty slogans and unpatriotic Tories who encouraged booing of England's World Cup squad. A sharp contrast was drawn with Mr Johnson and a sharp line was drawn under Corbynism. This signalled an intent to engage the Tories on tracts of the political battlefield that Labour abandoned under its previous management.

Even with the government's current problems, it remains exceptionally hard to find a Tory who fears that Labour can win the next election. Even though the conference ended on a high note, Labour people remain daunted by the immense mountain they have to climb to regain power. That said, the contest ought to become more competitive if Labour builds on the successes of its conference and the Tories continue to lurch from one crisis to another while hubristically telling themselves they can never lose. As the turbulence of the past 24 months has demonstrated, a lot can happen and a lot of it unexpected in two years.

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## OpinionPollution

# I've finally sold my old VW diesel – so how do I bolt when I need to now?

[Rachel Cooke](#)



Car drivers pay £12.50 in London's low-emission zone. Photograph: Daniel Berehulak/Getty Images

Sat 2 Oct 2021 10.00 EDT

Last Monday, I sold my car. This had to be done. Later this month, the mayor of London will extend his low-emission zone; my old VW being a diesel, every journey was about to cost me £12.50. But as I kept telling myself, there were other, more virtuous reasons for this mournful visit to the Shoreditch branch of the Philip Schofield theme park that is [webuyanycar.com](http://webuyanycar.com). Whatever else I might have done wrong in my life, at least I'm now no longer contributing to the city's congestion and pollution.

Travelling home on the tube, however, I was overcome by sudden sadness. As a teenager, nothing was more important than passing my test; even now, I still feel weirdly proud of the fact that I can drive and weirdly disdainful of those who can't. I regard driving as a feminist act. It has saved my bacon so many times; locking my car door from the inside late at night has always represented safety to me.

The woman who cannot drive cannot bolt, a word I use in its Mitfordian sense to denote "escape from a male lover of the species", though one does, of course, need something to bolt in. The man at [webuyanycar.com](http://webuyanycar.com), sipping thoughtfully from his Pip Schofield mug, spoke kindly of all the options available to me. But it's hardly the same, is it? Where's the drama in booking a hire car into which to throw all your worldly possessions? How to roar off stagily in something that's parked in the next-but-one street and that has a multicoloured Zipcar logo emblazoned on its side?

## Sibling rivalry



Joan Collins at the London premiere of *Lady Boss* on 1 July. Photograph: James Veysey/REX/Shutterstock

*Lady Boss*, a brilliantly mad (and sad) new film about Jackie Collins to be screened by the BBC next week, has lots to say about feminism, albeit mostly of the leopardskin-jacket-and-athletic-sex variety (the author of *Hollywood Wives*, though seriously into equal pay, was not, we gather, a great one for Kate Millett et al). But not everyone in it comes to praise or even fondly to recall the shoulder pads.

Jackie's big sister, Joan, just can't help herself, telling us, solemn-faced, that after she died in 2015, her sibling was [reincarnated as a fruit fly](#). What? How did she know? Apparently, it was its impressive tenacity that was the giveaway, the insect having doggedly followed poor, grieving Joan all the way from the Polo Lounge at the Beverly Hills hotel to the south of France.

## V&A's new baby



The V&A Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green, London. Photograph: Greg Balfour Evans/Alamy

However well-intentioned, I think the V&A's decision to change the name of the Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green to [Young V&A](#) – and to banish its historic collections of toys to V&A East – may be a mistake.

Reason one: while all of us have a childhood, not everyone is young. Reason two: such a name suggests that the V&A's other outposts are only for the old, which they're not. Reason three: Young V&A sounds so contingent and temporary – something, perhaps, to be grown out of. Reason four: in my experience, children know instinctively when they are being patronised and all this talk of "[nurturing the innovators of the future](#)" does sound a touch condescending to me. Reason five: no one should discount the value of (ostensible) boredom.

That sensation, almost as much as its opposite, can set a small brain working. As a child, dragged around a museum by a teacher or parent, I was always looking for the least dull thing, which is how, against all expectation, I would sometimes find an interesting, exciting thing.

Rachel Cooke is an Observer columnist

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**Observer comment cartoon**

**Conservatives**

## **Boris Johnson saves Christmas again – cartoon**

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[Opinion](#)[Sarah Everard](#)

## You can't opt in and out of taking violence against women seriously

[Catherine Bennett](#)



Sarah Everard: will her death actually effect change? Photograph: Metropolitan Police/Reuters

Sun 3 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

After the heartbreaking family statements and accounts of [Sarah Everard's abduction and murder](#), it seemed unlikely a judicial summing up could exacerbate the distress. But somehow the judge achieved it.

Everard was, Lord Justice Fulford said, “a wholly blameless victim”. Ah. The other sort – the woman who contributes to her own death at the hands of a pitiless stranger – evidently lives on in the mind of the senior judiciary. Forty years after the police and prosecution virtue-rated victims of the mass murderer Peter Sutcliffe, the criminal justice system applauds a female victim who lives up to the highest patriarchal standards. Sir Michael Havers said at Sutcliffe’s trial that “perhaps the saddest part of the case” was that “the last six attacks were on totally respectable women”.

After Sutcliffe’s death last year, West Yorkshire police apologised for similar ugliness. But even in the 1970s women seem to have been spared the suggestion that some police officers were well disposed, personally, towards the murderer.

Turning to the mitigating arguments, Fulford acknowledged of Couzens that “some of his colleagues have spoken supportively of him”. We already knew that Couzens’s nickname, as a serving officer, was “the rapist”. We learned months ago that he had been reported for indecent exposure in 2015, then for twice repeating this offence days before the murder, remaining in his job. But only thanks to the judge did we discover that even after he was known to have kidnapped and killed, the depraved Couzens – with his prostitutes and violent pornography – enjoyed support from colleagues. Are they among the officers now being investigated?

There’s little reason, given recent police statements, to hope so. After months during which the Metropolitan police could have enhanced safeguarding, addressed risks and even been ready with a self-lacerating review, all it could contribute after the trial were lines about wrong ’uns and lessons learned, its own great shock and sadness and the correct procedure

for women needing to distinguish between arrest and abduction. The kindest thing that can be said about Cressida Dick, given [the evidence](#) of employee mistreatment of women tolerated in police forces, is that this misogyny is so entrenched as to have defied any attempts she may have made to expunge it.

Female ex-officers have been speaking about the difficulty of reporting male misbehaviour, including domestic abuse, in this male-dominated culture and about the likely pariah status for women who try.

Women who value women-only spaces – where they feel safe from male violence – Lammy characterised as 'hoarding rights'.

As in March, when women gathering to mourn Sarah Everard were [set upon by male officers](#), this harrowing case has aroused collective concern. Again, men remind other men, using the hashtag #shewasonlywalkinghome, what it must be like for a young woman to be always glancing behind her, recrossing the road, carrying keys in her fist. Again, there's an appalled interest, for all the world as if it had been long hidden, in the decades of harassment that begin for women in puberty and cease only with middle age or police instructions (unmodified since Sutcliffe's murders in Leeds) to stay off the streets when especially dangerous men are at large.

David Lammy, the shadow justice secretary, was among the prominent men tweeting their abhorrence: "Enough is enough. We need to treat violence against women and girls as seriously as terrorism."

Sometimes, you gather, it's acceptable to discuss endemic male violence against women and girls and sometimes it's not. Just before the Everard verdict, Lammy had angrily dismissed women exercised by this very subject as "dinosaurs". Women who value women-only spaces – where they feel safe from male violence – he characterised as "hoarding rights".

Lammy, along with some Labour colleagues, simultaneously denounces male violence, then, taking victim-blaming to as yet unprecedented levels, is furious with any women concerned about losing the few places that individuals he depicts as terrorists can't access.

These single-sex spaces – from refuges to hospital wards and rest rooms – historically protected women by excluding men where women were particularly vulnerable. #Notallmen, of course, but that's safeguarding. “Preventative measures,” as Professor Kathleen Stock writes in *[Material Girls](#)*, “are usually by necessity broad-brush. They aren't supposed to be a character reference for a group as a whole.”

But there are now questions about their survival, partly because of their increasing, arbitrary [replacement by gender-neutral spaces](#), partly because of possible changes to [gender-recognition law](#). These could, as an unintended consequence, leave women – both trans and not – with almost nowhere they don't have to glance over their shoulders. As Alessandra Asteriti and Rebecca Bull argued in *[Modern Law Review](#)*: “Opening spaces to those who self-declare their sex and who are perceived as males” will “embolden male opportunists to enter single-sex spaces, reducing their risk-mitigation role”.

But public debate has been minimal. Not least because some of the same people who, unsatisfied by “bad apple” excuses, demand to know what safeguards prevent the police from harbouring another Couzens, will also scorn any questions about what, in future, could prevent the same sort of opportunist from appearing in women-only changing rooms. The implications of everyday harassment, along with the [data on male violence](#) and killings such as Everard's and [Sabina Nessa's](#), are liable to be ridiculed in this different context as invented “bathroom bogeymen”.

And some fears might, it's true, be disproportionate. Some threats might be, if not ineradicable, made manageable. Maybe it's easy to distinguish between decent and indecent exposure. Or, as Kathleen Stock proposes, the introduction of third spaces could be the best answer to conflicting interests around dignity and safety.

But first we need men like Lammy, with his admirable insistence that male violence against women and girls be taken seriously, to explain why, in that case, women's interest in personal safety can be disparaged – in terms almost worthy of a Metropolitan police officer – as beneath his notice.

- Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist
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[Observer letters](#)[Gene editing](#)

## **Letters: gene editing will just perpetuate disastrous factory farming**



Pigs created by gene editing. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian  
Sun 3 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

A quotation leapt to mind when reading “[Gene editing ‘would allow us to create hardier farm breeds](#)” (News): “For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong” (HL Mencken). Application of magic bullet “solutions” has got our species into many disastrous situations, from Australian cane toad waves to an explosion in obesity linked to the prescription of low-fat diets.

To support environmentally disastrous factory farming by modifying animals to resist one disease would only invite the spread of more pathogens that threaten humans and other animals.

A simple flick of a genetic switch in a giant monoculture crop to enable greater drought resistance would have widespread impacts on soil ecologies, water and nutrient cycles, promote continuation of disastrous farming practices and more “superweeds”.

Food security and a healthy planet and human population demand an end to trying to cosh nature into submission and instead building our knowledge and understanding of natural systems, innovation that builds healthy soils, increases genetic diversity within crops and animals, the use of a wide range of crop species and an end to the food waste of factory farming.

**Natalie Bennett, Green peer**

House of Lords, London SW1

Rather than back gene editing to produce disease resistant livestock, regulatory permission that encourages investment in and production of cultured meat could deliver far greater benefits. Why on earth continue to pursue developments that support environmentally damaging, intensive livestock production when “clean meat” grown from painless biopsies taken from a few pampered animals can deliver cheap protein at the same time as reducing deforestation for soy production, pollution of our rivers, CO2 emissions, animal cruelty and food miles, as well as creating a better working environment.

**Christopher Price**, chief executive, Rare Breeds Survival Trust

Kenilworth, Warwickshire

## **Plight of mothers in jail**

Reading about the 18-year-old woman on remand having to give birth alone in a cell after her requests for help were ignored, and the subsequent death of her daughter, one wonders how much longer the jailing of pregnant women and young mothers can be justified on safety and moral grounds (“[Prison guards get counselling after baby dies in cell – but not mother](#)”, News).

**Jane Brighton**

Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

## **What did John McDonnell do?**

John McDonnell accuses Keir Starmer of “reaching for the Blairite playbook” (“[Dump the New Labour playbook, Keir, and set out your programme for radical change](#)”, Comment). Through being in office, Tony Blair’s Labour introduced the minimum wage, invested massively in schools and the NHS and reduced inequality. What did Messrs McDonnell and Corbyn achieve, apart from losing two general elections?

**Stuart Skye**

Oxford

## Understanding abuse

Lisa Bachelor asks what can be done to make Britain safer for women (“[When will women feel safe on our streets?](#)”, special report). Sexual harassment of, mainly, women and girls has escalated, and recent cases of femicide have triggered responses of fear and outrage, with calls for changes in the law and police responses to these crimes. These changes are necessary, as is the need for schools to introduce awareness of the harm caused by abuse and harassment and bullying. But increased charging and sentencing will not work unless we also address possible causes.

What we should be asking is: why do men and boys carry out abusive and violent assaults on women and girls? In cases where the victim is unknown to the assailant, does the perpetrator have a history of watching pornography or other videos depicting violence against women? When the victim is known to the perpetrator, is there a history of abuse and violence in the assailant’s childhood?

**Pat Brandwood**

Broadstone, Dorset

## In Rubens’ name

It came as no surprise to me that new computer analysis of the National Gallery’s prized *Samson and Delilah* shows a 91% probability that it is not actually by Rubens (“[Was famed Samson and Delilah really painted by Rubens? No, says AI](#)”, News). As far back as 1992, with fellow artists Steve Harvey and Sian Hopkinson, I submitted a report to the gallery laying out clear stylistic, technical and documentary evidence against the painting. This

report is available, along with a new video summarising the case, at [www.inRubensName.org](http://www.inRubensName.org).

Our research then and subsequently has been sidelined and often ridiculed. The National Gallery has too often fallen back on the authority of a small group of Rubens experts, while ignoring the commonsense evidence in plain sight. Surely there can now be little doubt that this contentious work, bought for a record sum by the gallery with public money, was a costly mistake. But after three decades of obfuscation, what is really at stake here is the credibility of the art establishment as a whole.

In 1997, the gallery promised to arrange a public debate on this painting. There is an opportunity now for them to finally deliver on that promise, with the openness and transparency we expect from all our public institutions.

**Euphrosyne Doxiadis**

Athens

## Feminists, work together

Sonia Sodha's article was a blast of fresh air ("[‘White feminists’ are under attack from other women. There can only be one winner – men](#)", Comment). We deeply need such voices to take issue with the vogue for making women – and white feminists in particular – the source of all ills. Rafia Zakaria's book *Against White Feminism* exemplifies this unappetising trend.

Over the past 40 years I've been involved in a plethora of feminist activities, from raising funds for women and girls' education in developing countries to establishing a rape crisis centre in Sheffield. And I know many other women doing the same. Using guilt and blame to paralyse ordinary women like me – grassroots activists who bring about radical advances – is so counter-productive that it's tragic. As Sodha says, the one thing attacking women like us "will never ever do is change the world for the better". We'll continue to try to bring about that change, even if we have to brave Zakaria's contempt and ridicule in the process.

**Jo Adams**

Abingdon, Oxfordshire

# Mistaken identity

I genuinely expected the article “[Elite v plebs’: Oxford rivalries of boys who would never grow up to be men](#)” (News) to be about the composition of our current government.

**Jennifer Mirdamadi**

Liverpool

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**For the record****UK news**

## For the record

Sun 3 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

An article said a lawsuit filed in Delaware by the State of Rhode Island's pension fund named all the members of Facebook's board as "plaintiffs". In fact, they were named as defendants ([Has Mark Zuckerberg's total control of Facebook turned into a liability?](#), 26 September, the New Review, page 25).

A review of Fintan O'Toole's *We Don't Know Ourselves* referred to Ireland's population in 1961 being "at an all-time low of 2.1 million". As O'Toole's book noted, the figure that year was 2.8 million ([Ireland as it imagines itself](#), 19 September, New Review, page 40).

Penguin Random House launched WriteNow, a programme to foster under-represented writers, in 2016, not last year, as an article said. The headline of that article [Move over David Walliams... hunt on to diversify kids' books](#) (26 September, page 30) was amended after publication online to better reflect the report's focus on a mentoring scheme to support writers from under-represented groups in accessing publishing alongside established authors.

A travel feature incorrectly placed the Crieff Hydro hotel in Ayrshire, rather than Perthshire ([Teen spirit](#), 26 September, Observer Magazine, page 51).

Attack of the giant cucumber: a recipe instructed that a 600g cucumber be "cut into short pieces, about 6m in length". That should have said 6cm ([Peach, cucumber and peanut salad](#), 26 September, Observer Magazine, page 35).

Other recently amended articles include:

[Sustainable is the new black: top editors launch new-wave fashion titles](#)

'Something magical happens': the cameras helping refugee children to heal

Nigel Slater's recipes for hazelnut biscuits, baked damsons and sweetcorn fritters

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

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[Opinion](#)[Transgender](#)

## Shouldn't progressives be in favour of people wanting to speak their mind?

[Nick Cohen](#)

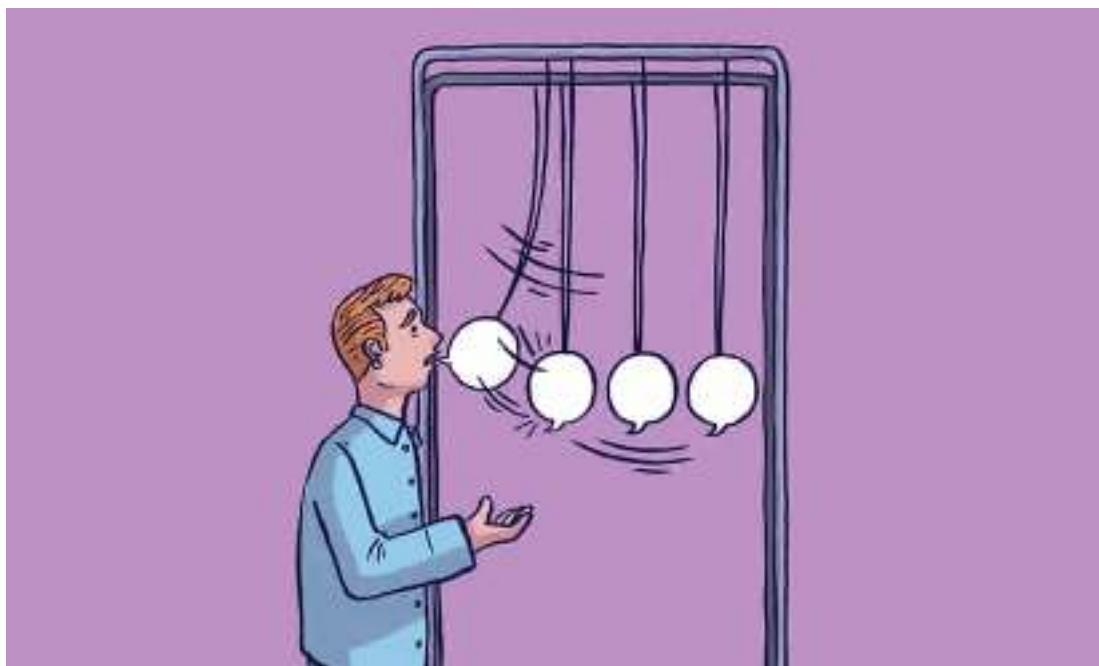


Illustration by Dominic McKenzie.

Sat 2 Oct 2021 13.00 EDT

Where once the left fought the bosses in the workers' name, today its loudest voices lobby bosses to police workers. If you are trying to understand why this section of the left is hated, its authoritarianism is a large part of the answer. In the popular imagination, "progressives" are people who tell you what to say and how to say it and will demand your employer fires you if you refuse. The bossy left has become the bosses' left.

Their predecessors had a trade unionist mentality. They instinctively sided with the employee against the employer whether they agreed with the employee's politics or not. The new left understands that real power lies with management in societies such as the UK and US, where unions barely exist in the private sector. Their emblematic radical is not a strike leader or a feminist agitator but a diversity consultant who convinces HR to pay her or him to berate staff who cannot argue back.

It's a cliche to say that modern institutions live in fear of the "woke mob". I'm sure the fear exists, but it is hardly debilitating. Progressives pay the corporate elite a compliment by acknowledging that power lies with CEOs. Indeed, they heighten corporate control by giving managers a new right to regulate political beliefs and minor linguistic failings.

Bosses must be grateful for the escape progressives offer them from their responsibilities. If an organisation is dominated by white people, or underpays women, its managers must be to blame. When the Centre for Social Investigation at Oxford University found that applicants with names that marked them as members of an ethnic minority were far less likely to receive a positive response from employers than applicants with traditional white British names, it concluded the unconscious bias and micro-aggressions the diversity consultants are determined to stamp out were irrelevant. What held ethnic minorities back was the "overt and conscious racism" of people at the top, with the power to hire and fire.

As it is a familiar experience for contacts to tell me in confidence that they are frightened of speaking their minds, while pretending in public that

nothing is wrong, the canard that cancel culture does not exist needs to be tackled.

Last week, an [inquiry](#) for the UK's sports councils described how athletes and administrators had been reduced to "swearing, shouting, crying and anxiety" by the demand that they admit trans competitors with the physical advantages that male puberty confers to women's sports.

They thought that [fair and safe competition](#) would be impossible but "were afraid to say in public what they privately believed". The researchers spoke of athletes who "had been threatened with sanction or disciplinary action if they spoke out". Many were with sporting agencies that adopted leftish positions and "felt they had no option but to remain silent in order to keep their job". What kind of twisted progressive politics leaves tearful sportswomen frightened of speaking their minds? And what kind of delusional progressive politician believes the public will vote for it?

Fear works. You normalise an idea by making opponents afraid to contradict you

The Cambridge philosopher Arif Ahmed was [honoured](#) last month by Index on Censorship for taking on his university authorities when he insisted on a clear and liberal definition of free speech. In a secret ballot, dons gave overwhelming support to his [proposals](#) that academics and students should be free to disagree in the most robust terms as long as they "tolerated" each other and did not seek to ban or intimidate opponents. Before his motion could be debated, however, Ahmed had to persuade 25 academics to second it. He told me it took six weeks to find colleagues willing to face the career risks an open endorsement of intellectual freedom would bring.

Fear works. You normalise an idea by making opponents afraid to contradict you. If all that were being attempted were the co-option of private companies, state bureaucracies, academia, publishing, the arts and the liberal media into a serious campaign against racism and misogyny, most progressives would say the ends justify the means and move on. But – and surely I do not need to spell this out – when the means include the suppression of debate you open the door to every variety of grifter and

fanatic. Employees and children are forced to take scientifically worthless [implicit bias tests](#). Progressive institutions are too scared to defend the material reality of biological sex difference, without which the theory of evolution, with its emphasis on sexual selection, could not exist. Like creationists, they have locked themselves into anti-Darwinian obscurantism. But unlike the religious right, they cannot claim that God made them do it.

Institutions and activists feed off each other. Institutions fear denunciations from activists if they do not censor or sack. Activists fear denunciation from more radical activists if they do not push their demands to the extreme. Institutions have no incentive to resist because the organisations that might once have tempered their power have fallen silent or switched sides.

The University and College Union [advised academics](#) to vote against defending their own intellectual freedom at Cambridge. Its leaders did not worry that they had lost touch with their members when they ignored their recommendations. The Society of Authors' [mission statement](#) says it will "oppose in the strongest terms any attempt to stifle or control the author's voice whether by censorship, imprisonment, execution, hate speech or trolling". Yet when JK Rowling faced [waves of murder](#) and rape threats, its chair, Joanne Harris, said that, although she did not approve, we should [shed few tears](#) for Rowling. "People with power, money and influence do not experience the same effect from online abuse as those with less power," she opined as she diminished the threats of violence routine for women in public life.

The maintenance of the progressive consensus overcomes all other principles. As I said, fear works but only if all institutions play along. Anyone who wishes the Conservatives gone must worry that the Tory party will soon say that it at least does not think "women" is a dirty word and it will not allow workers to be punished for speaking out of turn.

No Twitter mob or HR exec can monitor voters. In the privacy of the polling booth, no one can hear them scream.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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## Headlines monday 27 september 2021

- [Supply chain crisis Boris Johnson to consider using army to supply petrol stations](#)
- [Live UK suspends competition law to get fuel to petrol stations after panic buying](#)
- ['Dead end' EU lorry drivers will not help Britain ease its fuel crisis, union says](#)
- [Energy crisis Stanlow oil refinery 'on brink of collapse' as crisis talks continue](#)

## Supply chain crisis

# Boris Johnson to consider using army to supply petrol stations



Sorry out of use signs on the pump at the BP service station in Yaxley, near Peterborough in Cambridgeshire. Photograph: Paul Marriott/REX/Shutterstock

*[Aubrey Allegretti](#)*

*[@breeallegretti](#)*

Sun 26 Sep 2021 15.28 EDT

Hundreds of soldiers could be scrambled to deliver fuel to petrol stations running dry across the country due to panic buying and a shortage of drivers under an emergency plan expected to be considered by [Boris Johnson](#) on Monday.

The prime minister will gather senior members of the cabinet to scrutinise “Operation Escalin” after [BP](#) admitted that a third of its petrol stations had

run out of the main two grades of fuel, while the Petrol Retailers Association (PRA), which represents almost 5,500 independent outlets, said 50% to 90% of its members had reported running out. It predicted that the rest would soon follow.

The developments led to growing fears that the UK could be heading into a second “[winter of discontent](#)” and warnings that shelves [could be emptier than usual](#) in the run-up to Christmas.

In a bid to prevent the crisis from deepening further, ministers including the business secretary Kwasi Kwarteng, transport secretary Grant Shapps and home secretary Priti Patel gathered for a midday meeting on Sunday to discuss options – including Operation Escalin.

Conceived years ago during the planning for a no-deal [Brexit](#), it would mean hundreds of soldiers being drafted in to drive a reserve fleet of 80 tankers. It is understood that it would take up to three weeks to fully implement, because some of those mobilised may already be on other deployments and others could be reservists. Escalin was touted as an option last week, but government sources downplayed the chance of its activation.

Late on Sunday night, Kwarteng also announced that fuel firms would be temporarily excluded from the Competition Act for the purposes of sharing information and optimising supply. He admitted there had been “some issues with supply chains”, but insisted there was still “plenty of fuel at refineries and terminals”. Officials said the move would make it easier for firms to “share information, so that they can more easily prioritise the delivery of fuel to the parts of the country and strategic locations that are most in need”.

The Escalin and other proposals will be put to Johnson on Monday afternoon, in a meeting where ministers are also expected to discuss more immediate solutions to try to influence people’s behaviour and put an end to the current levels of panic buying.

Ministers are exasperated because they think that the true magnitude of fuel shortages would have been tiny if the public were acting normally, and the HGV driver shortage would have only had a marginal effect, but media reports have prompted queues outside forecourts across the country. The

PRA said demand at one service station had risen by 500% on Saturday compared with last week.

A source suggested that a high level of shortages will last at least another five days – and could go on even longer if people’s behaviour does not change. They called the situation a “catch-22”, because by making any interventions, the government could end up exacerbating the problem: “The more we seem to react to this, the more we end up driving it. But if we don’t react, it just carries on. We’re almost generating our own crisis.”

The shortage has also had major knock-on effects that ministers feel need urgent remedying, with teachers and doctors unable to fill up their tank to drive to school or hospital. The blunt communications strategy of insisting there is no lack of fuel is likely to be shifted to urging people to be mindful of others when buying petrol.

Attention is also turning to Christmas. Kate Martin of the Traditional Farm-fresh Turkey Association (TFTA) said the UK could face a [“national shortage” of turkeys](#) in the run-up to December.

The TFTA, which represents producers of high-end free-range turkeys, said it was “100% caused by a labour shortage” due to post-Brexit immigration rules, meaning “a whole host” of the workforce is “no longer available for us to use on a seasonal basis”.

The British Retail Consortium also said moves to relax immigration rules to fix supply chain issues was “too little, too late” for Christmas.

Andrew Opie, the group’s director of food and sustainability policy, predicted to the BBC that during the festive season, shoppers would see “less choice, less availability, possibly shorter shelf life as well, which is really disappointing because this could have been averted”.

Jim McMahon, Labour’s shadow transport secretary, claimed the government’s solution of streamlining HGV tests and [granting about 5,000 extra visas](#) for drivers and another 5,000 for poultry workers was “not good

enough”. He said if ministers did not do more, “shelves will continue to be bare, with medicines not delivered and Christmas ruined for the nation”.

A Tory MP, David Morris, spelled out the scale of the challenge facing the government. He said: “I can remember the winter of discontent and I remember what was building up to it and this to me feels very, very reminiscent.”

Morris told the Guardian: “We’re not anywhere near that situation yet, but there are perfect storm analogies coming along that could put us into that territory.” He stressed it was a “historic problem” that ministers were trying to address, but admitted the pressure Covid was likely to put on the NHS this winter and the looming end of the universal credit uplift would make it a challenging winter for many.

Shapps on Sunday urged people to “be sensible” and blamed “one of the road haulage associations” for what he called [a manufactured crisis](#), suggesting on Sky News that the group had leaked details from a meeting last week about driver shortages at fuel firms. However, the Road Haulage Association branded it a “disgraceful attack” concocted to “divert attention away” from the government’s handling of the issue.

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**Business live**

**Business**

# UK fuel suppliers expect crisis to ease soon, as petrol prices rise and disruption continues – as it happened

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## Supply chain crisis

# EU lorry drivers will not help Britain ease its fuel crisis, union says



Fuel tankers at a Shell oil depot in Kingsbury, Warwickshire. The UK government says it will allow up to 5,000 EU HGV drivers to work up to Christmas. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

*Peter Walker Political correspondent*

*@peterwalker99*

Mon 27 Sep 2021 05.53 EDT

HGV drivers from the [European Union](#) will not come to the UK on short-term contracts to ease the fuel crisis under government proposals announced at the weekend due to poor working conditions in the industry, a union official in Europe has warned.

“The EU workers we speak to will not go to the UK for a short-term visa to help the UK out of the shit they created themselves,” said Edwin Atema, the

head of research and enforcement at the Netherlands-based FNV union, which represents drivers across the bloc.

“In the short term, I think that will be a dead end,” he told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme. “I think some kind of Marshall plan would be needed to drag the whole industry back to the surface.”

Among a number of emergency solutions being considered to ease the supply chain crisis, most notably seen in long queues for petrol, ministers have said they will [allow up to 5,000 EU HGV drivers](#) to work in the UK up to Christmas.

Another plan, expected to be considered by Boris Johnson on Monday, would be [for hundreds of soldiers](#) to be used to deliver fuel to petrol stations running out of supplies amid panic buying and a shortage of drivers.

But Atema said the plan for EU drivers, even with the offer of high pay, ignored the fact that too many drivers could not accept the conditions that came with this, for example needing to pay for their own accommodation on rest days.

“Pay is an important area, but it’s not the only area,” he said, adding the industry across Europe had been “sick” long before Covid and [Brexit](#), with companies viewing drivers “as simply an extension of the vehicle”.

The industry was “plagued by exploitation, by irresponsible multinationals who dragged down prices, which ended with drivers voting with their feet, simply leaving the industry”, he said.

Regulation was “not even worth the paper it’s written on, because there is no enforcement, and no interest to enforce it down the supply chain”, Atema added.

He said: “It’s not like you can offer a visa, offer a good payment, and the issue will be solved. There is a whole range of issues behind [it]. Even the use of toilet facilities in the UK, and of course the rest of [Europe](#), is an issue.”

Ministers are considering a range of options after BP said a third of its petrol stations had run out of the main two grades of fuel, while the Petrol Retailers Association (PRA), which represents almost 5,500 independent outlets, said 50% to 90% of its members had reported running out. It predicted the rest would soon follow.

It has led to growing fears the UK could be heading into a second “[winter of discontent](#)” and warnings that shelves [could be emptier than usual](#) in the run-up to Christmas.

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[Essar Energy](#)

## Stanlow oil refinery ‘on brink of collapse’ as crisis talks continue



The Stanlow refinery supplies about a sixth of the UK's road fuel.  
Photograph: Eryrie/Alamy

[Graeme Wearden](#)

Sun 26 Sep 2021 11.37 EDT

The UK's second biggest oil refinery is locked in talks with tax officials over a deferred tax bill amid reports that it could be on the brink of collapse.

Essar Energy, which owns the Stanlow oil refinery in Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, is negotiating with HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) over a £223m VAT payment, delayed because of the pandemic.

[The Stanlow oil refinery](#) supplies about a sixth of Britain's road fuel, and is owned by the billionaire brothers Shashi and Ravi Ruia, through their

company Essar Oil UK.

Essar [Oil](#) UK (EOUK) used the government's pandemic VAT deferral scheme last year, which allowed businesses to delay tax repayments. It still owes £223m, and was reportedly due to start repayments this week.

Essar says it is in positive discussions with [HMRC](#) for a short extension to its "time-to-pay (TTP) arrangement" agreed earlier this year, having repaid £547m of the £770m originally deferred.

"All companies under the TTP have been given until January 2022 to meet their commitments. EOUK had agreed to an accelerated schedule to make this payment. However, the recovery from the pandemic has been slower than predicted," the company said, adding that it hopes for a resolution soon.

Essar Oil UK, which is being advised by EY, also insists it has made "considerable progress" to strengthen its financial position and agree new financing.

"As a result of that work over the past few months, EOUK has \$1.1bn [£800m] in liquidity secured. Further, the company has now returned to Ebitda positive [earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation] and is therefore in a much stronger position to weather the continued challenge presented by the pandemic," it said.

But [the Sunday Times reported](#) that the government was on alert in case Stanlow collapsed, and that it could go into insolvency if it could not raise more funds. If that happened, the refinery would be likely to be taken on by the official receiver, to keep the refinery running.

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Essar Oil UK said Stanlow was operating as normal during the current fuel crisis, and supplying fuel to north-west petrol stations as normal, [as panic buying hits forecourts across the country](#).

Since early August, the company has increased its daily vehicle shifts from 52 to more than 70, and is aiming to increase deliveries to more than 80 by

the end of October, it said.

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## 2021.09.27 - Spotlight

- 'You have to be a control freak' Mike Leigh on 50 years of film-making
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Interview

## **‘You have to be a control freak’: Mike Leigh on 50 years of film-making**

[Zoe Williams](#)



Mike Leigh: ‘I’m creating a different culture.’ Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian



[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Mon 27 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Interviewing Mike Leigh is a daunting prospect, not because of his intimidatingly central plinth in the pantheon of British cinema – well, maybe a bit of that – but because he is extremely exacting. You just couldn't work the way he does – his scripts are improvised, not written, resting on collaboration, trust, instinct, bravery – without weighing every word, cross-examining every sentence. Otherwise it would just be baggy. He takes this perfectionism into every interview, every conversation: [Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh](#), a close textual and visual reading of his life's work by Amy Raphael, reissued next month, bristles with this energy.

Then there's the incredible range of his output: since 1971, he has not just been making films and TV dramas, but breaking and recasting the expectations of form and genre. It bugs him when [people always talk about the same few works](#) – Abigail's Party, Life Is Sweet, Secrets & Lies – and neglect the films of which he is equally proud – [Peterloo](#), or Meantime, a magnificent 1983 exploration of the hard edges of Thatcherism, which maybe didn't launch, but certainly put a rocket under, the careers of Tim Roth and Gary Oldman. The British Film Institute (BFI) has a retrospective this autumn that includes every film he has ever made – “including the Play

for Todays”, he says, as if the world has finally recognised that you have to watch them all, like film-Pokémon – and a remastered Naked, which will go on general release in November.

In person, he is so warm and curious that, even though it’s true about his unsparing nature, you don’t really feel unspared; it wasn’t until I read back the interview transcript that I realised how often I got told off. I wonder if the success and originality of his method, going to the brink of an actor’s mind for the intuitively truest line, might be rooted in this: people who can be frank in an affectionate way can say almost anything.



Jane Horrocks, Timothy Spall and Claire Skinner in *Life Is Sweet*, 1991.  
Photograph: Channel Four/Allstar

We meet in central London in Soho House, the private members’ club on the same street as his erstwhile office, which he recently gave up because of the pandemic. Leigh loves and hates the fact that even now, at 78, with three Baftas and a Palme d’Or, and countless nominations for every other prize, he is still the scrabbly outsider he was when he started out. He hates it because it means he really has to sweat blood to raise money, yet loves it as a badge of his independence.

“My late producer, Simon Channing Williams, dead for about 10 years, would come back from meetings with potential backers, Americans, and say: ‘They don’t care that there’s no script, they don’t care that you can’t say what it’s about, but they will insist on the name, meaning an American movie star.’ And we’d walk away. Every project I’ve ever done has been embarked upon on the watertight understanding: leave me to it, and everybody involved, and we’ll deliver this work.

“Whether it’s been historical and we could say: ‘This is about Gilbert and Sullivan’ [Topsy Turvy]. Or: ‘This is about the Peterloo massacre.’ Or whether – like nearly everything else – it’s been: ‘We can’t tell you anything about it, just give us some money.’ Provided they accepted those conditions, and they have, it [the relationship between Leigh and his backers] has not been an issue.”

Just that point on casting is a radical act: when producers want a big name, with a few exceptions, that means one thing. Movie stars have to be movie-star handsome; in Leigh’s films, sometimes actors are beautiful, sometimes they aren’t, and sometimes they are, but only from some angles. Timothy Spall would never be described as a classic leading man, yet he has been the hero, to the extent that these ensemble works have heroes, in six Leigh films. It’s hard to imagine Abigail’s Party, the exploration of class and suburbia that rocked 1977 in mirth and dispute, peopled by perfect, symmetrical faces.

It’s hard not to connect this to the depth of the performances in Leigh’s work, not because ordinary-looking people are better at acting than beautiful ones, but because it’s just a numbers game: you have a much larger, more varied pool of talent if not everyone has to have a ski slope nose. Photogenia, Leigh says, “is one culture, and I’m creating a different culture. I’m concerned with real people out there in the streets.”



Alison Steadman in *Abigail's Party*, 1977. Photograph: Everett Collection/Alamy

The debate about *Abigail's Party* – it was mainly critically acclaimed, the argument more of an internecine playwright-on-playwright skirmish – was whether or not it conveyed “rancid disdain, for it is a prolonged jeer, twitching with genuine hatred, about the dreadful ... lower middle classes”, in the memorable phrase of Dennis Potter. Does Leigh view suburbia with contempt? Are his portrayals of the working class patronising? What about his own background? Did he even belong on the kitchen-sink or angry young man scene when his father was a doctor, and therefore he was middle class and grew up nowhere near the margins?

These charges have ebbed and flowed for the past 40 years, and he has always greeted them a little irascibly. We come at the conversation circuitously, chatting about Michael Ashcroft’s biography of Keir Starmer: “The poor bugger was being accused of the most ridiculous things.” (Ashcroft’s fundamental charge is that Starmer isn’t as working class as he makes out.) “I think I resonate with some aspects of that. I’ve got a long history of being accused of pretension – that I was affecting to be working class. It so happens that I grew up in a very working-class area, because we lived over my dad’s surgery. And I went to a very working-class school,

Salford grammar. But I've never affected to be anything other than what I am.”

I've got a long history of being accused of pretension. But I've never affected to be anything other than what I am

Irresistibly, when there's a retrospective of this depth, one is drawn to consider not just the films alone or their trajectory, but also how they fell at the time they were released, and how they are likely to be interpreted today.

Naked, released in 1993, was the focus of a complicated ire for its gender politics. The film centres on Johnny, played by David Thewlis at his most committed, who roams about, hating everyone, but women more than men; he is violent, pretentious, but also powerfully disappointed. The crushing sadness of the character almost redeems him, but in a complicated way. You couldn't draw a neat map of which bits have been redeemed.

There was a degree of feminist backlash – one writer hated it because she found the female characters doormatty, and many were angered by the sexual violence (there's also a rapist landlord). Both then and watching it again now, I didn't object to the misogynist violence – it's problematic when it's done aesthetically, or erotically, not when it's the unlovely brutality in a story *about* misogynist violence – but I could see the ambiguities that would at least open up a discussion about where its moral compass was.

Leigh can't see that at all. “There was a screening at [the north London cinema] Screen on the Green. And I went on to do a Q&A and I got jumped on by a bunch of feminists. What they weren't ready for were Katrin Cartlidge and Lesley Sharp and Claire Skinner and Deborah MacLaren, all of whom were in the film, all of whom are nothing if not feminists. You couldn't make the film with actresses who were not feminists. They jumped up and gave them a bloody mouthful. That was in 1993. At the end of the decade, there was none of that. I think people now will get what it really is. I think they'll read the central character, Johnny, in an intelligent way.”



Naked, 1993. Photograph: Channel Four/Allstar

Leigh now rationalises his improvised scripts in a wry, workmanlike way. “Yes, it is about going on a creative journey to discover what it is that you are doing. That isn’t to say people who write conventional scripts don’t do that. Except that when it comes to movies in particular, as we know, you can write the most brilliant script in the world, but then everybody else is there to fuck it up. So they’re going to collaborate whether you like it or not. You might as well do it deliberately.” He treads a delicate path between ceding himself utterly to that process, and being completely in charge of it. “To say I’m not a control freak at all would be preposterous. You have to be a control freak,” he says. Yet he never talks about any of his films at any length without mentioning a particular performance, or the set designer (Alison Chitty was his mainstay), or someone else, always by name.

Where he’s not delicate at all is in his hatred of rules and compromise, which sounds fearless turned upon a faceless executive producer, but different – less fearless, a bit Daily Express – when turned on wokeness, although the word itself doesn’t come up. “Not wanting to drag myself into the quagmire of these issues, I am predictably irritated by box-ticking on political correctness. I’m concerned about young film-makers. They have a hell of a bloody time, being told what they can and can’t do, that they ought to have different kinds of people working with them, different subject

matters. Nobody disagrees about diversity. But when it becomes prescriptive, that's dangerous."

I was quite surprised, since the question I thought I'd asked, obviously not very well, was about Britishness, his long fascination with the minute differences in class and outlook that become cavernous when characters are juxtaposed. It's striking how often his films have a greater impact abroad – in France and the US, in particular – than in the UK, but he doesn't find that especially interesting. "My work is rooted here, in our culture, but that's not what it's primarily about. It's about humanity."

Secrets & Lies, which is an incredible portrait of an adopted optometrist tracing her birth mother, did especially well in the US and, commercially and internationally, is his most successful film. "As much as anything, that's because tracing your birth is illegal in 50 of the 52 United States. In many countries, it remains illegal. So it's not just about me and my brand, it's about the specifics." Just as the wind is in his sails on a film that did particularly well – [his 2014 painter-biopic Mr Turner](#), for example, saw some of the best reviews of his career – partway through, he'll recall some work that was less well received, or languished in partial obscurity, and make the diversion to talk about that.



Marianne Jean-Baptiste and Brenda Blethyn in Secrets & Lies, 1996.  
Photograph: Channel 4 Films/Allstar

He sees his films as though they are his children – not with a progenitor’s narcissism, that they are all perfect, but rather that it genuinely troubles him when the world prefers some over others. The intimate, familial atmosphere that he brings to his creative process might seem to make sense of how many of his leading actors he has been married to – well, one, Alison Steadman, and a long-term relationship with Marion Bailey – but actually the relationships are the normal bit; the unusual bit is how well he can work with people he’s married, during and after. “I’m very professional. They’re very professional. We talk the language of what we’re doing. And, of course, the process might sometimes be between me and the actress, but most of it is about everyone working together.” As if to land this point, he adds: “I worked with Alison Steadman after we ceased to be together.” And then concludes: “It’s not a very relevant matter,” although whether he’s talking to me or himself is not completely plain.

Covid wrecked his recent projects – there is no way he could have made “socially distanced” work. “It takes time to develop a scene, time and patience, long improvisations in character, allowing things to just stay a little too long, not trying to make anything happen. This can result in fantastically boring improvisation, but that’s part of the organic growth.” He won’t tell me what his next project is. He won’t tell me why he won’t tell me. Does he think he’ll be working till his deathbed? “I’m sure I’ll be working after I’ve died.” This answer, something in his manner tells me, is a work in progress.

*A new edition of Faber’s Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh is available from 7 October. [BFI celebrate Leigh’s work with a complete film season](#) at BFI Southbank from 18 October to 30 November, plus UK-wide re-releases and Blu-rays. Mike Leigh will discuss his work and answer questions from the audience at a Guardian Live online event on 7 October. Book tickets [here](#).*

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## Supply chain crisis

# ‘I was empty, I’m not panic-buying’: in the petrol queue on the North Circular



The queue for the BP garage on the A406 in Chingford. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

*[Mark Brown](#)*

Sun 26 Sep 2021 12.37 EDT

A kilometre of one of the UK’s most congested roads was on Sunday taking on a new, unwanted role: the queue for a BP garage still [managing to sell petrol](#).

Julian Dunbar estimated he had waited an hour and a half on the inside lane of the A406 North Circular in South Chingford, east [London](#), to finally be able to fill up. “The petrol light is on, I’m almost empty,” he said. “It’s frustrating because not everyone here needs to fill up. We’re here because we need to for the week, not because we are panic-buying.”

Dunbar, who works in property management, was with his young daughter. “We’ve just been to the supermarket to do the weekly shop and of course there’s no pasta. Are we going back to how it was at the start of the pandemic? If everyone just had a bit of social responsibility for themselves then this wouldn’t be an issue.”



Julian Dunbar and daughter getting petrol. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Most people the Guardian talked to did not quite know who to blame. “I don’t know if it is the supply chain not being managed properly? [Brexit](#)? I get annoyed,” said Dunbar. “We are a very wealthy nation, we shouldn’t be in this position.”

The BP garage was one of the few locally that were still open. Nearby garages at Sainsbury’s, Tesco and Morrisons were all closed to petrol buyers.

The queue, causing slow-moving traffic in the other lanes for as far as the eye could see, was bringing out the worst in some drivers. “There has been some terrible behaviour,” said Heena Patel, a cost manager who had waited for an hour. “There are quite a few people trying to push in and using the excuse that they want to go to Costco … but they’re not. It’s selfish.”

She was relieved she finally had some petrol in the car. “I was actually empty, I’m not panic-buying. I need to get petrol because I’ve got to take my dad who’s 82 to the hospital during the week.”



Success: queueuers reach the pumps. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Gjenarin Shkambi, a builder from Romford, had potentially lost work because of his hour queueing. He had been on his way to price a job but was now heading home.

“I need petrol because I’ve got to drive 200 miles tomorrow for a job,” he said. “I need to go to work. I get annoyed but what can you do? You’ve got to get on with it. It is a nightmare. I can’t price the job tomorrow because it’s the opposite direction to where I’m working, it’s a joke.”

Ash Iko, a financial adviser, was sanguine. “It’s frustrating but there’s no choice. I was just driving by and saw the queue so I thought I should get some petrol. It is worrying. Nobody said this was going to happen. I do drive a lot.”



The wait goes on. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Most people in the queue took the waiting in their stride. Aside from pushing in, the worst behaviour seen by the Guardian was two drivers reversing into the garage using its exit road.

Elsewhere there were reports of violence, with a number of [clips](#) of forecourt fights doing the rounds on social media.

Danny Altmann, a professor of immunology at Imperial College London, [tweeted](#) his experience on Saturday afternoon. “I’m now officially in post-Brexit wild west. No HGV drivers, no petrol: queued most of the morning for petrol. Got near the front and they said none left. Man behind me was furious and started punching the guard. Became a melee of 8-10 men on the ground, punching and kicking.”

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[Rhik Samadder tries something new](#)[Cycling](#)

## Rhik Samadder tries ... track cycling: ‘It’s like being overtaken by lorries on a motorway designed by Escher’



‘I feel like a child again. Childhood being a time of massive anxiety, where one lacks motor skills and autonomy.’ Photograph: Andy Hall/The Guardian



Rhik Samadder

@whatsamadder

Mon 27 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

This is hardly the place to admit it, but I hate cyclists. I never know if they are going to stop at traffic lights or plough through; they're often very shouty due to always being in danger; and the worst thing is, they're right. We should all be cyclists as it's good for the planet. I hate being around people who are right but, to my credit, I am always willing to have my rabid road prejudices punctured, so I have agreed to give track cycling a go.

Track cycling is like cycling squared, but in an oval. You've seen it at the Olympics: supercharged, smooth, oddly soothing – until a collision takes out half the cyclists because they're riding mere millimetres apart. I am surprised anyone is able to have a go at whipping around the London 2012 velodrome on a two-dimensional bike that looks like it weighs less than a toaster. The Lee Valley VeloPark, in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, east London, is huge and engulfing. On the main floor, other people trying today's taster session sit in three-sided metal pens, spaced apart like we're at a sheep auction. I feel as if I'm in the hive where they make cyclists. I scan around for a giant alien ovipositor. *Where is the Queen?*



Two wheels bad ... Rhik comes a cropper shortly after setting out.  
Photograph: Andy Hall/The Guardian

I feel grimly compelled to try cleats, since I'm here. Cleats are my nightmare: to be clamped at the foot to a perineum-mashing machine that is constantly falling over. "If you crash, your feet come right out," fellow rider Gabriel, who belongs to a triathlon club, reassures me. Oh, excellent. Our permanently upbeat instructor Rory teaches us the elements of the track. The dark blue apron is a flat "safety zone" where anything goes. The dreamlike turquoise band, called the Côte d'Azur, is for easy riders. Then the track begins to bank: gently at first, towards a black line, then higher and higher, marked by a red sprinter's line, then a blue line, and then there is a broad sweep of terror to the high top of the track, where there are no more lines because you may as well be in space.

The others peel away. They may be beginners at track cycling, but I haven't been near a bike in 15 years. I let go of the wall, wobbling violently. I feel like a child again – childhood being a time of massive anxiety, where one lacks motor skills and autonomy. Track bikes are twitchy, without brakes or gears. I overcorrect, wrenching the handlebars wildly. The ground rises to meet my panic. I crash, not hard but shockingly, spilling across the floor. Other cyclists steer around me. On the plus side, my feet did come out of the cleats.

I hear a reassuring voice; a cyclist has stayed behind, to help with my cleats, and check I'm OK. It's Gabriel. I could cry. Rory is there, too. "You're good to go!" he encourages, with no evidence whatsoever. I stay low, hugging the black line. Low-friction environments always feel like alternate worlds, with unpredictable physical laws. Instead of slowing down for corners, we're taught to speed up. An hour on the track requires the same energy as three in an everyday environment. The higher one's track position, the longer the circuit and steeper the bank, requiring more work to maintain. I spend a half hour in terror, being passed by higher riders, who are instructed to shout "STAY" or "HOLD YOUR LINE" as they hurtle above me at a 45-degree angle, lest I change my position and cause carnage. It's like being overtaken by lorries on a motorway designed by MC Escher.

Steering into the corners, as I intuitively do, makes me lose height, and drop down the markers. (Bad news for riders behind.) "It's an endless straight line!" Rory shouts. His epiphanic exhortation unlocks the magic trick at the heart of track cycling: when is a circle a straight line? Attacking the corner, I point the bike at what feels like an uphill angle, letting the track turn me. Or perhaps the world turns, and I stay in place. The paradox of speed and stasis feels like being in a video game.



Tyred out ... Rhik opts to walk the remaining few yards. Photograph: Andy Hall/The Guardian

Wanting to feel superhuman, I climb to the top of the track. The level of power required to stay here is immense, as if the air is thinner. I can feel the laws of the old universe pushing down on me. But there's a rider below, and I've committed. I pump and gasp and try not to wobble, my legs wanting to shear off my body as I take the corner. I'm cycling on an untenable angle, held up by my own power. It's a rush; I get it. I think of mountain goats. I hold it together, before I can safely drop to a line on the straight. It takes me three laps to stop.

I am panting so hard my lungs are outside my body. The hour's not up but I'm done. Full respect to cyclists and their legs. I have cycled a mile in their terrifying shoes, and while it literally got me nowhere, I now understand them better. Although part of me still thinks they'd all be happiest here: in this alien cocoon, cycling a futile ouroboros and shouting "STAY" at one another. We could power the National Grid.

## Unicycles on escalators?

I don't mind cyclists now that infantilising e-scooters have hit the roads. What's next? Motorised tricycles? Adult prams with Porsche engines?

## Smugness points

Steep learning curve. 2/5

*Velodrome Taster Sessions at Lee Valley VeloPark cost £40 and are available to book at [visitleevalley.org.uk/lee-valley-velopark](https://visitleevalley.org.uk/lee-valley-velopark).*

*Want to suggest an activity for Rhik to try? [Tell us about it here.](#)*

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[The watcher](#)[Television & radio](#)

## Attack of the Hollywood Cliches! Charlie Brooker and Rob Lowe churn out a shoddy tropefest



Attack of the Hollywood Cliches... Photograph: Adam Rose/Netflix

[Joel Golby](#)

Mon 27 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

I have long made peace with the fact that I will never figure Netflix out. Maybe that is the point: Netflix, like the shining face of God, is not ever meant to be fully understood, just watched in awe from afar. But where once Netflix made sense – the first series of Orange is the New Black! The first three series of House of Cards! The mega-success of the Queer Eye reboot! – now some of the commissioning decisions seem to be made by a pulsing cluster of AI servers. This is why we have Nailed It!, for instance. Why He's All That with Addison Rae exists. Season 5 of Arrested Development and

that nine-movie Adam Sandler deal. These were designed by a robot in a lab to make me wistful for an era when the company sent out DVDs in little square envelopes in the post.

Anyway, Attack of the Hollywood Clichés! is up this week, and I do not know who it is for, why it got made (by [Charlie Brooker](#) no less), and who – beyond everyone who picked up a day-rate in its production – is benefiting. In short: it's one of those talking-head hours Channel 4 always seemed to do so well, only with that added layer (and layer ... and yet another layer) of Netflix/Hollywood gloss. Rob Lowe hosts, doing an absolutely incredible performance of Rob Lowe, spraying out high-sheen writer's-room-polished comic lines with all the élan of a man giving his third best man's speech of the weekend. There is a sparkling cast of talking heads – Florence Pugh is there! Andrew Garfield! Richard E Grant! – plus a stacked bench of imposingly intellectual film critics who have actually seen more than one Hitchcock film and have a lot to say about tropes. Whoever did the casting on this special did their job. Whoever did the interviews nailed it. Whoever cut this thing together ruined everything.

Here's the problem with Attack of the Hollywood Clichés: it doesn't say anything, at all. Here's a trope, notice it next time you watch a film, right: on to the next one. Did you know about romcom "meet-cutes"? Of course you did, obviously, but ... OK well what about the "one-man army" trope? Oh, you knew about that too. Let's see: here's one. Have you ever noticed that thing in films – in the biz we call this the "white saviour complex", where – ah.

I really don't see who, in the year 2021, is being newly introduced to the concept of the Wilhelm Scream, but ... Hollywood Clichés seems to think that millions of them exist. This feels like a real opportunity missed: an interview with critic Nathan Rabin, credited with coining the term Manic Pixie Dream Girl in 2007, consists of him broadly outlining the concept intercut with clips from Elizabethtown. The entire bit lasts fewer than 30 seconds. Is that it?

It feels like there are hours of more interesting tape lying on the cutting room floor: I am convinced Rabin said something more interesting about the MPDG (and her persistence in Hollywood over the last 14 years!) than, "It's

a very very potent fantasy, for men, that there is one woman out there – one magical woman! – who will save you.” Cut to Lowe for a quick gag he doesn’t care about, eyes perceptibly flicking to the clock behind the camera to make sure he can get all these interstitials filmed in one day.

In fact – bar one or two moments that actually delve into the history of film; there is a section on Hollywood’s attitude to showing sex on screen that almost threatens to be interesting – practically every trope exposed here is left completely uninterrogated. Why is a baguette poking out of a brown paper bag shorthand for someone having been grocery shopping, for instance: is it because it’s such a universal aesthetic indicator that it can play across multiple territories? We’ll never know. The maverick cop has been a mainstay of storytelling since Hollywood began: how might current perceptions of the real-life police force affect that story? Great question, but let’s not answer it. This hour had the potential to make fascinating enquiries about how and why films get made that will change the way you watch them for the rest of your life. Instead there’s an extended bit where [Rob Lowe](#) pretends he’s too Hollywood health-conscious to actually eat an apple. Oh well. Hey: while you’ve got the app open, fancy watching The Kissing Booth 3?

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## 2021.09.27 - Coronavirus

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## UK records 40 more deaths and 37,960 new cases – as it happened

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## Life expectancy

# Covid has wiped out years of progress on life expectancy, finds study



The study analysed data from 29 countries and found 27 had experienced reductions in life expectancy. Photograph: Jorge Mantilla/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Ben Quinn](#)

[@BenQuinn75](#)

Sun 26 Sep 2021 19.01 EDT

The Covid pandemic has caused the biggest decrease in life expectancy in western [Europe](#) since the second world war, according to a study.

Data from most of the 29 countries – spanning most of Europe, the US and Chile – that were analysed by scientists recorded reductions in life expectancy last year and at a scale that wiped out years of progress.

The biggest declines in life expectancy were among males in the US, with a decline of 2.2 years relative to 2019 levels, followed by Lithuanian males (1.7 years).

Life expectancy losses exceeded those recorded around the time of the [dissolution of the eastern bloc](#) in central and eastern Europe, according to the research, led by scientists at Oxford's Leverhulme Centre for Demographic Science.

Dr José Manuel Aburto, a co-lead author of the study, said: "For western European countries such as Spain, England and Wales, Italy, Belgium, among others, the last time such large magnitudes of declines in life expectancy at birth were observed in a single year was during the second world war."

The findings are contained [in a paper](#) published in the International Journal of Epidemiology after the analysis of the 29 countries for which official death registrations for last year had been published. A total of 27 experienced reductions in life expectancy.

Last week, the [Office for National Statistics estimated](#) that life expectancy for men in the UK had fallen for the first time in 40 years because of the impact of Covid-19. A boy born between 2018 and 2020 is expected to live until he is 79, down from 79.2 for the period of 2015-17, according to the ONS.

Aburto said the scale of the life expectancy losses was stark across most of those countries studied, with 22 of them experiencing larger losses than half a year in 2020.

"Females in eight countries and males in 11 countries experienced losses larger than a year. To contextualise, it took on average 5.6 years for these countries to achieve a one-year increase in life expectancy recently: progress wiped out over the course of 2020 by Covid-19."

Males experienced larger life expectancy declines than females across most of the 29 countries. Most life expectancy reductions across different countries were attributable to official Covid deaths, according to the paper.

Dr Ridhi Kashyap, another co-lead author, said researchers were aware of several issues linked to the counting of Covid deaths, such as inadequate testing or misclassification. However, she added that “the fact that our results highlight such a large impact that is directly attributable to Covid-19 shows how devastating a shock it has been for many countries”.

“We urgently call for the publication and availability of more disaggregated data from a wider range of countries, including low- and middle-income countries, to better understand the impacts of the pandemic globally.”

The ONS estimates from earlier this month showed variations between the different parts of the UK in terms of life expectancy, which refers to the average age to which a newborn would live if current death rates continued for their whole life.

Life expectancy for males has fallen in England, from 79.5 years in 2015-17 to 79.3 years in 2018-2, and [Scotland](#) from 77 to 76.8. But it has risen slightly in [Northern Ireland](#) from 78.4 to 78.7, while staying broadly unchanged in Wales at 78.3.

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[NHS](#)

## NHS backlog disproportionately affecting England's most deprived



Jonathan Ashworth, the shadow health secretary, says the waiting list crisis is in danger of leading to privatisation of the NHS. Photograph: Tayfun Salcı/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Ben Quinn](#) and [Rowena Mason](#)*

Sun 26 Sep 2021 19.01 EDT

The [NHS](#) backlog is being disproportionately shouldered by people in poorer areas, according to new research, amid a stark warning that waiting lists are likely to “grow significantly” because millions of people did not seek help during the pandemic.

Waiting lists [for routine treatments](#) have grown by 50% in the most deprived parts of England, compared with nearly 35% in the most affluent areas. Those in deprived areas were also nearly twice as likely as those in the

wealthiest to wait more than a year for treatment, according an analysis by the King's Fund.

The thinktank analysed the backlog of 5.61 million people – equivalent to almost one in every 10 people in [England](#) – who are waiting for treatments such as knee and hip replacements, cataract surgery and other common procedures.

### [Chart 1](#)

Of patients on waiting lists in the most deprived areas, 7% have been waiting a year or more for treatment, compared with 4% of those in the most affluent areas, according to the research, which was shared with BBC Panorama and PA Media.

Jonathan Ashworth, the shadow health secretary, warned that the long waiting lists were in danger of leading to privatisation of the NHS.

“Waiting times have got so bad that you’ve got people taking out payday loans, sometimes even remortgaging their homes, because they cannot bear the pain, or the disruption to their lives, or fear they will lose their lives,” he said. “That is eroding the fundamental universal system that we created.”

He told a [Labour conference](#) fringe that it was “such a danger” because “Tory MPs are already saying that if people are opting out of the NHS and into the private sector, then why not give them a voucher or tax relief to go to the private sector? And then all of a sudden you are on to a slippery slope to an insurance system.”

A call for the government to take urgent action on waiting times was made by the King’s Fund and the social care champion, Healthwatch England, which also released a poll showing the toll on people’s physical and mental health from waiting for treatment.

### [Chart 2](#)

Siva Anandaciva, chief analyst at the King’s Fund, said the pandemic had pushed NHS waiting lists to record levels and “laid bare” deep [health inequalities](#).

“It is not a surprise that waits for NHS care vary across the country, but the fact that patients in deprived areas are nearly twice as likely to wait a year or more for planned treatment should be a wake-up call for a government that has committed to levelling up the country, and ring alarm bells for MPs in ‘red wall’ constituencies,” he said.

Healthwatch England’s survey of 1,600 people who were on the waiting list or had a loved one in need of treatment found that 54% said it was affecting their mental health. It set out a series of recommendations, calling for “interim support” such as physiotherapy, pain relief and mental health support and for the NHS to “reprioritise” treatment if people’s needs changed.

The picture of the waiting list’s impact was bolstered by a separate poll commissioned by the charity Independent Age, which found that half of those over 50 on the waiting list said that they were in pain daily. The survey of more than 8,000 over-50s found that 10% had been caught up in the [NHS backlog](#). Of these, 52% waiting for an operation reported being in pain every day.

Despite an already dire situation, another leading thinktank said the NHS waiting list was likely to “grow significantly” after its analysis suggested that 7.5 million fewer people were sent for hospital care than expected during the pandemic.

The Health Foundation, which looked at figures between January 2020 and July 2021, suggested that the dip in referrals could be for a number of reasons: people could have put off seeking care during the pandemic, while others may have seen their GP “but not yet been referred due to the pressure on hospital services”.

An NHS spokesperson said the pandemic had inevitably had an impact on non-urgent care, but that staff had almost halved average waiting times for elective care over the last year: “Expert clinicians continue to prioritise patients with the greatest clinical need and hospitals should ensure that a

point of contact is available to those waiting for treatment, including through patient advice and liaison services.”

They pointed to recent recent data showing that in July, patients were waiting on average 10.9 weeks to be seen, down from 19.6 weeks in the same month last year.

The spokesperson added: “Caring for more than 450,000 seriously ill Covid patients has inevitably had a knock-on effect on non-urgent care, and NHS staff have stepped up and made effective use of additional resources, helping carry out millions more tests, checks, treatments and operations this summer compared to last.”

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## New Zealand

# ‘People are tired’: Chris Hipkins, the New Zealand minister battling to eliminate Covid



New Zealand’s Covid-19 response minister Chris Hipkins is near universally known by the name Chippy. Photograph: Hagen Hopkins/The Guardian

*Tess McClure in Wellington*

*@tessairini*

Fri 24 Sep 2021 16.00 EDT

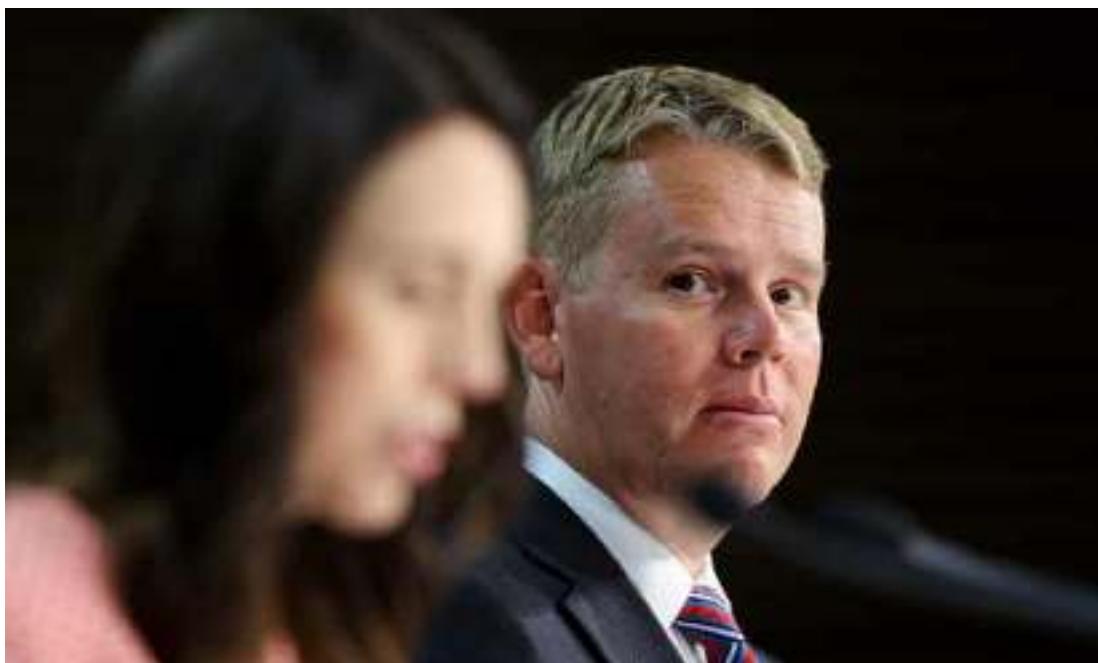
It’s New Zealand’s 1pm Covid press conference, and Chris Hipkins is eyeballing a room of journalists. He stands, sanitising his hands, and takes a moment to look around.

“We’ll start with some good news,” he begins.

In a global pandemic, good news can be hard to come by, but Hipkins, the Covid response minister, uses the line frequently enough that it became a catch-cry. Even when [a gaffe went viral](#) – he advised Aucklanders on how to “get outside and spread their legs” during lockdown – the minister responded with the bright side. “At least I’ve given you all something to laugh about”.

For most of the first 14 months in the job, Hipkins had plentiful bright sides to relay. New Zealand was ranked as having one of the [best pandemic responses in the world](#) – avoiding large scale outbreaks of disease, but also preserving its economy, freedoms, and relative normalcy.

Now, all that teeters in the balance, and he and prime minister Jacinda Ardern are on the front line. The country is wrestling with an outbreak of Delta – a more contagious and deadly variant than those it has managed to crush in the past. Auckland, the centre of the outbreak, has spent a month in lockdown. The country’s slow vaccine rollout means about 60% of its population still isn’t fully protected. Looming on the horizon are more questions – on when New Zealand will finally reopen, and what shape that will take. Whether the country will reach its [lofty goal of surpassing 90%](#) vaccination, and what happens if it doesn’t.



New Zealand's success in dealing with the Covid pandemic is teetering in the balance as Auckland deals with a Delta outbreak. Photograph: Hagen Hopkins/Getty Images

"The uncertainty is not letting up," Hipkins says, sitting on the grey couch of his office in the Beehive, New Zealand's parliamentary complex. "We've been asking people to live with uncertainty for 18 months ... People are tired."

"People can put up with a lot if they know when it's going to end. So that constant feeling of, when is this going to end? How does this end? Those kinds of questions do sort of wear people down a bit."

## **Shifting away from the 'nuclear option'**

A month into the outbreak, the minister looks a little tired himself – and the questions just reeled off are ones he's tasked with answering. New Zealand had planned to spend the rest of the year steadily vaccinating its population, then reopen at its own pace. Delta has forced it to shift gears: the country is in a race to vaccinate and to contain its current outbreak. Just 34% of all New Zealanders have had both vaccinations, or 39% of the eligible (12+) population. The government is committed to shooting above 90%.

Even if vaccination rates rise, allowing any cases of Covid to circulate will require a steep mindset shift. New Zealand has been resolutely intolerant of any Covid at large in the community. Hipkins remains adamant that elimination is still the government's goal, [but a big "what if" looms over the current outbreak.](#)

"The big shift that we have to make is moving from a situation where every positive case becomes effectively a public health emergency, to one where we continue to pursue elimination, but we have a more regularised way of responding to cases when they emerge," he says.

"We were getting close, we were heading in that direction until Delta showed up."

Now, he says hitting those high vaccination rates is the only way New Zealand can continue elimination without having to keep turning to lockdowns. “Level three and level four – it’s kind of the nuclear option, right? But you can’t fire nuclear missiles every time.”

The government’s strategy has, so far, enjoyed huge popular support in New Zealand. But at some point, Hipkins acknowledges, that could run dry.

“We’re not a police state. It wouldn’t work if people weren’t willing to follow those rules,” he says. “That public buy-in and goodwill is the only way that this works.”

Part of that goodwill has been helped by communication. Ardern’s government runs a tight media ship, and the government has mostly managed to muster a smooth, un-rattled face, even under fire. Hipkins is seen as a steady pair of hands in Ardern’s cabinet, and was handed Covid responsibilities after another minister [caused a string of minor scandals](#). Since taking it on, he’s maintained the reputation for being unflappable: detail-oriented, steady, more prone to understatement than histrionics. In parliament, the minister is near-universally known as Chippy, a nickname that’s followed him since university.



New Zealand's Covid-19 response minister Chris Hipkins has a reputation for cheerful competence. Photograph: Hagen Hopkins/The Guardian

"Very able operator," says Mike Munro, a communications adviser who worked in various roles for two successive Labour governments. "Speaks very plainly too – doesn't overcomplicate matters."

"He handles himself very well with the media. Never looks flustered or, you know, on the back foot," says Ben Thomas, a former national government adviser.

"I've never seen him lose his temper," says Neale Jones, an ex-Labour staffer. "That's probably a bit dull for writing a profile."

## From cutthroat to conciliatory

Covid-19 can be a make-or-break portfolio for politicians. The wins, if you get them, are big, but the stakes for failing are mass illness, economic strife and deaths.

"He's always been a guy who's been deeply enmeshed in the process and the mechanics of parliament and politics," says Thomas. Hipkins is leader of the house, and public service minister, two wonky roles that are deeply immersed in the nuts and bolts of governance. His face brightens talking about government process – and it's that interest and experience perhaps more than anything else, that he credits with carrying him through a year of Covid policy.

"I've watched people come into politics from outside, very talented people, very knowledgeable, with a lot of subject matter expertise – but they've struggled to get the machinery of government to do what they wanted to do. And I like to think that I've managed to – I'm not perfect – but that I've managed to kind of figure that out."

That's not to say that his tenure has been without scandal or error. New Zealand's vaccine rollout has been repeatedly criticised for its slowness. The government spent weeks hedging on whether all border workers were being

tested (they weren't). The opposition has slammed Ardern and her cabinet for failing to secure vaccine supply earlier in the year, and questioned whether that has slowed down vaccination rates.

Hipkins says taking on the Covid role has made him see knife-fight politics in a new light – admittedly an easier revelation to have on the other side of the fence. In opposition and pre-Covid government, Hipkins was known as a more cutthroat political player.

“He was one of those people who would have lodged, you know, hundreds or thousands of written questions,” Thomas says of Hipkins in opposition – a strategy that searches for any policy flaws, as well as gumming up government processes and eating into staff time. He caused [a trans-Tasman scandal lodging questions about Australians being granted NZ citizenship](#), and was accused by Australian ministers of trying to bring down the government.

The Covid portfolio, he says, “certainly changed some of my views on politics. I’ve always enjoyed the cut and thrust of politics, but I think politics in a global pandemic is a different thing. I’ve become a much more moderate, conciliatory person as a result of doing this,” he says.

“In any system, there are going to be weaknesses, there are going to be people who make mistakes. If you want to bring out the best in people, then constantly hammering them on that is not going to get you moving forward.”



Covid-19 response minister Chris Hipkins says hitting high vaccination targets is the only way New Zealand can continue its elimination strategy.  
Photograph: Getty Images

Asked about some of the vitriol New Zealand's Covid response has drawn from commentators overseas, Hipkins gives a brief grimace.

"You don't ever want to be too judgmental on other countries' decision making, because you get the benefit of the 20/20 hindsight, and they were making the best decisions they could with the information that they had at the time," he says. "I'm sure if you went to New South Wales and said ... 'What would you do differently, if you could go back and make those decisions?' I suspect they would say 'we would have locked it down earlier.'"

## **'You can never afford to stop'**

Among the biggest challenges of Covid is its relentlessness. Hipkins reels off numbers: since becoming Covid minister, he says he's received 800 written briefings, submitted 100 cabinet papers. At last stocktake, he'd received 1,300 policy recommendations.

Standing for a photographer, Hipkins pauses to inspect the front of his suit jacket. “It’s child puke I’m looking for,” he says. There’s been a recent stomach bug at the Hipkins household.

Asked how the role has been for his young family, Hipkins says he has a general policy of not discussing family. Then he pauses. “I do often reflect on the fact that almost every politician in the valedictory speeches when they leave parliament, says that their biggest regret is that they didn’t spend more time with their family.”

Covid Zoom meetings continued on Christmas Eve, decisions still have to be made on Christmas Day.

“The reality with Covid – reflecting as honestly as I can on a personal level – one of the things that’s the hardest about it, is that there isn’t any such thing, really, as a day off.”

“It just never stops. You can never afford to stop, because you just – if you want to keep ahead of it, you’ve just got to keep moving.”

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## 2021.09.27 - Opinion

- Badenoch's empire comments speak to the enduring mentality of colonialism
- My father was brutally killed by the Taliban. The US ignored his pleas for help
- The petrol queues seem like a throwback. But at least in the 70s our leaders weren't so callow
- The trillions in our pension pots could be key to tackling the climate crisis

[Opinion](#)[Colonialism](#)

## **Badenoch's empire comments speak to the enduring mentality of colonialism**

[Nesrine Malik](#)



Conservative MP and equalities minister Kemi Badenoch. Photograph: Russell Hart/Alamy

Mon 27 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

In every single country that was ever under British rule, you will find a significant number of people who praise colonialism or claim they would willingly welcome back the British. It's a sort of meme – half joke, half genuine frustration over political or economic instability.

Sometimes these laments are wistful longings for things that never really happened, such as the trains running on time, or lost status from a period when “people knew their place”. But they are almost always issued by those who have internalised the logic of empire itself – which is that it was,

overall, an improving mission, albeit with a small number of unsavoury excesses.

In messages leaked last week, Conservative MP and equalities minister Kemi Badenoch made these points, familiar to anyone who comes from a former colony. “[I don't care about colonialism](#),” she wrote. “They came in and just made a different bunch of winners and losers. There was never any concept of ‘rights’, so [the] people who lost out were old elites not everyday people.”

Idle nostalgia about empire, or indifference to it, can rarely be separated from the sort of worldview that established the empire itself: that there is some inherent natural order to the process of colonisation; might is right. If the British had the more evolved means – both in terms of technology and finance – to dominate a people and commandeer their natural resources, then they also had the right to do so.

The propaganda that then sustained empire, which imbued the “might” with the “right”, was the lie that empire was in fact really a civilising mission – a burden on the white man who brought not only Christianity to the heathen but also the order and hierarchy of his more sophisticated society. All the fraught discussions about empire still basically revolve around that coding – one embedded deeply not only in the British psyche but in that of much of the rest of the world, forged as it was in the furnace of colonialism and its monopoly on power for so long.

Empire has not only shaped British attitudes towards the rest of the world; it has shaped, to a large degree, the attitudes of those who have come to this country from the ex-colonies. In west Africa, in particular, the centralisation of power in the Christian church and the colonial administration, away from traditional structures and religions, vested both moral and political power in the coloniser. To become part of the local elite required learning English, adopting Christian values, aligning oneself more and more closely with Britain, maybe even being educated there. In creating this hierarchy, Britain created a centre of gravity, both cultural and political, that still has a powerful draw.

In my native Sudan, colonialism was a relatively gentle and short-lived experience (Sudan's resources were not easily extractable and most of its lands inaccessible). The British underinvested in the country's agriculture and overinvested in creating an army of local soldiers to support its military missions, first in Egypt and later during the second world war. By the time the British left, an entire generation of farmers had left their lands to become underemployed and overpaid soldiers. The result was the creation of a new set of values that fetishised the anglicised elite and gave urban life a higher social status.

Britain's current culture wars instantly marshal accounts of colonial and postcolonial life into supporting material for either "pro-" or "anti-" empire stances. But what is closer to the truth is that British minorities' views on empire, race and immigration are very much the product of colonialism itself, creating a class of winners and losers (Badenoch wasn't wrong there): the winners being those closest to the source of power and the political establishment.

When combined with the precariousness of the migrant experience, these competitive pressures can sometimes lead to an emphasis on social mobility and status, rather than group solidarity, and produce a sort of dog-eat-dog assimilation into the new society. Older, first-generation British minorities were more [likely](#) to vote for Brexit than those born here, and reported feeling anxious about the ease with which eastern European migrants were allowed into the UK.

Any criticism of Badenoch will no doubt be used by the right to show that non-“woke” black people aren’t “allowed” to have positive thoughts on empire. But black people both in former colonies and in the UK have long held these views. When we disagree with them, we know we are not arguing against facts, but against the loud echo of empire in a world where the power to define the colonial experience still resides with the colonising force.

Like most other non-democratic regimes, empire thrived through coercion and complicity. This isn't complicated stuff. But so integral is empire to British identity that any attempt to come to grips with it is degraded into a matter of loyalty: whether one is patriotic, “proud” of one's history, or a migrant who doesn't appreciate the freedoms bequeathed by past colonial

leaders. In this climate, challenging Badenoch's account of empire becomes an act of treachery.

The rise of a particular type of prominent ethnic-minority Conservative politician has made it even harder to have these conversations. Ministers such as [Priti Patel](#), [Sajid Javid](#) and Badenoch all simultaneously decry identity politics while leveraging their own identity to delegitimise others' accounts of Britain's racism.

With such powerful and prominent figures refusing to engage with the reality of the country and its history, we remain stuck: unable to move on from the logic of British rule as anything other than benign and above reproach; unable to understand how it still impacts on our politics, foreign policy and race relations. Badenoch is free not to care about colonialism. But I am not sure she, or any of us, can afford not to.

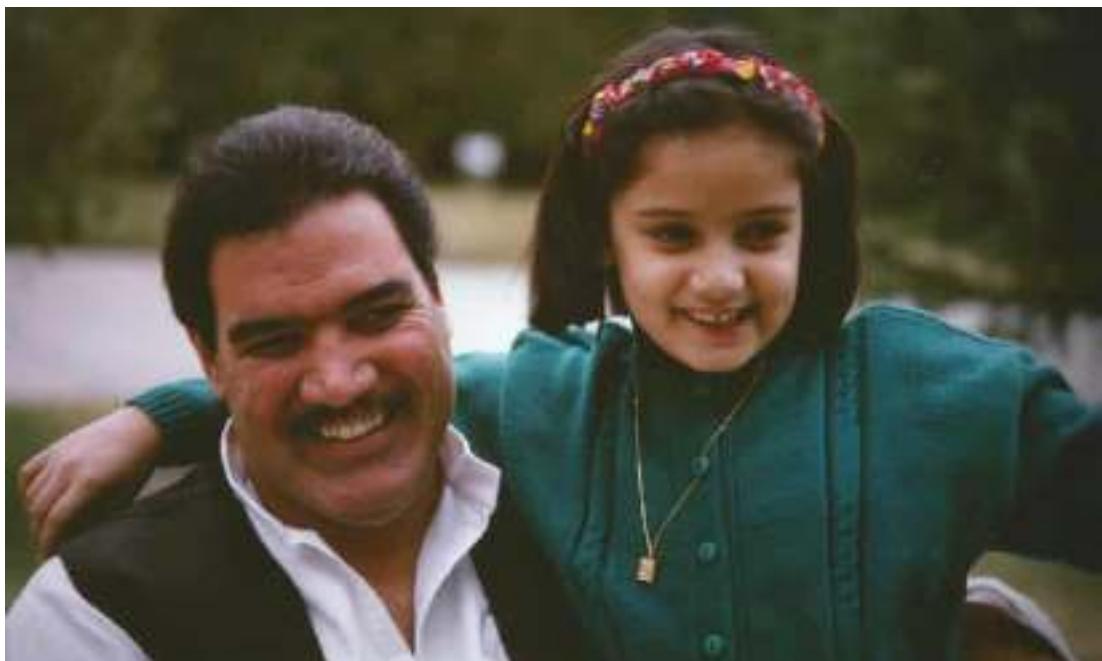
- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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## OpinionAfghanistan

# **My father was brutally killed by the Taliban. The US ignored his pleas for help**

[Muska Najibullah](#)



‘Afghanistan and Afghans have always been misunderstood, but the tragedy of my country is one of geopolitics, not of genes.’ Former Afghan president Najibullah with his daughter, Muska, in Kabul, 1989. Photograph: Muska Najibullah

Sun 26 Sep 2021 21.00 EDT

The night of 27 September 1996 was always going to be a long one. I was awake studying for midterm exams when my mother, calm but uneasy, heard the news that my father had been taken out of the United Nations compound in Kabul.

I was ecstatic at first. My father, Najibullah, the [former president of Afghanistan](#), would finally be reunited with his family. He, along with my uncle, had been living in the UN compound since 16 April 1992, when forces within his government had defected. His resignation and departure was part of a UN plan, intended to end the civil war and clear the way for a peaceful coalition government. But the resulting power vacuum quickly sucked Afghanistan into a vortex of anarchy.

After four years apart, my mum, sisters and I were eagerly awaiting my father. And now that a faction known as the [Taliban](#) were creeping closer to the Afghan capital, I was convinced that my family's reunification was days away. While I had the naive positivity of a child yearning for her father, my mother sensed a more grim reality on the horizon. She watched the news all night. "My sixth sense tells me he's not coming," she told us, fear in her eyes.

In the 1990s, before the internet connected the world, little was known about the Taliban. Radio reports would herald their significant gains made in the [south-west](#) of the country, describing the militia group as fighting for "[peace, security and stability](#)", an appeal that was popular with war-weary Afghans. That night, I thought we would meet my father soon. We spoke to him hours before the Taliban entered Kabul. There was nothing unusual in his voice. It was a normal exchange of words, one that I vaguely remember. The conversation was meant to be one of many, yet fate had different plans.

In the early hours of the night, when they entered the capital city, the Taliban went knocking on the gates of the UN compound to visit their "[special guest](#)". Hours later, a breaking news flash: "Former Afghan leader, President Najibullah executed." I didn't know what the word meant. I turned to my sister but her expressionless face made me panic. Rushing to grab a dictionary, I flipped to the letter E.

This is the first time I have shared my personal story. Not because I am the daughter of a former president of [Afghanistan](#), but because what is happening to my country now is distressingly similar to what happened then: 25 years ago today, the Taliban took over Afghanistan. And 25 years ago today my life, and those of so many others of my generation, changed for ever – and not all for the better.

Before my father, Aba, became the president, our life in Kabul was blissful. We lived in a tiny apartment in a vibrant neighbourhood called Macroyan. The early years of my childhood was a time when my family was still together, when we were a unit of five. We spent most of our time in the *aftaw-khana*, the sunroom. In the evenings, Aba returned home, and we gathered around him for dinner, catching up on the day's highlights – from work, school or what the elders heard on the news. But all this changed when Aba became the president.

We moved from our modest, cosy apartment to the grandiose presidential palace, the Arg. Our new residence, though heavily guarded and safe, isolated my siblings and me from everything we had ever known. Evening gatherings at the playground and the impromptu market runs for bubblegum and balloons came to a halt. At barely four years old, I found our new home claustrophobic. There was ample space but no one to play with. As the changing seasons came round, we hardly saw Aba. He was always busy, away at work. Eventually, those commonplace family meals were also a rare occasion.

Aba was a big man; imposingly tall and burly. He had acquired the nickname “Najib the Bull” because of his dominant personality. He had an intimidating gaze and a voice that roared with force. But for me, just like any little girl and her father, Aba was my hero. One night in 1986, the mujahideen set ablaze [an army ammunition depot](#) in Qargha lake, near Kabul. I cried for him to stop the noise, as the explosions echoed across the city. He wrapped me in a blanket and held me tightly in his arms. “You are safe with me. No one will harm you,” he said, and I believed him. But in 1996, when the Taliban marched into Kabul, there was no one to keep him safe.

The image has haunted me since the day of Aba’s brutal passing. Take a moment to look, or don’t, but it was the last I saw of him: hanging from a traffic pole, he and his brother mutilated for the whole world to see. As I watched the Taliban display them like some spectacle, I felt helpless and humiliated. At 13, I became an adult overnight. I lost my father, my home and any hope of returning to Afghanistan.

People try to imagine what it feels like to be an Afghan living in exile at this point. It's difficult to describe the feeling of displacement to someone who hasn't been through it. Although you are safe, you feel dislocated. There is too much to hold, too much to bear and sometimes it all feels so purposeless. There are glimpses of happiness when you hear stories of hope. You feel alive and inspired, and imagine what normality could look like in the country. You fantasise about your own life once you return. Like a jigsaw puzzle, you piece together old stories of your family and envisage a future that is absolute. Then, all that is suspended once another cycle of conflict takes over.

In 1992, my father [appealed to the US](#) to help Afghanistan become a bulwark against the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. He said: "If fundamentalism comes to Afghanistan, war will continue for many more years. Afghanistan will turn into a centre of world smuggling for narcotic drugs. Afghanistan will be turned into a centre for terrorism." His warnings were ignored. With the [withdrawal of Soviet forces](#) from Afghanistan in February 1989, virtually all western nations abandoned their embassies and ostracised my father's regime. Calling him a communist puppet, a murderer, a traitor, he found himself isolated, fighting a very lonely war. And then, a decade later, his premonitions came true. Triggered by the [9/11 attacks](#), the US invaded my country to fight [Islamic terrorism](#) and began what would be its longest war. I wonder, had the world listened to him, would it all have turned out differently?

Afghanistan and Afghans have always been misunderstood. Respected commentators talk about the brave and barbaric tribes who roam through our forbidding mountains, and how difficult it has been to unify us. This thinking is trite. The tragedy of my country is one of geopolitics, not of genes. A nation on the margins, we are constantly being betrayed by mercenaries in the pay of foreign rulers. All Afghans are yearning for peace.

As individualism and individual expression are once again taken hostage by the Taliban, many Afghans are fleeing. They fear losing their identity to a group that does not represent them, and in leaving they are being stripped of who they really are. Like my family, many will restart their lives from scratch along with a suitcase of memories and a hope to return. What will become of the nation's brightest? Your next Uber driver in New York City?

Or the cheerful kebab seller at your corner shop in Kilburn? And what about those back home? How many [girls and women](#) will you see on the streets? Will the kids go to school? Will they get a chance to see their fathers grow old?

Democracy didn't bring peace to Afghanistan. Nor did the [Doha agreement](#), a foreign and flawed deal that neglected the voices of the common people. Despite all these adversities, Afghans have come a long way. The old ways are not for this world, and many Afghans expect something different out of life, far more so than they did even 25 years ago. What it means to be Afghan has changed over the course of decades of conflict and violence. Perhaps now is an opportune time for us to educate the rest of the world about who we really are – our shared values, unity, dreams. Afghanistan is not a “graveyard of empires”, nor a nation of refugees. We are displaced, but one day will return – soon, *inshallah!*

- Muska Najibullah is an Afghan-born writer, visual storyteller and activist
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[Opinion](#)[Politics](#)

## The petrol queues seem like a throwback. But at least in the 70s our leaders weren't so callow

[John Harris](#)





Queues for the petrol pumps in Chingford, North London. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Sun 26 Sep 2021 10.40 EDT

Among the words that will send the collective British psyche into panic, three are among the most potent: Christmas, petrol, and winter. Put them together, and you have the perfect ingredients for a crisis, made all the more surreal by the fact that one of its key causes – Brexit – is a word [no one in politics wants to mention](#).

Despite ministers' assurances that the [lack of fuel is all in our heads](#), queues at garage forecourts extend into the distance. Supermarkets are full of empty shelves; rising energy prices threaten household budgets. Everybody knows that the UK's labour shortages are dire, and that a deficit of 100,000 hauliers is serious indeed.

The government, meanwhile, is once again all over the place, first [refusing to look](#) at its impossibly stringent visa rules, before announcing [yet another U-turn](#). We are now, it seems, offering EU workers who have gone home the most Brexity of re-enticements: 5,000 fuel tanker and lorry drivers, along with 5,500 "poultry workers", will apparently be eligible to work in the UK

until Christmas Eve ... whereupon, having ensured the festive season can go ahead, they will be sent packing.

Headlines over the past week have repeatedly [drawn comparisons](#) with the fabled winter of discontent of 1978-79. For a few people, that might also evoke hopes of some Margaret Thatcher-esque saviour sooner or later coming to clean up the mess. But most seem to implicitly acknowledge that, with the endless consequences of Brexit and the unfolding effects of the climate crisis, life is going to be full of trouble and uncertainty for a long time to come. That, in turn, leads to two questions: who might have the skills to somehow lead us through it all? And why do our current front-rank politicians hardly inspire confidence?

The answer to the latter question, it seems to me, is partly generational. Not long after the 2008 crash, [I interviewed Denis Healey](#), the Labour elder statesman who had been chancellor from 1974 to 1979, in truly dreadful circumstances. When we met, Gordon Brown was sliding towards eventual defeat, while the comparatively callow David Cameron and George Osborne prepared for power.

Healey's time as chancellor, he told me, had been defined by "fucking disaster". We talked about inflation, strikes, shortages and a plunging pound. And about the stress such things caused: he had developed shingles, as well as repeatedly suffering colds and flu. "I wanted to make a success of the job," he said. "It was very tiring, but I'd been in the army for five years in the war, so I'd learned to put up with things."

This latter point was rather understated: [his political generation](#) had come of age in the 1930s, put their lives on the line as the world fell apart (while serving with the Royal Engineers, Healey was a beachmaster at the [Battle of Anzio](#) in 1944), and then played their part in both postwar reconstruction and managing the social and political disasters that followed the oil price shock of 1973. What they experienced highlighted something latter-day politicians often seem not to understand – that power is usually not about great political victories or even modest success, but crisis management, the probability of failure, and the skills and experience needed to cope.

As well as recklessness and ideological zeal, Thatcher – who was born in 1925 – had some of the war generation’s air of heft and seriousness, but such qualities began to dwindle away in the John Major years. And when New Labour took power, though Brown often resembled the kind of politician that had defined the decades after the war, Tony Blair heralded the arrival of something much flimsier. [Healey told me](#) it eventually amounted to “bullshit and nothing else”; JG Ballard [caught its essential flavour](#) when, at the end of the Blair years, he wrote about a politics of “ fleeting impressions, [and] an illusion of meaning floating over a sea of undefined emotions”.

And then came people of my age, members of what was termed Generation X. On the whole, the more privileged members of that cohort had cut their teeth in a world that was economically stable, in which consumerism was king. Some were maligned as slackers, but [other accounts](#) of Generation X tended to include such adjectives as “pushy” and “motivated”. After the Berlin Wall came down, party politics was eventually erased of much ideological content, and personal ambition often seemed to be the main currency. Besides, among many who either considered themselves bright and capable or were told they were, politics seemed to be the last thing anyone wanted to get involved in (“I saw the best minds of my generation accept jobs on the fringes of the entertainment industry,” [wrote Zadie Smith](#)).

These days, I sometimes wonder whether the few members of my generation who chose that vocation simply ended up in over their heads. The years of Cameron, Osborne and Nick Clegg, and the calamities they caused, are a good case in point. So too is the recent history of the Labour party: in 2015, in the race to succeed the Gen-Xer Ed Miliband and up against three leadership candidates of a similar age, the then 66-year-old Jeremy Corbyn presented a picture of conviction and authenticity and won a massive victory. But when the baton was then passed to his [younger parliamentary allies](#), the movement he had spawned fell apart.

In the US, Gen X’s lack of impact on liberal politics speaks volumes: the Democratic party’s last nomination contest came down to [a choice between](#) Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders, and radical hope now lies with that inspirational millennial Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Boris Johnson and Keir Starmer are at the upper end of the Generation X demographic; given that he was born in 1962, Starmer might actually belong in the dread category of Boomer. But they and many of their colleagues fit the profile of people big on ambition yet devoid of substance and grit. In search of those things, both reach for scripts left behind by previous political generations: Johnson has his Churchill fixation; and in his half-cocked confrontations with his party's left and use of a very clunky political argot ([repeated mentions](#)) of people who "work hard and play by the rules", the tired cliche of "hardworking families"), Starmer looks like someone bumbling through a school play about Blair.

Given time, perhaps younger people who have come of age in an increasingly troubled world and have no notion of returning to old and comfortable certainties might do a better job. For now, there is only the unsettling combination of a mounting social and economic crisis, and political responses so unconvincing they suggest the Nirvana lines to which I and my fellow Gen X-ers once bellowed along, almost as an apology: "Oh well, whatever, never mind."

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist
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## OpinionPensions

# The trillions in our pension pots could be key to tackling the climate crisis

[Richard Curtis](#)



‘I’ve heard from peace campaigners unwittingly invested in weapons, and the most hardened environmentalists invested in coal and deforestation.’ Charred tree trunks in Porto Velho, Brazil. Photograph: Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters

Mon 27 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

Someone said something really striking to me the other day – that weather used to be the last thing on the news, but now it’s the first. And it’s not good news. Fire, floods, drought – climate change in terrible and obvious action. It made me think of something I’ve been increasingly obsessed by – unexpectedly – which is pensions. Pensions used to be the last thing on our minds, certainly not something to talk about at lunch, but to help tackle the climate crisis, they actually should now be the first.

With delegates from across the world gathering in Glasgow this November for Cop26 – the most important climate negotiations for a generation – pensions should be right at the heart of the conversation. They can be a huge and radical agent for change: a powerful weapon in our armoury for the battle against the climate crisis.

Over the past 18 months, I've been part of the [Make My Money Matter](#) campaign, a partnership of the public, businesses and financial institutions that's pushing to make sure that the trillions of pounds – yes, trillions – that are invested through our pension funds help tackle the climate crisis, not fuel the fire. With [£2.6tn invested in UK pensions](#) alone, and more than \$50tn worldwide, our campaign believes pensions to be citizens' hidden superpower in fighting against catastrophic climate change.

Until recently, people like me never thought about where our pension money went and the impact it had. Our pensions have often left us accidental investors in many of the practices we condemn, and the causes we fight against. Since we launched, I've heard from peace campaigners unwittingly invested in weapons, doctors invested in tobacco, and environmentalists invested in coal, oil and deforestation. There's a brilliant [Ted talk](#) by a cancer doctor called Bronwyn King who discovered that a lot of her money was invested in tobacco companies – she'd actually been killing more people with her investments than she'd been saving with her life's work.

The good news is that where pensions were once poorly understood and easily ignored, they're increasingly seen as a critical part of businesses' sustainability plans, governments' net-zero strategies, and individuals' drive to reduce their carbon footprint. Research we've done shows that more than 20 million people are now aware that their pension may be contributing to the climate crisis. We've had huge numbers of people change their pensions, and seen more than £600bn committed to robust net-zero targets.

So ahead of Cop26, we're asking for two things. First, we've spoken to the 100 biggest UK pension providers, calling on them to halve their emissions this decade and commit to net zero before 2050. Second, we're joining forces with partners from across the country calling on the UK government to lead the world on green pensions by mandating that all providers commit to robust net zero.

In taking these critical steps, we can make sure our pensions take advantage of the enormous opportunities of the green industrial revolution, while protecting our savings against the ravages of climate change. And meanwhile – anyone reading this – do check if your own pension is cheating on you and ask if you can have a sustainable pension. This is a people's movement – and the more pressure from below the better. And, be assured, it's not a money v morals thing – the returns from sustainable pensions are almost always equal and increasingly often better than old-style ones.

With people across the world determined to make their money matter, and the demand for cleaner, greener pensions growing across society, now is the time for individuals, the financial industry and the government to put pensions at the heart of the climate agenda. And it makes such logical sense – what's the point in collecting a pension in a world on fire?

- Richard Curtis is a filmmaker and activist
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## 2021.09.27 - Around the world

- ['Time for solidarity' Ambassador in limbo makes plea for Afghans to be allowed into EU](#)
- [Dr Nader Alemi Fears for Afghan psychiatrist abducted by armed men](#)
- [German elections Worst ever result momentarily silences CDU](#)
- [Japan Country urged to abolish third-party consent from abortion law](#)

## [Afghanistan](#)

# Ambassador in limbo makes plea for Afghans to be allowed into EU



A person unfolds an Afghan flag in front of the parliament in Athens during a protest organised by Afghans in Greece against the Taliban regime.  
Photograph: Yorgos Karahalis/AP

*[Helena Smith](#) in Athens*

Mon 27 Sep 2021 00.00 EDT

In other times, Mirwais Samadi would have welcomed a campaign to deter his compatriots from opting to become illegal migrants and embarking on the often dangerous trek from [Afghanistan](#) to Europe.

By far the worst part of his job as Afghanistan's ambassador to Athens – apart from the strange limbo he has found himself in representing a nation whose leaders he refuses to recognise – is notifying families back home of

loved ones who died along the way. Invariably they are the victims of smuggling networks motivated solely by profit.

But Greece's announcement of a media blitz to discourage "illegal migrant flows" from Afghanistan only weeks after [Taliban](#) militants seized power has also left the ambassador appalled.

In the face of European hostility to Afghans heading west – and as the new regime vows to rule according to a [ruthless interpretation](#) of Islamic law – Samadi, like other career diplomats still loyal to the old regime, has found himself imploring EU governments to think again.

"This is a time for solidarity, not the time for the west to turn its back on the people of Afghanistan and abandon them or have a campaign that urges [them] to stay," he told the Guardian in his cavernous ambassadorial office. "In normal circumstances I would not be in favour of illegal movement but when people are forced to leave due to the security situation and for fear of their lives, what should we do?"

The centre-right government of the prime minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, unveiled the EU-funded initiative, saying its goal was "to make clear that [Greece](#) guards its borders in an organised way and does not allow illegal migration flows".

Amid fears of the country again becoming the gateway for thousands of Europe-bound refugees desperate to escape the excesses of Islamist hardliners still seeking international legitimacy, the Greek migration ministry admitted the move had been prompted by "the latest geopolitical developments in Afghanistan".

Under the campaign, mainstream Afghan newspapers and social media will be targeted in what officials have called a blitzkrieg of messaging aimed at dissuading Afghans from paying smugglers to help them flee.

Platforms including YouTube will be employed, with videos reportedly being prepared to convey the unvarnished reality of what awaits people if they succeed in reaching Greece through irregular means. Last week asylum

seekers on Samos were moved into a “closed” and [highly fortified reception centre](#) – the first of five EU-funded facilities on Aegean isles – that is encircled by military-style fencing and equipped with magnetic gates more resonant of a prison than a migrant camp, NGOs say.



Afghanistan’s ambassador to Athens, Mirwais Samadi, in his office.  
Photograph: Helena Smith/The Guardian

In his smart blue suit, cufflink shirt, loafers and yellow tie, Samadi, who served in Washington prior to arriving in Athens in 2019, is visually everything the Taliban are not. Like Afghan ambassadors worldwide, he was appointed by the now exiled foreign minister, Mohammad Hanif Atmar, with whom he and his counterparts still confer as representatives of Kabul’s “legitimate government” in weekly online Zoom meetings.

“No one has told us to take down our flag,” he said, pointing to the ensign the Islamic Republic used before [the Taliban takeover](#). “We are in a limbo situation where no one recognises the Taliban, but how long that will go on for, no one knows.”

Western powers have not recognised the Taliban’s recently announced government, and its foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, has yet to nominate any representatives to replace Afghanistan’s contingent of

ambassadors abroad if diplomatic relations are established. As a result, its overseas missions remain in the hands of pro-western career diplomats astounded by the course of events in their homeland, unsure of how they will survive financially and holding meetings with officials who have fled the country.

Samadi, whose wife is a prominent women's rights activist, belongs firmly in that school. His time in Athens has been a wake-up call to the desperation that drives Afghans to seek refuge in Europe, often at great personal cost.

Eight months ago, the diplomat says, he too pressed the case for his compatriots not to embark on perilous journeys to Greece, long on the frontline of migrant and refugee arrivals from Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

"The hardest part of my job is having to inform families of children who are found dead in the sea, or in the forests around the Greek-Turkish [land] border," he said. "In interviews with all the major TV channels in Afghanistan I encouraged people, back then, not to attempt to come illegally. I said please don't send your children on these dangerous journeys. But now circumstances are completely different."

Describing the situation as unique, he warned: "If countries close their borders it will be a human catastrophe ... now is not the proper time for such a campaign, we have all seen the heartbreakening scenes."

Instead, he said, all nations should be holding the Taliban to account because if the situation inside Afghanistan were to improve – with better job opportunities, security and freedom of expression for women, human rights activists and civil society – the desire to leave would diminish.

"Now is the time to make the Taliban accountable," he said. "If the Taliban don't enter negotiations with other Afghan political groups and agree to form a broad-based, inclusive government based on rule of law and respect for the rights of everyone then we should not be stopping but helping to get vulnerable people out."

Afghans account for the largest number of asylum seekers in Greece – although the vast majority are headed on elsewhere – with an estimated 40,000 registered in the country.

A nondescript building perched on an elevation in Athens' northern suburbs, the Afghan embassy was deluged daily by hundreds requiring passports and other documents to apply for refugee recognition status, prior to the pandemic.

“So far only about 10,000 of the 40,000 here have had their requests processed,” Samadi said. “The rest are still waiting. Over 95% arrive without documents and over 90% are in a very bad economic situation. They have sold everything, their clothes, properties, jewellery to make the journey.”



Gates at the new refugee camp in Samos. Photograph: Nicolas Economou/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Before the Greek campaign even gets off the ground there are questions as to whether it will have any effect. “Migrants trust their own sources and have their own way of understanding things,” said Gianluca Rocco, the chief of mission of the International Organization for [Migration](#) (IOM), the UN migration agency, in Greece. “They don’t listen so much to campaigns.

Usually they trust their network of families and friends more than messages from governments of Europe.”

Since the [fall of Kabul](#), Greece – which also took part in US-led evacuation efforts in August – has taken in about 65 Afghan refugees, including six female MPs who arrived en route to being resettled with their families in the US. Athens’ foreign ministry described them as “defenders of fundamental values, freedom of expression and gender equality”.

Samadi said he could sympathise with the domestic pressure the Greek government faced but that it was also up to the EU to stand up for the core values it represented.

“Thousands [of refugees] have arrived here and I know Greece has challenges, but there should be a joint EU effort to address this common challenge,” the ambassador said. “People in Afghanistan now are in a state of shock. But if the situation doesn’t improve then definitely in the coming months, once winter has passed, there is a strong possibility of big migrant flows towards Greece and the EU.”

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[Global development](#)

## Fears for Afghan psychiatrist abducted by armed men



Dr Nader Alemi, whose hospital has treated thousands of Afghans, including Taliban fighters, since it opened in 2004. Photograph: Magda Rakita/BAAG

Global development is supported by



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*Haroon Janjua in Islamabad*

[@JanjuaHaroon](#)

Mon 27 Sep 2021 05.38 EDT

One of Afghanistan's most prominent psychiatrists has been abducted on his way home from work by a group of armed men.

Dr Nader Alemi, 66, who opened the country's first private psychiatric hospital in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, was stopped by seven men in a white car last week, said his family.

Alemi, whose hospital was [featured](#) in the Guardian in 2016, has treated thousands of Afghans, including Taliban fighters, since it opened in 2004. He is believed to be the only Pashto speaking psychiatrist in the north. It's the language most commonly spoken by the Taliban in the region.

His family said Alemi had received several threatening calls and messages in the months before he was abducted. One chilling message, sent on 21 June and seen by the Guardian, said: "You will be killed soon."

Alemi is a prominent figure in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan's fourth-largest city. As well as opening the hospital, he has also built a secondary school in

the city, equipped with a library and laboratory.

His daughter, Manizheh Abreen, said her father was being driven home last Monday when the men stopped the vehicle and ordered the driver, Basir, out of the car. They told Alemi to get out of the car and go with them to answer questions at a local police station. “They forcefully pushed him into their car and fled away. They stopped him where there were no CCTV cameras installed and they knew it already,” said Abreen.

The family said they do not know who was responsible for the kidnapping and have not received a ransom note.

Alemi’s son, Dr Fardeen Alemi, said: “Our main concern is that my father is suffering from diabetes and he needs to take regular insulin. We are extremely devastated about this situation. My father has only done sincere service towards the community and he is a brilliant psychiatrist and helped people in need.

“He has always held this idea that I have to serve the people and that’s why he never left his country,” he said.

The family said there is no active, formal government presence in Mazar-i-Sharif, and fear Alemi’s abduction will not be properly investigated.

Dr Khan Murad Muradi, one of the doctors in Alemi’s neuro-psychiatric hospital, said: “We are all shocked and saddened by this horrible incident. He was a kind-hearted man and I don’t think any doctor could treat patients in a situation like this. No one feels safe here in Mazar-i-Sharif.”

Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director for Human Rights Watch called on Afghan authorities to investigate the whereabouts of Alemi.

“If he has been abducted then those responsible should be held accountable. The [Taliban](#) claim to be able to bring security, so they should properly investigate what happened and bring those responsible to justice, while also protecting the rights of those accused of any wrongdoing.”

On Saturday, the Taliban killed four alleged kidnappers in Herat, hanging their bodies in public as a deterrent to others.

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[Germany](#)

## Germany election: worst ever result momentarily silences CDU



Armin Laschet, the CDU's candidate for chancellor, captured at his party headquarters after the first exit polls for the election. Photograph: Kai Pfaffenbach/Reuters

[Philip Oltermann](#) in Berlin

[@philipoltermann](#)

Sun 26 Sep 2021 15.41 EDT

As the first exit poll flashed up on the screens inside the Konrad Adenauer Haus, the Berlin headquarters of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the party faithful who had gathered in the central courtyard fell silent.

The black bar representing their conservative party showed up first: 25%, the worst result the dominant political force of modern German politics – the party of [Angela Merkel](#), Helmut Kohl and Adenauer – has recorded in its

history. Until today, the CDU's low point was the 31% it gained at the first democratic vote in the postwar era, in 1949.

"Vote for what makes [Germany](#) strong", urged a large banner outside the building, showing the head of CDU chancellor candidate Armin Laschet at the end of a line of era-defining chancellors. But tonight the CDU looked weak, and Laschet will face an uphill struggle to inherit the chancellory on the back of such a painful result.

The CDU not only has history on its side, however; it also has an uncanny inability to give up a fight. When the television screen showed the bar for the Social Democratic Party (SPD) revealing the two traditional broad-church parties to be neck-and-neck, there were yelps of relief.

By the time it was clear that a leftwing coalition between the SPD, the Greens and Die Linke would on first exit polls not have enough support for a governing majority, young Christian Democrats were cheering and clapping with their hands in the air.

When Laschet took to the stage at his party HQ at shortly before 7pm CET, his speech was almost upbeat: "We knew this would be an open and tight election," he said. "We can't be happy with the result, but this will be a long evening."

Like Olaf Scholz, the SPD candidate, he laid a claim to lead [the next government](#). Every vote for his party was a vote against a leftwing government, he said, "which is why we will do everything to form a government under the leadership of the [Christian Democratic] Union".

During the Merkel era, Germany's conservatives had long looked immune to the erosion in support suffered by other traditional parties of the centre right across [Europe](#). In 2013, the chancellor shored up 41.5% of the national vote behind her party, an emphatic win reminiscent of the middle of the 20th century, when Germany was a de-facto two party state.

Now that the CDU has caught up with the rest of Europe, it is unclear what the ramifications will be. Rightwingers in the party will blame Merkel for

gutting her conservative outfit of its old ideological core, leaving her successor to pick up the mess. Centrist will say the ideological core has had little to offer to a modern German electorate, and that it was only thanks to Merkel's skill that the party managed to remain popular for so long.

Many will point a finger at Laschet, who ran a campaign that lacked focus, energy and a coherent message. The lackadaisical air that has followed him throughout the campaign trail was evident even on the day of the vote: as Laschet posed in front of photographers at the polling station, it was obvious that he had folded his ballot the wrong way around, so his own vote was clear for everyone to see.

Many commentators will argue that the CDU would have won a clear victory if it had picked as its candidate Markus Söder, the highly energetic and waspish state premier of Bavaria. Sunday's result in Germany's south throws a question mark over such received wisdom: the Christian Social Union (CSU), the CDU's Bavarian sister party, looked on course to get 33% of the vote in the conservative stronghold, the second worst result in its history.

As the Christian Democratic Union's members digested the result on Sunday night, eyes turned to the result in the electoral district number 196.

The constituency, in an unspectacular part of the eastern state of Thuringia, was seen by some as one battleground that could point to the party's future: the CDU was represented here by Hans-Georg Maaßen, the former head of Germany's domestic intelligence agency, who was forced to resign in 2018 after being accused of ignoring evidence of anti-immigrant riots in the east.

Maaßen sees his job as being to win back CDU voters who have drifted off to Alternative for Germany (AfD), mainly by coopting their agenda. On social media channels, he has railed against Merkel's immigration policy, "economic globalists", and a perceived takeover of the national media by leftwing activists.

The AfD sees it differently: it has hopes that Maaßen could open the door to future coalitions between the large conservative bloc and the far-right upstarts. One local AfD branch, in the city of Suhl, endorsed Maaßen over

its own candidate, urging its supporters to vote for “a candidate with backbone and political experience”.

On Sunday night it looked like the Maaßen experiment had failed spectacularly: not only was the SPD on course to win the seat in district number 196, but the CDU rightwinger was trailing behind the AfD in third place.

The worst-case scenario for the Christian Democrats was always that its party would descend into infighting as soon as the clock struck 6 on Sunday, and be unfit to conduct coherent coalition talks in the coming weeks.

If the eventual result as close as it seems, and with no emboldened rival in sight, Laschet is likely to survive. His party will do its utmost to block out the historic nature of its defeat, and fight to keep alive its dream of providing the country with its next chancellor.

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## [Japan](#)

# Japan urged to abolish third-party consent from abortion law



Japan is one of only 11 countries that require third-party consent for abortions, despite calls to end the practice by the World Health Organization.  
Photograph: Kimimasa Mayama/EPA

*[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo*  
Mon 27 Sep 2021 04.30 EDT

[Women's health](#) campaigners have urged Japan's government to amend a law that forces married women to seek consent from their husbands before they can have an abortion.

Japan is one of only 11 countries that require third-party consent for abortions, despite calls to end the practice by the World [Health](#) Organization and other groups.

Although the 1948 law makes exceptions in some cases, including rape or when the mother's health is in danger, the restrictions amount to a "sexual assault" on women by the Japanese state, according to Kazane Kajiya, an abortion rights and [contraception](#) access activist.

Speaking on the eve of [International Safe Abortion Day](#), Kajiya said the maternal health act was designed to ensure that women continued to perform their traditional role as mothers.

"Women have the right to decide what to do with their bodies, and denying them that right amounts to sexual abuse by the nation," she told reporters on Monday.

"Japan doesn't protect women, but tries to 'protect' their bodies as public property and future incubators. We are treated as mothers and future mothers. We want the human right to access contraception and [abortion](#) without anyone else's approval. But Japan treats our bodies as its national property."

Women who have an abortion without consent – by forging their husband's signature or buying illegal abortion pills online – face up to a year in prison.

"When it comes to women making decisions about their own bodies, men's opinions carry more weight than women's happiness, health, and even their lives," said Kajiya, who has launched a petition demanding a change to the law.

Campaigners say the requirement underlines Japan's outdated attitude towards women's reproductive health. The morning-after pill is available only with a doctor's prescription, and the health ministry has said only that it will "consider" easing regulations to allow the emergency birth control to be sold over the counter, as it is in dozens of other countries.

The Japan Society of Obstetrics and Gynaecology has called for the maternal health law to be changed to allow women to seek abortion without third-party consent during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. The WHO and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women have recommended that Japan abolish the requirement.

Kajiya said that although the law applied mostly to married women, it had been used to force some to go through with a pregnancy regardless of their marital status, including the victims of abuse and sexual assault.

Abortions are legal in [Japan](#), with about 160,000 reported in the year up to March 2019, including 13,588 involving women under the age of 20, according to the health ministry.

Abortion pills are illegal, however. Pressure is mounting on Japan's health authorities to approve the oral drug, which is recommended by the WHO, but its use could also require third-party consent, Kajiya said.

“Why do women who are capable of making decisions and taking responsibility for their lives need men’s permission to take an extremely safe medicine?” Kajiya said. “We are treated like minors, because we are not allowed to make decisions about our own bodies. It means our bodies will never truly be ours.”

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## Headlines thursday 30 september 2021

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- [Live Shoppers warned of nightmare Christmas; fuel crisis ‘back under control’](#)
- [Furlough Ditching scheme will add to UK’s economic woes, warn unions and firms](#)
- [Supply chain crisis Global plea to ease Covid restrictions](#)

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# **Treasury minister branded ‘ridiculous’ after claiming HGV driver shortage nothing to do with Brexit – as it happened**

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**Business live**

**Business**

# **Shoppers warned of nightmare Christmas; fuel demand still at ‘unprecedented demand’ – as it happened**

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## UK job furlough scheme

# Ditching furlough scheme will add to UK's economic woes, warn unions and firms



Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak has been criticised for ending the UK's furlough scheme as economic recovery from Covid falters.  
Photograph: Toby Melville/AFP/Getty Images

[Larry Elliott](#) and [Richard Partington](#)

Wed 29 Sep 2021 19.01 EDT

Rishi Sunak's decision to wind up the [furlough](#) scheme today will intensify Britain's economic woes, an array of unions, business groups, employment experts, City firms and politicians have warned.

With signs of activity slowing even before pressures on supply chains began to mount over the past few weeks, the chancellor was criticised for cutting off a wage-subsidy lifeline that is [still supporting well over a million jobs](#).

Frances O'Grady, the TUC general secretary, said the end of the furlough scheme coupled with the £20 a week cut in universal credit next week meant the government was heading into the winter with no plan to protect workers.

"Ministers should rethink the end of furlough. Many workers in hard hit industries are still furloughed and need support for longer. Otherwise, we may see a rise in unemployment," O'Grady said.

Business leaders warned of an "autumn storm" from the government dismantling emergency pandemic support schemes at a time when the economic recovery from Covid-19 was faltering.

The coronavirus Job Retention Scheme was launched by Sunak on 20 March last year, after consultation with unions and bosses, covering 80% of a furloughed employee's wages, up to £2,500 a month.

The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) said the end of the furlough scheme, the scrapping of the small employer sick pay rebate, and the closure of the government's apprenticeship incentive scheme would add to pressure on companies.

Mike Cherry, the FSB's national chair, said: "It's potentially a dangerous moment. As the weather turns colder, so too will the operating environment for many firms. With recent economic growth numbers having fallen below expectations, the upcoming festive season may not provide as much of a boost as hoped to many small businesses' bottom lines."

The government has spent around £70bn to support the wages of more than 11.6m jobs over the past 18 months, and Sunak is hopeful that a record stock of more than a million job vacancies will absorb workers coming off furlough.

### About 1.6 million jobs remained on furlough at the end of July

However, employment experts warned this was unlikely because of mismatches between vacancies and where most workers were furloughed. One of the UK's biggest recruitment firms said the end of furlough was

unlikely to help firms address [chronic staff shortages](#) in some sectors of the economy.

Niki Turner-Harding, senior vice-president of Adecco UK & Ireland, said: “The end of the furlough scheme won’t turn the tables when it comes to the candidate-led environment that jobseekers are experiencing right now. Not least because those employees still furloughed work in industries most affected by the current situation, such as the travel industry.”

As many as [1.6 million workers](#) remained on furlough at the end of July according to the latest official figures from HMRC, representing about 5% of the overall workforce. However, large numbers of workers in sectors of the economy hardest-hit by Covid-19 are still receiving emergency wage support from the state, with fears the end of the scheme will drive up unemployment.

Usage of the scheme peaked at almost 9 million in May 2020 during the first wave of the pandemic, and at about 5.1 million [during the winter lockdown earlier this year](#). However, the rate of workers returning to their jobs has slowed steadily in recent months despite the reopening of the economy, as certain sectors remain under intense pressure.

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.

Christine Jardine, Treasury spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats, warned Thursday’s sudden stop could trigger an economic crisis akin to Black Wednesday in 1992 when Britain crashed out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism. Jardine said Sunak risked a “coronavirus Black Thursday” unless he prolonged the furlough to the 10 most affected sectors.

The chancellor insisted now was the right time to close the scheme and encouraged companies to make use of other government support measures, including the super-deduction tax break and kickstart job creation scheme.

“I am immensely proud of the furlough scheme, and even more proud of UK workers and businesses whose resolve has seen us through an immensely difficult time. With the recovery well under way, and more than 1 million job vacancies, now is the right time for the scheme to draw to a close,” he said.

Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at the wealth management firm, Hargreaves Lansdown, said: “Any hope that the end of the furlough scheme might be the magic wand to solve the supply chain crisis is likely to be wishful thinking.”

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## Supply chain crisis

# Transport bosses call on governments across world to ease Covid restrictions



Containers stacked high at the Port of Los Angeles as a record number of cargo ships are stuck floating and waiting off the southern California coast.  
Photograph: Frederic J Brown/AFP/Getty Images

*[Jasper Jolly](#)*

*[@jjpjolly](#)*

Thu 30 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Airline, shipping and trucking bosses have joined union leaders in calling for governments around the world to ease coronavirus restrictions on transport workers to help avoid a [Christmas supply chain crisis](#).

Industry representatives from around the world issued a joint call on Wednesday for coordinated action from national governments to simplify border restrictions.

The cost of transporting goods across the world had become almost negligible in recent decades, but the pandemic disruption to factories, shipping and customer demand has caused [chronic delays to cross-border deliveries](#) and led to record shipping container prices.

Willie Walsh, the former boss of British Airways, who now serves as director general of the International Air [Transport](#) Association (Iata), called for government restrictions to be eased to avoid disruption during Christmas and warned that further transport cost increases were likely.

“There is definitely a risk,” said Walsh. “What we’re facing is a crisis from restrictions, not from the virus itself.

“Demand is very high, but supply is very disrupted. Without question there is a risk of disruption as demand rises.”

Iata was joined by the International Chamber of Shipping, International Road Transport Union (IRU) and the International Transport Workers’ Federation in arguing that reducing and harmonising restrictions such as vaccine paperwork and testing requirements for transport workers could help ease the pressure at Christmas. The huge [variation in restrictions between neighbouring countries](#) causes delays and contradicts scientific advice, they said.

Shipping routes are particularly strained between the US and China, the two largest economies in the world, while air cargo in the broader Asia-Pacific region has also been hit hard by travel restrictions.

In the UK the lack of qualified lorry drivers has added to a fuel crisis. The UK government on Wednesday [deployed its reserve tanker fleet to try to keep petrol stations supplied](#) around the country, amid shortages that led to panic buying.

Umberto de Pretto, the IRU’s secretary general, said there would “absolutely” be problems at Christmas, as companies are already facing problems with their transport plans for the period which is crucial for retailers and producers of consumer goods, food and drink.

“There will be disruption, there will be issues, because no one is addressing the problems,” he said. “How can you drive the recovery without drivers?”

Iata’s Walsh said continued travel restrictions were “unnecessary, completely out of proportion to the risk that is faced”, citing the 36 questions on the UK’s passenger locator form. “I doubt anybody is reading the answer to those questions,” he said.

The lobby groups and unions said the World Health Organization should prioritise transport workers for Covid-19 vaccinations. However, they said they were against mandatory vaccines for workers for now because of unequal access to vaccines in different countries.

Chicago-based United Airlines on Wednesday said it will [fire 600 workers who have not taken mandatory vaccines](#), but the policy is thought to be unlikely to be introduced in some countries such as the UK.

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## 2021.09.30 - Spotlight

- 'Freud would have a field day' Anish Kapoor on vaginas, recovering from breakdown and his violent new work
- Sex, power and humiliation Eight lessons women learned from Monica Lewinsky's shaming
- 'I pleaded for help. No one wrote back' The pain of watching my country fall to the Taliban
- Plight of the pickled onion How pub snacks went from simple nosh to properly posh

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[Anish Kapoor](#)

Interview

## **Anish Kapoor on vaginas, recovering from breakdown and his violent new work: ‘Freud would have a field day’**

[Jonathan Jones](#)



‘I can’t sit here and psychoanalyse them. I don’t know how to’ ... Kapoor with a new work at his studio. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian



Thu 30 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

At 67, [Anish Kapoor](#), with a knighthood, a Turner prize and a retrospective due at the Venice Biennale next year, appears determined to strip away his own artistic skin. Like Marsyas – the satyr flayed alive by Apollo, whose gory fate Kapoor once commemorated in a 150m-long, 10-storey-high sculpture – the artist is exposing his innards. That’s the only way to describe his latest works. One of the world’s most renowned sculptors is about to go public as, well, a painter. Yet it is the content of the works he’s about to unveil that may disconcert. “They’re very, very violent,” he confesses. “And I just wonder what the hell that has to do with what’s in me. I can’t sit here and psychoanalyse them. I don’t know how to. But I recognise that it’s there.”

The works, about to go on display at Modern [Art](#) Oxford, are beautifully painted yet brutal: full of images of bloodletting, decapitation and disembowelling. Kapoor seems to have taught himself to paint the human figure in order to desecrate it. At his London studio, there are stacks of these blood-soaked canvases depicting huge wounded bits of bodies and purple organs spattered on the walls.

“Yikes,” he says. “I’m not doing it intellectually. I just wanted to make a many-breasted quasi-female figure and see what happened. Could I unwrap her pristine exterior and look at her problematic interior, full of blood and guts and breasts and bits and pieces, and all that? Fuck knows. Freud would have a field day.”



Seeing red ... Kapoor’s The world trembles when I retrieve from my ancient past what I need to live in the depths of myself. Photograph: ©Anish Kapoor. All rights reserved DACS, 2021

Kapoor isn’t exactly an inhibited conversationalist. We meet twice, at his gallery, then his studio. On the weekend in between, he gives a speech to [Index on Censorship](#) in which he warns against “self-censorship”. And the flow of images and ideas in our discussion is certainly a masterclass in how to not censor yourself. Throwing out provocations and theories, he tries to explain what he’s up to.

“I’m doing what I’ve always done, which is to look to some primal ritual act. If one takes that to its logical conclusion, the primal ritual act has to be murder or sacrifice. In [Freud’s Moses and Monotheism](#) he talks initially about Moses having not been a Jew but an Egyptian – which I quite like – but from there on, it’s all about the idea that Moses was murdered. Moses was sacrificed.”

I read a book called Blood Relations that said the first culture was made by women – and it came from menstruation

In case anyone misses the point, the paintings are accompanied by sculptures of enigmatic doorways and stepped buildings like Aztec pyramids, over big metal trays flowing with great painterly globs of red matter. Human sacrifice has played a part in many cultures. For Kapoor, it is a part of what religion is: “Its purpose has to be to ask ridiculous questions like, ‘Where do I go after I die?’ Or, ‘Where was I before I was born?’ Public display of the victim, public sacrifice, somehow helps us, even though it’s completely counterintuitive. We think the energy of civilisation is in a different direction. But apparently not so.”

These are unusual ideas and impulses to put on public display. At the gallery of his London dealer, we stop in front of a triptych of three big canvases that depict what at first look like florid, sensual blooms. Then you notice a headless neck bursting with blood, and the flowers turn out to be exposed anatomies. What’s going on? “The Diana of Ephesus who has 10,000 breasts ... she’s there. So I think what was in my mind was the sacrifice of Diana, the opening up, the revealing, of what’s inside her body. You’ll see that the only remaining bit, in a way, is her vagina. All the rest is opened up.”



Leaning in ... Kapoor with one of the exhibits for his show at Modern Art Oxford. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

The vagina has become quite a theme for Kapoor. There was a row in France over [his Versailles sculpture, Dirty Corner](#), which was nicknamed ““the queen’s vagina”. So what’s with the vaginas? Kapoor answers, unexpectedly, in terms of Marxist anthropology. “There’s an anthropologist I’m really interested in who’s weird,” he says. “A man called Chris Knight who wrote a book called [Blood Relations](#), in which he speculates that the first culture was made by women and that it came from menstruation. That women who lived together, especially in small groups, menstruated together, and that they used red ochre to cover their bodies so as to hide their menstruations. He speculates that the first acts of culture were to do with this act of solidarity.”

The earliest artistic material known is indeed red ochre, which was used at [Blombos Cave](#) in South Africa up to 80,000 years ago. It makes a strong red pigment – hand prints and animal images in red ochre survive in cave art. Kapoor can’t get enough of it either. “I have an obsession with red. My favourite colour of all, the one I use by the ton, is Alizirin crimson. It’s a very dark bloody Bordeaux wine red. What’s interesting about red is that it links to black so unbelievably easily. Red makes great darkness. And of course one might say red is fully a colour of the interior.”

So Kapoor’s paintings are not so far from his sculpture after all. Since the 1980s, he has used colour to release the cosmic and the inward – from early works, in which he scattered raw pigment on small objects, to Descent into Limbo, a 2.5m deep hole painted with a black so dark the drop seems infinite ([and into which one gallerygoer fell](#)). “Colour is deeply illusionistic,” he says. “Deep space is something I’m constantly in conversation with – the way colour affects deep space, in ways that are indescribable with words.”



The drop seems infinite ... Descent Into Limbo, made with ‘the universe’s blackest black’. Photograph: ART on FILE/Getty Images

In his studio, among the bloody canvases, is a black lozenge on a white background, encased in a glass tank. He asks me what I think it is. One thing I am sure of – it’s flat. Then he gets me to look from the side. It’s not flat at all: it bulges out into space, a solid diamond form. The optical illusion is mind-blowing. “So this is one of these new works made in the blackest material in the universe,” he says. “It’s in a case because the material is highly toxic and it’s incredibly fragile, especially to saliva, so you can’t talk in front of it. It’s a nano material. And what happens is the light enters and basically it’s trapped and doesn’t escape.”

It traps 98.8 % of light – “blacker than a black hole”. When Kapoor got exclusive artistic rights to this material a few years ago, there was a bit of a hoo-ha. You can even buy a “blackest black” acrylic paint, created by self-styled rival Stuart Semple, with the warning that by ordering it, “you confirm that you are not Anish Kapoor, you are in no way affiliated to Anish Kapoor, you are not purchasing this item on behalf of Anish Kapoor or an associate of Anish Kapoor.”

After my breakdown, my mother went to India, got some earth and put it under my bed – so I could dream myself well

The entire row is daft, for Kapoor's actual black nano material is dangerous, difficult to use and has taken years to develop into artworks. He shows me 19 more of these freaky spatial illusions in an upper room of his studio. Next year they will be unveiled at the Venice Accademia show. They take a lifetime's colour research to a sublime extreme. Is it a cliche to ask if this fascination with colour was influenced by his childhood in India? "I think some of my relationship to colour has to be cultural. This propensity for red has to have something of that. I think of Picasso and his relation to his Spanish roots. They were with him always – the dark mythological forces playing away".

In fact, when I push him to explain how his gory canvases reflect his own psyche, as opposed to anthropological ideas, he comes out with a moving story about India, displacement and the healing power of ritual. "I grew up in India," he says. "I was there until I was 17, 18. My mother was Jewish, so my brother and I then went to Israel. And I had the most awful, terrible nervous breakdown. I could hardly walk. I had an aunt who lived in Israel and my mother came to visit me. And my aunt, who had a kind of shamanistic predilection, said to my mother, 'You must go back to India and you must bring some earth and you must put it under Anish's bed.' Sorry Jonathan, this sometimes makes me want to cry. But anyway, I'll tell you it. And so my mother, bless her, went to India and got some earth and put it under my bed, and my aunt said further, 'He will be able to dream himself well from this matter.' Wow! You know it took me years to recognise the power of this thing. It gives me goosebumps. Sorry, but it does give me goosebumps."

Kapoor is an artist who takes you to the edge. He can make you contemplate the biggest questions. His new paintings are not so much a departure as a key to everything he has ever done, ransacking religion and myth to ask why human beings have always been driven to ponder the mystery of being. "I've been in Buddhist practice for a long, long time," he says. "Zen practice. It matters to me. I do really believe that we are religious beings. Where do I come from? Who am I? What am I? Where do I go? Those are questions that puzzle us all."

- [Anish Kapoor: Painting is at Modern Art Oxford from 2 October to 13 February](#). His show at Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia opens April 2022.
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## **Sex, power and humiliation: eight lessons women learned from Monica Lewinsky's shaming**



Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton embrace at a fundraiser for the Democratic party in November 1996. Photograph: Dirck Halstead/Getty Images



Zoe Williams

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Thu 30 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

In November 1995, a 22-year-old White House intern called [Monica Lewinsky](#) had the first of nine sexual encounters with Bill Clinton, the 49-year-old US president. As an official investigation would later reveal, these included fellatio, but not penetrative sex. The relationship, such as it was, continued until March 1997. It was a high-risk enterprise, occurring at the president's official residence and at a time when Clinton was accused of sexually harassing a former Arkansas state employee, Paula Jones. But perhaps it didn't seem that high-risk to either of them: Clinton had got away with much longer affairs before – and Lewinsky didn't see Linda Tripp coming.

Tripp, a former White House official then working at the Pentagon, already had a dim view of the Clinton administration. When Lewinsky, who had transferred from the White House to the Pentagon in April 1996, began confiding in her colleague in late 1997, Tripp recorded their conversations and persuaded Lewinsky to keep safe a dress with Clinton's semen on it. Tripp then passed the tapes and intel to [Kenneth Starr](#), the independent

counsel who was investigating the Clintons over historical property investments in Arkansas, the president's home state.

The fallout almost cost Clinton the presidency. He denied any sexual activity with Lewinsky. This apparent perjury later gave Starr grounds [to argue for his impeachment](#). It was incredibly arresting at the time, partly because of the lurid details – the stains on Lewinsky's dress, [the cigar that reportedly featured](#) in a sex game – and partly because it was such a baffling snapshot of US politics. If impeachment was such a huge deal – the first time in more than a century it had happened to a president – how did Clinton remain in post afterwards, apparently untouched by it?

Later, in the 00s, people started to consider the political dimension more searchingly. What implications did it have for the policy environment? Could Clinton have got more done without it? To what degree were Starr's tactics in pressing the impeachment part of a wider play to kill the administration by a thousand insinuations?

Now, though – thanks in part to [the podcast Slow Burn](#), which in 2018 built an intricate, magisterial portrait of the scandal – the blaring questions mostly boil down to: is that really how we used to think? Did we genuinely find it that easy to blame a woman, any woman, for anything? Were we really so credulous in the face of powerful men that their word was untouchable by anything short of DNA evidence?

As the US TV channel FX revisits the scandal in a 10-part drama, [Impeachment: American Crime Story](#), soon to be shown on BBC Two, here are eight lessons we can draw from the ugly mess.

**'Slut-shaming' was big in the 90s – and didn't pretend to be anything else**



Monica Lewinsky in February 1999. Photograph: Greg Gibson/AP

Lewinsky's affair with Clinton was revealed by the Drudge Report, a US news-aggregation website, on 17 January 1998, the day after the FBI had detained Lewinsky in a sting operation known as Prom Night. Even before – long before – any truth in the affair had been established, Lewinsky became a hate figure. Katie Couric, a mainstream news anchor, described her as a “predatory girl who had set her sights on the president”. This interpretation – that the intern was problematically promiscuous and “basically blackmail[ing] the president of the United States”, in the words of the talkshow host Bill Maher – was not uncommon, from Democrats as much as Republicans. Clearly, she was power-mad, her grandiosity and narcissism conveyed by the fact that, for her, only the president would do.

This was a well-worn way to discredit a woman who might reveal the sexual improprieties of a man in public office. The smear even had a name: “[A little bit slutty, a little bit nutty](#)”, as coined by the team who used it against [Anita Hill](#) in 1991, when she accused the would-be supreme court justice Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment.

There was a relentlessness to the attacks on Lewinsky, though, which partly resulted from the way the picture refused to cohere: was she a strategic, self-interested genius or a delusional, naive idiot? Was she a slut or a fantasist? If

she was a spoilt brat who got everything she wanted, how had she ended up with nothing?

Most of this troubling ambiguity, of course, came from the fact that Clinton wasn't telling the truth. Yet, even after that was established, the raw hatred of Lewinsky didn't dissipate. One of the most extraordinary articles [appeared in Salon magazine at the end of 1998](#); in it, a writer concluded that Lewinsky's mother, Marcia Lewis, was "also strangely drawn to powerful men with oversized libidos" (he got this from Lewis's "moist-palmed" book about the Three Tenors, written two years earlier). Not to get bogged down in his logic, it was a distillation of pure disgust: this young woman is sexual; her mother is also sexual. How perfectly vile. Poor powerfully libidoed men.

## **The understanding of power dynamics was extremely underdeveloped**



Clinton and Lewinsky on the south lawn of the White House in November 1996. Photograph: AP

It had hardly gone unnoticed, then, that Clinton was powerful, maybe peerlessly so, while Lewinsky was a nothing, a nobody, a fleck. Yet the difference between their positions, and what exploitation could possibly thrive in that chasm, went unexamined. In a US Observer article entitled

New York Supergals Love That Naughty Prez, 10 prominent women – mainly writers, a couple of comedians, a restaurateur, a fashion designer – discussed the saga in detail, pondering questions such as: is a blowjob infidelity? Did he really do this? (It was February 1998 and had not been confirmed – they agreed that he definitely did.) Did it make them think any less of him? (No.) Would they do the president? (Mostly yes.) They were feminists, some of them famous ones – Erica Jong, Nancy Friday, Patricia Marx – although, being sex-positive, they considered themselves outliers (they talked about “mainstream feminism” as something distinct).

At one point, the author and journalist Katie Roiphe asked: “Why did the public opinion overwhelmingly support Anita Hill, whereas Monica Lewinsky nobody has any sympathy for?” Francine Prose, a distinguished woman of letters, replied: “I wanted Clarence Thomas out of there ... Whereas I don’t want Clinton out of there. So you know, bless little Monica ...”

It makes me want to scream at the past: “Guys, just because sex is great and so are the Democrats, it doesn’t give you a pass on questions of power and coercion. Where does that end? What if he wants a virgin sacrifice?”

Where there was censure of the president, it was mainly over lying: to the public (generally disapproved of); to his wife (mainly a conservative complaint); and to members of his cabinet who learned they had inadvertently lied for him (Madeleine Albright). It was terribly rare even to voice concern at how young Lewinsky was (Donna Shalala, the health secretary, was an exception), let alone to ask what “consent” meant in this context. This was all the more astonishing after the world had heard Clinton’s defence.

## **Clinton’s defence was jaw-dropping**

His impeachment at the end of 1998 boiled down to two counts: lying under oath and obstruction of justice. The oath was in his deposition earlier that year in the sexual harassment case that Jones had brought against him. That was where he denied having a “sexual relationship”, “sexual affair” or “sexual relations” with Lewinsky.

Asked to account for this, 11 months later, by Starr, a man in possession of presidential semen on Lewinsky's blue dress, Clinton came back to the first court's definition of sex: touching a list of body parts, either directly or through clothes, "with an intent to arouse or gratify the sexual desire of that person". He didn't think receiving oral sex counted, he said. And why should it? He was prepared to swear under oath, as many times as it took, that he had made no attempt to arouse *her* sexual desire or gratify it. Maybe this made him a medium-good lawyer, but – good God – what kind of a person?

## **If you're a woman caught in the Madonna-whore dichotomy, try to be neither (good luck with that)**



Hillary Clinton watches on as her husband thanks the Democratic House members who voted against impeachment in December 1998. Photograph: Susan Walsh/AP

Hillary Clinton's approval rating hit an all-time high at the start of the impeachment process, when she was perceived to be performing the ultimate duty of a wife: loyalty. Between 1992 and the end of her husband's presidency, her popularity inversely tracked her political activity. Trying to reform healthcare, she was distrusted; talking about biscuits, she was better

loved. Even decades later, her public standing would deteriorate whenever she tried to build [an identity separate to that of “wife”](#). In a sense, she is trapped in the aspic of the last century’s spousal model, while the world has moved on. If anything, the attacks on her are more severe now than they were in the 90s.

This seems to me to be idiosyncratic to the US. In the mid-00s, I was talking to my cousin, who had moved to New York 20 years before, about the old saying that you know you are a citizen when you start to get angry at a country’s politicians. “I will never understand how much they hate [Hillary Clinton](#),” she said.

## **Third-wave feminism had a blind spot, as did second-wave**



A White House reporter watches Monica Lewinsky’s deposition during Clinton’s impeachment hearing in February 1999. Photograph: Ron Edmonds/AP

There was one feminist intervention that made sense to me at the time. [Amelia Richards and Jennifer Baumgardner wrote](#): “We don’t need to defend Lewinsky’s decisions or justify her love to support her rights in the name of the rights of all young women. We want the right to be sexually

active without the presumption that we were used or duped. We want the right to determine our own choices based on our own morality.”

This reignited a classic debate between the libertine, sex-positive third wave and the rule-bound, sex-as-victimisation second wave. It was seen as a replay of the “porn wars” of the 80s, but it was nothing like the porn wars.

The Lewinsky affair was like a symphony of individual and institutional misogyny, with variations, repetitions and crescendoes on that theme. First Clinton, never mind objectifying her, treated her like a non-person, a sex doll. Then the FBI sting operation, [which Starr described years later](#) in non-consensual, sadistic terms (“Fresh from the gym … Monica screamed, she cried, she pouted,” he wrote, of a young woman he had asked his team to threaten with [27 years in prison](#)). Then a much broader cultural attack in which she became the landing point for a seething social anxiety that was basically *vagina dentata* – what if a hot woman seduces you and then bites off your penis?

The idea that she had agency in all this is laughable, but the second-wave idea that no young woman can consent to anything is also laughable. A more sophisticated conversation could have taken place, had the two sides not fallen so readily into established trammels.

## **The public hates being asked to adjudicate on sexual morality (if it’s a man’s)**

The more allegations came out about Clinton, the more his polling improved – even in the wild west of the newly minted internet, which gave out details that mainstream media outlets prior to this would never have touched; even with Starr’s epic report. Public shaming relies on a public, yet the public seemed to identify with the wrongdoer. This is interesting to consider in the light of the Teflon reputations of Boris Johnson and Donald Trump. I always thought they had a pass on infidelity and misogynistic language because of the nature of their support base; an authoritarian politician can get away with anything, so long as it can be filed under “red-blooded man”. But it might be more accurate to say any man can get away with anything that can be filed under “man”.

## The era was a fat-shaming bonanza

The scrutiny of Lewinsky and Tripp's bodies was so intense that it spiralled off into its own universe. Saturday Night Live had repeated skits in which John Goodman would make himself look fatter than he was already in order to impersonate Tripp, the joke being ... who knows what the joke was.

Lewinsky was lambasted for being fat (sample joke from Jay Leno: “[She’s] considering having her jaw wired shut, but then, nah, she didn’t want to give up her sex life”), then derided for worrying about whether she was fat (David Letterman’s suggestion for the first line of her memoir: “Does this font make me look fat?”).

In retrospect, the joke was obvious: if a woman can’t conform to a size and shape in order to exist in public life, she doesn’t belong in public life.

## The world has moved on – but not as much as it needs to



Lewinsky, escorted by members of her team, in Washington in February 1999. Photograph: Kamenko Pajic/AP

It is hard to say how Lewinsky's treatment would have been different had the story broken yesterday. Certainly, the castigation from the mainstream media would have been more muted, although there is now a vivid misogynistic manosphere online that could pick up the slack.

It remains a high-stakes endeavour to accuse a powerful man of sexual misconduct in public life. It still seems to be a numbers game. One woman's word alone is rarely believed (Brett Kavanaugh was unscathed); 50 might do it (it took 87 to bring down Harvey Weinstein); 150 is ideal (the number of women and girls who accused Larry Nassar, the US gymnasts' doctor).

Four women publicly accused Clinton of sexual assault or misconduct, one of them in a rape allegation. Starr, that mighty sword of conservative justice, was later involved in stitching up Jeffrey Epstein's sweetheart deal for his first conviction for a sex offence involving a minor. [A former aide has recalled Clinton visiting Epstein's “paedophile island”](#) and the two men being friends. The impunity of these compromising actions and associations is hard to imagine now. But I still wouldn't fancy being a woman at the centre of one of these storms.

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Afghans at Hamid Karzai airport in August, trying to flee Kabul.  
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[The long read](#)

## **'I pleaded for help. No one wrote back': the pain of watching my country fall to the Taliban**

Afghans at Hamid Karzai airport in August, trying to flee Kabul.  
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

by [Zarlasht Halaimzai](#)

Thu 30 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

In the weeks before Kabul fell, my mind was strangely calm. There is a moment just before the world falls apart, when human beings almost believe they can reverse the sequence of events that has brought them to this point – a flash of magical thinking in which they can will a different reality into existence.

On 2 July, when the Americans [left Bagram airbase](#), I woke up in London with a horrible headache. My phone was inundated with messages of disbelief. “I am so sorry about it,” a few friends wrote, but they couldn’t name “it”. I couldn’t name it either.

I’d never been to the Bagram airbase, but I knew it as the sprawling capital of American power in Afghanistan, an impenetrable fortress about 30 miles north of Kabul that had accommodated tens of thousands of troops for almost two decades, along with the latest military technology, a jail where detainees [had been tortured](#), a spa where soldiers could get a manicure, and fast-food vendors selling hamburgers. How did the Americans leave this carefully crafted citadel without telling anyone?

“Gone in the darkness of the night, like thieves,” my father said, at our home in London, barely concealing his shock as he glanced up from his tablet. He had been glued to the news for days. We have family and friends in [Afghanistan](#), and we worried about what would happen to them if the situation deteriorated.

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I was born in Afghanistan, and spent most of my childhood there. When I was 11, my family fled Kabul, driven out by the war. For four years we lived like nomads, waiting to get back to our home. In the 1990s, while different factions jockeyed for power, we still believed we would go home. But when the Taliban took over in 1996, that hope became untenable, and we ended up in London seeking asylum.

At the time that my family became exiles, Afghans were reeling from the long proxy war that the US and Russia fought in the country for most of the 80s. In the midst of the cold war, the US had helped arm and train Afghan militia groups to fight against the Soviet-backed communist government. Both sides committed terrible atrocities, and ordinary Afghans were caught in the middle. Throughout this brutal clash of empires, the US promised Afghans prosperity once the Russians were defeated.

Afghanistan was at the forefront of US foreign policy in this period. In 1982, Ronald Reagan proclaimed 21 March as Afghanistan Day, “to commemorate the valor of the Afghan people and to condemn the continuing Soviet invasion of their country”. The following year, he invited the mujahideen [to the White House](#) as defenders of human rights. But none of this brought safety or security to the Afghan people. No matter how Afghans have tried to make good on this alliance, the principal feature of the relationship between the US and Afghanistan has always been force.

When I was little, I read a Russian [fairytale](#) in which a cruel king set the man whose wife he coveted a series of gruelling tasks, in the hope that the man would disappear and never come back. When the man completed all the tasks, the king sent him on an impossible mission: Go there, I don’t know where; get that, I don’t know what.

In their rage after 9/11, the Americans, supported by 42 countries including the UK, invaded Afghanistan. Their aim was to take out al-Qaida and the Taliban. When enough bombs had been dropped on a country already so devastated by war that it could barely support life, the US set the Afghans a series of impossible tasks to rebuild Afghanistan in its image.

The Afghans tried. After 20 years, during which there emerged a fragile democracy, universities, a commission for human rights, Afghan Idol, [Sesame Street](#), Valentine-themed cafes in Kabul, a tiny trade in pomegranates and grapes (the best grapes and pomegranates in the world) and a whole generation of young Afghans hungry for a better life, the story turned much darker. For Afghans watching the US [sign a peace deal](#) with the Taliban in February 2020, there was an unnerving feeling that we could see what was coming, that there was nothing we could do to prevent the impending disaster.

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Eighteen months later, on Sunday 15 August, Kabul fell to the Taliban. I was taking a few days off from my work running an [NGO](#) in Greece that helps refugees deal with violence and displacement. I was in a village in Gloucestershire. As the news came in, it jarred with the perfect English countryside around me. That morning, I had been walking in the woods trying to clear my head of the grim news I had been following hour by hour.

They are outside the gates, I heard, first in messages from friends in Kabul, and then on the news. Outside the gates – it sounded medieval. Like Constantinople, Kabul was under siege. The messages kept coming in: they are outside the gates, but they don't want to fight. They want a deal with the government. They are on the outskirts of the city. They want to take the city without firing a shot. They are inside the city. A friend sent a video he had made, walking around his neighbourhood in Kabul. The normally bustling streets were deserted. You could hear the tension and fear in his voice as he quietly described the scene.

People were flooding to the airport, and a friend who was supposed to fly out that day panicked when her flight was cancelled. All commercial flights have been stopped, she texted me. Pictures of hundreds or maybe thousands of people waiting outside the airport flashed up on the news. I was in constant correspondence with family and friends who were still inside Afghanistan, most of whom were desperate to get out. I got several texts asking me if there would be any help for people who had served in the army or the police. "What will become of me?" one asked. "I was a policeman."

For months, people had been afraid about what was coming. Groups of civilians and aid workers had started circulating lists of journalists, judges, NGO workers, artists and women in Afghanistan who had actively stood up for human rights, democracy and the state. These were people who had spent decades building the country's institutions, and now they needed to get out. In my work with refugees, I've dealt with hundreds of Afghans whose families had been killed or whose lives were threatened because they had worked with the US army. Just a few weeks of work was enough to get your name on a Taliban blacklist.

In 2018, I received an Obama Fellowship and joined a two-year programme that brought together civic leaders who work on some of the world's most pressing issues. In the gatherings I attended in the US, I met several officials who had held prominent roles in the Obama administration. Through the night of Sunday 15 August and into Monday morning, I wrote to them, hoping that they could tell me what to expect, and what the US evacuation plan was – but the answers came back vague and unclear. I emailed a few officials, now in high-profile government positions, asking for help. Don't leave the people in darkness, I pleaded. No one wrote back. As Monday

came to a close and the scenes at the airport became more and more desperate, it became apparent that there was no plan for evacuation, and a huge number of people would be left behind.



The scene at Hamid Karzai airport in August. Photograph: Wakil Kohsar/AFP/Getty

Aid workers, journalists, former military personnel – people with any connection to Afghanistan – started calling anybody that could help with evacuations. The most valuable contacts were those with connections to the military – generals, special forces, people who understood how to operate in hostile environments and who could pressure the US government into getting people out. Civilians who had never dealt with emergency evacuations of people in war zones were suddenly coordinating with special forces on WhatsApp groups. “I have a couple of military people helping me, and we have got several families to the airport and out,” a journalist in New York told me. One woman in the group was heavily pregnant and the journalist had worried that the stress might send her into early labour, but she had made it.

Confusion about what qualified people for evacuations made an already chaotic situation worse. I was helping to gather documents for people to present for their evacuation, but every time I managed to get what I thought

were the right papers, a different set of instructions came from the US embassy in Kabul. The constant rule-changes made it all but impossible for people who were at risk to get out. Many of those on the evacuation lists had destroyed their documents in fear of being targeted by the Taliban.

Sitting at my desk looking at the names of the people that wanted to leave, I felt a sadness I couldn't put into words. Each name represented a whole life. People who had spent years trying to make a difference were now forced to leave their work, their families and their homes, and go into exile. Afghanistan would be a darker place for their absence.

I felt dizzy. Just a couple of weeks before, I had been working to stop the deportation of an Afghan colleague from Greece. Many European countries had been deporting Afghans right up until the day Kabul fell, arguing that Afghanistan was a safe country.

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When the Taliban had entered the city on the Sunday, there was speculation among the people I was in contact with, inside and outside Afghanistan, about the fate of the Afghan government and the president, Ashraf Ghani. Within a few hours, Ghani was imprisoned in his own palace, his fate uncertain. He had vowed to stay and steward the people through the crisis, but by the end of the day he'd left the country along with his closest advisers. When I spoke to a friend who had worked on Ghani's election campaign, he seemed as shocked as I was. "I didn't think Ghani would leave," he said.

Ghani's departure destroyed any remaining morale. My phone pinged with messages from Kabul. A friend who was at the airport waiting to be evacuated texted. It's over, she said. All speculation that there might be any kind of power sharing had ended with the president's departure. How could ordinary people be expected to put up resistance?

Catastrophe is a felt experience. Once I heard that Ghani had left the country, my stomach dropped, and instead of my body, all I could feel was a dull ache. I couldn't imagine what would happen next. As Kabul unravelled, I hardly slept, and when I did, my dreams were full of magic. In one dream, I was split into several characters – a maimed man, a woman with a sword, a

blue girl that could fly. I'd wake up and immediately pick up my phone. The morning after the Taliban took over Kabul, I woke up to a suicide note that a woman in Kabul had sent to a WhatsApp group I was in. I am trying to be strong, she wrote, but I can't.

Another morning, I woke up to photos of a friend, bloodied and bruised. He had tried to get to the airport after receiving an email from the US embassy telling him he could get on to a plane, but the Taliban beat him as he tried to get through a checkpoint. He never made it out of Kabul.

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Within 48 hours of taking over Kabul, the Taliban had set up checkpoints all over the city, making it nearly impossible to get to the airport, where foreign soldiers were loading people on to [cargo planes](#) and transporting them to countries around the world, including Albania, Kosovo, Rwanda, the US and UK.

The negotiations about which countries would take in these refugees were shaped by hostile and racist refugee policies in Europe and elsewhere. A former colleague who was leading some of the negotiations told me that several countries were willing to take vulnerable people as long as it didn't become public knowledge. In one meeting she was told: you can send them here, but don't expect any official welcome from the government. Sometimes Afghans would take off not knowing where they would land. Their destination would be negotiated while they were up in the air, and they would eventually land in an unknown country that they'd never intended to go to.

The [US military](#) was guarding the airport, but they didn't want to assist people trying to get there, so extracting people from the city became a largely civilian effort. Recognising their opportunity, mercenaries swept in and started to offer a taxi service to the airport. One private military contractor, run by the founder of Blackwater, advertised its services in Afghanistan online. For \$6,500 a pop, or sometimes more, they transported people to the airport and on to a plane. All you had to do was prove you were good for the money. NGOs and well-funded civilian groups started using the service to get their people out.

Some people were forced to make several attempts to get to the airport, risking their lives each time. A female judge who had been an anti-corruption champion made seven attempts to get to the airport. Instructions came in from those running the convoys to meet at the Serena hotel in Kabul, but each time she got there she was told a different reason why the convoy was not leaving. When she did make it to the airport, it proved impossible to get past the hundreds of people who were waiting to get through the gates.



Afghans escaping to Pakistan in August. Photograph: Akhter Gulam/EPA

For those coordinating evacuations, not knowing how anything would turn out, the stress was taking its toll. People were breaking down on the phone, sobbing uncontrollably. They had to make impossible choices. Who was vulnerable enough to be on a list? Who constituted a dependent? Where could they go?

Evacuees wondered what to take with them. Imagine that in a space of a few hours you had to leave everything behind. What would you take? Your pillow? Your photographs? Maybe a little rug your father gave you? Your notebooks? A friend of mine who was waiting to be evacuated sent me several pictures of suitcases, wondering what constituted appropriate

luggage on a military plane. I had no idea. Do you take warm clothes in case you end up in Albania, or something different in case you land in Uganda?

Some who did get the chance to leave were forced to choose between staying with their families and staying alive. Every Afghan I was in contact with for those few weeks, those inside the country and those of us who left years ago, was experiencing trauma and exhaustion. Every time a plane took off from Kabul airport, it shattered a life and broke up a family.

Another friend who had spent all his life in Kabul and worked as a journalist, often openly criticising the Taliban, was anxious to leave. The Taliban were going door to door, taking names and making threats. He was moving from one relative's house to another, hiding. We were talking daily and I was trying to find a place on a convoy to the airport and a seat on a plane for him and his family. Finally, it came. I was asleep when I got a call at 5am from someone who was assisting the evacuations in the US. There were places on a convoy leaving later that day, and it seemed safe enough to suggest it to my friend. I sent the names over and then called my friend. Pack your bags, I said. Someone will call and let you know where you should meet them. I hung up and waited to hear back.

Hours went by. I had so much to do, but I kept checking my phone every couple of minutes. No new messages. My friend rang me several times and all I could say was that the people running the convoy would soon be in touch, but nothing came. And then it happened. Tweets began to trickle in, pictures of [an explosion](#) at the airport. A suicide bomber had driven a car bomb into the crowds waiting to be let into airport, blowing up 169 people who were trying to save themselves and their families.

I texted the person who was organising the rendezvous in Kabul, asking for an update. The convoy hadn't left, they replied. That night I sat on the stairs that led up to my bedroom, unable to move. If the convoy had left, there was a good chance my friend would have been killed. But because it hadn't gone, this one chance to get away from danger had disappeared. What terrible luck to be born in Afghanistan, I thought.

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Witnessing the catastrophe in the ambiguous position of an Afghan outside Afghanistan brought back all the feelings of fear and pain that I had felt as a child when my family feared for our lives. Meanwhile, I was working, along with many others in different countries, on an impossible task: to do something – anything – about what was happening to people in danger. *Go there, I don't know where; bring that, I don't know what.*

On 18 August, when Led by Donkeys, a UK-based activist group, got in touch with me suggesting that I record a message to Priti Patel, who continues to detain and deport Afghan asylum seekers under the guise of “illegal immigration”, I didn’t hesitate. At 6am, a van with a giant screen parked outside the Home Office, to stream a video message I recorded on my phone, asking Patel to stand with Afghan refugees. A video of the message playing to the windows of the Home Office was [shared on Twitter](#), where it has had more than half a million views.



Taliban fighters patrol the streets of Kabul, overlooked by a poster of former Afghanistan president Ashraf Ghani. Photograph: Wakil Kohsar/AFP/Getty

Because Afghanistan was in the news, my inbox flooded with invitations for media interviews. It was a moment when people suddenly wanted to hear from Afghan women. What did we think was going to happen? How did we feel? What should be done? Some questioners were better prepared than

others. One journalist began an interview by asking me whether I'd always felt inferior growing up in Afghan culture. Another asked me what I would do to secure the airport – I gently reminded him that I was not a military strategist.

It felt strange to be asked to speak when, for months, Afghan women like me had tried to warn about the looming catastrophe. Most of my pitches for pieces from Afghan women had been either ignored or politely rejected, which felt bewildering after the New York Times had, in February, published an [article](#) by Sirajuddin Haqqani, deputy leader of the Taliban and a proscribed terrorist responsible for the death of countless civilians in Afghanistan.

As dark as it got, there were moments of hope. When some members of the Afghan girl's [robotics team](#), a celebrated group of young scientists, got out, I felt myself able to relax for a brief moment. The beloved Afghan pop star, Aryana Sayeed, [posted a selfie](#) from a military plane, prompting me to play her songs and dance around in my kitchen. When I contacted the leaders of the Jewish community in London, they responded with heartfelt solidarity and sponsorship of Afghan families in the UK. Many recognised their own family's experiences in the images of parents handing their children over the airport fence to foreign soldiers. But every night, when I lay in bed to try to sleep, all I could feel was intense worry about what would happen next. I wondered about all the terrible things that were now in store for people in Afghanistan.

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A couple of weeks after the evacuation deadline had passed, I left London for Greece. My focus was on supporting the newly arrived Afghan refugees who were now stranded all around the world. In Greece, where I work, the government has turned refugee camps into detention centres, and the displaced are largely Afghan.

In Kabul, education and health systems have mostly collapsed, and nine out of 10 people are experiencing food shortages. According to the UN, 14 million Afghans are at [risk of starvation](#) as winter approaches. More refugees will doubtless try to escape this fate in the coming months, displacing more Afghans who could be rebuilding the country.

The Taliban are courting the international community for recognition and legitimacy, and for aid to be continued. The humanitarian sector is under pressure to provide emergency support in areas ravaged by war, the climate crisis and a collapsing economy. There are dark days ahead for ordinary Afghans, who are once again caught up between powerful forces vying for regional power.

No one had wanted the US to stay in Afghanistan for ever. US forces have perpetrated countless acts of violence in the country. What Afghans wanted was a planned withdrawal that didn't collapse the Afghan state and hand power to an extremist group that is now [subjugating women](#) and minorities. But the Afghans who warned about this outcome were ignored.

I am still in contact with people in Kabul, and many still hope to get out. Among them are people who had never imagined leaving their homes. One family has stayed throughout the changes of regime for 40 years, hoping that better days would come. Now, with the Taliban in power, their hopes for their daughters, who were in school and in university, are gone, and they want to leave. "I just want to finish medical school," their daughter texted me a few days ago. "I have worked so hard for it."

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## Snacks

# Plight of the pickled onion: how pub snacks went from simple nosh to properly posh



From peanuts to spicy peas. Composite: Guardian Design; george733/Su Nitram/Getty Images/iStockphoto

*[Tony Naylor](#)*

Thu 30 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

In the past seven years, the snack menu at Sheffield micropub the Beer House has been on quite a journey. If you like a bag of peanuts with your pint, it's one you'll recognise.

Owner John Harrison's original snack range was simple: pickled onion Monster Munch, KP nuts and Walkers crisps. Today, salted almonds are his biggest seller and his selection includes Snyder's jalapeño pretzel pieces, pork pies, olives and sausage rolls, the latter sourced from fellow

independent businesses in Sharrow Vale. “It’s rare to see people eating crisps now,” says Harrison. But if you do fancy a packet, the Beer House stocks upmarket Pipers. Karnataka black pepper and sea salt, anyone?

Such change has been driven, says Harrison, by customer suggestion and his belief that, in a turbulent pub market, offering something different helps develop a loyal audience. “You don’t go to a pub because they’ve got great snacks. But decent snacks ensure people have a better time. Micropubs are successful because, like the beer, you’re getting something you’re not getting anywhere else.”

But is that still true? In recent analysis of 1.5m orders, the app ServedUp found that hand-cooked and healthier baked crisps, olives and cashews are enjoying soaring sales in pubs, as pickled onions and salt-and-vinegar crisps decline.

The pub snack’s function has not changed since Victorian regulars were downing oysters with their stout. Landlords want peckish punters to stay put and stay thirsty. “Saltier snacks, pork products and moreish mild heat are good for business,” says Harrison. But snack ranges are increasingly sophisticated and, among those who regularly buy something to nibble on in the pub – 19% of pub-goers, according to manufacturer Tayto Group – so-called posh snacks are on the rise.

Nick Attfield, the director of properties at the Suffolk brewery Adnams, is baffled by biltong. “I think it’s dreadful. I can’t stand chewy meat.” But he imagines Adnams’ 10 managed pubs will soon stock it, alongside rice crackers, cheese straws and homemade pork scratchings. “And in pretty Kilner jars, where it used to be crisp boxes under the bar. Customer expectation has gone through the roof. It’s the general food trend, isn’t it? People are fascinated with food.”

Over the past decade, food has become a significant attraction at about one-third of UK pubs and, in such venues, snacks act as a shop window for restaurant-style menus – they set the tone. As a child, Alice Bowyer remembers pubs serving Mini Cheddars and cubed cheese on the bar. Now, as the executive chef of Bristol-based Butcombe Brewery’s 119 pubs, all of which serve food, she oversees snack menus that, alongside Tyrrells crisps

and Mr Filbert's "hand-crafted gourmet" nuts, might include kale crisps in Bristol's vegan heartlands or Somerset Charcuterie's spicy cider chorizo pokers, "like posh Peperamis".

"If you had the best scotch egg in our pubs, I'd be delighted," says Bowyer. "It doesn't have to be shit. Or an afterthought." But she adds: "We want to make sure our pubs are not too pretentious. We'll absolutely still sell pickled eggs and Monster Munch in some."

The idea that mainstream brands or traditional snacks are endangered by a growth in gourmet nibbles is moot. In March, a Perspectus Global survey of 2,000 pub-goers found that pork scratchings were still Britain's favourite pub snack, with dry-roasted and salted peanuts, salt-and-vinegar and ready-salted crisps completing the Top 5. Olives trailed in 13th and wasabi peas a fitting 20th. Because why would you want that much heat when drinking beer or wine?

That survey chimes with what David Massey has observed over the past 10 years. A director at CG Supplies in Stoke-on-Trent, AKA [lovepubsnacks.co.uk](http://lovepubsnacks.co.uk), Massey supplies about 2,000 British pubs and describes a market in which all snacks are flying ("August was the busiest month we've ever had"), but which has become far pickier.

For example, Tyrrells, Real and Pipers are now Massey's bestselling crisp brands, with flavours other than the traditional big three – ready-salted, cheese-and-onion and salt-and-vinegar – markedly more popular. Particularly in "proper real ale pubs", says Massey, many owners, "wouldn't dream of having anything other than a hand-cooked crisp".



‘A substantial meal’ ... a Butcombe Brewery scotch egg.

“When you can buy five packets of crisps for £1 in the supermarket, people don’t want to pay £1 a packet in the pub,” says Massey. “But if it’s something special, they don’t think anything about it.”

If the popularity of hand-cooked crisps reflects how Jamie and Nigella have transformed British attitudes to flavour, other shifts in pub snacks similarly track wider food trends. The past decade’s nostalgia for childhood flavours – seen in the playful menus at Heston Blumenthal’s Fat Duck restaurant or when your local suddenly started stocking Nik Naks and Wotsits – is still in play. “We sell a lot more Monster Munch than we used to,” says Massey.

The [high-protein foods](#) trend has, more recently, transferred from the gym to the pub. Massey previously tried to sell biltong and beef jerky, “two or three times and it failed miserably. But they sell really well, now. There’s definitely been a change somewhere.”

Thriving, perhaps at a point where retro-modern British food and hipster notions of authenticity intersect, Massey has also noticed a significant revival of interest in ultra-traditional scratchings. After a feverish wave of artisan brands (see Mr Trotter’s “triple-cooked pork crackling”) and novel flavours from peri peri to pickled green chilli, it is back to basics. “We’ve

got a Proper Black Country scratchings that is, by far, our biggest single-item seller. It's a little bit the opposite of the crisps. You had so many new pork scratchings coming out. It's gone full circle. Everyone wants proper old-fashioned scratchings."

The pandemic may subtly change our relationship with pub snacks. Stuart Smith, the merchandising director at the foodservice giant Brakes, says that, instead of packets to rip open and share, individual items in recyclable packaging are on the up. "We've seen a huge increase in sales for meat snacks in paper bags." Meanwhile, scotch eggs are still enjoying a PR bounce from last December's cabinet-level debate over whether or not they counted as a "substantial meal". "It's fascinating. I've got them on quite a few menus now," says Attfield. "It started off as a joke, one I don't think publicans found particularly funny, but it got people talking."

There will be those who see gentrification in £1.20 bags of crisps or £3 scotch eggs. Or landlords chasing profit. True, as wholesale per-bag costs are similar and they command a higher price, pubs make more per bag on posh crisps than standard. Tayto Group research suggests we will pay 30% more for premium brands.

But these are peripheral sales. The Beer House's snacks generate roughly 5% of turnover. In smaller independents, landlords often serve snacks that are popular or a fun USP, rather than hugely profitable. The £1 beetroot or scotch bonnet pickled eggs at the Cock Tavern in Hackney, east London, are, says its manager, Joel Wood, "a total loss leader" to get people talking and drinking. "To loads of regulars and myself it's a really decent snack. The working man's scotch egg, where you shake a pickled egg in a packet of crisps – bangin'!"

At Corto, a craft beer and natural wine bar in Clitheroe, Lancashire, Katie Mather serves sourdough and miso butter or pan con tomate, because she and husband, Tom, love food. "We're trying something different that we enjoy about European cafe-bar culture. We're not making a huge profit. We use expensive ingredients. But it's something people come back for."

At the same time, she says: "That doesn't mean I don't enjoy traditional pub snacks." Corto sells Monster Munch, "and we're looking at making pickled

eggs”.

This is surely the way forward. Why choose between gourmet and big-brand pub snacks? You can have both. Yes, if you must, even wasabi peas.



Pub-goers enjoying bar snacks at the Spaniards Inn, north London, in 1958.  
Photograph: Picture Kitchen/Alamy

## From whelks to wasabi peas – 200 years of pub snacks

**1800s** Oysters were plentiful and, by the mid-1800s, according to David Long’s book London’s Secret Square Mile, pickled eggs were so popular at one London pub that its address, now Crawford Passage, was known as Pickled Egg Walk. [Henry Mayhew’s London Labour and the London Poor](#) recorded hawkers going pub to pub with pickled whelks, pies, boiled peas and sheep’s trotters.

**1910s to 1940s** By the 1920s, Frank Smith, of Smith’s Crisps, [in Cricklewood, north London](#), was selling packets of crisps to pubs alongside salt cellars to season them with. According to company legend, these were regularly stolen – inspiring the salt sachet in Smith’s Salt ’n’ Shake. By the 40s, Smith’s crisps were everywhere. “A 1949 article from the Economist

summarised pub food as ‘crisps or a flaccid sardine on leathery toast’,” note [the pub historians Jessica Boak and Ray Bailey](#), authors of 20th Century Pub.

**1950s to 1980s** KP starts selling nuts in 1953, pork scratchings emerge as a pub snack and pie-warmers appear on bars alongside filled rolls. The “fish man” tours pubs before last orders selling pots of cockles and prawns, tolerating merry punters asking: “Have you got crabs?”

**1990s to 2021** Kettle Chips arrive, joining bombay mix and Twiglets on adventurous menus, paving the way for the hand-cooked revolution. The early 00s saw many pubs getting nostalgic (corner-shop sweets, prawn cocktail crisps). More recently, swanky nuts (cashews, pistachios), Mediterranean imports (olives, charcuterie) and spicier items (wasabi peas, jalapeño corn kernels, chilli crackers) have made inroads.

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## UK reports 36,480 new cases – as it happened

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## Global development

# ‘I’ll never go back’: Uganda’s schools at risk as teachers find new work during Covid



An abandoned classroom in Uganda, where many teachers were left with little or no income when schools shut. Photograph: Alon Mwesigwa

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Alon Mwesigwa](#) in Bombo

Thu 30 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

The last message Mary Namitala received from the private school in which she taught was in March last year, the day all schools in [Uganda](#) were ordered close due to Covid-19. The message read: “No more payments until when schools open.”

“My husband and I decided to leave our rented house in town and shifted to the village, to our unfinished house. We could not afford to continue paying rent,” says Namitala, from her home in Bombo in central Uganda, about 20 miles north of the capital Kampala.

She had no choice but to find other sources of income.

“I have transitioned from teaching into farming and there’s a ready market for our produce,” she says, pointing to rows of tomato plants in her garden, and the chickens she is breeding. She has even rented an extra plot of land to grow more crops.

“I will not leave my business, which I started, to devote all my time to teach again,” she says, adding that other former colleagues have done the same.

I am looking for other ways to survive. It makes me sad that I have to leave this profession

*George Wakirwaine, teacher*

About 40% of Uganda's primary schools and 60% of its secondaries are private institutions, run by individuals, religious organisations, charities and businesses, with no help from the local authorities. Their main source of income is through school fees, which cover all running costs, including teachers' salaries, which range from \$100 to \$250 (350,000 to 880,000 Ugandan shillings) a month.

Some private schools offer a high-quality education and good facilities, some are started as business ventures, purely to make money for the owners. But many others are opened and funded by families or villages in areas where government schools are overcrowded or too far away.

When schools closed, parents stopped paying, income dried up and most schools had to reduce or stop paying teachers' salaries.

The government continued to pay the wages of state school teachers, but its [promises to assist private school teachers](#) have gone unfulfilled.

The Economic Policy Research Centre, a thinktank in Kampala, [reported](#) in May that 85% of private schools were not paying full teacher salaries due to financial challenges brought on by Covid-19.

Across [sub-Saharan Africa, 50% of private school teachers](#) (15% of the total number of teachers) saw a drop of 50% in salaries on average.

Like Namitala, many teachers in Uganda have found new careers, which threaten the future of private schools. [Hundreds are being put up for sale](#) due to pressures from banks to repay loans and disinterest from owners to reopen.

Robert Kimanya, headteacher at Green Galaxy nursery and primary school, near Kampala, says many of his teachers left because of Covid closures. "I have two teachers who have joined the army. Some have relocated to their

villages. That means when we open, some schools will not get teachers, including government schools.”



George Wakirwaine was unable to support his family after his teaching salary stopped. Photograph: Alon Mwesigwa

George Wakirwaine, 30, a teacher for seven years at a community school in Kampala, could not afford to keep his wife and two daughters in the city when his wages dried up. He sent them to his family's village. His survival has largely depended on the goodwill of the parents whose children he taught. He also fetches water for homes in the neighbourhood for a small fee.

“I am looking for other ways to survive. It makes me sad that I have to leave this profession,” he says.

Some teachers have no plans to return to the profession.

“I will never go back [to teaching],” says one former teacher, who now runs a tailoring shop in Kampala. Another, who is also running a shop, says: “It’s not worth it. First, there is no money, and when you find yourself in such a situation [long closures], no help whatsoever.”

Nicholas Bwire, who leads the Mukono Private Teachers Association, a loose association of up to 500 private school teachers in Mukono district near Kampala, says: “It reached a point where teachers started begging parents to give them something to eat. They now call us beggars who go to them to beg what to eat.”

Racheal Namugaya, 30, a teacher at Global junior school in central Uganda, says she will not leave teaching, but she will keep her fresh food market stall running when schools reopen, as a cushion against future closures. She is among the lucky ones. Although her salary stopped, the school still provides her accommodation and occasionally food.



Teacher Racheal Namugaya and the market stall she started to support herself during Covid school closures. Photograph: Alon Mwesigwa

But it is the market stall that has supported her. “I get what to eat, feed my child and provide medication, in case she is sick,” the mother of one says. “I got a loan from friends to start off. They trusted me. I have paid off the loan. The business is doing well.

“I will not close [my business] when schools open. I will get someone to help, but keep very much involved.”

For now, there is little chance of schools reopening, despite [appeals from teachers' unions and Unicef](#). The government is insisting teachers are vaccinated before returning to work. More than 80% of teachers have yet to receive their first dose. The government confirmed last week that schools will remain [closed until January](#), continuing the disruption to education for 15 million children across the country. Universities are expected to reopen in November.

Education minister and [first lady Janet Museveni called for patience](#), saying while “teachers in private schools have suffered ... [the] government has chosen to let schools remain closed ... to ensure that the lives of children remain safe from the danger that the Covid-19 pandemic brings”.

Namitala says Covid had taught teachers a big lesson. “We’re supposed to create other ways of survival.”

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## Global development

# Brazil hospital chain accused of hiding Covid deaths and giving unproven drugs



A woman passes by the entrance of a Prevent Senior hospital in São Paulo on 28 September. Photograph: Amanda Perobelli/Reuters

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

*Tom Phillips and Flávia Milhorance in Rio de Janeiro*

Wed 29 Sep 2021 14.45 EDT

One of Brazil's biggest healthcare providers has been accused of covering up coronavirus deaths, pressuring doctors to prescribe ineffective treatments, and testing unproven drugs on elderly patients as part of ideologically charged efforts to help the Brazilian government resist a Covid lockdown.

Prevent Senior, a health maintenance organization with a chain of hospitals and more than half a million members, is in the crosshairs of a congressional inquiry into Brazil's coronavirus crisis and the highly controversial response of President Jair Bolsonaro.

Last month a group of whistleblowing doctors [handed a 10,000-page dossier](#) to investigators containing a series of incendiary allegations against the São Paulo-based firm that caters to senior citizens.

The dossier contained claims that elderly patients had been used as "human guinea pigs" for the testing of unproven Covid "remedies" without giving their full consent.

On Tuesday, the lawyer representing those whistleblowers, Bruna Morato, appeared before the Covid investigation in Brasília and made further allegations.

They included claims that:

- Prevent Senior doctors were pressured into giving patients a cocktail of ineffective drugs, including the antimalarial hydroxychloroquine and the anti-parasitic ivermectin, in what was referred to as the “Covid kit”.
- The decision to promote hydroxychloroquine as a supposedly effective Covid treatment was partly designed to help government ideologues who allegedly wanted to use such information to convince Brazilians there was no need to stay at home during the pandemic. “The economy couldn’t stop so they [the government] needed to find a way of giving hope to people who were leaving their homes. This hope had a name: hydroxychloroquine,” Morato alleged.
- The use of such unproven medicines was also part of “a cost-reduction strategy” on the part of Prevent Senior. “It is much cheaper for a health provider to make certain medication available rather than actually admitting those patients,” [Morato claimed](#).
- Coronavirus deaths had been concealed in order not to compromise the results of Prevent Senior tests allegedly designed to show “Covid kit” drugs were effective against the disease. “This is fraud,” [said](#) the inquiry’s vice-president, Randolfe Rodrigues.
- Prevent Senior doctors had supposedly received instructions to reduce the oxygen supply to seriously ill Covid patients who had been in

intensive care for more than 10 or 14 days. “The expression I heard repeated on numerous occasions was: ‘Deaths free up beds too,’” Morto said.

In [a statement](#) Prevent Senior said it repudiated the “untruthful accusations” and had always operated within legal and ethical guidelines. The company denied it had ever hidden or under-reported deaths.

“Prevent Senior has always respected the autonomy of its doctors and has never fired its employees because of their technical convictions,” the company said.

The claims sparked a major outcry in Brazil, where nearly 600,000 people have died because of Covid – second only to the US.

Daniel Dourado, a public health expert and lawyer from the University of São Paulo, said: “This is an unprecedented scandal in Brazil.”

Dourado said much about the allegations against Prevent Senior still needed to be elucidated. A police investigation was needed. But there were disturbing signs that Prevent Senior may have formed an “alliance” with some government officials and informal advisers “to create a narrative that was used to trick the Brazilian population into becoming infected” with Covid. “These accusations are extremely serious,” Dourado said.

Christina Barros, a member of the Covid-19 taskforce at Rio de Janeiro’s Federal University, agreed that the accusations, if confirmed, were grave.

“If it happened as is claimed, it is like telling patients … that they were not being treated by the doctors in front of them. [That actually] those doctors were following a script laid out by an administrative office that was motivated either by cost reduction … or political purposes,” Barros said.

“It will be up to investigators to define the extent of this [but] it is very serious.”

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## YouTube

# YouTube to remove misinformation videos about all vaccines



Under previous guidelines YouTube demoted – effectively hiding from view – videos that spread misinformation about non-Covid vaccines or promoted vaccine hesitancy. Photograph: Ianni Dimitrov Pictures/Alamy Stock Photo

*[Dan Milmo](#)*

Wed 29 Sep 2021 09.00 EDT

YouTube is to remove videos that spread misinformation about all vaccines, as it steps up a crackdown on harmful content posted during the coronavirus pandemic.

From Wednesday, the video streaming site, [which has already banned Covid jab falsehoods](#), will take down content that contains misinformation such as claiming any approved vaccine is dangerous, causes chronic health defects or does not reduce spread of disease.

Under previous guidelines, the platform demoted – effectively hiding from view – videos that spread misinformation about non-Covid vaccines or promoted vaccine hesitancy.

Last year, YouTube implemented a ban on Covid vaccine misinformation videos, which has led to 130,000 pieces of content being taken down since then. YouTube, which is owned by Google, has removed a total of 1m videos for spreading general Covid falsehoods since the pandemic broke out.

Matt Halprin, the global head of trust and safety at YouTube, said vaccine misinformation was a global problem and had spilled over from the spreading of falsehoods about Covid jabs.

“Vaccine misinformation appears globally, it appears in all countries and cultures,” he said.

Halprin added that falsehoods around the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine, which has been wrongly attributed to causing autism, were an example of the misinformation YouTube will target.

“There is still a lot of challenges around MMR and people arguing whether that causes autism. And as we know, the science is very stable that vaccines do not cause autism,” he said.

Halprin said the ban would also apply, for instance, to content that claims vaccines cause cancer, infertility or contain microchips, the latter having gained prominence as a falsehood about Covid jabs.

In 2019, a [major study affirmed](#) that there was no link between autism and MMR, in the wake of a pre-Covid upsurge in vaccine scepticism, fanned by social media and anti-government populism. A paper in the journal Annals of Internal Medicine, which is published by the American College of Physicians, found “no support for the hypothesis of increased risk for autism after MMR vaccination in a nationwide unselected population of Danish children”.

Halprin said the new guidelines will still allow personal testimonies on taking vaccines, discussion of vaccine policies and references to historical

failures in vaccine programmes, as long as the content does not include broad misinformation or promote vaccine hesitancy. As well as applying to falsehoods about vaccines for specific diseases such as hepatitis, the guidelines will apply to general statements about vaccines that are deemed to be misleading.

On Wednesday, a search under the terms “MMR vaccine autism” produced a page of results containing rebuttals of any link between the vaccine and autism, including a video entitled “Vaccines and autism: how the myth started”. However, the page also includes a TV interview with the actor Robert De Niro in which he states that Vaxxed, a documentary directed by Andrew Wakefield – one of the key figures in promoting discredited links between MMR and autism – is a film that “[people should see](#)”. De Niro was being interviewed in 2016 after his Tribeca film festival pulled a screening of Vaxxed in the wake of a backlash against the film.

YouTube’s move follows a [decision by Facebook last year](#) to remove false claims about Covid vaccines once they have been debunked by public health experts.

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## 2021.09.30 - Opinion

- 'The woke' are just the latest faux enemies of Englishness conjured up by the right
- Germany's election result could soon be inspiring Europe's centre left
- Bond's mission stays the same: letting Britain think it's still a superpower
- We're told not to bottle up bad experiences - but a stiff upper lip can be for the best

## [OpinionEngland](#)

# ‘The woke’ are just the latest faux enemies of Englishness conjured up by the right

[Patrick Wright](#)



Illustration: Eleanor Shakespeare/The Guardian

Thu 30 Sep 2021 03.00 EDT

Like some of the emeritus professors who have recently steamed into the Conservative party’s “anti-woke” campaign under the name of [History Reclaimed](#), I grew up in a less fractured country, in which, stately occasions apart, waving union jacks seemed largely left to the National Front.

In English classrooms, we were encouraged to be more moved by the famous list of “characteristic fragments” that [George Orwell](#) pulled together in the first months of the second world war, as he searched for a unifying

“pattern” in the diversity of English life. He wrote of old maids biking to communion through autumn mists and the clatter of clogs in a Lancashire mill town.

Orwell admitted that a Scottish or Welsh reader might be irritated to find his list was made of entirely English materials. Yet it was urban as well as rural, northern as well as southern, and definitely not centred on the values of the social elite. His working class may have left “the flag-wagging, the Rule Britannia stuff” to small minorities, but its members also shared the “connecting thread” of patriotism on which the warring state must rely. They may have had the foulest language in the world, but they bore no resemblance to the image of “idlers” condemned as “among the worst in the world” by present cabinet ministers Kwasi Kwarteng, Priti Patel, Dominic Raab and Liz Truss in the 2012 tract [Britannia Unchained](#).

For a couple of decades after 1945, Orwell’s [England](#) Your England remained a defining text for a nation that had set out to turn the patriotism of the war effort into a driver of social democratic consensus. That world had been largely dismantled by the end of the 20th century, and politicians who continued to appeal to Orwell’s “connecting thread” for a transformed and hugely different present were often faced with guffaws of disbelief.

There was, however, one aspect of Orwell’s vision that is by no means so exhausted. His “England” was given urgency and coherence by the threat of an apparently triumphant Nazi Germany. That habit of defining England against a sharpening sense of encroaching danger has proved dynamic as well as enduring.

I had reason to notice how changeable the perceived enemy might be while researching my book [The Village That Died for England](#) in the early 90s. Situated in a little valley on the Dorset coast, Tyneham was evacuated shortly before Christmas in 1943, and turned into a training ground for American and British forces preparing for D-day. The local officials and volunteers engaged in the painful task of counselling the last residents out of the valley reassured them they would be able to return once the war was over, and this promise would not be forgotten.

After the victory, the landowners wanted their property back, and many in the area rallied behind them. The campaign was joined by Arthur Bryant, a popular rightwing historian and columnist whose reputation was still overshadowed by his prewar enthusiasm for Hitler's Germany. It was Bryant, more than anyone else, who launched Tyneham into its postwar career as a radiant embodiment of all that had been best about England. In his version, the promise of return became Churchill's personal pledge. The subsequent "betrayal" became the responsibility not of the Nazis but of the postwar Labour ministers who decided, in 1948, that, with the cold war under way, the War Office must keep its requisitioned land.

Conservationists would rally to the defence of the flora and fauna, but it was not really on their account that Tyneham's story would be rehearsed in countless articles and broadcasts over the postwar decades. It endured because it served as an allegory for those who believed that England had won a vast and costly war only to face destruction from within.

In the early postwar years, this polarised way of telling the story of England had entered the political mainstream and was being put to work alongside "monetarist" reform by Tory revivalists. It was used to pitch the memory of the war at various embodiments of Thatcher's "[enemy within](#)", a term that she at first directed against the striking miners. Repeatedly, this was an England that blamed many of its woes on immigration but its memory was also rallied against the reforming agencies of the postwar state – centralised planning, comprehensive education, tower blocks, the anti-racist bureaucracy in local government, the arts establishment with its preference for arcane music and poetry that didn't even rhyme. And when the domestic state was "rolled back", the narrative of England betrayed came to be concentrated more fully on the European Union, understood through "Euromyths" of the sort peddled by freeloading English MEPs and an overpaid young bullshitter named Boris Johnson.

As I [suggested in this paper](#) back in 2005, it is not Orwell who should be counted the enduring prophet of this resurgence, but the writer GK Chesterton, who portrayed the English as a "secret people" in the opening years of the 20th century. His blameless English aborigines had silently endured the yoke of baronial power and were then suffering under the Fabian state, with its metallic expertise. Chesterton initiated a vision of the

English as a virtuous but silenced majority, largely innocent of their own imperial history, but surely capable of one day breaking out into a revolution that would make the Russian and French versions seem tame.

Consider Nigel Farage on the [morning after the 2016 referendum](#), hailing a victory for “real people”, distancing himself from the £350m-a-week-for-the-NHS-pledge, before settling down to a victory breakfast of kippers and champagne. In the Sunday Telegraph, meanwhile, Andrew Roberts (who is among the brave-hearted historians of History Reclaimed) hailed the Brexit-voters as “bloody-minded insurgents” who had risen up in the tradition of the peasants’ revolt. It was left to the former editor of that paper, Charles Moore, who has never borne much resemblance to a revolting peasant, to confirm the link: “I can testify how hard it is to assert our right against those in power.” No thought there for the looming difficulty of reconciling this abrasive English uprising with the view from Northern Ireland or Scotland.

Whether its leaders knew it or not, Brexit was a performance mounted by politicians who used Chestertonian fables to take down a country that their policies had already turned into a land of seething resentments. Detailed plans for the separation were always in short supply, but the message was there in the insouciance of David Davis turning up to negotiate in Brussels [with no papers](#), or Jacob Rees-Mogg [sprawled like an etiolated dandy](#) over several seats in the House of Commons. You could see it in Johnson’s unkempt mop of boyish hair as well as in Lord Frost’s union jack socks and Farage’s proudly brandished fag and pint. It is still there in the casual preference for plausibility rather than truth, the careless shrugs, the blending of dog whistle racism with the cod-heroism of no longer submitting to codes of conduct dismissed as elitist or “politically correct”. It is surely this proudly “unwoke” outlook, which happily appeals to the worst in people, that has proved the prevailing Englishness of recent years.

And the future consequences? You can take your pick. “[Global Britain](#)”, if you can believe it, and if Johnson is able to manage the unruly English mount he has created for himself. For myself, I keep remembering the degraded Dorset valley Bryant described in 1954: “a desolate, uncared-for, rabbit-haunted wilderness of deserted, weed-ridden pastures, ruined houses and shell-swept, barbed wire entanglements.” History Reclaimed, indeed.

- A new edition of Patrick Wright's The Village That Died for England: Tyneham and the Legend of Churchill's Pledge is published by Repeater Books.
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[OpinionGermany](#)

## **Germany's election result could soon be inspiring Europe's centre left**

[Martin Kettle](#)



‘The new government is likely to be led eventually by the Social Democrat Olaf Scholz.’ Photograph: Michele Tantussi/Reuters

Thu 30 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Germany’s [general election](#) signals far more than just the end of the Angela Merkel era. Although it will eventually produce yet another centrist coalition government, this should not be dismissed as simply the same old same-old. For the new government will represent several steps into the unknown. There will be significant lessons and lasting political consequences – for Germany above all, but also for the continent of which, in spite of everything, Britain remains part.

Even without Merkel at the helm, Germany remains Europe’s economic powerhouse and principal regional player. That will not change. Yet, with [no party](#) exceeding 26% of the votes after last Sunday’s contest, German voters have ushered in a new and more fragmented political order. For the first time they face government by a three-party coalition, not the more familiar two.

The new government is likely to be led eventually by the Social Democrat Olaf Scholz. But the parties on which he would rely – the Greens and the economically liberal Free Democrats – will drive hard bargains. In the short term this may signal weeks of paralysis in Berlin – just as [Germany](#) takes over as chair of the G7. On the larger stage, it raises doubts about Germany’s familiar role under Merkel as the European Union’s ultimate anchor and arbiter. France may spy a window of opportunity to assert itself as Europe’s leader.

Some will seize on the revival of the Social Democrats (SPD) as the single most striking aspect of the election. After all, Scholz has turned around the seemingly inexorable electoral decline of Germany’s – and Europe’s – main party of the centre left. The SPD had slid from 41% support in 1998 to 21% in 2017. This week’s 26% vote showed noteworthy improvements in every part of the former East Germany.

Does this mean that those reports of the death of social democratic politics have been confounded? Up to a point, yes. If Scholz becomes chancellor, he

will join centre-left heads of governments in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Spain, Portugal, arguably France, and potentially soon Norway. His own record – both as SPD leader and, before that, as a generally successful mayor of Hamburg – suggests Scholz should not be glibly dismissed as continuity Merkel.

Yet gaining barely more than a quarter of the vote should be no one's idea of triumph. It is the direct result of the continuing diffusion of electoral support, and of the less firmly embedded nature of political identity that characterise many post-industrial democracies, especially under proportional voting systems. Yet Britain's first-past-the-post system does not disguise the fact that a similar lightness of political identity is established here too. This is a problem with which Labour's Keir Starmer has also been grappling this week.

In many ways, the most extraordinary aspect of the German election result was the eclipse of the CDU-CSU Christian Democrats. Merkel's party recorded an all-time low vote share of 24%. It lost support in every part of Germany. The CDU and its Bavarian CSU ally have clearly been stunned.

Merkel's [own seat](#) on the Baltic was won by the SPD. Across in Saarland, so was that of her original choice of successor, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer. The economy minister, Peter Altmaier, went down too. So did Merkel's chief of staff, Helge Braun. The CDU candidate to succeed Merkel, Armin Laschet, is being urged to resign his leadership of North-Rhine Westphalia.

Given the CDU-CSU's dominance of postwar German politics, reinforced after reunification under Helmut Kohl in 1990, this rejection is genuinely remarkable. Yet it echoes that of other seemingly impregnable centre-right parties elsewhere in Europe, such as the French Gaullists and the Italian Christian Democrats.

Nevertheless, the dynamics of the CDU-CSU collapse must not be misunderstood. It has become common to claim that the decline of centre parties of left and right is the result of shared policy failures that have triggered the rise of the nativist far right. But this absolutely did not happen in Germany.

Far from rising as the CDU-CSU fell back, the vote of the rightwing AfD went down by 2.3%. The leftwing party Die Linke did worse, losing almost half its votes and seats to become even more marginal. Instead, disillusioned centre-right voters migrated to the centre, to the SPD, Greens and FDP, not to the extremes.

The conclusion seems to be that German voters are searching for better and more progressive centrist solutions than Merkel's successors offered. This is neither irrational nor perverse, and Germany is far from alone.

Europe is full of countries with latent or actual majorities for a less hegemonic progressivism than the mass parties of the industrial past tried to uphold. Britain, as [Gordon Brown](#) argued persuasively this month, is very much one of them. If Scholz proves to be the skilled political sculptor who can bring life and shape to the majority emerging from inside his country's block of electoral marble, he will find he has many eager imitators.

- Martin Kettle is a Guardian columnist
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Opinion[James Bond](#)

## **James Bond's mission stays the same: letting Britain think it's still a superpower**

[Dan Sabbagh](#)





Daniel Craig in No Time To Die: ‘A powerful British secret service ranges across the world, albeit to foil dastardly, non-state enemies.’ Photograph: Allstar/MGM/UNIVERSAL PICTURES\EON\DJANJAQ/NICOLA DOVE

Wed 29 Sep 2021 11.17 EDT

It’s no time to die for [James Bond](#), which is a relief, because Britain’s best-known secret agent has plenty of work to do. There are the well-worn problems of tackling Ernst Stavro Blofeld, one explosion at a time, and the not inconsiderable task of reviving Britain’s pandemic-hit cinema industry, one increasingly expensive ticket at a time. But all this pales somewhat against what might be Bond’s true purpose: as a not very secret weapon in the struggle to assert Britain’s place as a cultural superpower.

Some parts of the British state claim to have an ambivalent relationship to 007, not least the real-life version of his employer, [MI6](#). They complain that Bond’s shoot first, cause a diplomatic crisis later approach is hardly a realistic advert for the undramatic work of intelligence – especially when it comes to pay and expenses. “You won’t find any Aston Martins in the staff car park,” a Whitehall insider tetchily said. Despite recent and necessary efforts to bring the franchise more in line with some modern concerns, the films are not considered an advert for the diverse workforce MI6 needs to attract.

And yet ... this is the same real-life spy agency that recently decided it wanted to appoint a “Q”, a technology mastermind, just like in the films – played latterly by Ben Whishaw – to act as one of the organisation’s deputies. Quite why this was necessary is not obvious, given the agency is unlikely to be developing dry humour or “smart blood”, although [the job advert](#) did insist that “MI6 needs to be at the cutting-edge of technology in order to stay ahead”, in case anybody was in doubt.

The Bond films, however, are more than just a convenient device for recruiting senior spies via the news media. At a time when Britain is struggling to provide fuel for petrol tanks and cheap gas during a warm September, following on the heels of the US in its retreat from Afghanistan and getting involved in a [bizarre, Franglais-laden tit-for-tat](#) with Emmanuel Macron, James Bond presents an alternative universe in which a powerful British secret service ranges across the world, albeit to foil dastardly, non-state enemies.

It is not difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction, but in the movies some impressions linger. If a Bond movie shows Q controlling a set of vast subterranean screens tracking villains around London, most of the viewing public who do not work in intelligence would be tempted to conclude that glitzy, high-definition capabilities are readily available. Politicians, in Britain at least, are often disappointed by the reality they find, which is partly why Boris Johnson spent £9m to create [a new screen-laden situation room](#) underneath Downing Street earlier this year.

Such is the importance attached to Bond that the government provides a level of support to the franchise that if it were a bank it might have to be nationalised. Some of this dates back to the Casino Royale debacle – where much of the 2006 film (the best, surely, of the Daniel Craig era) [was shot in the Czech Republic](#). Preventing a repeat helped justify a revamp of the [film tax rules](#) in 2007, with Bond one of the biggest beneficiaries. [An analysis](#) published last year concluded that No Time To Die had received [£47m in tax credits](#) on a production spend of £200m.

For a movie aiming to gross in the region of \$1bn (£741m) at the global box office, this could be argued as generous, although the film industry is an important source of skilled, creative jobs in Britain. But the help does not

stop there. Almost a decade ago, Bond was product-placed in the Olympic Games opening ceremony, complete with a [once-in-a-lifetime cameo from the Queen](#), an endorsement so remarkable that it could not have been bought. This time round, No Time To Die features British soldiers, the HMS Dragon warship and part of RAF Brize Norton doubling up for a Norwegian Nato base from an eager-to-help military.

It is not hard to see the thinking behind this, given that the film will draw the bulk of its audience overseas. Whatever the reality of Britain's standing in the world, the projection of power that comes via a Bond movie is something the UK cannot otherwise buy.

- Dan Sabbagh is the Guardian's defence and security editor
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[Opinion](#)[Second world war](#)

## We're told not to bottle up bad experiences - but a stiff upper lip can be for the best

[Adrian Chiles](#)





A nurse visits patients on a ward in Westminster hospital, 1940. Photograph: Mirrorpix/Getty Images

Thu 30 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

Sometimes people I speak to on my radio programme say something that will stay with me for a long time. Marguerite Turner, 98, said two such things to me last week. She was talking about her work in the second world war. Her most vivid memory is of a single night in May 1942. As a nurse in the Voluntary Aid Detachment, she was stationed in the south of England at a large private house being used as a medical facility. Around midnight, she stepped outside to take a break in the blissful scented silence of the garden. Then: "I heard a sort of engine noise from somewhere. There was no light. The noise grew louder and louder, then a whole lot of planes flew over. You couldn't see them; they were so high up. They went on and on. I knew they must be ours because there was no one shooting at them. I stood listening in that garden. Then they grew fainter and fainter, obviously going somewhere."

Those planes, it turned out, were among the first of Bomber Harris's so-called "thousand bomber raids" on German cities. That night the target was Cologne. Nearly 500 Germans were killed outright and 45,000 were made homeless. Forty-three of the aircraft she had heard didn't return. And there,

deep in the darkness a long way down, stood this young nurse, her tranquillity overwhelmed by the deafening din of violence. Seventy-nine years on, the viciously juxtaposed smell and sound are with her as if it was yesterday. As she puts it: “The scent of lilac and a curtain of engines.”

So her memory, related so vividly, now becomes ours to carry forward. That, I suppose, is the whole point of conversations like this, not least those to be found in Lucy Fisher’s new book, *Women in the War*, with Marguerite and others like her.

Ten minutes into my interview, I realised Marguerite hadn’t shared anything about the horrors she had witnessed first-hand, as a wide-eyed young nurse treating the grievously wounded. I found a way of phrasing the question, but she dodged it with aplomb, choosing instead to tell a sweet story of begging enough trinkets to turn her patients’ woolly army socks into Christmas stockings for them. Unedifyingly, I pressed her for – how can I put it? – gorier material. But she wouldn’t have it, explaining she only chose to remember “amusing and interesting things. If it was a bad and tragic thing – and we had a lot of those, believe you me – I looked at them, learned from them, and shut the door and locked the key, and that’s for me to deal with and no one else.”

I found this fascinating, in that her approach seemed to fly in the face of so much we now understand about the need to deal with the bad stuff by talking and thinking it through. Bottling it up, we fear, will get us nowhere. Yet here we have someone who has seen the worst of things and apparently found peace by bottling the memories up and gluing in the cork for good measure.

It is very easy to dismiss this approach as a fine example of the quintessentially British stiff upper lip which, even if it has worked in this case, has doubtless done more harm than good down the years. But, as an inveterate over-sharer, I wonder if there’s a lesson to be learned. Perhaps you can overdo talking about the bad stuff; maybe there is a danger that constantly airing it gives it the space to feed off itself and carry on growing.

I had one more go at getting a little more out of poor Marguerite, who by now was showing signs of getting fed up with me. “You couldn’t go around

thinking of bad things,” she said in exasperation. “No one could have flown a plane if they’d been thinking of crashing the whole time.”

[Adrian Chiles](#) is a Guardian columnist

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## **Top Republicans rub shoulders with extremists in secretive rightwing group, leak reveals**



Then president Donald Trump arrives to speak to the 2020 Council for National Policy meeting in Arlington, Virginia, in August last year. The group was founded in 1981 by activists influential in the Christian right.  
Photograph: Evan Vucci/AP

[Jason Wilson](#)

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Thu 30 Sep 2021 13.34 EDT

A leaked document has revealed the membership list of the secretive Council for National Policy (CNP), showing how it provides opportunities for elite [Republicans](#), wealthy entrepreneurs, media proprietors and pillars of the US conservative movement to rub shoulders with anti-abortion and anti-Islamic extremists.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), which monitors rightwing hate groups, [describes](#) the CNP as “a shadowy and intensely secretive group [which] has operated behind the scenes” in its efforts to “build the conservative movement”.

The leaked membership list dates from September last year, and reveals the 40-year-old CNP put influential Trump administration figures alongside leaders of organizations that have been categorized as hate groups.

The group was founded in 1981 by activists influential in the Christian right, including Tim LaHaye, Howard Phillips and Paul Weyrich, who had also been involved in founding and [leading the Moral Majority](#). Initially they were seeking to maximize their influence on the new Reagan administration. In subsequent years, CNP meetings have played host to presidential aspirants like George W Bush in 1999 and Mitt Romney in 2007, and sitting presidents including Donald Trump in 2020.

In [videos obtained by the Washington Post](#) in 2020, the CNP executive committee chairman, Bill Walton, told attendees of the upcoming election: “This is a spiritual battle we are in. This is good versus evil.”

The CNP is [so secretive](#), according to reports, that its members are instructed not to reveal their affiliation or even name the group.

Heidi Beirich, of the [Global Project Against Hate and Extremism](#), said in an email that “this new CNP list makes clear that the group still serves as a key

venue where mainstream conservatives and extremists mix”, adding that CNP “clearly remains a critical nexus for mainstreaming extremism from the far right into conservative circles”.

The document – which reveals email addresses and phone numbers for most members – shows that the CNP includes members of SPLC-listed hate groups.

They include leaders of organizations listed as anti-Muslim hate groups, including:

- Frank Gaffney, founder and executive chairman of the Center for Security Policy (CSP)
- Brigitte Gabriel, founder and chairman of Act For America (AFA)

They also include several founders or leaders of groups listed as anti-LGBTQ+ hate groups, such as:

- Michael P Farris, president and CEO of the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF)
- Brad Dacus, founder and president of the Pacific Justice Institute
- Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council
- Matthew Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel
- Tim Wildmon, president of the American Family Association

Also, there are members of organizations listed as anti-immigrant hate groups, including James and Amapola Hansberger, co-founders of Legal Immigrants For America (Lifa).

Additionally, the list includes members of groups that have been accused of extremist positions on abortion. They include Margaret H Hartshorn, chair

of the board of Heartbeat International, which has [reportedly](#) spread misinformation worldwide to pregnant women.

Several high-profile figures associated with the Trump administration, or conspiracy-minded characters in Trump's orbit, are also on the list, such as Jerome R Corsi, who has written conspiracy-minded books about John Kerry, Barack Obama and the September 11 attacks. Corsi is listed as a member of CNP's board of governors.

Along with these representatives of extremist positions, the CNP rolls include members of ostensibly more mainstream conservative groups, and representatives of major American corporations. Still others come from the Republican party, a network of rightwing activist organizations, and the companies and foundations that back them.

A newcomer to the group since a previous version of the member list was exposed is Charlie Kirk, founder and president of Turning Point USA (TPUSA), a conservative youth organization.

Although TPUSA works hard to make inroads into mainstream culture with stunts and on-campus events, Kirk has recently staked out more hard-right positions, saying last week that Democratic immigration policies were aimed at "diminishing and decreasing white demographics in America", a day after [Tucker Carlson](#) ventilated racist "great replacement" conspiracy theories on his Fox News program.

The CNP is so secretive, reports say, that members are told not to reveal their affiliation or name the group

Conservative movement heavyweights in the group include Lisa B Nelson, chief executive of the American Legislative Exchange Council; Eugene Mayer, president of the Federalist Society; Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform; Daniel Schneider, executive director of the American Conservative Union, which organizes the CPac conference; and L Brent Bozell III, the founder of the Media Research Center and a member of the Bozell and Buckley dynasties of conservative activists.

Other members include pillars of the Republican political establishment, including former GOP congressional majority leader Tom DeLay; former Wisconsin governor Scott Walker; Reagan administration attorney general Edwin Meese III; and former RNC chair and Trump White House chief of staff Reince Priebus.

Their number also includes sitting congressmen such as Barry Loudermilk and influential operatives like David Trulio, who was the senior adviser and chief of staff to the under-secretary of defense in the Trump administration.

The member list also includes representatives of major US corporations, such as Marc Johansen, vice-president for the satellites and intelligence program for Boeing; Jeffrey Coors, of the Coors brewing family, who have extensively sponsored conservative groups; Lee Roy Mitchell, the founder and chairman of the board for movie chain owner Cinemark Holdings; Steve Forbes, the founder and chief executive of the Forbes business media empire; and Scott Brown, a senior vice-president at Morgan Stanley.

Other members of the group represent organizations that operate under a veil of secrecy, with conservative “dark money” organizations well represented.

One member, Lawson Bader, is the president of Donor’s Trust and Donors Capital Fund, nonprofits that disguise the identities of their own donors, and whose largesse to rightwing causes has earned them the [reputation](#) as “the dark-money ATM of the conservative movement”.

Another member, Richard Gruber, is the president and chief executive of the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation. The Bradley foundation has long bankrolled conservative movement causes, including Donors Trust, and has reportedly sponsored widespread efforts to discredit the election of Joe Biden in 2020.

Conservative media figures are also on the list: Neil Patel, co-founder and publisher of the Daily Caller; Larry Beasley, chief executive of the rightwing newspaper the Washington Times; and Floyd Brown, the founder of the Arizona-based Western Journal and founder of the [Citizens United Pac](#).

Pro-gun groups are also represented, with NRA chief executive Wayne LaPierre and Gun Owners of America founder Tim Macy each listed as members.

The 220-page document – which includes a statement of principles and an indication of members' policy interests alongside a complete member list – was leaked and provided to journalists via a transparency organization, Distributed Denial of Secrets.

An earlier, [redacted version of the list](#) was published along with [reporting](#) by the [Center for Media and Democracy](#) in late 2020. DDOSecret's publication restored personal information, which allowed further reporting and verification of the list's contents.

Emma Best from that group said in a messenger chat that CNP was "a secretive forum for ultra-wealthy and elite conservatives to strategize and form long-term plans that have national and international impact". Therefore, she said, "any opportunity to shine a light on their members, activities and interests is clearly in the public interest".

The Guardian repeatedly requested comment from CNP staff, including executive director Brad McEwen, and other groups mentioned in this story but received no immediate response.

This article was amended on 30 September 2021 because an earlier version misnamed Americans for Tax Reform as "Americans for Tax Return".

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## Democrats

# Democrats search for a path forward as key deadlines loom



Nancy Pelosi on Thursday. Assurances of progress offered little comfort to nervous Democrats on Capitol Hill, where a series of legislative and fiscal deadlines loom. Photograph: Mandel Ngan/AFP/Getty Images

*[Lauren Gambino](#) and [David Smith](#) in Washington*

Thu 30 Sep 2021 22.12 EDT

With the fate of Joe Biden's domestic agenda on the line, Democrats searched furiously for a path forward after negotiations over a once-in-a-generation expansion of the social safety net neared collapse and a vote on a smaller public works measure appeared increasingly unlikely.

With almost no margin for error and little time left to break an impasse that threatens to imperil its passage – and possibly the entirety of the president's

program – [Democrats](#) charged ahead on Thursday, even as a crucial Democratic holdout called for shrinking the \$3.5tn plan in half. But assurances of progress offered little comfort to nervous Democrats on Capitol Hill, where a series of legislative and fiscal deadlines loom.

“We’re obviously at a precarious and important time in these discussions,” the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, [told reporters on Wednesday](#), as Biden spent the day locked in negotiations with Democratic leadership and lawmakers.

Nancy Pelosi, the House speaker, insisted on Thursday morning that she was prepared to move ahead with a vote later in the day. “So far, so good for today,” [she said](#) at an unusually crowded press conference. “It’s going in a positive direction.”

“We’re on a path to win the vote,” she added.

The cautiously optimistic tone reflected the fluid nature of the negotiations after Pelosi previously left open the possibility that she could delay a Thursday vote on the infrastructure bill while the president worked to secure an agreement with two centrist holdouts on his broader social policy package that aims to fulfill Democrats’ promise to reshape the American economy.

Congress did meet one critical deadline, after the House and Senate approved a short-term funding bill that averted a government shutdown at midnight by funding federal agencies through 3 December.

At the center of the uncertainty are centrist senators Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona. Both have said that the price tag of Biden’s agenda is too high, but to the immense frustration of their colleagues, have not publicly outlined what they would be comfortable with spending. Compromise is the only way forward for Democrats, who need every vote in the Senate and nearly every vote in the House.

In a statement on Wednesday, Manchin reiterated his opposition to the current spending package, saying it amounted to “fiscal insanity”. Then, speaking to reporters on Thursday, he said he would not support a package

that cost more than \$1.5tn – less than half the size of the package Biden and Democrats are seeking – warning that any more spending risked “changing our whole society to an entitlement mentality”. The president was aware of his red line, he said.

The scaled-down offer would likely be a nonstarter with progressives, who say they have already made significant concessions.

“What do they want to cut? Childcare for families that desperately need it? Do they want to not address the climate crisis for a future generation? Do they not want homecare programs for our seniors and the disabled?” Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, a progressive from Minnesota, said in an appearance on MSNBC. “These are the conversations we’re waiting to have.”

Manchin’s position makes it unlikely that Democrats will reach a deal by Thursday, when Pelosi wants the House to vote on the Senate-passed infrastructure bill, which would spend billions of dollars upgrading the nation’s roads, bridges and broadband. Asked by reporters if he was confident the vote would happen on Thursday, House majority leader Steny Hoyer replied: “Nope.”

That leaves Democratic leaders in a time-sensitive bind, partially of their own making. They initially promised progressives that they would advance the infrastructure and social policy bills in tandem. At the same time, Pelosi told centrists that she would bring a vote on the infrastructure bill to the floor this week. But with Manchin and Sinema objecting to the cost of the social spending proposal, Pelosi said she was forced to shift strategy. Now she is asking her caucus to move ahead with the infrastructure bill while Biden and the senators search for a compromise.

The social policy bill could be transformative for millions of American families. Though the details are fluid and the overall package almost certain to shrink, the proposed legislation would extend the child tax credit, establish universal pre-K education, create a federally paid family and medical leave system, in addition to an array of programs to combat the climate crisis and transition the country toward renewable energy. The plan

would be paid for by trillions of dollars in tax increases on the wealthiest Americans and corporations.

Democrats are attempting to enact the social policy bill using a fast-track procedural rule known as reconciliation to shield it from the Senate filibuster, which requires 60 votes to pass most legislation.

The move to decouple the groundbreaking legislation from Thursday's infrastructure bill vote has infuriated progressives, who say they will sink the infrastructure vote if there is not an agreement on the broader package. In a sign of the deep mistrust within the party, congresswoman Pramila Jayapal of Washington, the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, said she wanted to see the Senate approve the package first before supporting the smaller bill.

Complicating matters further, Sinema is saying she wants to see the infrastructure bill pass without delay, even as her objections to the larger bill risk delaying – or completely derailing – its passage.

Pelosi said there would need to be an agreement with Biden on the “legislative language” for his social policy bill before the vote on Thursday.

She added at the press conference: “I just told members of my leadership that the reconciliation bill was a culmination of my service in Congress ... Remove all doubt in anyone’s mind that we will not have a reconciliation. We will have a reconciliation bill. That is for sure.”

As Democrats worked to salvage their ambitious plan, lawmakers made little progress toward resolving the stalemate over the debt ceiling. In a largely party-line vote on Wednesday night, the House approved legislation that would suspend the debt limit through 16 December. The bill advances to a vote in the Senate, where the path to overcoming Republican obstruction remains unclear.

The brinkmanship has pushed the country dangerously close to financial calamity, and yet both sides appear dug in. Republicans want to force Democrats to raise the debt ceiling on their own by using the reconciliation process to circumvent the filibuster. Schumer called the position

hypocritical, arguing that Republicans have a responsibility to help raise the debt limit as Democrats did on three occasions during the Trump administration.

Schumer said: “As default gets closer and closer to becoming a reality, our Republican colleagues will be forced to ask themselves how long they are going to keep playing political games while the economic stability of our country is at risk.”

But on Thursday the Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell, insisted that Democrats have plenty of time to raise the debt ceiling without Republican votes by using a budget reconciliation procedure. “This may inconvenient for them, but it is totally possible,” McConnell said. “This Democratic government must not manufacture an avoidable crisis.”

Even if those urgent problems are resolved, the questions over Biden’s agenda remain with the White House and Democratic leaders racing against the clock to strike a deal. With little room for error, Biden continued his personal outreach to reluctant Democrats as some members doubled down publicly in TV interviews and on Twitter. Even if a consensus is reached, the laborious task of trimming and finalizing the bills remains.

Asked whether Democrats could pull it off, Psaki told reporters to stay tuned.

“It’s like an episode of a TV show,” she said, of the high-stakes negotiations. But which show depends on what happens next.

“Maybe the West Wing if something good happens,” she said. “Maybe Veep if not.”

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[Nicolas Sarkozy](#)

## **Nicolas Sarkozy given jail sentence for illegal campaign financing**



Nicolas Sarkozy was not in court for the verdict. He has denied wrongdoing.

Photograph: Ludovic Marin/AP

*[Angelique Chrisafis](#) in Paris*

*[@achrisafis](#)*

Thu 30 Sep 2021 06.43 EDT

The former French president [Nicolas Sarkozy](#) has been sentenced to a second jail term after being found guilty of illegal campaign financing for the vast, showman-style political rallies of his failed 2012 re-election campaign.

The 66-year-old, who remains an influential figure on the French right, received a one-year sentence that the judge said could be served under house arrest by wearing an electronic ankle bracelet.

Sarkozy is now in the extraordinary and unprecedeted situation of having two custodial sentences. At the same time, he has maintained his high public profile, publishing a book on culture this month and regularly being interviewed on TV for his views on April's presidential race, with candidates on the right vying for his endorsement.

In March, Sarkozy became France's first postwar president to be handed a custodial sentence when he was given a three-year jail term, two years of which were suspended, for corruption and influence peddling over attempts to secure favours from a judge.

Sarkozy has appealed that verdict and under French guidelines had not yet begun serving the sentence. If the verdict and sentence are upheld on appeal, there is a possibility of wearing an electronic ankle bracelet during his punishment.

Sarkozy will also appeal against Thursday's verdict on illegal campaign financing, his lawyer said. He had denied wrongdoing in the two cases.

The latest trial was labelled the "["Bygmalion" case](#)" for the name of the events company that organised Sarkozy's elaborate and artfully filmed stadium gigs in front of thousands of flag-waving fans when he was fighting for re-election and lost to the Socialist party's François Hollande.

In court, the state prosecutor highlighted Sarkozy's "couldn't care less" attitude in demanding one rally a day in the form of vast "American-style shows" and allowing costs to rise substantially above the legal limit for a presidential election campaign.

The prosecution said accountants had warned Sarkozy he was about to pass the official €22.5m spending cap but that he insisted on holding more events to fend off Hollande, who was gaining ground as a "Mr Normal" seeking to crack down on the world of finance.

In the end, Sarkozy's campaign spending came to at least €42.8m, nearly double the legal limit.

Delivering the verdict on Thursday, the judge said Sarkozy went ahead with organising the rallies after being warned in writing of the risk of going over legal spending limits. She added: “It wasn’t his first campaign, he was an experienced candidate.”

Sarkozy, who was not in court for the verdict and attended only one day of the trial, argued he had been too busy running the country to pay attention to an “accounting detail”. He said allegations he was reckless with public money were “a fairytale”.

Seen as one of the best orators on the French right, he had delivered thunderous speeches from slick, purpose-built sets in huge venues with big audiences, accompanied by specially composed music as renowned directors filmed the extravaganzas for TV and beamed images on to giant screens around the room.

A series of other party members or events organisers were found guilty of further charges of setting up or benefiting from a fake billing scheme to cover millions of euros in excess spending.

Although Sarkozy is the first former modern French leader to receive a prison sentence, he is not the first to be found guilty in court. In 2011, Jacques Chirac, then aged 79, received a two-year suspended sentence for corruption committed while mayor of Paris.

Sarkozy is facing other ongoing legal investigations. He has been placed under formal investigation in what is potentially [France’s most explosive political financing scandal](#) in decades: allegations that he secretly received €50m from the former Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi for his successful 2007 election campaign. Sarkozy has repeatedly denied the allegations, dismissing them as “grotesque”.

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## [Hong Kong](#)

# Hong Kong seeks to resurrect legislation to further crush dissent



Hong Kong's security secretary, Chris Tang, right, a former police chief, says the new legislation would 'fill gaps' around the Beijing-imposed security law, being used to jail pro-democracy figures. Photograph: China News Service/Getty Images

*[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei*

*[@heldavidson](#)*

Thu 30 Sep 2021 04.48 EDT

The Hong Kong government is pushing ahead with its own national security legislation to "fill gaps" around the Beijing-imposed law already being used to [crush dissent and jail opposition figures](#).

On Wednesday, the city's security secretary, the former police chief Chris Tang, said the government would consider targeting Taiwanese and other

foreign political organisations when drafting the new legislation, known as Article 23.

It came amid a raft of developments in the [campaign against Hong Kong's pro-democracy groups and figures](#), including the denial of bail to student activists as young as 15.

According to the public broadcaster RTHK, Tang said the new law would be based on the initial draft proposed in 2003, which was shelved after mass protests, and also take into account the circumstances in [Hong Kong](#) since the 2019 pro-democracy protests.

“Since the national security law has been enacted, there may still be gaps that need to be filled with the Article 23 legislation,” Tang told the legislative council. He also flagged creating a new offence of “inciting hatred”, RTHK reported.

Article 23 of Hong Kong’s mini-constitution, the Basic Law, requires the city to enact national security laws to prohibit “treason, secession, sedition [and] subversion” against the Chinese government.

But the clause was never implemented because of deeply held public fears that it would curtail Hong Kong’s cherished rights, such as freedom of expression, and an attempt in 2003 drew 1 million people to the streets.

The failure to implement Article 23 had been cited as a key reason for Beijing’s decision to [unilaterally impose its own national security law](#) (NSL) on Hong Kong.

While the NSL broadly outlaws acts of secession, subversion, foreign collusion and terrorism, the new law would cover treason, theft of state secrets, and the political activities of foreign political bodies in Hong Kong, the South [China](#) Morning Post said.

01:59

Hong Kong: five arrested for sedition over children’s book about sheep – video

Last week Tang told the SCMP the “time was ripe” for Article 23 as there was an immediate need to tackle “espionage”, claiming without evidence that the 2019 pro-democracy protests were orchestrated by “state-level organisations”.

As the government works on the new security laws, authorities are continuing their crackdown on the remaining elements of the pro-democracy movement, with a rush of developments this week.

On Thursday, a court denied bail to student activists, including a 15-year-old girl. Four of the seven members of Returning Valiant charged with conspiring to incite subversion are minors.

Also this week, 10 elected district councillors were removed from their seats after authorities found their mandatory oaths of allegiance to be invalid, but gave no further explanation.

RTHK issued new editorial guidelines to its staff, ruling the station must support the government in safeguarding national security and interests, or face disciplinary action. It is the latest in [a series of moves to control the previously editorially independent broadcaster](#) since a change of management.

On Wednesday, the legislative council [criminalised doxing](#) – the malicious spread of private information online – under penalty of HK\$1m or five years in jail. The same day, the Legislative Council also passed a bill outlawing online insults of the Chinese flag, banning its display upside down or in any other way which “undermined its dignity”, and mandated weekly flag-raising ceremonies in schools.

Police also froze the assets of [a long-running civil society group](#), the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, a day after it announced its dissolution. Several members of the group have been arrested, charged, [or jailed](#), and its museum commemorating the Tiananmen Square massacre was [raided this month](#). Its online exhibition was this week blocked in Hong Kong, with access denied via local internet providers.

In the run-up to China's National Day on 1 October, Hong Kong media have reported police are preparing to station about 8,000 officers, including from the "raptor" squad and counter-terrorism units, around the city.

This article was amended on 1 October 2021 to correctly refer to the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, rather than the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Democratic Freedoms as an earlier version said.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/30/hong-hong-seeks-to-resurrect-legislation-to-further-crush-dissent>

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[China](#)

## China's factory activity in shock slowdown as energy crisis hits home



Workers make flags at a factory in Wuyi, Zhejiang, ahead of national day. The country's economy is showing signs of slowing down. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

*[Martin Farrer](#) and agencies*

Thu 30 Sep 2021 01.08 EDT

China's factory activity has shrunk unexpectedly amid curbs on electricity use and rising prices for commodities and parts, raising more concerns about the state of the world's second biggest economy.

A closely watched survey released on Thursday showed that China's factory activity contracted in September for the first time since the pandemic took a grip in February 2020.

The figures showed that output fell thanks to a marked slowdown in high-energy consuming industries, such as plants that process metals and oil products. Sub-indices also highlighted a fall in new orders, employment and new export orders.

Analysts had expected the manufacturing purchasing manager's index (PMI) to remain steady at 50.1 in September, but the official result showed the index at 49.6. The 50-point mark separates growth from contraction.

China's economy rapidly recovered from a pandemic-induced slump last year. Although the non-manufacturing PMI provided a welcome bright spot for September, momentum has broadly weakened in recent months, with its sprawling manufacturing sector hit by rising costs, production bottlenecks and electricity rationing.

Good morning: China manufacturing PMI contracts below 50 to 49.6 & the details are terrible:

Output, new orders, employment, new export orders all down!

Note that this is mostly impacting small firms.  
[pic.twitter.com/lxB6ZCWgtw](https://pic.twitter.com/lxB6ZCWgtw)

— Trinh (@Trinhnomics) [September 30, 2021](#)

Another sign of the [energy crisis](#) came late on Wednesday when the Russian state energy company Inter RAO said China had asked it to increase electricity supplies to offset shortages at home.

Inter RAO was considering a significant increase in electricity supply, a spokesman said, providing no further details. Russia can supply up to 7bn kilowatt-hours of power to China every year but the exports fell last year by 7.2%.

The sudden contraction in factory activity will further weigh on an economy already facing serious problems in its bloated property sector, chiefly in the form of the [struggling behemoth Evergrande](#).

The Shenzhen-based company owes \$305bn to homebuyers, contractors and investors, and the possibility of it defaulting on deals to finish homes and pay out on investment products brought a rash of public protests and saw its shares plunge. Although it calmed some market nerves last week by repaying some local debt, it missed a repayment on interest on dollar-denominated bonds, and missed a repayment deadline on another bond coupon on Wednesday night.

The property sector accounts for up to 25% of GDP according to some estimates, but the country's huge tech sector is also facing a sustained assault from the government in Beijing as it tries to push back against billionaires in its pursuit of "common prosperity".

Leading forecasters such as Goldman Sachs and Nomura have downgraded their expectations for GDP growth.

Economies throughout the world are grappling with production issues due to supply chain disruptions. UK car production [fell 27% in August](#) because of a shortage of semiconductors, and data on Thursday showed Japan's industrial output falling for a second straight month in August.

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## **Headlines tuesday 28 september 2021**

- [Petrol shortage No end to panic-buying, says fuel retail boss](#)
- [Live UK fuel crisis threatens to disrupt health services and companies](#)
- [Boris Johnson Prime minister puts army on standby](#)
- ['I wanted to cry' Key workers on being hit by the UK fuel crisis](#)

## Supply chain crisis

# Petrol shortage: customers still panic-buying, says fuel retail boss



A closed petrol station in Manchester on Tuesday 28 September as the fuel crisis continued. Photograph: Jon Super/AP

*[Jessica Elgot](#)*

*[@jessicaelgot](#)*

Tue 28 Sep 2021 05.05 EDT

Customers are still panic-buying petrol across the country with filling stations emptied within hours, the chair of the Petrol Retailers Association has said, as a Conservative MP urged the army to start deliveries to restore public confidence.

The PRA's chair, Brian Madderson, said members were worried about putting a £30 cap on purchases because of the risk of people confronting staff and said prioritising key workers for fuel would be unworkable.

“As soon as a tanker arrives at a filling station, people on social media are advising that a tanker has arrived and then it is like bees to a honey pot. Everyone flocks there and ... within a few hours it is out again,” he told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme.

Madderson said his members would not be placing limits on buying. “It is confrontational, we don’t want to put our staff at risk with confronting their customers, so that has got some merits, but also a lot of demerits.”

He also said he did not condone profiteering and called on members to think twice about putting up their prices.

“The one thing we do not condone is profiteering in situations like this,” he said. “Most of our members, the independents, have a regular customer base and if they offend their customer base they don’t deserve to have them when this crisis is over,” he said. “People have got long memories and I would urge anybody who thinks about trying to make a fast buck to think again because it just isn’t right.”

No 10 said army drivers would be ready to help deliver petrol and diesel on a short-term basis, but stopped short of an immediate deployment, even though some essential workers have not been able to carry out their jobs without fuel.

Tobias Ellwood, the chair of parliament’s defence select committee, has said the army should be mobilised, not just put on standby, to “regain public confidence” and halt panic-buying.

“The country wants to see the government is in command and it has a clear cross-Whitehall plan,” he told Sky News. “We have gone from 1% fuel pump shortages to 90% so altering people’s buying behaviour to prevent the panic buying and going back to previous purchasing patterns requires regaining the confidence of the nation.

“I believe the army should not just be put on standby but in fact mobilised, be seen to be used. That will help ease the pressure on shortages of course, it will return public confidence, and then on top of that there is the bigger issue

about articulating a clear strategy to alleviate the chronic shortage of lorry drivers.”

The shadow home secretary, Nick Thomas-Symonds, said the failure stemmed from government inaction, rather than blaming the public.

He said the HGV driver shortage was a “catastrophic failure of leadership” and said he had warned the transport secretary, Grant Shapps, about the impending disaster.

“We find ourselves in this position because of a complete failure of the government to lead and to plan ahead,” he said. “I and other shadow cabinet colleagues wrote to Grant Shapps back in July highlighting these issues. We got very short shrift from Grant Shapps, who wrote back to us in the first week of August saying, in his words, that he wouldn’t be using foreign labour to solve this issue.

“Now, the government says it wants to train up … and I’m absolutely in favour of training up HGV drivers, but it hasn’t done that to a sufficient extent, nor has it until recently made a very small concession on being able to bring drivers in from abroad.

“So this is a catastrophic failure of leadership, it looks like we’ve ended up with petrol running out, the prime minister talking about bringing the army in. This is a crisis of the government’s own making.”

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**Business live**

**Business**

# PM says UK fuel situation improving but urges motorists to go about business in ‘normal way’ – as it happened

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## Supply chain crisis

# Boris Johnson puts army on standby amid fuel supply crisis



Drivers continued to stockpile fuel at petrol stations despite government warnings that they were exacerbating the problem. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Rowena Mason](#), [Aubrey Allegretti](#), [Dan Sabbagh](#), and [Richard Partington](#)*  
Mon 27 Sep 2021 17.00 EDT

Boris Johnson has ordered the army to remain on standby to help fuel reach petrol stations hit by panic buying, as Keir Starmer and businesses called on him to get a grip on the shortages rippling across the economy.

No 10 said army drivers would be ready to help deliver petrol and diesel on a short-term basis, but stopped short of an immediate deployment, even though some essential workers [have not been able to carry out their jobs](#) without fuel.

The decision was taken at a meeting of cabinet ministers on Monday, as the industry said consumer panic – rather than real shortages – was the main driver of the problems, and predicted that it would ease within days.

People continued to queue at fuel stations in spite of government warnings that drivers trying to top up were making the situation worse.

Kwasi Kwarteng, the business secretary, said it was right for the government to take “sensible, precautionary steps”.

“The UK continues to have strong supplies of fuel. However, we are aware of supply chain issues at fuel station forecourts and are taking steps to ease these as a matter of priority,” he said. “If required, the deployment of military personnel will provide the supply chain with additional capacity as a temporary measure to help ease pressures caused by spikes in localised demand for fuel.”

The government also authorised an extension to licences for fuel tankers, automatically renewing them without refresher training.

A joint statement from the fuel industry, released by the government, said companies expect the situation to ease in the coming days because many cars are now holding more fuel than usual.

The companies, including BP, Shell and Esso, said there was “plenty of fuel at UK refineries and terminals, and as an industry we are working closely with the government to help ensure fuel is available to be delivered to stations across the country”.

No 10 and ministers did discuss a plan for more immediate deployment of military drivers, but decided to hold off for now. The Ministry of Defence was sent a military aid to civil authority request to ensure that about 100 troops would be ready for action.

The Labour leader accused Johnson of having allowed the situation to “spiral out of control, despite months of warnings from industry”.

“The consequences of Boris Johnson’s failure to prepare or plan are being felt across our country,” Starmer said. “The government must now bring

together businesses and trade unions to develop a proper plan, both for the immediate crisis, as well as to tackle the long-term issues that have led us here.”

Ed Davey, the Liberal Democrat leader, said the government should already have had troops on standby, as he did as energy secretary when the threat of a fuel shortage loomed in 2012.

“Someone in government needs to explain their incompetence and there must be a case for someone to resign – whether it’s transport secretary Grant Shapps, business secretary Kwasi Kwarteng, or someone in the MoD. But this is shockingly bad government,” he added.

The British Medical Association (BMA) called for emergency measures to let medical staff fill up, warning that as pumps run dry “there is a real risk that NHS staff won’t be able to do their jobs”.

Dr Chaand Nagpaul, the BMA council chair, said: “Emergency and essential workers rely on fuel both to travel to work and for their work itself – whether this is to get to hospitals, practices and other healthcare settings, or for ambulances to reach people in urgent need of care and GPs to visit very ill patients at home.”

Sadiq Khan, the Labour mayor of London, also called for priority petrol stations for key workers. He said: “As the current reductions in fuel delivery affect petrol stations across the capital, it is essential that key workers are able to get fuel to travel to work and provide the services our city needs.”

The CBI called on the government to do more to anticipate wider problems with shortages that are likely to carry on hitting the economy while labour shortages continue.

Tony Danker, director general of the business body, said: “There are labour shortages across the economy, and of course, the government is right that in the long run, we can’t simply turn to immigration to solve those problems. But in the short run, there is no solution, other than to look that way.”

Pump prices for fuel in the UK have reached their highest level in eight years as petrol stations run dry amid panic buying, with a further jump expected as wholesale energy costs continue to surge. Figures from the RAC showed that the average price of a litre of petrol rose from 135.9p on Friday to 136.6p on Sunday, the highest level since September 2013.

As queues continued to form at forecourts on Monday after [a chaotic weekend](#), the AA warned that prices could rise further this autumn as the global oil price soars to its highest level in three years.

Hoyer, which delivers petrol for BP, said it had 50 vacancies in its fuel fleet of about 1,200 vehicles, and called on motorists to stop panic buying. Meanwhile, surplus goods firm Wholesale Clearance UK said it had sold out of jerry cans over the weekend as motorists stockpiled fuel.

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## Transport

# ‘I wanted to cry’: three key workers on being hit by the UK fuel crisis



Many petrol stations have run dry. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/SOPA Images/Rex/Shutterstock

*Rachel Obordo and Jedidajah Otte*

Mon 27 Sep 2021 14.43 EDT

With people in places across the UK still unable to fill up their tanks as petrol stations have run dry and British fuel prices have hit an [eight-year high](#), three key workers – a carer, a GP and a social worker – spoke about the impact the situation was having on them and their work.

## ‘I’m completely stuck’

Rosie, a private carer from rural Norfolk, has already had to stop seeing some clients she visits owing to her nearly empty tank.

“I have been unable to get fuel, I have about a quarter of a tank left,” she said. “I’ve had to prioritise clients to whom I live closest, and those most vulnerable. Those with family members nearby, I’ve told them I’m probably not going to be able to see them. I think I can get through to Wednesday, then I’m completely stuck.”

She said the fuel shortage was potentially worse for those living in rural areas where there is no public transport worth mentioning.

“My nearest petrol station is miles away, so I have to use fuel to go hunting for more fuel. This situation has a big impact on people here. Care agencies are not prepared to cater for some of the remote areas I service.”

The impact on some of the people she cares for is enormous, she said. “I’m concerned how the families of people I can’t get to will manage. I have one particular family where the lady has just come out of hospital a week ago. If I don’t come, her only carer is her 79-year-old husband. They thankfully live only five miles away, so they are top of my list. But another family is 35 miles away, and I can’t do them at the moment, as much as I don’t like letting them down.

“Not being able to get fuel is having a huge knock-on effect on people. Family members might have to move in with vulnerable relatives, and I may have to go and stay with clients of mine, although I do hope this will all resolve itself when people calm down.”

## **‘I’ve told my surgery that I might not be back for work on Wednesday’**

Sean Nolan, a GP from Somerset, first tried to get fuel on Friday before travelling to London for a cycling event at the weekend. “I was still looking at 1am on Saturday but places were either closed or empty,” he said.



Dr Sean Nolan outside a petrol station unable to get any fuel.

When the event finished on Sunday afternoon, although Nolan's car fuel gauge indicated the tank was empty, he estimated he still had enough for about 10 miles of travel and agreed to take a friend home who had lost her lift because of the fuel crisis. Nolan spent an hour in a petrol station queue where drivers were "acting very aggressively", but he couldn't get any fuel.

He eventually parked his car and went into a bus depot to ask for advice. "Someone kindly gave me a large 2-litre handgel container to try and get some fuel but the stations were empty," he said.

Shortly afterwards he met three men who were leaving their church after evening service, who said they had fuel in their van. "The next two hours were filled with gathering materials to siphon the fuel, and watching a YouTube video on how to work around the vehicle's safety locks. "I took the tubing from my bike pump which needed a seal, so I used the NHS gloves from my car and the face masks I had available.

"The men who helped me were amazing and gave up a huge part of their evening. We all filled our mouths with diesel multiple times to siphon it. How many people are willing to drink diesel and get dirty to help someone they don't know?"

After finally getting the 2 litres of fuel into the tank, Nolan arrived at his friend's house in Twickenham at about 10.30pm, where he is staying until he can drive back home to Somerset.

"I won't be able to get home tomorrow and I've already told my surgery that I might not even be back on Wednesday," he said.

## 'I wanted to cry'

"I genuinely thought the government would have done something by today," said Emma in Nottinghamshire. "I live in quite a rural area and the nearest petrol station is about 15 miles away."

Emma, a social worker in her 40s, has had to cancel her home visits, where she checks on children and ensures their safety. "I've alerted my manager who has allocated staff to help cover and I pray nothing happens in the meantime," she said. Emma tried her local Tesco petrol station on Monday at about 10am after hearing that they had a fuel delivery an hour before. "When I got there it was closed – I was gutted," she said.

"While I was standing there in disbelief, two cars arrived, one belonged to a district community nurse in uniform between calls, and the other was a primary school teacher. We just shook our heads and asked: 'What do we do now?' before jumping back into our cars to carry on the search. To be honest, I wanted to cry."

Emma managed to make her way home and is going to try one more time tomorrow morning. "Some of us who are classed as critical workers have jobs to go to and I feel like the children I visit are my responsibility. My hands are tied and I just can't physically get there to see them."

## 2021.09.28 - Spotlight

- [Sew it yourself! Inside the zero-waste, zero-sweatshop revolution](#)
- [Europe After SPD win in Germany, is centre left on the rise?](#)
- [The long read Pinker's progress: the celebrity scientist at the centre of the culture wars](#)
- [Nigel Kennedy on his Classic FM fight ‘Hendrix is like Beethoven, Vivaldi is more Des O’Connor’](#)

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## Sew it yourself! Inside the zero-waste, zero-sweatshop fashion revolution



‘I find myself thinking: what to make next?’ ... Fleur Britten with Simon Johnson at Pattern Project in south London. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

*Fleur Britten*

Tue 28 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

My foot hovers nervously over the sewing machine pedal. I am cautiously working my way through a sew-it-yourself kit produced by [Pattern Project](#), a “microfactory” startup in south London. It has pioneered a laser-cutting machine that can cut patterns on demand, with minimal waste. The pieces for the dropped-sleeve dress that I am sewing have been snipped to my precise measurements by a zippy little laser, which whizzes over the crisp Irish linen, scorching faint seam guides into the fabric so I know exactly where to sew.

Pattern Project’s founders, Shruti Grover, 34, and Simon Johnson, 35 – partners in life and in business – are seeking funding for their first shop. A “22nd-century” vision of fashion, says Grover, it will hold no stock, but will sell custom-fit clothing that is laser-cut in front of you within minutes, out of local, ethical and sustainable fabrics – and then sewn by you.

They have already collaborated on a zero-waste pattern for the latest collection by the fashion designer Phoebe English, while last weekend they exhibited at the V&A in west London as part of the [London Design festival](#).



Do it yourself ... (*from left*) Lydia Morrow; a model wearing garments from Merchant & Mills; and Leila d’Angelo. Composite: Guardian Design;

courtesy of Lydia Morrow; Roderick Field; courtesy of Leila d'Angelo

Pattern Project is at the cutting edge of a make-your-own-clothes revival, but it is not the only business facilitating home-sewn fashion. The catalyst was Covid. “We took six weeks of sales in one day over lockdown,” says Michael Jones of [Merchant & Mills](#), which sells whatever you might need – patterns, fabric, tools and online tutorials – to sew your own. Even now, 18 months on, sales are 50% higher than before the pandemic.

Shedding its “mumsy”, hobbyist image, the sew-it-yourself (SIY) movement has become something more modern, sustainably minded and social. For starters, sewers have been rebranded as “sewists” – because who would want to be mistaken for a waste pipe? Plus, thanks to a new wave of independent pattern-makers, it is not hard to find on-trend designs, downloadable in pdf format anywhere in the world.

“When I tell people that I’m making my own clothes, they look at me like: ‘Oh, you poor thing,’” says [Leila d’Angelo](#), a 34-year-old insurance broker who dusted down her sewing machine during the second English lockdown. “Then I come in with a bustier dress and they’re like: ‘Sorry, what? That’s not what I was expecting.’”



‘The perfect small challenge’ ... Made My Wardrobe’s Lydia Higginson says a callout for face masks last year inspired many dormant sewists. Photograph: Dan Higginson

According to Jones, the new customers are “young and mostly female, against [fast fashion](#) and much more switched on about environmental issues”. Many are motivated to sew because it enables them to avoid sweatshop production. “A lot of people are clear that cutting and sewing is where the exploitation happens,” says Lydia Morrow, a 25-year-old Glasgow-based sewing influencer who shares microtutorials on Instagram Stories. “I can cut that out now.”

There is plenty of support available for newbie sewists, too. The [Fashion District festival](#), a five-day celebration of sustainable fashion that took place last week in Stratford, east London, dedicated a third of this year’s programme to maker workshops, including a tutorial on upcycling scarves into kimonos, hosted by the community interest company [Trashion Factory](#). “There’s a huge appetite for people to be involved in their own fashion,” says Helen Lax, the festival’s founder. “This is a different incarnation of the good life. Rather than just following a pattern, the maker community is going off-grid and having a go. It’s about being able to take control of your style.”

For many sewists, the face mask was a gateway drug. After spotting a callout for 500 cloth masks from a homeless charity, Lydia Higginson, the founder of [Made My Wardrobe](#) sewing kits, rallied her followers to help. “It was a quick win – the perfect small challenge to get people back on their machines,” she says. “And then they were like: ‘What else can I make?’”



A 22nd-century vision of fashion ... Shruti Grover and Simon Johnson, the founders of Pattern Project. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

The new generation of mail-order sewing kits – complete with pattern, sustainable fabric and the promise of a clean conscience – serves as an outstretched hand waiting to guide nascent sewists through the daunting process of dressmaking. Made My Wardrobe, which has sold 20,000 dungarees kits (from £58) and patterns (£12.50) since launching them two years ago, also offers kits for underwear, period pants and swimwear, using recycled denim and recycled fishing yarn (in UK sizes 6 to 24). If you get stuck, Made My Wardrobe and Pattern Project offer “sew-along” video tutorials.

While you will find only British and European organic fabrics at Pattern Project (as well as an Italian polyamide that they claim will biodegrade [about five years after disposal](#)), the bigger fashion problem it wants to solve is overstock. It is estimated that [20% of the 100bn items of clothing produced each year are not sold](#); they are then usually buried, shredded or burned. “Brands always over-order,” says Grover. “It’s cheaper to produce more and sell at mad discounts later than it is to produce less, but higher-quality, stuff.” Pattern Project’s ultimate goal is to see its zero-waste laser in

fashion stores and haberdasheries across the country, so clothes can be cut and sewn on demand, affordably and quickly.

In the meantime, the sewists are playing what they call “pattern Tetris – making patterns fit into a smaller amount of fabric”, says Atia Azmi, 38, a GP and a host of [un:CUT: The Makers’ Podcast](#). According to the government’s [2019 report Fixing Fashion](#), “as much as 15% of fabric can end up on the cutting room floor … Hundreds of thousands of tonnes of fabric are wasted at the design and production stage before clothing reaches the customer.” Within the sewing community, downloadable zero-waste patterns have blown up online.



Super sewist ... at work at Mend Assembly in Totnes, Devon. Photograph: Annemieke Goldswain-Hein

Reducing “fashion miles” – the distance a garment and its component parts travel through the supply chain – is also on the sewists’ agenda. The starting point for the newly opened [Mend Assembly](#) in Totnes, Devon – a two-storey centre offering a makers’ space, dressmaking workshops, repairs and upcycling – was “clothing localism”, says its co-founder, Joss Whipple.

As well as utilising “existing waste streams” (upcycling old sweatshirts into kids’ leggings, say), Mend Assembly hopes to work with the regenerative

“farm-to-clothing” concept of the non-profit group [Fibershed](#), whereby local demand for clothing is met by using local, natural fibres in a closed loop. “We believe that when clothing becomes aligned with local practice, so many of the problematic elements of the global commercial model fall away, from reduced carbon and transport to deeper connection, respect and care for the clothes that we own and wear,” says Mend Assembly’s website.

That connection is tangible to those in the maker community. “When you’re wearing something you’ve made, not for one second are you not aware of that,” says d’Angelo. “Every time I look down, I think about the mistakes I made and the way I saved it and I’m filled with pride. It’s the ultimate in conscious consumption.”

My Pattern Project dress takes a painstaking four hours to sew, although a professional could make it in an hour. The experience gives me a new appreciation of the skilled stitchwork of millions of unthanked garment workers around the world. “The more you make for yourself, the more you realise the time and effort it takes to make things – and how cheap things are on the high street, compared with how long it takes,” says Azmi. “The value people place on fashion has been diminished because of cost.”

The value people place on fashion has been diminished because of cost

#### *Atia Azmi*

For d’Angelo, a self-confessed “mile-a-minute person”, sewing is “the only way I can slow down and give my body a space to chill”. Morrow, who has made half of the clothing she owns, says: “It feels so empowering to have crafted from scratch an extension of who you are.” For Azmi, it is about the morale boost that comes with perfecting the fit. “I’m 5ft 2in [1.57 metres], so usually clothes are too long or the shoulders are not right. Now I can tailor them exactly as I want them, or match them to a hijab, or make longer sleeves. I feel more confident when something fits well.”

To get involved, d’Angelo recommends following the Instagram hashtags #sewfrosting, #indiepatterns and #tntpatterns. You will find monthly challenges based around a loose theme, but the ultimate challenge is to sew your whole wardrobe. Working towards an 80:20 ratio of handmade to

bought clothes, d'Angelo challenged herself this summer to make a 15-piece holiday wardrobe. Sewing right up until the last second, she says she felt like “a capable person in a world spinning out of control”. The shopping sprees of old have been replaced with research trips; instead of asking: “Shall I buy this?” she now asks: “Could I make that?” She says: “If I’m not prepared to spend five hours making it, do I really want it?”

I stride out of the Pattern Project studio in a perfectly fitting dress in exactly the colour I wanted. The kit cost £60. I find myself thinking: “What to make next?”

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[Europe](#)

## After SPD win in Germany, is Europe's centre left on the rise?



SPD supporters at the party headquarters in Berlin on election night.  
Photograph: Wolfgang Rattay/Reuters

*[Jon Henley](#) Europe correspondent*

*[@jonhenley](#)*

Tue 28 Sep 2021 00.00 EDT

Social democracy is back, according to jubilant SPD officials. And after Germany's oldest political party [edged the narrowest of wins](#) against its conservative CDU/CSU rival, it may be tempting to believe Europe's centre left is stirring.

Not everywhere, though: in France, the Socialist party shows no sign of recovering from its near-obliviation in 2017, when it failed to make the

second round of the presidential election and crashed from 280 MPs to 30 and just 7.4% of the vote.

The Dutch Labour party (PvdA), another traditional centre-left party of government that collapsed to historic lows in 2017, winning less than 6% of the vote and losing three-quarters of its MPs, fared no better in [parliamentary elections in March](#) this year.

And in next month's elections in the Czech Republic, the Social Democratic party (CSSD), which has won four of the past six elections and finished second in the rest, may fail to clear the 5% threshold needed for parties to return candidates to parliament.

In Norway, however, after eight years out of power, Labour is in talks to form a left-leaning coalition, having [emerged as comfortably the largest party](#) in elections this month, a result that means all five Nordic governments should soon be led by social democrats.

On Sunday, Germany's SPD staged its comeback, recovering from a catastrophic score of 20.5% five years ago – its lowest since 1949 – to narrowly beat the conservatives of the outgoing chancellor, Angela Merkel, with a swing of more than five percentage points.

Centre-left parties head coalition governments in Italy and Spain and are leading what looks increasingly like a functioning opposition in Hungary. Reports of [the death of Europe's centre left](#) may have been somewhat exaggerated.

Reports of its revival, however, may also be premature. The 2008 financial crash and its fallout (high unemployment, low living standards, austerity and public spending cuts) combined with longer-term trends (globalisation, automation, immigration) to erode traditional centre-left support, especially for those parties unfortunate enough to find themselves in government.

Populist far-right parties, meanwhile, played to precisely those concerns, attracting historically centre-left voters. At the other end of the spectrum, a new anti-capitalist, anti-globalisation, anti-establishment far left proved just as big a threat.

But if all those factors may help explain the centre left's decline in recent years, the reasons for this cautious, uneven return – if that is what it is – look as varied, and just as ambiguous.

After 16 years of conservative-led government in Germany and eight in Norway, the centre left (but also other parties) plainly benefited from voters' desire for change. "There's turnover, you know," said Tarik Abou-Chadi, a political scientist at Zurich and Oxford universities. "It happens."

It is happening, too, amid a continuing fragmentation of Europe's politics, with small parties getting bigger and the big, traditional mainstream parties of government – which once reliably won 40% of the vote and now struggle to pass 20% – shrinking.

With many more parties in parliament, relatively low scores can secure victory – but also make it harder to govern. In Norway, Labour may have finished first, as it has in every election for nearly a century, but it did so with its second worst score since 1924. The SPD's vote was barely half what it regularly won in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. Sweden's social democrats clung to power in 2018 with their lowest share since 1908.

"Actually, the parties of the mainstream right lost," said Abou-Chadi. "The centre-left won, but they did so with historically low scores. In Germany, the left bloc grew for the first time since 1998, so we may be seeing an underlying shift. But mainly the mainstream right's hitting its own structural crisis."

Amid such fragmentation, he said, what matters is "who becomes the challenger party on the left. And that may not necessarily be the centre left. In Germany, until June it was clearly the Greens, but they slipped. In the Netherlands it turned out to be D66" – the progressive, socially liberal party that finished second.

Some centre-left politicians, including the SPD's chancellor candidate, [Olaf Scholz](#), and Norwegian Labour leaders, have seen a theme in the pandemic, which they argue has increased voters' sense of social justice. Better pay and conditions for key workers in essential, unglamorous jobs was a central plank of the victorious centre-left campaigns in both countries.

[Analysis of US and French election results](#) suggests the pandemic boosted candidates from mainstream parties by as much as 15 points, in what academics call a “flight to safety” in times of anxiety, with centre-left parties more likely to benefit from voters’ desire for strong government institutions, high welfare spending and social unity.

Covid may also have helped knock back Europe’s rightwing populist parties, half of which saw their support fall during the pandemic – if only by small amounts – as they struggled to adapt their anti-institutional message to the realities of the pandemic.

Some of this may be helping, in some countries. But the overall picture remains one of ever greater fragmentation, unstable, difficult-to-form coalitions, and fickle voters. That will inevitably favour some parties, but probably only temporarily.

“I think it’s a bit soon to start celebrating the return of social democracy,” said Jonathan Hopkin, a comparative politics professor at the London School of Economics. “These are poor results by historical standards … and fit in with what we know about party politics these days: volatility, flighty voters, increasing interest in voting for what used to be fringe parties.”

To maintain its advance, Hopkin said, he saw little option but for the SPD in particular to “embrace fundamental economic change”. Staying with neoliberal policies plus “a few gestures to post-material concerns … will not get them very far. They need to act like a party that exists to challenge capitalism, not to slightly dilute it.”

With barely 25% of the vote and in what shows every sign of being a messy coalition, that may not be easy.

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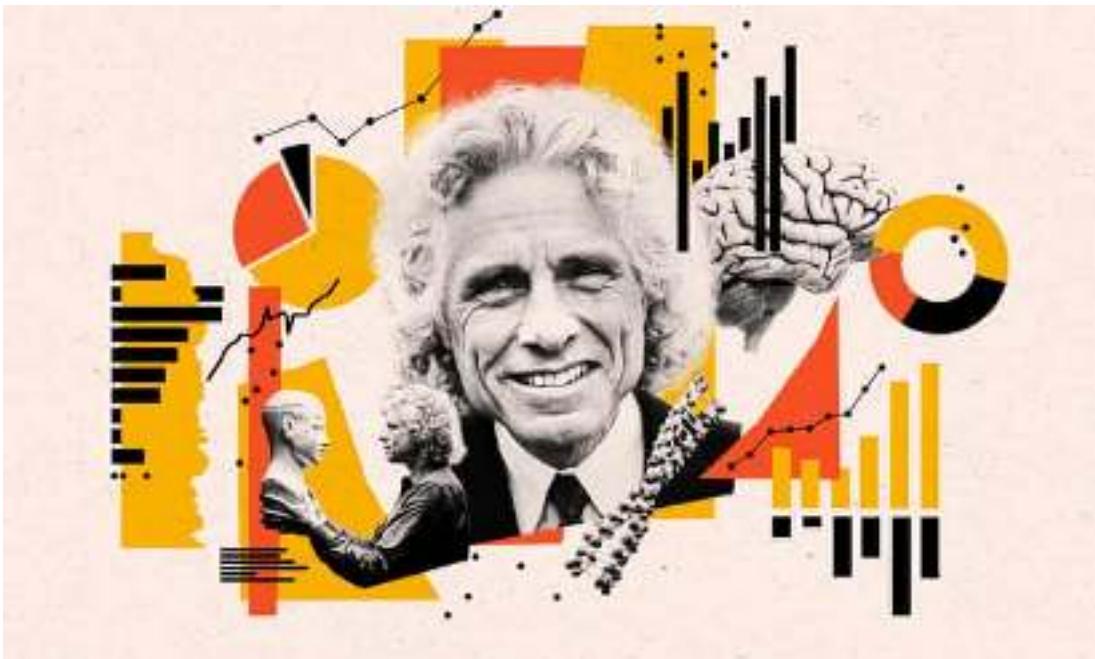


Illustration: Klawe Rzeczy/The Guardian

[The long read](#)

## Pinker's progress: the celebrity scientist at the centre of the culture wars

Illustration: Klawe Rzeczy/The Guardian

by [Alex Blasdel](#)

Tue 28 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

On a recent afternoon, [Steven Pinker](#), the cognitive psychologist and bestselling author of upbeat books about human progress, was sitting in his summer home on Cape Cod, thinking about Bill Gates. Pinker was gearing up to record a radio series on critical thinking for the BBC, and he wanted the world's fourth richest man to join him for an episode on the climate emergency. "People tend to approach challenges in one of two ways – as problem-solving or as conflict," Pinker, who appreciates the force of a tidy

dichotomy, said. “You can think of it as Bill versus Greta. And I’m very much in Bill’s camp.”

A few weeks earlier, Gates had been photographed in Manhattan carrying a copy of Pinker’s soon to be published 12th book, *Rationality*, which inspired [the BBC series](#). “We sent it to his people,” Pinker said. Pinker is an avid promoter of his own work, and for the past 25 years he has had a great deal to promote. Since the 1990s, he has written a string of popular books on language, the mind and human behaviour, but in the past decade, he has become best known for his counterintuitive take on the state of the world. In the shadow of the financial crisis, while other authors were writing books about how society was profoundly broken, Pinker took the opposite tack, arguing that things were, in fact, better than ever.

In *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, published in 2011, he gathered copious amounts of data to show that violence had declined across human history, in large part because of the emergence of markets and states. Understandably, the book struck a chord with people who move markets and run states. Gates called it “the most inspiring book I’ve ever read”, and Mark Zuckerberg included it on a list of what to read at Davos. Then, in 2018, at the height of Donald Trump’s presidency and amid the accelerating climate crisis, Pinker published a follow-up, *Enlightenment Now*, which expanded his argument. It wasn’t just that life had become less violent; thanks to the application of science and reason since the 18th century, the human condition had dramatically improved in health, wealth and liberty, too. Bill Clinton had *Enlightenment Now* on his bedside table, and Gates declared it his “new favourite book of all time”.

“Bill’s got a pretty nimble mind, so I think he can riff on anything,” Pinker said, imagining how Gates would fare on the radio show. He was looking out over Cape Cod Bay from the upper deck of his house, which he shares with his wife, the philosopher and novelist Rebecca Newberger Goldstein. From the bottom deck, a staircase of more than 100 steps runs down to a beach, like one of Pinker’s trademark graphs depicting the decline in some measure of human misery. Pinker sees the world in broadly utilitarian terms. “A quantitative mindset, despite its nerdy aura, is in fact the morally enlightened one,” he writes in *Enlightenment Now*. On this basis, he has ranked Gates, who has spent roughly \$50bn on philanthropy, near the top of

a moral hierarchy crowned by people such as Norman Borlaug, a Nobel Peace prize-winning agronomist credited with saving more than a billion lives through his innovations in agriculture.

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Pinker's positive spin on the world has brought him into the orbit of many powerful people. On his phone, under the heading Politicians, he keeps a list of the two dozen or so heads of state, royalty and other leaders who have asked him for an audience. They include the prime minister of his native Canada, Justin Trudeau ("That was the greatest thrill for a Canadian boy") and Mauricio Macri, then the president of Argentina ("I got to stand on the Evita balcony"). In 2016, Pinker co-authored [an article](#) for the New York Times with Colombia's then-president, Juan Manuel Santos, two months before Santos won the Nobel Peace prize for helping to end the country's [50-year-long guerrilla war](#). He has twice been a guest at Bohemian Grove, which has been described as an off-the-record summer camp for male members of the American establishment. He told me he had met some amazing people there, like Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, the former secretaries of state to Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, respectively. He seemed to enjoy both the absurdity of the experience and its purpose – to bring powerful people into contact with one another.

Pinker says he offers these global leaders "an infusion of ideas – or even just enthusiasm for good, old-fashioned liberal democracy". That means "a mixture of civic norms, guaranteed rights, market freedom, social spending and judicious regulation," as he put it in Enlightenment Now, all held together by a state strong enough to keep people from each other's throats. He believes the balance of these elements should be cautiously tweaked and twiddled through experimentation and empirical feedback. In the case of the western world, this roughly translates to the view that things are pretty good, which isn't to say they couldn't be better, and although there are threats to face, we shouldn't burn the system down, because things could certainly be a whole lot worse, and if we can make incremental improvements, then a rising tide will lift all boats. It's a position that Gates, in a conversation with Pinker and the New York Times, called the "conservative centre".

In the eyes of his critics, this stance has made Pinker the world's most prominent defender of the status quo. At a time of rising inequality and ecological catastrophe, his prescription for the world – do basically the same thing we have been doing, just a bit better – can seem perverse. To less optimistic observers, the existence of billionaires such as Gates – he and seven other men own as much wealth as the [planet's poorest 3.5 billion people](#), according to a recent Oxfam estimate – indicates a profound rot in the current arrangements of civilisation. The writer Pankaj Mishra has called Pinker a member of the “intellectual service class”, which shuffles about justifying the positions and soothing the moral sensitivities of society’s winners. Nicolas Guilhot, a professor of intellectual history at the European University Institute, believes that Pinker is fighting a somewhat desperate rearguard action on behalf of neoliberalism against an encroaching army of detractors across the political spectrum. Pinker’s books, and their support from the likes of Zuckerberg, Clinton and Gates, are a reaction, Guilhot told me, “from people who are aware that they’ve lost a lot of ground”.

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Despite his preference for problem-solvers over conflict-mongers, a strong case can be made that Pinker belongs in that second camp. “Sometimes to my own retroactive surprise, I seem to have a taste for controversy,” he recently told Steven Levitt, the economist and author of *Freakonomics*. A search for Pinker’s byline on the newspaper archive site Nexis returns 191 articles since 1994, with headlines that reflect the breadth of his interests, as well as an inclination to provoke: [Why Can’t a Woman Be More Like a Man?](#), Sniffing Out the Gay Gene, Nuclear Power Can Save the World, The Enlightenment Is Working. Over the course of his career, the subjects of his major books have expanded from language to the mind, and from human behaviour to the sweep of history. Each new topic has taken him further from the fields in which he did original research, and each new book has seemed more eager than the last to start a row.

In recent years, Pinker has carved out a niche for himself as a pundit who brings social science to the culture wars. He comes to these conflicts armed with the rhetorical skills of the debate champion and the visual aids of a management consultant. By some metrics, it is a winning strategy. He makes liberal use of graphs and charts in his recent books – there are about 180 in *Better Angels and Enlightenment Now* – and helped to create Google

Books's ngram viewer, which plots the frequency of words and phrases in the English corpus, among other languages. His own ngram results put him below Richard Dawkins and Noam Chomsky, two of his major intellectual influences, but above Yuval Noah Harari and Jordan Peterson, to whom he has been compared. (Google Trends, which tracks more demotic kinds of interest, in the form of search queries, puts Peterson on top by a significant margin.)

As a young scholar in the 80s, Pinker was distinguished more for his insights into language acquisition and visual cognition than for his willingness to plunge into acrimonious debates over gender, race and progress. His life in the public eye began in the early 90s, when an editor at a scholarly journal told him he wrote stylishly, and suggested he try doing it for a broader audience. Not long afterwards, he spoke to the philosopher Daniel Dennett, who had recently made the leap from academic to mainstream writing. "Within 40 seconds of hanging up with Dan, the phone rang and it was his literary agent, John Brockman, on the line," Pinker told an interviewer in 2001. The initial outcome was *The Language Instinct*, a wide-ranging account of the nature of language, published in 1994, which combined easy-to-follow discussions of Chomskian linguistics with evolutionary theory and jokes from Woody Allen. A quarter of a million copies have been sold. When I suggested that he must have been gobsmacked by his sudden transformation from research scientist into public intellectual, Pinker demurred. "I had seen the success of Richard Dawkins and Stephen Jay Gould, and realised that no one had yet done the same thing for language or cognitive science," he said. "So I was prepared for it to be popular."

The section of *The Language Instinct* that garnered the most attention happened to be its most acerbic one, a chapter chiding rule-bound grammar bores. Its popularity seems to have emboldened the contrarian in Pinker. In 1997, he published *How the Mind Works*, which he framed as a critique of what he called the "standard social science model", according to which nurture explained almost everything, and nature almost nothing. The next year, Pinker sold out one of London's largest lecture halls for a debate about the book's thesis. "Not every academic who has the chance to speak to large audiences enjoys it in the same way," says Ravi Mirchandani, who was Pinker's UK publisher in the 90s, and who also published Richard Dawkins at the time. Before the debate, a journalist asked Pinker about his treatment

of academic orthodoxies. “I suppose I do line them up and mow them down,” he replied, while mimicking firing a machine gun.

By the time of *The Blank Slate*, which came out in 2002, Pinker was positioning his work as an attack on what he considered the three central dogmas of the “intellectual establishment” in academia and the media – that there is no such thing as human nature, that our minds are somehow separate from our bodies, and that people are born good. By contrast, he held that quite a number of traits are universally human, that the mind is an information processing system running on the unique hardware of the brain, and that, whatever good we’re capable of, the basic condition of humanity, to paraphrase Thomas Hobbes, his favourite political philosopher, is a war of each against all.

Those first popular books irked their fair share of reviewers and academics, especially on the left, who feared that Pinker’s debatable scientific interpretations had unsavoury political implications. But the real turning point in his career arrived in 2007, in the form of a simple question: “What are you optimistic about?” The prompt was part of an annual symposium for the website Edge, run by Pinker’s literary agent, Brockman. Pinker’s 678-word [answer](#) was that violence had declined across human history, an argument he expanded over the next four years into the 696-page book *Better Angels*. “A large swathe of our intellectual culture is loth to admit that there could be anything good about civilization, modernity, and western society,” Pinker wrote in the book.

Around the same time that he was researching violence, Pinker was beginning to see himself as having a particular role to play in public life – not just as a talented explainer of science, or even a critic of intellectual orthodoxies, but as someone who could stand athwart the stupidification of public discourse. “I came out of the closet as a defender of reason and objectivity,” Pinker told the Times. The major result of this decloseting was *Enlightenment Now*, which he described to me as his “theory of everything, or almost everything, or at least a lot”. In the book, he argues that, along with liberalism, the Enlightenment gave rise to three main values – reason, science and humanism – that led to the massive improvements he charts in the human condition. These improvements were not only material but moral, as people began to expand their circle of moral concern to those beyond

their own family, tribe, nation or species. It was his wife, he said, who convinced him that these values were “worth singling out and defending”.

Since Enlightenment Now came out, in early 2018, Pinker has been engaged in almost unceasing conflict with what he considers his many intellectual enemies, who include intellectuals (“intellectuals hate progress”), progressives (“intellectuals who call themselves ‘progressive’ really hate progress”), and universities full of progressive intellectuals (a “suffocating leftwing monoculture”). He has also taken aim at postmodernism (“defiant obscurantism, dogmatic relativism, and suffocating political correctness”), a stretch of the green movement running all the way from Al Gore to the Unabomber (“quasi-religious ideology … laced with misanthropy”), contemporary identity politics (“an enemy of reason and Enlightenment values”), and the many people who “lack the conceptual tools to ascertain whether progress has taken place or not”. In these conflicts, Pinker sometimes presents himself as the lone contrarian in a sea of irrationality. He has written in the past that arguments that are “completely reasonable to me, yet blazingly controversial to everyone else” are “the story of my life”.

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This summer, I flew to Provincetown, on Cape Cod’s northern tip, to observe up close the intellectual habits of a man considered by some to be one of the most influential thinkers of our time. I arrived on a warm morning at the start of tourist season, and when Pinker picked me up he had the top down on his Volvo convertible. Provincetown has long been a summer resort, especially for LGBTQ people; it is the sort of liberal idyll – commerce meets individual rights meets cappuccinos – that Pinker extols. Fourth of July celebrations had ended the previous day, and the clothing boutiques and cafes along the main drag were festooned with American flags and pride banners. Men in thongs with tanned pectorals cycled by the waterfront.

Pinker recognises the dangers of being trapped within the comfortable perspective of such a comfortable world. The antidote, he says, is an empirical mindset. In Rationality, he notes that in 2019, following the first shark fatality in Massachusetts in 80 years, towns up and down the Cape invested in expensive shark warning and control measures, even though car crashes kill 15 to 20 people there every year, and “cheap improvements in

signage, barriers and traffic law enforcement could save many more lives at a fraction of the cost". That actuarial approach to human life has caused some to think he is bloodless, which he is not. He loves classic rock, says his favourite genre of movie is the concert film or rock documentary, and has watched *The Last Waltz*, about the largely Canadian band the Band, at least a dozen times. He is a keen landscape and wildlife photographer. "He just takes an infinite delight in the world as it presents itself," his mother, Roslyn, told me.



Provincetown, on the tip of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Photograph: Boston Globe/Getty Images

Pinker began his training as an experimental psychologist in the mid-70s, and spending time with him is a little like auditing Intro Psych, which he has taught every year at Harvard, and before that MIT, for the past 25 years. No matter the topic of conversation, he will reach for a wider theory or study to explain it: the universality of facial expressions, the roots of physical attractiveness, the moral awe people feel for Noam Chomsky, why zebras have stripes. He likes to divide the world into opposing forces or tendencies: he has written that there are two basic intellectual cultures, two fundamental political outlooks, two types of declinism, two flavours of pessimism, two sides to happiness, two ways to get something you want from other people,

two ways to appreciate the world's progress, and two forms of politicisation subverting reason today.

When we stopped to order sandwiches at a deli in the small town of Truro, he brought up a study from the 80s that identified two species of vegetarian – those who eschew meat for moral reasons, and those who do it for health. Pinker, who ordered a smoked turkey sandwich with muenster cheese, described himself as a “reducetarian” and reckons that, morally speaking, he probably shouldn’t eat meat. (If he could choose his final meal, he told the aspiring jet-setter’s magazine Monocle, it would be a rib steak, beer and bottle of San Pellegrino at the Brooklyn steakhouse Peter Luger.)

We ate our sandwiches on the upper deck of his house. The conversation bounced from his book sales (higher per capita in the UK than in the US) to people’s irrational fears about nuclear energy (“Chernobyl killed about as many people as coal emissions kill every day”) to Woody Allen (“Can you mention Woody Allen these days? I think you can mention Woody Allen. For one thing, he was almost certainly innocent”). Afterwards, Pinker showed me his study, where a large swathe of fabric the colour of snooker baize hung. When the coronavirus pandemic closed the university, he decamped to the Cape, and delivered his lectures for Intro Psych online. “I put my slides behind me on the green screen so I could point at them like a weatherman,” he said. He has described himself as “a modern lecturer-entertainer, with bullet points, [borscht belt](#) humour and audiovisual razzle-dazzle”. On a nearby shelf was a small bag filled with fake cockroaches and a curl of plastic dog poo. “For my lecture on disgust,” he said.

Pinker is not only a scientific showman; he is also a willing guinea pig. By his own admission, he does not shy away from self-revelation. He has an MRI scan of a sagittal section of his brain on his website, and has had [his genome sequenced](#) and posted online, along with his medical history (basal cell skin cancer, 1995; Hashimoto’s thyroiditis, 2010; blood type, O+). According to genetic tests [published](#) in 2012, he shares significant amounts of DNA with his longtime friend the Harvard law professor and Trump impeachment lawyer Alan Dershowitz, and with the conservative New York Times columnist David Brooks, with whom he also shares significant parts of his worldview.

Having toured the house, Pinker and I suited up for a bike ride. “I like to go fast,” he told me. He rides a several-thousand-dollar carbon frame, which he bought secondhand on eBay. For many years, he used to check the weight of everything that went on his bike, including his water bottle. “It was truly obsessive compulsive, because we know that, when it comes to speed, aerodynamics are a far bigger factor than weight,” he said. Before the advent of GPS tracking apps, he used to measure his routes out on a map and record his rides in a journal. He still weighs himself every morning.

“We’re a pair of Mamilis,” Pinker joked as we cycled out of his garage. “Middle-aged men in Lycra.” I added that we were Weird, too. (The acronym – which stands for western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic – is drawn from the work of Joe Henrich, the chair of evolutionary biology at Harvard, and several of his colleagues. They have criticised behavioural scientists for routinely publishing “broad claims about human psychology and behaviour” based only on samples from Weird societies.)

“Right,” Pinker said, before plunging down his steep drive.

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Later that afternoon, Pinker and I arrived at a pair of graveyards flanking the Truro Meeting House, a converted church where he was due to give a talk on Rationality the following week. In one of the burial grounds was a modest obelisk commemorating an 1841 gale in which 57 of the town’s fishers died. Many of the other old graves contained children. Since the 19th century, child mortality has plummeted a hundredfold in the developed world, Pinker writes in *Enlightenment Now*. Up the road, in another cemetery, he had once taken a photograph of the tombstone of a father and his five-day-old son. The inscription read: “O Death all Eloquent how dost thou prove / What dust we dote on when we creatures love.” “You need these slices of life to reassure you that the data is not off the mark,” Pinker said of the graves.

From a Pinkerian perspective, the story of his own family is the story of modernity’s rising trend lines. He was born in Montreal in 1954 in a community of Jewish refugees. His maternal grandmother lived through the Kishinev pogrom in what is now Moldova, in 1903; his paternal grandmother’s entire family was annihilated in the Holocaust. In Montreal,

Pinker's father lived in what Pinker described as "the most oppressive immigrant poverty". Eventually, several of the men in the generation above Pinker started flourishing businesses. "I am not the descendant of a long line of rabbis (as an improbably large proportion of Jews claim to be)," Pinker has written, "but of makers or sellers of gloves, neckties, auto parts and women's garments; I grew up with the belief that God made the Jews as a light unto the nations, and made the gentiles because someone had to buy retail."

In kindergarten, Pinker's teacher told his mother that he was "the smartest kid she ever taught," Roslyn recalled. "I came home and said to my husband, 'You'll never believe this.' That was the first time I had thought anything about it." As a child, Pinker read the encyclopedia cover to cover. As he grew older, his outlook on the world was shaped by the cold war and the domestic upheavals of the 60s. He has said that the first historical event he can recall is the [Cuban missile crisis](#), in 1962, and that he can still feel the dread he experienced hearing radio tests of the air-raid siren. It was a politically fraught time in Montreal – a militant leftwing nationalist movement was agitating for the rights of Quebec's oppressed French-speaking people – and discussions in the Pinker household would often turn on fundamental questions. There were arguments about whether humans were essentially brutish or noble, whether, if left to their own devices, they would devolve into violent anarchy or self-organise into a communalist utopia. Pinker engaged in these debates, but was not exactly a partisan, he told me. "A lot of people would say, 'I went through my Marx, Rand, Mao, whatever phase,'" he said. "But I was never an ideologue."



Buses on fire during the Montreal police strike of October 1969.  
Photograph: Bettmann Archive

In *The Blank Slate*, he tells a slightly different story, perhaps for effect. “As a young teenager in proudly peaceable Canada during the romantic 1960s, I was a true believer in Bakunin’s anarchism,” he writes. “I laughed off my parents’ argument that if the government ever laid down its arms all hell would break loose. Our competing predictions were put to the test at 8am on 7 October 1969, when the Montreal police went on strike. By 11.20am, the first bank was robbed. By noon, most of the downtown stores were closed because of looting. Within a few more hours, taxi drivers burned down the garage of a limousine service that competed with them for airport customers, a rooftop sniper killed a provincial police officer, rioters broke into several hotels and restaurants, and a doctor slew a burglar in his suburban home.”

Pinker concludes: “This decisive empirical test left my politics in tatters (and offered a foretaste of life as a scientist).” But somewhat contrary to this tale of dark human instincts run riot, the Canadian historian Bryan Palmer told me that much of this violence was motivated by the political grievances of the Quebecer minority, and was targeted at Anglo businesses like the limousine service, which was given preferential treatment by the city government. The “sniper” was a security guard from the limousine service who fired a shotgun into a crowd.

In 1976, when the cold war was still hot, Pinker began his graduate studies at Harvard, in the department of psychology. He went on to a postdoctoral fellowship at MIT, where in 1982 he became a professor in the department of brain and cognitive sciences. Pinker's views of the era in which he grew up and trained as a scientist seem to have stuck with him. In *Better Angels*, he charts a spike in homicide rates in the 60s that lasted for a generation. He told me this was due to the "depravity that was unleashed" in that decade.

"The 60s were a temporary local reversal of the civilising process," he said, referring to the historical theories of the sociologist Norbert Elias, whose work influenced *Better Angels*. "If you defy the norms of bourgeois propriety, you're going to have a lot of macho violence, and in the 1960s it was the bourgeois vision of the nuclear family that we had a lot of contempt for." Pinker has always searched for universals – the underlying structure shared by all languages, the behaviours practised by all cultures, the traits shared by all minds. In his telling, history, too, revealed basic lessons of human nature. Scoured of its particular economic and political conditions, it had been transformed into a kind of parable.

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The day after our bike ride, Pinker and I scampered down a short embankment dotted with poison ivy and put in to the little Pamet River in a tandem kayak. I had forgotten to change for the excursion before leaving my rental, so I was wearing an old pair of Pinker's shorts. We were not far from the mouth of the river, where Pinker proposed to Goldstein, and where he has said he wants his ashes scattered. A few years ago, a massive storm surge had swept salt water up the stream, killing off much of the fauna that inhabited it. Now, as we paddled through lush alleys of cattail and bulrush, frogs seemed to be popping up all around us. "They've come back!" Pinker said, delighted. We stopped at an open bend so he could try to take a photo of a frog to send to his wife. The world here was green and bursting with life. I recalled a throwaway line from *Enlightenment Now*: "Everything is amazing."

Everything, of course, is not amazing. Pinker knows this, but many of his critics say he hasn't grasped quite how much is going wrong. His data shows that many bad things, from global poverty to racism and sexism, have declined, but a recurring theme of the criticisms is that he's not always

careful with the data (“shockingly shoddy,” is how the historians Philip Dwyer and Mark Micale have put it). Pinker has attempted to address some of these criticisms in a 10,000-word defence of Enlightenment Now in the rightwing publication Quillette.

A deeper problem, critics say, is Pinker’s faith in data to reveal the truth. Yes, it would be great to just rely on the data, they argue, but data is interpretive all the way down, shaped by what is collected, how it’s collected and for what purpose. That’s a problem Pinker acknowledges in Enlightenment Now, but never fully reckons with. “When you really dig not only into the facts but into his own sources, it’s fully ideological,” Guilhot, the intellectual historian, told me. Several critics have also argued that it’s cruel to ask people to see themselves as data points along a rising trend line, especially if they happen to be among the many people the trends haven’t lifted up. Others say that progress rarely comes from the cheerleaders of the status quo; it comes from radicals organising against the powers that be. Many point out that, whatever the data may show, the really important question is not how much better the world has become, but how much better it could still be.



Pinker in 1999. Photograph: Graham Turner/The Guardian

Pinker's relative comfort with the status quo has led him into arguments that spill well beyond the covers of his books. He often says he “manages his controversy portfolio carefully”, but controversy seems to have overtaken him in recent years. He has sparked anger by describing “people who gravitate to the alt-right” as “often highly intelligent, highly literate” people; by writing that [the Tuskegee study](#), in which more than a hundred poor African American men were allowed to die of untreated syphilis and related complications, was “a one-time failure to prevent harm to a few dozen people”; and by “drowning out the voices of people suffering from racist and sexist violence”, according to an [open letter](#) signed by hundreds of graduate students and more than 180 professors in the field of linguistics. Then there were the pictures that began circulating of him with the financier Jeffrey Epstein at various public events, including after Epstein’s 2008 conviction for sex offences against a minor. It turned out that Pinker had also helped his friend Alan Dershowitz interpret a statute in Epstein’s defence on sex trafficking charges in 2007, the same year Pinker and Dershowitz co-taught Psychology 1002: Morality and Taboo. “He’s sending a signal that men who abuse women are welcome in our field,” Jessica Cantlon, a professor of psychology at Carnegie Mellon University, told me. (Pinker says he regrets having helped Dershowitz with his defence of Epstein.)

Many critics allege that Pinker’s recent remarks are part of a longer history of comments and behaviour that have come dangerously close to promoting pseudoscientific or abhorrent points of view. To take a single example: the journalist Malcolm Gladwell has called Pinker out for sourcing information from the blogger Steve Sailer, who, in Gladwell’s words, “is perhaps best known for his belief that black people are intellectually inferior to white people”. Angela Saini, a science journalist and author of *Superior: The Return of Race Science*, told me that “for many people, Pinker’s willingness to entertain the work of individuals who are on the far right and white supremacists has gone beyond the pale”. When I put these kinds of criticisms to Pinker, he called it the fallacy of “guilt by association” – just because Sailer and others have objectionable views, doesn’t mean their data is bad. Pinker has condemned racism – he told me it was “not just wrong but stupid” – but published Sailer’s work in an edited volume in 2004, and quotes Sailer’s positive review of *Better Angels*, among many others, on his website.

Pinker cherishes facts over assumptions, but occasionally his assumptions have caused him to rush past the facts. In 2013, Pinker initially defended the philosopher Colin McGinn after McGinn had been accused of sexually harassing a female graduate student, calling McGinn's actions "no more serious than exchanging sexual banter". He revised his opinion of the case after being confronted with the evidence. What McGinn did crossed the line, Pinker told me, but he still thought the punishment was disproportionate. (McGinn resigned his position, though it's unclear under exactly what circumstances.) McGinn later made a failed attempt to start a business ethics consulting firm, and Pinker and Goldstein signed on as advisers. "Rebecca and I were pretty sure that nothing would become of it," Pinker told me. "It was basically a favour to him, a gesture of friendship with no consequences."

"Depending on how much of a sense of humour you and your editor have, here's an answer to the question, 'Are there downsides to being famous?'" Pinker emailed me after I asked him about Epstein, Sailer, McGinn and others. "Yes. Journalists ask you to explain why you've been 'associated with' various people, out of the thousands you've interacted with over the decades, who've done something wrong." Earlier, he had said of the various criticisms he has faced, "It's as unpleasant as you'd expect. But I do my humanly best. I process them as part of a set of stress management strategies – not before bed, often on an airplane when I'm already miserable."

Ultimately, though, Pinker sees this as part of the job of the public intellectual. "This is the business we've chosen," he said, quoting *The Godfather Part II*. "People are going to attack me, and I'm going to attack back."

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Although the controversies Pinker generates have intensified, it's not because his basic view of the world has changed. What has changed is the world. The same defence of capitalism and liberal democracy that animates much of *Enlightenment Now* can be found, in miniature, in *The Blank Slate*, though between them stand the financial crisis, the migrant crisis, [the forever wars in Afghanistan and Iraq](#), the rise of social media and authoritarian populism, and numerous [increasingly alarming reports](#) from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. At the same time, over the

past decade or so, a greater diversity of people have entered academia and public discourse, and have challenged opinions that were once considered acceptable. “There’s a huge reckoning happening,” Saini said.

It’s hard not to see Pinker’s latest book, *Rationality*, which walks readers through various cognitive biases, as a response to his critics – particularly those who lacked “the conceptual tools to ascertain whether progress has taken place or not”. In *Enlightenment Now*, Pinker recommends “cognitive debiasing” programmes as part of a strategy of countering irrationality in the world; *Rationality* reads like the centrepiece of the curriculum. If only everyone were capable of reasoning properly, Pinker sometimes seems to imply, then our endless political arguments would not occupy so much of public life. Instead of being consumed by conflict, we would be busily problem-solving. “I think the issue that a lot of people have with Pinker is that, for someone who is so exercised about other people’s biases and lack of rationality and logic, he sometimes feels a little reluctant to question his own,” Saini said.

Pinker’s methods sometimes seem cynical, but I never got the sense that he was anything less than sincere. He agrees with his leftwing critics that we are living in a precarious moment, in which hard-fought-for advances in human wellbeing are under threat. He consistently says that the political battle against the Trumpist, authoritarian, conspiratorial right is of primary importance. But the cultural and ideological battle against what he called “woke-ism, Occupy Wall Street leftism, Rage Against the Machine leftism, Extinction Rebellion – these rather cynical and destructive movements” seems to occupy more of his emotional energy. In his view, many factions on the left see the world as a zero-sum battle for supremacy among different racial, ethnic and gender groups. He also believes that the excesses of the left are partly to blame for the dangerous lunacy of the right. “Unlike a lot of academics, I actually have conservative and libertarian friends,” he said. “They sometimes ask me, ‘Why should we trust climate science when anyone with an opposing view would be cancelled?’ I disagree about the climate science, but it’s otherwise a good point.”

To fight back against this, Pinker has joined the boards of more than half a dozen organisations that say they are dedicated to promoting free speech. When I began listing a few to check which ones he belonged to, he

interjected: “I’m on the board of all of them!” He went on: “The reason these organisations are so important is that a lot of repression comes from a small number of activists. Even if they’re not a majority view, a radical minority can become a repressive regime.” In *Better Angels*, he continued, he wrote about this dynamic of the “spiral of silence”, which led to witch-hunts, the Inquisition, the French Revolution, Stalinism and Nazi Germany. He also compared what he sees as the intellectual bankruptcy of woke orthodoxy to the folktale *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. “It takes a little boy to point it out,” he said.

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On my last morning on the Cape, I strolled through Provincetown to the wharf where Pinker and I were taking the ferry to Boston. While I waited for him in the queue for the boat, a man and his boyfriend announced their engagement to a group of friends – then joked they only did it so one would be eligible for the other’s healthcare benefits. The moral circle was expanding, but maybe not as far as it could.

Back in Boston, Pinker showed me around the spacious open-plan apartment he shares with Goldstein, in a converted leather warehouse. On a wall opposite the front door were two large photographs of the couple with the Obamas on the day that Goldstein was presented with the National Humanities medal, in 2015. If anywhere were western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic, it was this million-dollar former warehouse with photos of Barack Obama on the wall.

Pinker’s apartment seemed to contain the curated fruits of his career. Gazing down on the room was a nearly lifesize portrait of him, reading a book. On another wall was a caricature of him which first appeared in the *New York Review of Books*. A small painting of him was lying loose on top of a low bookshelf. “One of the things that happens when you’re famous is that people send portraits to you,” he said, bemused. Next to the portrait was a little pile of new translations of *Enlightenment Now* – Italian, Japanese, Hungarian. Standing at the centre of the apartment like a statue, in the dead space where his study and the living room converged, was a glass magazine rack, about the height of Pinker himself. Displayed on its zigzagging levels were publications, some more than a decade old, with his or Goldstein’s face staring up from the covers. “What’s on the rack are basically things that we

don't feel we can throw out, but not the things that we tend to read in bed," he later joked. Success tends to be its own justification, and the evidence that Pinker's approach to the world works for him was all around us. "Celebrity is bizarre," I remarked. Pinker grinned. "Yes it is," he said.

Pinker and I had planned to go up to Harvard to see his office, which he hadn't entered since the start of the pandemic, nearly a year and a half earlier. Before we left, I asked to see a pair of black caiman-leather cowboy boots he had custom made for him by the legendary bootmaker Lee Miller, part of his signature look at public events. ("He told me he likes cowboy boots because it's the only way a man can get away with wearing high heels," Pinker's friend the biologist Jerry Coyne told me. "He likes mostly reptile boots, I think.") Pinker showed me the boots, but opted to wear a pair of driving loafers designed by Nicolas Sarkozy's son Louis, for whom Pinker is a celebrity model.

Earlier, Pinker had picked up a chunk of graffitied concrete, the size of an American football, from the top of one of his shelves. "Part of the Berlin Wall," he said. His father had brought it back from a business trip he took to Germany in the weeks the wall was coming down. Pinker put the souvenir back in its place, where it lay like a page torn from a book. "Whatever happened to good old liberalism?" Pinker said to me later, exasperated but cheerful. "Who's going to actually step in and defend the idea that incremental improvements fed by knowledge, fed by expanding equality, fed by liberal democracy, are a good thing? Where are the demonstrations, where are the people pumping their fists for liberal democracy? Who's going to actually say something good about it?"

- This article was amended on 28 September 2021 because an earlier version referred to "Quebec's... French-speaking minority". That group is a minority in Canada as a whole, but forms a majority of the population of Quebec.

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Interview

## **Nigel Kennedy on his Classic FM fight: ‘Hendrix is like Beethoven, Vivaldi is more Des O’Connor’**

[Dave Simpson](#)



‘Maybe I should have thrown chairs around’ ... Nigel Kennedy. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Tue 28 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Throughout his career, Nigel Kennedy has had run-ins with what he calls the “self-appointed wielders of power”. The latest came last week, when he pulled out of a gig at the Royal Albert Hall two days before showtime, accusing organisers Classic FM of preventing him performing a Jimi Hendrix tribute, which they deemed “unsuitable for our audience”.

“This is musical segregation,” he said as the news broke. “If it was applied to people, it would be illegal. If that type of mentality is rampant in the arts, then we still haven’t fixed the problem of prejudice. This is much more serious than my feathers being a bit ruffled. Prejudice in music is completely dreadful. They’re effectively saying that Hendrix is all right in the Marquee Club, but not in the Albert Hall.”

When I phone him a few days later at his home in the Polish mountains, the violinist is in good humour, but unrepentant. As Kennedy tells it, he was never thrilled by the station he calls Jurassic FM’s preference that he perform Vivaldi’s Four Seasons, the recording which gave him the world’s biggest-selling classical album on its release in 1989, comparing the request to asking Deep Purple to do Smoke on the Water.

“I was very lucky to have found a piece of repertoire which struck a chord with people,” he admits, “but it’s not a giant step for mankind for Nigel Kennedy to do that again.” Thus, as a compromise, he agreed to perform Four Seasons, with Chineke!, an orchestra of young black and ethnically diverse musicians, if he could also do Hendrix’s Little Wing in the style of pastoral composer Vaughan Williams.



‘Sonic possibilities’ ... Jimi Hendrix in 1967. Photograph: Ray Stevenson/Rex Features

“But there’s been one obstruction after another,” he sighs. “No rehearsals, then having to work with a conductor when it doesn’t require one and I’ve never done it with one.” Kennedy argues that as his Four Seasons predated other classical commercial blockbusters and Classic FM – that he found their audience for them. “So it’s ironic that they’re now telling me what’s suitable for their audience.”

Kennedy says his participation actually halted three weeks ago, but this wasn’t announced until much later – presumably amid behind-the-scenes panic. “So it looks like the spoilt artist walking out. But I’m standing up for the noise-makers,” he says. “If we down tools then what are the people behind the desks going to be dealing in? Fish fingers?” He emits one of the mighty cackles that pepper our 75-minute conversation. “Not that I’d mind. I love fish fingers.”

I actually thought of busking Hendrix’s Little Wing outside the Albert Hall – but some uniform would probably move me on

Classic FM have refused to comment and Chineke! – who had previously mixed genres with collaborations with Carl Craig and Stormzy, but were

presumably alarmed at being caught in a ruckus between two big beasts – have said the content was Classic FM's decision. Again, Kennedy blames “people behind desks”.

“It’s not the young players. If we were in a room together we’d get on like a house on fire. I was prepared to rehearse a week with them, unpaid, give them the benefit of my experience and I would learn from them in terms of creating beautiful music.” He’s saddened that the public won’t get to hear it. “I actually thought of busking and playing Little Wing outside the Royal Albert Hall, if they won’t let me play it inside! But then some uniform will probably move me on and say ‘Have you got a licence?’”

Kennedy first interpreted Hendrix (a version of Fire) for the 1993 tribute album Stone Free (featuring the likes of the Cure and Eric Clapton) and in 1999 he released The Kennedy Experience, [an album of classical explorations of Purple Haze](#) et al.

“Hendrix should be talked about like the great composers, man,” he says. “Beethoven. Bach. Duke Ellington. Stravinsky. Jimi is in that line. Serious motherfuckers!” Not Vivaldi?



Mindblowing ... Kennedy and Mike Stern play Hendrix at a jazz festival in Poland. Photograph: Wieslaw Jarek/Alamy

“Not so much. Vivaldi is like ... not quite Des O’ Connor but it’s lighter shit that people can listen to while they’re drinking their coffee.” Ouch. He’s laughing like a drain.

Kennedy argues that for all Hendrix’s “mind-blowing” guitar-playing, his genius extends to composition. “The songs he wrote and forms he took were very different ... more free-flowing structure, loosening of the edges. A groundbreaker.” Kennedy’s violin case contains a grainy photo of Hendrix playing one, which the late star had apparently picked up in the BBC’s Maida Vale studios during a lunch break, much to the chagrin of its owner. “From interviews towards the end of his life he was becoming interested in the sonic possibilities orchestras offered him,” Kennedy explains, claiming that with his own violin, he can take his hero’s music somewhere else. “Kind of folk trance symphonic ... I’m starting to sound like that fucker from Spinal Tap. ‘It’s a bit Mozart and a bit Bach and I’m going to call it Mach.’”

He’s cackling, but the Classic FM ruckus cuts to the core of a near-lifelong belief that dividing music into unmixable genres is “a really puerile mentality”.

Brighton-born Kennedy, a world class virtuoso violinist, was just six when his music teacher mother sent him to audition at what he jokingly calls “Yehudi Menuhin’s school of precocious brats” in Surrey, but he could have become a rocker. “I played piano, so I could have easily gone down that Deep Purple/Santana route. It just happened that the first gigs I was offered were in classical. I felt very lucky to be offered anything. It was never on a plate for anybody. It felt like winning the lottery.”



No walk-outs ... Kennedy played the Doctor Who theme at the 2008 Proms.  
Photograph: Martin Argles/The Guardian

Kennedy later studied at New York's Juilliard School, part-funded by busking. He was 16 when [Stéphane Grappelli](#) invited him on stage at Carnegie Hall, but his teachers told him that playing jazz would damage a classical career, so he initially refused. "Then I realised that here was this teenage precious brat telling one of the greatest violin players ever that it would be bad for me to play with him. So I got through half a bottle of Scotch, tumbled on stage and it was one of the most memorable times of my life." Later, a record company executive said this made Kennedy "the wrong person to play Mozart".

Not all his experiments have worked. As a young man, he attempted Indian music, playing before an Indian audience in Westminster Hall. "We reached a point in the raga where it doubled time and I just couldn't remember the next bit," he chuckles. "So we were playing on and on. People were walking out, and not walking back in!" He's since played with everyone from Kate Bush to the Who and listens to everything from Led Zeppelin to the Fall.

I'm not Keith Moon blowing up toilets in hotels, but I don't like much restraint

In the 90s, he took up with the Fall's (and the Adult Net's) singer and lead guitarist [Brix Smith](#), after her divorce from Mark E Smith. "We never met, but there was this antagonism between me and Mark," he remembers, "Then he sent me a letter saying 'Thanks Nige, you saved me a lot of money'. But Brixie was a great person to be with and I learned a lot from her. She'd spent a lot of time with Mark and really understood the art of songwriting."

In Smith's memoir, [The Rise, the Fall and the Rise](#), she details Kennedy's riotous behaviour, such as freewheeling cars down hills, but notes his hours of daily practice and observes: "I realised that his level of perfectionism was so intense and rigid that he had no room for any other restrictions in his life." Kennedy admits this is a "completely correct" reading of his psyche, which explains his many spats. "I'm not Keith Moon," he insists, "blowing up toilets in hotels, but I don't like much restraint. Compared with most violinists I reckon I'm a risk, but you've got to try stuff or else you haven't lived."

Now 64, Kennedy's big regrets are that he didn't broaden from classical music sooner (it now makes up "about 30%" of his output) and that he didn't take up an offer to join Duke Ellington's band when he was 14. "It would have made me a better musician, but my parents and tutor-benefactors didn't want to see me surrounded by loads of old codgers with brown paper bags with special bottles in them on a tour bus. Maybe if I'd been a more strident 14-year-old and thrown chairs around I'd have been allowed, but maybe if I'd been in that band I wouldn't be here talking to you now."

When he was 19, Kennedy took up boxing in the Bronx. After "shitting blood" after the gym bouts he soon realised he was "averse to being hit", but it triggered a lifelong admiration of the sport. Thus, the cover of his forthcoming memoir, *Uncensored* – "a dissection of the BBC, record companies, conductors, run-ins with police and all kinds of not exactly positive shit" – depicts him wearing boxing gloves.

"I'm quite combative," he laughs. "I've never minded saying what I think."

- Nigel Kennedy's memoir and three CD box set, both titled *Uncensored*, are released on 4 November on Fonthill Media and Warner Classics

respectively.

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## 2021.09.28 - Coronavirus

- [Live Covid: India reports lowest deaths since mid-March; England parents warned over hoax vaccine letter](#)
- [Japan Nation to end state of emergency as Covid cases plummet](#)
- [England Rules in hospitals to be relaxed to help tackle waiting lists](#)

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## Scotland delays vaccine passport enforcement – as it happened

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[Japan](#)

## Japan to end state of emergency as Covid cases plummet



Commuters at Shinagawa station in Tokyo earlier this month. New daily cases in Japan have fallen over the past month, to 1,128 on Monday, almost half the number of the previous day. Photograph: Franck Robichon/EPA

*[Justin McCurry](#) and agencies*

Tue 28 Sep 2021 03.29 EDT

[Japan](#) will lift emergency coronavirus measures across the board at the end of this week, amid a dramatic fall in cases and rapid progress in its vaccination rollout.

The prime minister, Yoshihide Suga, said restrictions in 27 of Japan's 47 prefectures would end on Thursday.

But bars and restaurants may not immediately return to business as usual, as experts warned that complacency could spark another wave of infections this winter.

“Lifting of the emergency doesn’t mean we are 100% free,” said Shigeru Omi, the government’s top medical adviser. “The government should send a clear message to the people that we can only relax gradually.”

It will be the first time since early April that none of Japan’s 47 prefectures is subject to emergency restrictions.

“The number of new coronavirus cases and patients with severe symptoms have dramatically declined,” Suga told a parliamentary committee on Tuesday, according to the Kyodo news agency.

“We will enhance our response to the spread of infections through vaccinations and improvements to healthcare, and work on balancing antivirus measures with getting life back to normal.”

### [Japan coronavirus cases](#)

Currently, bars and restaurants are being asked not to serve alcohol and to close at 8pm, with those that refuse to comply subject to fines. However, prefectoral governors will be able to continue restrictions on alcohol sales as they attempt to tread a fine line between encouraging social and economic activity and triggering a fresh outbreak.

The emergency measures will end a day after Japan’s ruling Liberal Democratic party [LDP] elects a new leader who will also replace Suga as prime minister due to the LDP’s dominance of the lower house of parliament.

Suga [decided not to run](#) in the LDP leadership race – effectively ending his premiership – earlier this month amid criticism of his handling of the latest Covid-19 outbreak and his insistence on holding the [Olympics](#) this summer in defiance of public opinion.

His most [likely successors](#) – either the vaccination minister, Taro Kono, or the former foreign minister Fumio Kishida – will be under pressure to keep

the virus in check with the arrival of cold weather and the year-end office party season.

The state of emergency, which applies to large parts of the country, has been repeatedly extended and expanded since it was first declared in April. The measures were in place in Tokyo during the Olympics and Paralympics, forcing residents to watch most of the sport on television.

While Japan has managed to avoid the catastrophic number of deaths experienced in countries such as Britain and the US, it has not fared well by east Asian standards, with about 1.69m cases and 17,500 deaths.

Infections began to rise quickly in July and peaked in mid-August after the Olympics, surging to more 5,000 a day in Tokyo and 25,000 across Japan. Pressure on hospitals forced thousands of Covid patients to battle the illness at home.

However, new daily cases have fallen over the past month, to 1,128 nationwide on Monday, almost half that of the previous day. Infections are typically low on Mondays due to a lack of testing facilities over the weekend.

Long-term trends in Tokyo – the centre of Japan’s outbreak for most of the pandemic – also point to a marked fall in cases. The capital reported 154 infections on Monday, down 148 from the same day last week and the 36th straight day of week-on-week decline.

The health minister, Yasutoshi Nishimura, warned that some [restrictions on eating out](#) and attending big events would remain in place for about a month to prevent a resurgence.

“New cases will undoubtedly rise after the state of emergency is lifted,” said Nishimura, who is overseeing the government’s coronavirus response. “We need to continue with the necessary measures to prevent a rebound,” he said, adding that the reintroduction of “quasi-emergency” measures was possible.

Businesses that continue to limit their opening hours will receive financial support from the government, he said.

After a [slow start](#), Japan's vaccination rollout has gathered pace. Almost 60% of the population has received two jabs, while the government has said all those who want to be inoculated will receive shots by November.

Kono said Japan would also start administering booster shots, starting with medical workers by the end of the year and older people in early 2022.

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## Coronavirus

# Hospitals in England relax Covid rules to help tackle waiting lists



New guidelines include cutting social distancing from two metres to one, dropping the need for patients to isolate before operations, and ‘standard’ rather than ‘advanced’ cleaning procedures. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

*[Andrew Gregory](#)*

Mon 27 Sep 2021 13.40 EDT

Ministers have ordered a major relaxation of coronavirus infection control measures in England’s hospitals in an effort to make it easier to tackle the backlog.

The move follows a review, led by the chief executive of the UK [Health Security Agency](#), Dr Jenny Harries, into whether the NHS could start to remove some Covid rules and enable medics to see more patients.

Currently, stringent guidelines designed to protect staff, patients and visitors from coronavirus, in place since the early part of last year, also make it harder to treat the rising numbers in need of elective care.

A record 5.6 million people in England are waiting for treatment, according to the latest [NHS](#) data.

Three key recommendations for elective care were accepted by Sajid Javid, the health secretary, on Monday. Each comes into force immediately.

They involve cutting social distancing from 2 metres to 1, dropping the need for patients to isolate before operations, and adopting “standard” rather than “advanced” cleaning procedures.

They are likely to prompt concern among some health professionals and scientists, as the virus continues to infect tens of thousands in the UK each day. Trisha Greenhalgh, professor of primary healthcare at the University of Oxford, said on Twitter that the relaxation of rules could “make things worse”.

Dr Simon Clarke, associate professor in cellular microbiology at the University of Reading, said the changes appeared “generally reasonable” and should be implemented where they can to “improve access to healthcare”. However, he warned that false negative test results could mean that “some asymptotically infected patients will be put on wards with vulnerable patients”.

Clarke also said the new cleaning guidance “smacks of corner-cutting” and “may well lead to transmission of Covid-19 and other infections in our hospitals”.

The changes come hours after it emerged that the UK has joined a handful of countries to have fully vaccinated two-thirds of its population against Covid.

More than 44.7m second doses have been delivered in the UK, government figures show – the equivalent of just over 66.6% of the total population. Other countries to have passed this mark include Belgium, Canada, Chile, Singapore and Spain.

“As ever more people benefit from the protection of our phenomenal vaccination campaign, we can now safely begin to relieve some of the most stringent infection control measures where they are no longer necessary to benefit patients and ease the burden on hardworking NHS staff,” said Javid.

A new analysis by the Health Foundation warned on Monday that the waiting list is likely to “grow significantly”. It suggested that 7.5 million fewer people were sent for hospital care than expected during the pandemic.

While it is not clear whether all those will eventually come forward to seek help, the thinktank warned the waiting list will “continue to grow” over the next few years. Boris Johnson conceded this month that the backlog would “get worse before it gets better”.

Now fresh advice will be issued to hospitals over how they carry out elective care, Harries said, as more of the population is vaccinated and scientists understand more about how the infection is transmitted and how it can be contained.

The review says NHS staff working in areas where Covid control measures have been relaxed should be fully vaccinated, asymptomatic and not be a contact of a positive case.

“We have reviewed the existing Covid-19 evidence-based guidance and made a series of initial pragmatic recommendations on how local providers can start to safely remove some of the interventions that have been in place in elective care specifically for Covid-19,” said Harries. “This is a first step to help the NHS treat more patients more quickly, while ensuring their safety and balancing their different needs for care.”

The guidance will not apply to certain areas, such as emergency departments.

Patients preparing to undergo elective operations, such as hip or knee surgery, will no longer need to have a negative PCR test or isolate for three days before the procedure. Instead, patients in “low-risk” groups who are double vaccinated and asymptomatic will take a lateral flow test on the day.

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## 2021.09.28 - Opinion

- We argue over statues, yet history shows they're really all about power
- I survived rape, but I didn't understand what trauma would do to me
- In a queue for petrol in Essex, I found an unexpected camaraderie
- Can a mother ever be good enough? I know what my son would say ...

## OpinionStatues

# We argue over statues, yet history shows they're really all about power

[Mary Beard](#)



Protesters throw a toppled statue of slave trader Edward Colston into Bristol harbour, June 2020. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

Tue 28 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

Two thousand years ago the ancient Romans had some imaginative solutions to the problem of what to do with statues of rulers they had come to deplore. Some they gleefully toppled and threw into the nearest river, [Edward Colston-style](#). But others they carefully reworked. It didn't take much to get out a chisel and refashion the face of the old tyrant into the face of the new beloved leader.

If cash was very tight, you might just put a new name on to an old statue, because hundreds of miles away hardly anyone knew what these guys really

looked like. As Alex von Tunzelmann deftly captures in her recent book, [Fallen Idols](#), statues are always works in progress: toppled, moved, reworked, reerected and reinterpreted. There has never been a time when they were not contested.

Centuries later, images of Roman emperors are still part of the backdrop of power. There is hardly a stately home or a modern museum in the west that does not have its line-up of busts of the first “12 Caesars”, from Julius Caesar (assassinated 44BC) to Domitian (assassinated AD96). These are sometimes authentic ancient portraits, but more often they are slightly over-the-top replicas created in the 17th or 18th centuries. Most of us, me included, walk straight past them, as if they were merely the predictable backdrop to the power politics of the past, designed to give a hint of the allure of “the Caesars” to each new man on the make. They are not much more than pricey wallpaper.

Sometimes they are exactly that. In fact, some of the earliest European wallpaper to survive features the heads of Roman emperors. But it doesn’t take much thought to see the problem here: they are hardly figures to be admired. They have gone down in history as an unsavoury bunch, almost universally derided, and of the famous first 12, Julius Caesar to Domitian, there was only one (the down-to-earth Vespasian who came to the throne in AD69) for whom there was no suggestion that he had been murdered or forced to take his own life.

So what were they doing centuries later plastered over the palaces of dynasts? And does this have anything to teach us in our own “culture wars”? Does it help us think a bit harder about what images of power, and the powerful, are *for*?

My favourite example is the decoration of the so-called King’s Staircase at Hampton Court Palace – painted in the early 18th century, decades after the palace’s Tudor heyday, by Antonio Verrio. An exercise in “extreme baroque”, it is now usually ignored by visitors, if not deplored: “gaudy colour, bad drawing and senseless composition” as one unimpressed 19th-century critic dubbed it. But it is, in fact, far from “senseless”. It is a clever illustration of a niche satirical skit written by the emperor Julian in the fourth century AD about his predecessors.

In this squib Julian imagines that a group of those earlier rulers, now long dead, were keen to have dinner with the Roman gods, but that the gods were not so sure – and after much to-ing and fro-ing, and a good bit of character assassination, withdrew the invitation. What we see in the painting is a colourful lineup of emperors, including a rather haughty Julius Caesar and a dissolute Nero. They have not yet been told that they will *not* be dining with the gods at the empty table that is balanced in the clouds above their heads. But they soon will be.

What on earth is this scene doing on the main staircase up to the king's apartments? What was the king – or his visitors, or his servants – to make of this parade of classical rulers, almost all of whom fell somewhere on the spectrum between villain and idiot? There have been many modern attempts to explain it. Was there a coded religious message here, in the conflicts between Roman Catholics and Protestants? Or were most people in the 18th century as uncertain about the story behind the painting as we are? (Julian's skit was a bit better known then but, honestly, not much.)

None of these ideas quite get around the problem of the glaring mismatch between the ancient figures on such prominent display and the public relations of the 18th-century monarch. And significantly it is a mismatch found elsewhere at Hampton Court.

A much more admired set of paintings in the palace are Andrea Mantegna's *The Triumphs of Caesar*, painted in the 15th century and brought to England in Charles I's great haul of artworks from Mantua, Italy, in the early 17th century. It is a glorious series of images, recreating the lavish Roman processions held to celebrate Julius Caesar's military victories. In the final canvas we see a rather gaunt Caesar himself carried along in his triumphal chariot. You did not have to know very much about Caesar's career to know that the next big event was his own assassination. Oliver Cromwell, I suspect, got the point. These paintings were among the few of the king's portable artworks Cromwell did not sell off.

This royal palace, in other words, was decorated with images that did not simply use the past to bolster the power of the modern monarchy, but set up all kinds of questions and debates about the nature of autocracy, and how it

should be judged; and it exposed to the monarch himself, at the heart of his palace, the awkward underbelly of one-man rule, and its sometimes nasty end.

There is a message here for us, too, in thinking about the [statues in our own public spaces](#). Certainly, many of these were put up to celebrate those we no longer wish to celebrate. And I doubt there is anyone who thinks there are some that are not better toppled. But we miss part of the point if we think the only long-term function of these works of art is celebratory, whatever the motivations were for putting them up in the first place. The statues now have an important job to do in helping us face up to the past, in focusing our justifiable anger, or at least ambivalence, about some of those we were taught to regard as “heroes”, and in prompting us to ask how much “better” than them we really are, or should be.

To put it another way, when I look at that bronze statue of Charles I on horseback that now stands just off Trafalgar Square in London, I do not see him as a hero to be worshipped or as a martyr to be venerated; nor do I feel the slightest twinge of regret for the “divine right of kings”, or any of the other dreadful ideas for which he stood. I see him as a useful reminder of the costs we sometimes have to pay for progress (in this case, his execution), and as an affirmation that we really have done better since then. He has not yet, so far as I know, been marked out for the chop a second time around.

- Mary Beard is a professor of classics at Cambridge University. Her new book *Twelve Caesars: Images of Power from the Ancient World to the Modern* is out today
- Mary Beard and the Guardian’s Charlotte Higgins will discuss the enduring appeal of the Greek myths at a Guardian Live online event on 3 November. Book tickets [here](#)

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## OpinionRape and sexual assault

# I survived rape, but I didn't understand what trauma would do to me

Lucy Hall



'I shouldn't have had to rely on a charity to get me through the night when my life was essentially in danger.' Photograph: Phillip Chesterton/Alamy Stock Photo

Tue 28 Sep 2021 03.00 EDT

Last month I thought about taking my life and wrote a note. I hadn't made up my mind about dying, but I thought it was best to be prepared. I used the most legible form of my handwriting I could, I kept it succinct and without blame. I hoped the core message would come through: "I have tried so, so hard, but the pain is *too much*."

I didn't realise the irony. I didn't realise yet that it was the "trying" that was killing me. I was trying much, much too hard to be OK and to be happy. And

because I wasn't (and am not) happy – or, a lot of the time, OK – I felt like a failure. This feeling of failure was the thing making me want to die. I hope that in detailing the depths of pain I felt that night, this article might help someone.

In her book on trauma and survival, *My Body Keeps Your Secrets*, Lucia Osborne-Crowley writes about alcohol addiction as a coping mechanism in the wake of [her rape](#). She writes: “All these months of self-medicating were driven by the belief that if I just waited for more time to pass, if I just got myself to the next day, to the next appointment, eventually it would get better. It didn’t.”

Time does not heal all wounds, she says. There are some things you cannot just live through. “You have to feel them. Really, really feel them. Feel them until the feelings run out. As my best friend says: the only way out is through.”

Like Lucia, I am a trauma survivor. I have been raped and attacked with a knife. I spend a lot of time thinking I am about to be killed.

When I was raped four years ago my life changed overnight. I was diagnosed with PTSD and referred to the Priory mental health hospital, but relied for two years on the financial support of my parents to have immediate and specialist therapy. The resources for rape survivors on the NHS are few and far between, I discovered quickly. I went to the police too, but the experience was violating. They had my phone for 18 months. They turned up unannounced at my house on several occasions. Eventually I dropped the case because my mental health was suffering too much, and I had no faith in a conviction ([the statistics speak for themselves](#)).

When I was attacked again, two years later, I felt I couldn't tell anyone. I started vomiting almost every day and went to the doctor, who dismissed me instantly. I felt nothing but shame. I had, by then, stopped therapy and at first I felt unable to ask for more financial support, but after languishing on an NHS waiting list I eventually went back to private therapy, feeling neglected by public services and medical professionals alike. The shame I felt from this second act of violence remains intense.

When I wrote the note, I was in the middle of a period of (literal) isolation having tested positive for Covid. I slept most of the time, ate pizza, watched a trashy film, then slept again. But once I started feeling a little better, my mind entered its own struggle.

I live alone, in a nice flat, but with no outdoor space, and I have quite extreme ADHD, which means I am mentally and physically restless. I am single, and while I have numerous loving friends and family who continued to check in, there was no one person for whom I was a priority. I enjoy my own company a lot: I go on holidays on my own because I prefer it; I take myself to dinner and to the cinema; I can strike up conversations with anybody if I need to. In so many ways that other people envy, I am incredibly comfortable in my own skin.

But during this period of time, sitting on a small sofa in my north London flat, I have never felt more alone. I called the Samaritans, which means – I suppose – that I wanted to be saved. I didn't tell anyone else how serious my feelings of hopelessness and isolation were: I knew I wouldn't be able to bear the frustration of trite responses and platitudes, no matter how well intended. The Samaritans got me through that night.

The next day, I got a negative PCR result – I was clear of Covid. This was not a relief, though, because my physical symptoms had returned. What was wrong with me? I went to the hospital and spoke to a doctor for more than half an hour, who told me, gently but firmly, that the physical and emotional trauma I had been through following the attacks was incredibly serious; and if I continued to downplay it, the physical pain I was in risked becoming long term. “Your body is shutting down in protest,” he said. “This is what happens with unprocessed trauma.”

I left the hospital in a daze, unsure how to navigate the next few hours (let alone the rest of my life). I replied to a backlog of kind messages asking how I was. I replied, explaining I didn't have Covid, but actually the reality was – for me – a lot more serious. “Great you don't have Covid!” the responses rolled in. Some of the messages had top-ups of “but that must be tough”. I closed my eyes and cried for about four hours.

For the first time in my life, I understood fully how much time and energy I had spent fighting my own pain. And I saw clearly what I had to do now. I had to let the pain in.

After that, and up until now, I have sunk into a deeper part of myself. I cry more than I used to because I don't try to fight back tears. I allow myself to feel flat and hopeless. I read when I want to. I sleep as much as I have to. I don't drink to numb pain – it doesn't work, I now fully realise.

I am determined to let myself feel whatever I need to feel, be that pain or joy. And I want to feel joy. I do want to live.

But the luxury of *feeling things* requires support. It requires mental health services to be properly funded, so people in my situation have a proper place to go: I shouldn't have had to rely on a charity to get me through the night when my life was essentially in danger.

I am lucky that I can express this in writing. I am lucky I have the words. Writing this piece was a huge relief. If the pandemic has taught us anything it's that we need to prioritise emotional literacy. This must start at school, and should be a priority in education.

To anyone who has felt these things, to anyone living in the wake of violence and abuse, I want to say that you are not alone. I was helped – perhaps even saved – that night by the kind man I spoke to from the Samaritans, by Lucia's book, and by another book which has become my bible, [The Body Keeps the Score](#). These books have made me realise that fighting pain is self-destructive. That in learning to live with trauma we have to face it. The only way out is through.

- Lucy Hall is a writer and activist on sexual violence
- In the UK and Ireland, [Samaritans](#) can be contacted on 116 123 or email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) or [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie). In the US, the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) is at 800-273-8255 or chat for support. You

can also text HOME to 741741 to connect with a crisis text line counselor. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at [www.befrienders.org](#)

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[Opinion](#)[Supply chain crisis](#)

## In a queue for petrol in Essex, I found an unexpected camaraderie

[Tim Burrows](#)



Drivers queue for petrol in Brockley, south London, September 2021.  
Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

Tue 28 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

Before this weekend, I had never seen a petrol station cashier answer a telephone. Yet here he was, this harassed man in front of me, fielding several calls as I queued to pay for my fuel. “I would come soon if I were you,” he suggested to one caller. “We haven’t got much left.”

A couple of hours earlier I had been relaxing in the bliss of the era before this latest episode of Crisis UK – the nationwide rush for petrol, ultimately sparked by labour shortages in the haulier industry. I admit that I had read the [news of clogged forecourts](#) with a sense of smugness at the perceived

foolishness of those involved – collectively worsening the problem that they were trying to avoid. Then I joined them. My fuel story was that I had a call from my wife who reminded me that she was planning to drive her mother from Essex to Norwich to visit her new grandson. The trip had been planned for months and so, of course, was one of those marked essential. And our tank was empty.

I left my desk with a sudden realisation that all the people who had [rushed out to fill their tanks up](#) were acting perfectly rationally too. I turned the corner in my patch of Southend, Essex, and on to a main drag where I knew there were a couple of petrol stations. But long queues were creating tailbacks and I couldn't get near. I drove out of town, but each station I reached had run out of fuel.

I found somewhere after an hour of driving aimlessly and joining fruitless queues. The new, often motionless line of traffic actually felt like a moment of relief from the chaos of WFH-with-two-kids life. I even had a book with me. But the world outside was far too distracting.

People seemed genuinely ... pumped. One woman was grinning from ear to ear: "Crazy isn't it?" As I neared my chosen nozzle, a trio of drivers swapped highly detailed stories of why they, like me, absolutely had to get the fuel now and how much further they thought they might have been able to eke it out. Outside the forecourt, pedestrians marvelled, many waving and smiling, one taking a photo, another stopping for a short exchange with a queueing driver. Some driving past tooted their horn, sometimes shouting a sarcastic good luck.

It wasn't all that quirky across the country, of course. The former [rugby player David Flatman has described](#) how his HGV-driving brother-in-law was being followed by desperate drivers as he tried to deliver fuel. There have been reports of [fist-fights breaking out](#) over that last drop of diesel. But my experience at the pumps was a reminder that these kinds of disruptions – when our dependence on essential workers is briefly made visible, along with the fragility of any social order – contain an element of carnivalesque. The sense of breaking out of the normal day-to-day (without the dread of Covid attached) seemed to genuinely excite those taking part.

It is perhaps the latest example of what the Guardian's media editor, Jim Waterson, [described on Twitter](#) as "the theory of the UK as a load of messy types who live for drama". If all the world's a stage, then that includes petrol station forecourts. It might not be entirely surprising that a nation that spent much of the past 1.5 years passing out drunk in front of evening Zoom calls that went on for too long might try to make the best of a bad situation.

Compared to a deadly pandemic, the weekend's fuel crisis – and we'll see how it plays out over the coming days and weeks – seemed almost enjoyable. After all, many of us will be learning how to squeeze some fun out of self-inflicted inconveniences in the years to come, if things carry on this way. If someone doesn't suggest sending in the army, is it even a party?

- Tim Burrows writes about society, culture and place
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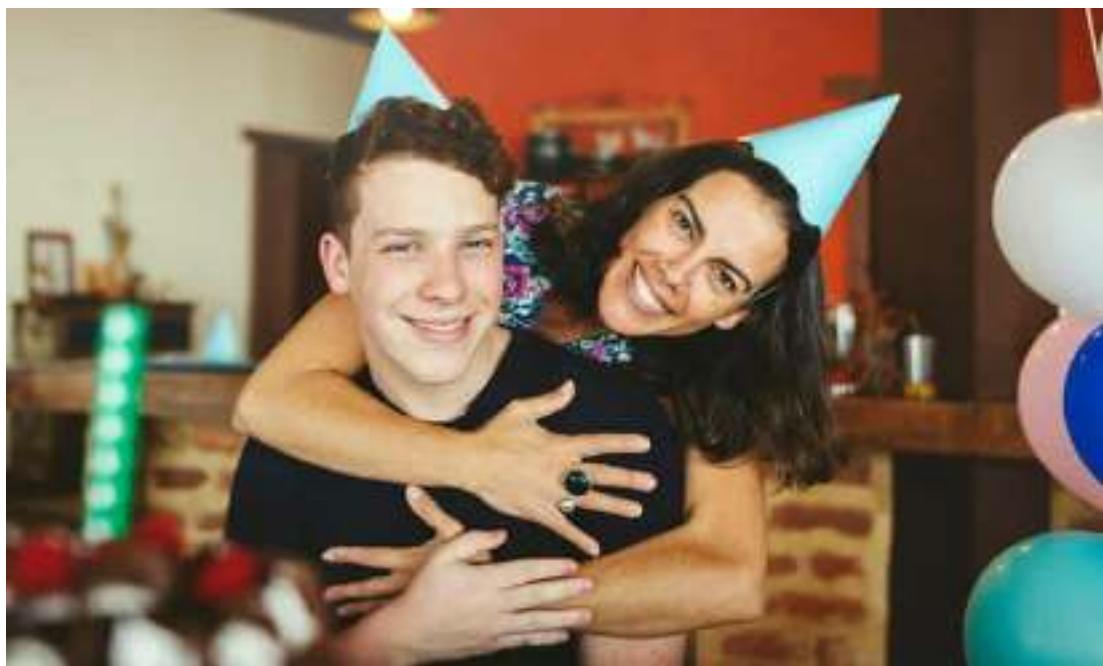
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## Can a mother ever be good enough? I know what my son would say ...

[Zoe Williams](#)



‘His birth was the best day of my life to that point; it was merely the first day of his life.’ (Posed by models.) Photograph: Giselleflissak/Getty Images

Tue 28 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

I was casually telling my son, before his 14th birthday this week, why it was a bigger deal for me than it was for him. His birth was the best day of my life to that point, I explained; it was merely the first day of his life. I was looking out of the window, directly into the Palace of Westminster (it was St Thomas’ hospital, by Westminster Bridge), thinking I had just created something so miraculous that he was actually going to be the salvation of the world. I suddenly understood the story of the baby Jesus – it was a metaphor for the grandiosity of bliss. But I was also half-wondering when my myrrh would arrive. It’s possible I’d had too much gas and air. Still, I was conscious, just about. He was like a tiny blinking hedgehog. QED.

Back in the present day, this really annoyed him. I annoyed him more by going: “What? It’s not like I want you to get me a present. I will still observe your birthday in the regular way. You should just know that, really, it’s my special day.”

A therapist once told me that his patients spent most of their time in his office complaining about their mothers. I asked: is it because the bar is too high and no mother can ever be good enough? Or is it because a mother’s proprietorial intrusion is so great that no one can quite shake the feeling that their mum is watching them go about their business? Take biting your nails, for instance. While the words out of her mouth might be: “Don’t do that, it’s a terrible habit,” the words going around her head are: “Those are still my fingernails. I grew them. If anyone gets to bite them, it’s me. Ew. What a disgusting idea, I don’t want to bite your fingernails.”

The therapist gave me an answer, by the way: it’s both. No mother can ever be good enough, but even if we could be, we wouldn’t be trying, because we are all too busy thinking crazy things.

With this in mind, I am prepared to pretend to believe that TJ’s birthday is actually his. Anyone who wants to wish me a happy giving-birthday can [find me on Twitter](#).

# Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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## 2021.09.28 - Around the world

- US Congress Top general to face Congress after book claims he took steps to stop Trump starting a war
- US Republicans block measure to fund US government beyond Thursday
- China Power shortages hit homes and factories prompting global supply fears
- Taiwan Strait UK warship sent through waterway for first time in more than a decade

[US military](#)

## **General defends himself over Trump and says his loyalty to nation is absolute**



Milley at the hearing on Tuesday. The general said his two calls with the Chinese army chief followed intelligence suggesting China was fearful of an attack, and were intended to defuse tensions. Photograph: Reuters

*[Julian Borger](#) in Washington*

Tue 28 Sep 2021 11.28 EDT

The chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen Mark Milley, has defended himself against charges of insubordination for taking actions aimed at mitigating the threat of [Donald Trump](#) starting a war in his last weeks as president.

“My loyalty to this nation, its people and the constitution hasn’t changed and will never change,” Milley told the Senate armed services committee on

Tuesday. “As long as I have a breath to give, my loyalty is absolute.”

Milley was facing hostile Republicans, some of whom have demanded his resignation following revelations that he spoke twice to his Chinese counterpart, reassuring him that the US would not launch a surprise attack.

The revelations are contained in a new book, [Peril](#), by the Washington Post journalists Bob Woodward and Robert Costa.

According to the book, Milley also ordered officers assigned to the Pentagon war room to let him know if Trump ordered a nuclear launch, despite the fact that the chairman of the joint chiefs is not in the chain of command.

The general said his two calls with the Chinese army chief followed intelligence suggesting [China](#) was fearful of an attack, and were intended to defuse tensions.

“My message again was consistent: ‘Stay calm, steady and de-escalate.’ We are not going to attack you,”” Milley said, at one of the mostly closely scrutinised interrogations of top [US military](#) leaders in more than a decade.

He said the calls were closely coordinated with the defense secretary and other senior officials in the Trump administration, and that several senior Pentagon officials sat in on the calls.

On the question of his actions on nuclear launch procedures, he said he had a responsibility to insert himself into those procedures in order to be able to perform his role to advise the president properly.

“By law I am not in the chain of command and I know that,” he said. “However, by presidential directive, and [defense department] instruction, I am in the chain of communication to fulfil my legal statutory role as the president’s primary military adviser.”

Woodward and Costa also give an account of a conversation with the House Speaker, Nancy Pelosi, in which she expresses her alarm over Trump’s mental health and his sole authority to launch nuclear weapons.

Milley confirmed the call but insisted, in remarks not included in his prepared testimony: “I am not qualified to determine the mental health of the president of the United States.

“My oath is to support the constitution of the United States of America. Against all enemies, foreign and domestic,” Milley said, staring at the Senate committee. “And I will never turn my back on that oath. I firmly believe in civilian control of the military is a bedrock principle essential to the health of this republic, and I’m committed to ensuring that the military stays clear of domestic politics.”

The formal purpose of the Senate hearing was to hear testimony on “the conclusion of military operations in Afghanistan and plans for future counter-terrorism operations”.

Milley, alongside the defense secretary, Lloyd Austin, and the head of US central command, Gen Kenneth McKenzie, also faced stern questioning from both sides over the chaotic last days of the 20-year US military presence in Afghanistan, and were asked why many Afghans granted special immigrant visas or with visa applications pending were left to fend for themselves after Kabul fell to the Taliban.

McKenzie was also likely to face questions about a [29 August drone strike](#) that was meant to target an Islamic State car bomb but instead killed 10 members of a family, seven of them children.

Milley deemed it a “righteous strike” before all the evidence was available, and all three men will have to respond to concerns that such deadly mistakes could become more concerning as the US resorts to an over-the-horizon approach to counter-terrorist operations in Afghanistan in the future, flying long-distance bombing sorties with little or no human intelligence on the ground to guide attacks.

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## US domestic policy

# Republicans block measure to fund US government beyond Thursday



The House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, arrives at the US Capitol on Monday. Moderate and progressive Democrats are split over the size of Joe Biden's social spending package. Photograph: Mandel Ngan/AFP/Getty Images

*Reuters in Washington*

Tue 28 Sep 2021 05.28 EDT

Senate Republicans have blocked a measure to suspend the US federal debt ceiling and avoid a potentially catastrophic government shutdown, leaving Democrats who narrowly control both chambers of Congress only three days to find another way to keep the [government operating beyond Thursday](#) – when current funding expires.

The legislation was aimed at beating two fast-approaching deadlines that, if left unaddressed, threaten to destabilise the US economy as it struggles to

emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The near party-line vote of 48 votes to advance against 50 opposed fell short of the 60 votes needed to push the bill ahead in the 100-seat Senate. Chuck Schumer, the Senate Democratic leader, voted “no” to allow him to call another vote.

Democrats now have just three days to find another way to keep the government operating beyond Thursday.

Republican senator Richard Shelby predicted that lawmakers would not resolve the standoff any time soon. “Probably will be here Thursday,” he told reporters.

Lawmakers also will have to figure out how to raise the debt ceiling to head off the risk of default, with independent analysts warning that the US Treasury is likely to fully exhaust its borrowing authority sometime between 15 October and 4 November.

Schumer, who has warned that a default would hammer the economy, said afterward that Democrats would take further action this week to avoid a government shutdown and debt default but did not specify what the next step would be.

“Our country is now staring down the barrel of two Republican-manufactured disasters,” he said on the Senate floor after the vote.

A government shutdown – or worse, a default – would be [a huge hit to Joe Biden’s Democrats](#), who have positioned themselves as the party of responsible government after Republican Donald Trump’s chaotic presidency.

Republicans have refused to vote with [Democrats](#) on the debt ceiling despite Democrats doing so under the Trump administration, a time when Republican tax cuts added to the national debt.

“We will support a clean continuing resolution that will prevent a government shutdown,” said the Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell,

in a speech on the chamber floor. “We will not provide Republican votes for raising the debt limit.”

In [a letter](#) released to reporters, the House majority leader, Steny Hoyer, and 63 other Democrats accused McConnell of “manufacturing a crisis” and said: “Holding the debt limit hostage is ... dangerous, illogical and irresponsible.”

Republicans have said they want Democrats to lift the debt limit on their own, saying they do not support their spending plans. Democrats point out that much of the nation’s new debt was incurred during Trump’s administration.

Democrats are also at odds over two pillars of Biden’s domestic agenda – a \$1trn infrastructure bill and a \$3.5trn social spending package.

The rift risks derailing Biden’s presidency and the party’s hopes of keeping its congressional majorities in next year’s midterm elections.

Biden spent the weekend negotiating with lawmakers over the phone, according to administration officials. The White House and Democrats in Congress were considering whether to narrow benefits for electric vehicles and community-college tuition in the social spending bill, sources said.

Biden told reporters that Democrats might not reach an agreement this week, an assessment backed by the second-most senior Democrat in the Senate, Dick Durbin. “I don’t think anybody has a rosy scenario,” Durbin told reporters.

The infrastructure bill, which is favoured by moderates, would fund road, bridge, airport, school and other projects. It passed the Senate last month with considerable Republican support.

But progressive Democrats have threatened to oppose the measure unless moderates in both the House of Representatives and Senate agree to the larger package, which Democrats intend to pass without Republican votes.

Moderate Democrats say the social spending bill's \$3.5trn price tag is too high, and Democrats – including the House speaker, Nancy Pelosi – have acknowledged it will need to be scaled back to pass.

Biden's spending plan would provide an expansion of existing health, education and childcare programs alongside new federal efforts to curb climate change. But it must pass via reconciliation, a budgetary measure which means a simple majority is needed.

Republicans are uniformly opposed to Biden's proposal, which would be paid for by increasing the tax rate on businesses earning more than \$5m a year and raising the top rate on individuals from 37% to 39.6% for those earning more than \$400,000, or \$450,000 for couples.

*Gabrielle Canon contributed reporting*

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[China](#)

## Power shortages in China hit homes and factories prompting global supply fears



Power cuts to meet official energy use targets have forced Chinese factories to shut down and left some households in the dark Photograph: Olivia Zhang/AP

*Guardian staff and agencies*  
Mon 27 Sep 2021 21.24 EDT

Widening power shortages in China's north-east have left homes without power and halted production at numerous factories, while some shops operated by candlelight as the economic toll of the squeeze mounted.

Residents in the north-east, where autumn temperatures are falling, reported power cuts and appealed on social media for the government to restore supplies.

Rationing has been implemented during peak hours since last week, while residents of cities including Changchun said cuts were occurring sooner and lasting for longer, state media reported.

China's power crunch, caused by tight coal supplies and toughening emissions standards, has hurt production in industries across several regions and poses a risk to [already strained global supply chains](#).

Manufacturers face existing shortages of processor chips, disruptions in shipping and other lingering effects of the global shutdown of travel and trade to fight the coronavirus pandemic.

In the north-east, factories were idled to avoid exceeding limits on energy use imposed by Beijing to promote efficiency. Economists and an environmental group say manufacturers used up this year's quota faster than planned as export demand rebounded from the coronavirus pandemic.

In the city of Liaoyang, 23 people were hospitalised with gas poisoning after ventilation in a metal casting factory was shut off after a power outage, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

The suspension of production at some factories prompted concerns over the possible shortage of goods ahead of Christmas, including smartphones and devices.

Apple components supplier Eson Precision Engineering said on Sunday it would halt production at its factory in Kunshan, west of Shanghai, until Thursday "in line with the local government's power restriction policy."

Eson said the suspension shouldn't have a "significant impact" on operations.

Apple didn't immediately respond to a question from Associated Press about the possible impact on iPhone supplies.

The impact on homes and non-industrial users comes as night-time temperatures slip to near-freezing in China's northernmost cities. The

National Energy Administration has told coal and natural gas firms to ensure sufficient energy supplies to keep homes warm during winter.

Liaoning province said power generation had declined significantly since July, and the supply gap widened to a “severe level” last week. It expanded power cuts from industrial firms to residential areas last week.

The city of Huludao told residents not to use high energy-consuming electronics like water heaters and microwave ovens during peak periods, and a resident of Harbin city in Heilongjiang province told Reuters that many shopping malls were closing earlier than usual.

The power squeeze is unnerving Chinese stock markets at a time when the world’s second-largest economy is already showing signs of slowing. The Chinese economy is grappling with curbs on the property and tech sectors and concerns around the future of [cash-strapped real estate giant China Evergrande.](#)

Stricter emissions standards have in part driven the power shortages.

China has vowed to cut energy intensity by about 3% in 2021 to meet its climate goals. Provincial authorities have also stepped up the enforcement of emissions curbs in recent months after only 10 of 30 mainland regions managed to achieve their energy goals in the first half of the year.

The ruling party also is preparing for the Winter Olympics in Beijing, and the nearby city of Shijiazhuang in February, a period when it will want clear blue skies.

The power pinch has been affecting manufacturers in key industrial hubs on the eastern and southern coasts for weeks.

At least 15 Chinese companies have said in exchange filings that production had been disrupted by power curbs, while more than 30 Taiwan-listed firms with China operations had stopped work to comply with the power limits.

The fallout of the power shortage has prompted some analysts to downgrade their 2021 economic growth outlook for China, and also warned of possible

global supply shortages to textiles, toys and machine parts.

*With Reuters and Associated Press*

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## UK news

# **UK sends warship through Taiwan strait for first time in more than a decade**



HMS Richmond seen in Japan last month, from where it sailed through the strait to Vietnam. Photograph: Operation 2021/Alamy

*Agence France-Presse*

Mon 27 Sep 2021 20.10 EDT

Britain sent a warship through the [Taiwan](#) strait on Monday for the first time since 2008, a move that challenges Beijing's claim to the sensitive waterway and marks a rare voyage by a non-US military vessel.

HMS Richmond, a frigate deployed with Britain's aircraft carrier strike group, sailed through the strait on a trip from Japan to Vietnam, Britain's defence ministry said.

“Wherever the Royal Navy operate, they do so in full compliance with international law,” the ministry said in a statement.

“The UK has a range of enduring security interests in the Indo-Pacific and many important bilateral defence relationships, this deployment is a sign of our commitment to regional security,” it added.

Britain said it was the first time one of its warships had travelled through the narrow waterway separating [Taiwan](#) and mainland China since 2008, when HMS Kent made the voyage.

US warships regularly conduct “freedom of navigation” exercises in the strait and trigger angry responses from Beijing, which claims Taiwan and surrounding waters – and almost all of the South China Sea.

The US and most other countries view those areas as international waters that should be open to all vessels.

China’s initial response to the British warship’s passage was muted on Monday.

“We hope the relevant countries can do more to build mutual trust between countries and uphold peace and security in the region,” foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying told reporters.



Satellite image of the strait of Taiwan, located between south-east China and Taiwan. Photograph: Gallo Images/Getty Images

Until recently, Washington was the main global power willing to sail through the Taiwan Strait.

But a growing number of US allies have transited the route as Beijing intensifies its military threats towards Taiwan and solidifies its control over the disputed South China Sea.

Canadian, French and Australian warships have all made voyages through the Taiwan Strait in recent years, sparking protests from China.

A Royal Navy survey ship, HMS Enterprise, transited through the strait in 2019 but it was not a warship.

Taiwan's defence minister Chiu Kuo-cheng confirmed to reporters that a foreign vessel had sailed through the waterway but did not state which country it was from.

Taiwan's 23 million people live under constant threat of invasion by authoritarian China, which has vowed to seize the island one day – by force if necessary.

Beijing has stepped up military, diplomatic and economic pressure on Taiwan since the election of President Tsai Ing-wen in 2016, who views the island as “already independent”.

Last year, Chinese military jets made a record 380 incursions into Taiwan’s defence zone, and the number of incursions for the first eight months of this year has already exceeded 400.

This article was amended on 28 September 2021 to remove an image that was miscaptioned as showing the strait of Taiwan.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/sep/28/uk-sends-warship-through-taiwan-straight-for-first-time-in-more-than-a-decade>

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## **Headlines saturday 2 october 2021**

- 'A perfect storm' Supply chain crisis could blow world economy off course
- Supply chain crisis Emergency visa scheme extended in major U-turn by Boris Johnson
- Business Germans with no HGV experience asked to drive lorries
- Food 120,000 pigs face cull due to lack of abattoir workers

## Supply chain crisis

# ‘A perfect storm’: supply chain crisis could blow world economy off course



A record number of cargo ships are stuck off the California coast amid a supply chain crisis that could mean fewer gifts and toys for Christmas this year. Photograph: Frederic J Brown/AFP/Getty Images

*[Martin Farrer](#) in Sydney*

Sat 2 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

It was all going so well. Successful vaccination programmes were driving the post-pandemic recovery of the global economy, stock markets were back at record highs, and prices were rising just enough to make deflation fears a thing of the past.

But a supply crunch that initially put a question mark over the availability of luxury cars or whether there would be enough PlayStations under our Christmas trees is instead morphing into a full-blown crisis featuring a

shortage of energy, labour and transport from Liverpool to Los Angeles, and from Qingdao to Queensland.

All the problems are in one way or another tangled up in the surge of post-pandemic consumer demand, but taken together they threaten what one leading economist calls a “stagflationary wind” that could blow the global economy off course.

Mohamed El-Erian, and adviser to the insurance giant Allianz and president of Queens’ College, Cambridge, says this week’s surprise [fall in factory output in China](#) was a clear warning that the world economy could slump while prices were still rising quickly, a doomsday double whammy that almost sank the UK in the 1970s.

“The supply chain problems are much more persistent than most policymakers expected, although companies are less surprised,” he said. “Governments are having to rethink quickly because the three elements – supply side, transport, labour – are coming together to blow a stagflationary wind through the global economy.”

Energy shortages are providing the starker illustration of the problem, with increasing numbers of petrol stations in the UK [running out of fuel](#), and cities in northern China having to ration power and force factories in the world’s number one manufacturing nation to shutter just when pre-Christmas demand is reaching a peak in the west.

Both countries have been caught out by not having enough reserves amid a scramble throughout the world for natural gas and for oil, which has almost doubled in price in 12 months to nearly \$80 a barrel.

Along with ongoing Covid-related restrictions in some large manufacturing countries such as Vietnam, and a well-documented shortage of components such as computer chips, factories are simply not producing enough.



Volkswagen was among the carmakers forced to close plants amid a shortage of semiconductors. Photograph: Reuters

British car production dropped by 27% year on year in August as a lack of semiconductors and led to a big drop in the number of vehicles exported to Australia, the US and China. On Thursday, Volkswagen, Ford and Opel maker Stellantis announced fresh temporary closures in Germany because of the chip problem. Opel is closing a plant until 2022 – the longest such stoppage so far.

In Japan, an index of stocks of finished goods has dropped to levels not even seen in the wake of 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster.

But even if they could get their hands on more sources of energy and materials, and factories could make more goods, it would still cost more to ship things. Drewry's shipping index, which measures the cost of containers, is up 291% compared with a year ago. On some busy routes, such as from China to Europe's biggest port Rotterdam, the cost of shipping a container has risen sixfold in the past year.

The problems don't end when the goods arrive at a port, with labour shortages presenting a final problem in the increasingly tortuous journey of products to their final destination. A lack of truck drivers in many parts of

Europe, partly because of disputes over conditions and partly because of ongoing Covid restrictions, is causing delays.

Flavio Romero Macau, a supply chain expert at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia, says that massive pent-up consumer demand in the wake of the pandemic has strained the world's delicately balanced economic ecosystem.

"Consumers are crazy to buy things because the world is awash with dollars from government stimulus, higher savings and pent-up demand. PlayStations, laptops, phones, gym equipment – you name it people are trying to buy it," he says.

"Higher demand and restricted supply equals inflation: there's no way out of it. You put all these things together and its a perfect storm."

While [warnings increase about the threat of stagflation](#), more economists believe central banks might have to move more quickly to raise interest rates if inflation takes hold across the developed world.



The Bank of England has signalled that interest rates could go up next year.  
Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters

The Bank of England has flagged that rates [could go up next year](#), and the US Federal Reserve has at last signalled the end of its massive pandemic stimulus plan that could push up the cost of borrowing in 2022.

Neil Shearing, the chief economist at Capital [Economics](#), said the UK and the US were most at risk from overheating into inflation, leading to central bank action.

“Risks are generally skewed to the upside and there is a real possibility that inflation increases to a much higher rate that would, in time, necessitate a more substantial tightening of policy,” he said.

A paradigm shift in monetary policy after years of cheap credit could be accompanied by a rebalancing of the global economy as countries seek to shorten supply chains and become more self-sufficient through more [autarkist](#) policies, which promote non-reliance on imports. Romero Macau believes many companies could take the chance to move manufacturing away from China, where the supply of cheap labour that launched its economic miracle is drying up, to countries such as Vietnam and Mexico. The latter, he said, has cheaper labour costs than China, making it attractive especially for American companies.

Richard Flax, the chief investment officer at digital wealth manager Moneyfarm, said the crisis was already prompting a rethink by policymakers and business leaders.

“Large corporates and governments are reviewing their supply chains for crucial goods, with a mind towards security of supply as well as cost. We would expect to see supply chains in some sectors shorten as a response to Covid, either via reshoring, or as companies try to diversify their sources of supply.”

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## Supply chain crisis

# Emergency visa scheme extended in major U-turn by Boris Johnson



Government reserve fuel tankers parked in Cambridgeshire on Friday. About 100 army drivers will be used. Photograph: Terry Harris/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Rajeev Syal](#)*

Fri 1 Oct 2021 17.00 EDT

Boris Johnson's government has made a dramatic U-turn in an attempt to save Christmas – with a raft of extended emergency visas to help abate labour shortages that have led to empty shelves and petrol station queues.

New immigration measures will allow 300 fuel drivers to arrive immediately and stay until the end of March, while 100 army drivers will take to the roads from Monday, the government announced late on Friday.

About 4,700 further food haulage drivers will arrive from late October and leave by the end of February.

The rules mean that the government has relented to lobbying from the fuel and food industries and extended some temporary visa schemes beyond [Christmas](#) Eve and into the new year.

The move, designed to tackle chronic disruption to supply chains, is a major change in policy after ministers previously insisted they would not relax immigration rules in response to the crisis.

It comes as Sir [Keir Starmer](#), the Labour leader, demanded that parliament should be recalled to sort out the fuel and food shortages.

Almost 200 military personnel, including 100 drivers, will be deployed from Monday to provide temporary support as part of the government's wider action to further [relieve pressure on petrol stations](#) and address the shortage of HGV drivers.



A fuel tanker at Buncefield oil depot in Hemel Hempstead. Photograph: Paul Childs/Reuters

To help increase fuel stocks, military personnel are now being trained at haulier sites across the country, the government said, and from Monday will

be on the road delivering fuel supplies.

Fuel haulage drivers from abroad will be allowed to work in the UK immediately, and will not be subjected to previous barriers, a Cabinet Office release said.

“Hauliers will find licensed drivers to recruit and will submit applications to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy which will endorse applicants with the necessary licence and a contract to work as a fuel driver,” the statement said.

The shortage of up 100,000 heavy goods vehicle (HGV) drivers – exacerbated by the pandemic and Brexit – has also affected the food sector and other industries. The British Retail Consortium has warned that significant disruption to Christmas was inevitable unless the problem was contained within days.

The announcement also confirmed that 5,500 poultry workers will arrive from late October and will be allowed to stay until the end of this year.

The visas were announced after poultry producers, which previously relied on labour from eastern Europe, [warned of threats to Christmas](#) and potential overcrowding on farms because of a lack of workers.

Supermarkets and restaurants across the UK are expected to import hundreds of thousands of birds from the EU after fewer were raised by British farmers.

Johnson’s Brexit campaign was founded on giving the UK more control over immigration and ending free movement.

The Home Office had been opposed to adding HGV drivers to the formal occupation shortage list but is thought to have been convinced to back a more short-term visa scheme.

It is likely that other sectors suffering from labour shortages – such as hospitality and social care – will now put pressure on ministers to [grant them exemptions](#) as well.

During Labour's party conference in Brighton this week, Starmer called on the government to extend the scheme to six months, describing the former Christmas Eve deadline as not "long enough".

The government's statement insisted that it will return to its commitment to train UK workers and no longer rely upon bringing in foreign staff.

The business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, said: "Thanks to the immense efforts of industry over the past week, we are seeing continued signs that the situation at the pumps is slowly improving.

"UK forecourt stock levels are trending up, deliveries of fuel to forecourts are above normal levels, and fuel demand is stabilising."

He added: "We want to see employers make long-term investments in the UK domestic workforce instead of relying on overseas labour to build a high-wage, high-skill economy."

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/oct/01/overseas-food-and-fuel-drivers-to-get-visas-in-major-u-turn-by-boris-johnson>

## Supply chain crisis

# Germans with no HGV experience asked to drive lorries amid UK fuel crisis



Lorries on the M1 motorway in South Yorkshire. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

*[Julia Kollewe](#) and [Graeme Wearden](#)*

Fri 1 Oct 2021 13.03 EDT

Thousands of Germans who live in the UK have been written to by the government asking them to drive lorries in an attempt to ease the UK fuel crisis, even though the majority have never been at the wheel of an HGV.

They were included in a 1m-letter mass mailing that also tried to recruit ambulance drivers to get behind the wheel of lorries.

The recruitment drive is aimed at easing the UK's supply chain shortages and a lack of petrol at forecourts.

The news came as a government minister warned that motorists could face another week of queues at the pumps and an industry body said more than a quarter (26%) of independently owned petrol stations in the UK were still dry.

The Germans were automatically included in the mailout because German driving licences issued before 1999 include an entitlement to drive small- to medium-sized trucks of up to 7.5 tonnes.

A Department for [Transport](#) (DfT) spokesperson explained that UK residents from Germany who swapped their licence for a British one would have had that element transferred to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) database. This meant they were included in the HGV category, which also covered ambulance drivers, when the DVLA sent out the letter.

The DfT said: "The letter was automatically sent to almost 1 million people with lorry licences - including a limited number of international residents who were automatically eligible. Anyone wishing to drive professionally faces further tests and training."

A spokesperson said: "We don't want ambulance drivers to change jobs, or to be diverted from their vital work saving lives ... it was impossible to narrow the copy-list by profession due to personal data protection."

One 41-year-old German man, who, along with his wife, received a copy of the letter at their London home on Friday morning, [told the Independent](#): "We were quite surprised. I'm sure pay and conditions for HGV drivers have improved, but ultimately I have decided to carry on in my role at an investment bank.

"My wife has never driven anything larger than a Volvo, so she is also intending to decline the exciting opportunity."

The Petrol Retailers Association (PRA) said on Friday that the fuel situation at forecourts was improving, but far too slowly, and that independent petrol

retailers were not receiving enough fuel to meet demand, more than a week after the shortages were first reported.

The policing minister, [Kit Malthouse](#), said it could take “a week or so” for things to return to normality.

He told Radio 4’s Today programme: “We are still seeing strong demand in parts of the country around fuel.

“My latest briefing is that the situation is stabilising, that we are seeing more forecourts with a greater supply of fuel and hopefully that, as demand and supply come better into balance over the next few days, week or so, that we will see a return to normality.

“If things started to deteriorate further, obviously the prime minister and the secretary of state for energy [Kwasi Kwarteng], whose responsibility this is, will have to review the situation.”

One option is to deploy the army drivers who are on standby, and have been receiving specialist training in how to drive fuel tankers.

The PRA, which represents two-thirds of the UK’s 8,380 forecourts, said fewer than half of them (47%) had both petrol and diesel in stock on Friday, compared with 52% on Thursday.

Gordon Balmer, the executive director of the PRA, said: “Whilst the situation is similar to recent days, there are signs it is improving – but far too slowly.

“Independents … are not receiving enough deliveries of fuel compared with other sectors such as supermarkets. Until independents start getting frequent supplies, we will continue to see long queues at forecourts.”

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## Supply chain crisis

# Up to 120,000 pigs in UK face culling due to lack of abattoir workers



A free-range pig farm in Shottisham, Suffolk. The trade body said farmers were keeping pigs on their farms for longer. Photograph: Geogphotos/Alamy

[Mark Sweney](#)

[@marksweney](#)

Fri 1 Oct 2021 11.18 EDT

Farmers have warned that up to 120,000 pigs face being culled because of a lack of abattoir workers, as acute labour shortages across supply chains continue to wreak havoc on the UK economy.

Rob Mutimer, the chair of the National Pig Association (NPA), said Britain was facing an “acute welfare disaster” within a matter of weeks, with farmers forced to kill their livestock because of an acute shortage of butchers and slaughterers.

“We are within a couple of weeks of having to consider a mass cull of animals in this country,” he told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme on Friday.

“We think our backlog is in the region of 100,000 to 120,000 as we stand today. And it is growing by around 12,000 a week. This is happening on pig farms all over the country; they are backed up and running out of space to keep animals.”

One farmer said they were being told to expect further reductions next week in the number of animals able to be transported, as there were not enough workers at meat-processing plants to handle the loads.

“The problem in the industry has got considerably worse over the last three weeks,” said Mutimer. “[A cull] involves either shooting them on the farm or taking them to an abattoir and disposing of them in a skip. These animals won’t go into the food chain, they will either be rendered or sent for incineration. It is an absolute travesty.”

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He said that a combination of post-Brexit immigration rules and an exodus of foreign workers amid constantly shifting pandemic restrictions on travel had left the industry at crisis point.

The NPA urged retailers not to turn to cheaper pork from European Union suppliers to stave off a shortage on the shelves.

Mutimer said farmers were keeping stock on their farms for longer even though they were over their ideal weight for slaughter – he gave the example that on his farm some pigs are now 25kg (55lb) over prime – but farmers were out of space and there was a welfare issue.

“Pens and sheds are not designed for animals of this size,” he said. “We are heading for an acute welfare disaster quickly.”

Earlier this month, meat industry representatives warned that farmers might have to begin culling pigs because of a [looming shortage of carbon dioxide](#)

to stun the backlog of animals destined for abattoirs.

Most food-grade CO<sub>2</sub> in the UK is produced as a byproduct from fertiliser factories, but rocketing gas wholesale prices had [forced the closure of two of the biggest plants](#), until the government stepped in with [financial support to restart production](#).

On Friday, the business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, [temporarily exempted parts of the CO<sub>2</sub> industry](#) from competition law, to help them to share information and prioritise supplies to businesses that need it most.

The meat industry is just one of many sectors of the economy struggling with labour shortages linked to Brexit and the pandemic, with a shortage of delivery workers hitting supply chains.

After reports of [a lack of HGV drivers to deliver fuel to forecourts](#), motorists rushed to fill up their tanks, prompting more than a week of fuel shortages across the country.

The crime and policing minister, Kit Malthouse, said on Friday that motorists could face another “week or so” of long queues at filling stations, although he added that the “situation is stabilising”.

Supply disruptions are making it harder for UK factories to operate, with an “ongoing onslaught of snags and hitches at every stage of the supply chain,” said Duncan Brock, director at the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply.

Kwarteng, in an interview with the website Conservative Home published on Friday, said the labour and supply chain shortages were part of a transition to a new post-Brexit economy that no longer relied on a “low-wage, high-immigration” model.

The labour shortage is also hitting the hospitality sector, with JD Wetherspoon, which runs 861 pubs across the country, reporting on Friday that it was [struggling to find staff in some areas](#).

Meanwhile, the Bolton-headquartered retailer AO.com had more than £200m wiped off its stock market value after it blamed driver shortages and supply chain problems for a slowing in growth and lower-than-expected profits.

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## 2021.10.02 - Spotlight

- His rage, his pain, his shame, they're all mine Jeremy Strong on playing Succession's Kendall Roy
- 'I'd been reading about Stalin' The making of Succession
- Brexit Colm Tóibín: will the Brexit fallout lead to a 'united Ireland'?
- Blind date 'I thought she might ditch me for the waiter'



Jeremy Strong. Photography: Simon Webb. Styling: Helen Seamons

## **'His rage, his pain, his shame, they're all mine': Jeremy Strong on playing Succession's Kendall Roy**

Jeremy Strong. Photography: Simon Webb. Styling: Helen Seamons

by [Hadley Freeman](#)

Sat 2 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

Earlier this year, Jeremy Strong left his apartment in Brooklyn, walked across the bridge to Manhattan and headed towards the far west side of the island, where he was filming the third season of the feverishly adored and heavily accoladed HBO series [Succession](#). Strong plays Kendall, the alternately bullied and rebellious son of the vilified, Murdoch-esque media tycoon Logan Roy, played by Brian Cox, and Succession follows the [jostling among the patriarch's four children](#) for his affection and respect, both of which he generally withholds. None of them is as visibly crushed by this as

Kendall, who bears more than a slight resemblance to James Murdoch, even down to the [dabblings in hip-hop](#). With every timid step Strong makes on screen, every apologetic dip of his chin when he starts to talk, he captures the pain of a son who knows he has failed to live up to his father's expectations from the first time he cried. He won an Emmy last year for the role, beating, among others, Cox, in neatly Freudian style.

I have a lot of armour and anxieties, and I have to strip all that away to engage my creative self

Strong likes to walk while learning his lines, so on that day in New York as he was walking he was also talking, reciting a speech he would soon be saying to Cox, in which Kendall tries to curry favour with his father, but also to be seen as his own man. "Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a ghost-grey Tesla rolling to a stop, so I looked in it, and there was [James Murdoch](#)," Strong says when we meet in a London hotel. "He looked at me and I looked at him, and there was a flicker between us. Then he was gone. So we had a moment."



Jeremy Strong wears blazer, by Geoffrey B Small, from [bluemountain.school](#). Jewellery throughout, Jeremy's own. Main image:

suit, [paulsmith.com](http://paulsmith.com); shirt, by Dries Van Noten, from [selfridges.com](http://selfridges.com).  
Photography: Simon Webb. Styling: Helen Seamons

Strong has a slight tan and, because he happens to be dressed all in brown (jacket, T-shirt, trousers), he looks a little like a sleek, velvety teddy bear. There is a softness to him, whereas Kendall is all prickles and pain. But even in the telling of this anecdote, Strong takes on Kendall's tics, the shoulders raising an inch, his voice dropping a half-octave. And then, Kendall-like, he suddenly doubts himself: maybe Murdoch didn't really recognise him, maybe he doesn't watch the show. At least one member of the Murdoch family is a fan, I say: last year [Interviewed Cox](#) and he said that a man once approached him to say his wife enjoyed Succession but "found it a little hard to watch sometimes". His wife, Cox revealed with a mighty cackle, was James Murdoch's sister, Elisabeth.

Unlike Cox, Strong stays serious: "Yes, I heard about that. And of course that means you feel a greater sense of responsibility." There is a pleasingly apt difference between interviewing the father and the son: where Cox (like Logan) was all devil-may-care swearing, Strong (like Kendall) is quiet and intense. My God, he's intense. When he arrives, I start by making small talk, asking whether it's nice to be in London, given he studied at Rada as an 18-year-old. But Strong is not one for casual chat. "It is," he says. "For me, this city is very connected with the mythology of my life. I slept outside the National Theatre to see Ian Holm play [Lear in a Richard Eyre](#) production. It was one of those revelatory things that changed my life and I thought, 'That's what I want to do.' So it feels like a talismanic place."



With Brian Cox in Succession. Photograph: HBO/Kobal/Rex/Shutterstock

Within a few more minutes, he's quoting acting inspiration he gleaned from TS Eliot's Four Quartets, Hamlet, Cy Twombly, Chekhov and "Dustin Hoffman quoting [Jacques Cousteau](#) – I think about this quote all the time: You have to know how far to go to go too far." (I think this is actually [a version of an Eliot quote](#): "I do not see how anyone can go very far ... who is not ready to risk complete failure." But who am I to argue with Strong, Hoffman and Cousteau?) "I remember things that are instructive. They are like northern lights for me," Strong says.

He is eloquent but – initially – self-conscious, although that's probably because doing interviews makes him anxious. "I always think beforehand: 'What the fuck am I going to talk about?'" he says. Because of that anxiety, he prepared for this interview the way he prepares for a role: intensely. He researched me and comes ready with questions about my childhood and work. He is especially interested in my recent interview with the author [Edward St Aubyn](#), who was abused by his aristocratic father. It's not hard to see why Strong-as-Kendall would feel a kinship there: "It was so moving to me that he said he was crushed so easily. That world he inhabits is so redolent of Succession," he says.

I don't really feel like an actor any more; I feel as if I'm me for half the year and I'm Kendall for half the year

Due to the heightened secrecy around the show, I'm not allowed to see even one episode from the new season, so I've no idea what has happened to poor Kendall after we saw him publicly denouncing his father at the end of season two. The only clue Strong gives is to say that he and Succession's creator, Peep Show's [Jesse Armstrong](#), talked a lot about F Scott Fitzgerald's 1936 essay about his breakdown, [The Crack-Up](#). "Jesse said, 'It's like winning a grand slam. Has Kendall freed himself? Or has the crisis of getting what he wanted made it worse?'"

Strong doesn't just think about his character – he fully commits to him. "I feel a great responsibility to understand his pain and feel the weight that's on him," he says, and unfortunately for him, there's a lot of weight on his character. Kendall is so painfully self-destructive that he ended season one attempting to buy drugs and inadvertently causing the death of a young man in the process, and season two cutting himself off from his own family. So it's hard to imagine that things are going brilliantly for him in season three.

I ask Armstrong if he ever worries that he's putting too much on Kendall, given how much Strong internalises it: "Honestly, no. When you're writing, you need a chip of ice in the heart about taking the character to uncomfortable places. But on a friend/human level, I do feel for Jeremy. I remember after he'd been doing gruelling stuff in the second season, he came back to the set one day with his family and I didn't recognise him for a beat – he was physically transformed, back from this sort of vacancy to a human being with his lights switched back on again, burning."



Strong looked at pictures of plane crashes to put himself ‘in the right place’ for the scenes about the financial crash in *The Big Short*. Photograph: PictureLux/The Hollywood Archive/Alamy

They only finished shooting two weeks before we speak, and I ask Strong how long it takes for him to get Kendall out of his system. “I don’t think he does leave me,” he says. “I don’t really feel like an actor much any more; I feel as if I’m me for half the year and I’m Kendall for half the year. I think when you live with a role for long enough, like [Mark Rylance playing Rooster in Jerusalem](#), then it’s in you.”

My tolerance for thespian actor chat is usually pretty low (oh, you think acting is such a profound profession? Allow me to introduce you to brain surgery). But, to my surprise, I enjoy it from Strong, and it takes me a while to figure out why. Finally, as our interview runs on far past our allotted time, I get it: often when actors wax on about how they lived among sheep for a year to play a shepherd, it feels as if they’re stroking their ego, but with Strong, it feels like endearing enthusiasm. Every conversation with him, whatever the subject, whirlpools back to acting, like a person who can’t stop talking about their true love, or a child on their favourite obsession. Also, he has the talents to justify the talk.

I don't think any of the directors I have worked with would say I'm easy, but they know I put it all on the line

Even leaving aside Succession, he has long been making a name for himself as a highly talented character actor, one who started in New York theatre and quickly become a favourite of directors as varied as [Kathryn Bigelow](#) (Zero Dark Thirty, Detroit), [Adam McKay](#) ([The Big Short](#), as well as the pilot of Succession) and [Aaron Sorkin](#) (Molly's Game, The Trial of the Chicago 7). Does their fondness for him suggest he's easy to direct? "I don't think any of those directors would say I'm easy, but they know I put it all on the line," he says with a wry smile.

"Jeremy takes his work extremely seriously," says [Rafe Spall](#), who acted with Strong in The Big Short, the adaptation of Michael Lewis's book about the 2008 financial crisis. "When we were filming the scene when we discover that Bear Stearns has tanked, Jeremy was sitting next to me and I saw he was looking at his phone a lot. I asked what he was looking at and he said, 'Pictures of plane crashes.' He told me they put him 'in the right place'."



Strong, centre right, with Sacha Baron Cohen in The Trial of the Chicago 7.  
Photograph: AP

When Sorkin cast him in [The Trial of the Chicago 7](#) as Jerry Rubin, the countercultural activist, Strong prepared by “taking all these gummies [edible cannabis], going to Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago and listening to the Grateful Dead. It was a palate cleanser after Kendall.” During the courtroom scene, in which Rubin, fellow activist Abbie Hoffman (Sacha Baron Cohen) and others were accused of crossing state lines to incite anti-Vietnam riots, Strong, in the spirit of Rubin, brought an “assortment of period noisemakers” to disrupt proceedings. After Sorkin irritably asked him to please stop clanging his cowbell, he slipped a fart machine on the chair of Judge Julius Hoffman, played by Frank Langella, who was less than amused when he sat on it.

“I felt, this is guerrilla theatre and that’s what these guys would do. But Sacha turned to me and said, ‘You can’t do that!’ I was like, ‘Dude! You’re [Sacha Baron Cohen!](#)’” And it did the trick: the take in which Langella sat on the fart machine, and then glares at Hoffman and Rubin, is the take that appears in the movie.

When he’s making [Succession](#), Strong largely stays separate from the other cast members to maintain the dynamic of the show in which Kendall is emotionally disconnected from his family. “It’s not like I stay in character, but you need to believe in what you’re doing and take it seriously. I don’t know how you can do that without going all out. Also, for me, the creative self and social self are entirely separate. I have a lot of armour and anxieties in my social self, and I have to strip all that away to engage my creative self,” he says.

The relationship between Kendall and Logan is at the heart of *Succession* and the moments when Logan blows up at his son are almost unwatchably painful. Is it scary to get a Brian Cox gale force 10? “Sometimes. I don’t always know when he’s going to shout at me,” he says, eyes widening. Once, he burst into tears.



Blazer and shirt, by Geoffrey B Small, from [bluemountain.school](#). Photography: Simon Webb. Styling: Helen Seamons. Fire Specialist: Matt Strange. Grooming: Sam Cooper at Carol Hayes management using Kiehl's. Photographer's assistants: Sam Brown and Jake Newell. Stylist's assistant: Peter Bevan

I ask if it's hard for him to maintain a distance from Cox off camera, given how friendly he is in real life.

"Yeah, it is hard, because Brian is so avuncular," he says, enjoying the word. "We have very different processes, and he tolerates me and I have inestimable respect for him. But I prefer to keep him in his corner and I stay in mine so we can meet in the ring. It harms my sense of the dynamic when it's so frictionless and warm between us. That bonhomie doesn't serve the work."

In season two, in a typical moment of poor judgment, Kendall performed an [unforgettably weird rap for his father](#) to show him his love, much to Logan's displeasure. Wasn't Strong tempted to laugh in Cox's face as he said lines like "L to the OG, Dude be the OG"? Strong recoils, shocked: clearly I still don't get it.

“Oh no! Laughter isn’t even on the cards – it couldn’t be! Because the rap was sincere, it’s committed. I don’t feel as if I’m doing a scene for Brian Cox, I feel as if I’m rapping for my dad,” he says.

I ask if he can do the rap for me and he says no. “It’s not a parlour trick,” he says, a gentle rebuke. “But there was something wonderful about doing the rap, because it was expressive and not internal. So much of the time there’s a muzzled anguish that lives in Kendall. But when he convinces himself he’s free, it’s a real reprieve because he’s not sitting in the burning chair any more.” Strong often makes viscerally visual references to describe Kendall’s pain: for the photoshoot, his suggestions included him appearing to be on the verge of drowning, and burning his script (the latter was safer).

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It is Strong’s natural intensity – that ability to sit in the burning chair – that makes him feel so perfectly cast as Kendall, says Armstrong: “I normally think I prize doubleness or the ability to do two things at once. Of course, Jeremy can do that and play, say, confidence which is both undermined by a deeper lack of confidence, but also bolstered and pumped up by a need to act out the confidence which is a mask. But what he brings is what I prize most highly, and that’s single-mindedness. He finds these absolute convictions in the character, and in a world that is full of all kinds of phoniness, Jeremy-as-Kendall’s singularity of wanting is very important. Even if what Kendall wants is in some ways bullshit, his wanting is very pure. And when we see the strings cut on that wanting, and he’s left flailing without a purpose, that’s very affecting, too.”

I thought I’d always be a chameleonic character actor. But with Jesse’s writing, there’s something more naked being asked of me

Armstrong has always insisted the show is not based on the [Murdochs](#). “Or the [Trumps](#), or the [Sulzbergers](#), or the [Newhouses](#), or any of those dynastic media families,” Strong adds (although he did read everything he could about James Murdoch when he got the part, and yes, he does see the many resemblances between Kendall and Donald Trump Jr). Yet he has a habit of appearing in films that are based on actual events. As well as the Bigelow, Sorkin and McKay films, he played Lee Harvey Oswald in [Parkland](#). He was

especially good in *The Big Short*, playing a compulsively gum-chewing investor who quickly grasps the scale of what's coming. "I've always been drawn to stories about the times we live in, and when Adam McKay came to me with *Succession*, it felt very much like what he did with *The Big Short* and [\*Vice\*](#) [about Dick Cheney]. He's made this triptych of American life," he says. Yet by signing up for the show, Strong upended what he expected for his own life: "I thought I would always be one of those chameleonic character actors. But with Jesse's writing, there's something more naked being asked of me. There's nowhere to hide. Kendall's rage, his pain, his contempt, his shame, his feelings of inadequacy – all of those things are mine. And that feels very different from just putting on a funny voice when you're a kid."

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Strong was born and raised in Boston. His mother was a hospice nurse and his father works in juvenile justice, "so I couldn't have been further away from the world of *Succession*". As a child, he says, "I never felt able to take up space in the room." But when he was on stage, he was liberated: "It was just this abracadabra where you're free from your inhibitions, the way you're perceived by others and even the way you perceive yourself. I think acting, for me, was a way to disappear from my normal social self and also a way to appear more forcefully. Honestly, I don't know what I'd do without acting."

He started doing plays at school, encouraged by his English teachers, and when he was 18, he was accepted on a Rada summer course. He read [\*Laurence Olivier\*](#)'s autobiography and fell in love with his descriptions of "theatrical courage" and being bold in one's performance: "That English tradition in acting which we don't have as much in America, even in film," he says. After graduating from Yale, where he majored in English, he scratched out a living in New York, getting whatever jobs he could in theatre. When he was in his mid-20s, he was hired as [\*Daniel Day-Lewis\*](#)'s assistant on the set of 2005's *The Ballad of Jack and Rose*. I ask if it was Day-Lewis – famously no slouch when it comes to immersing himself in a role – who encouraged him to take his fully committed approach to acting.



Jumpsuit, [paulharndenshoemakers.com](http://paulharndenshoemakers.com). Photograph: Simon Webb/The Guardian

“I had always had a predilection towards that, but seeing the level of Daniel’s commitment, his courageousness, his willingness to make a fool of himself – that had a profound and formative effect on me,” he says.

What was he doing for Day-Lewis as his assistant? “Oh, just mundane stuff.” Like getting his coffee? Strong is amused at the thought: “No, he’s not someone who needs anyone to get him coffee.” I start to ask again, but he stops me: “I feel very protective of his privacy.” Whatever it was, Strong obviously did such a convincing job of being Day-Lewis’s assistant that he was cast as his private secretary in [Lincoln](#) – another role based on a real person. Surely they had a laugh about that?

“No, no. Maybe afterwards, but getting that part was so meaningful to me. Although I didn’t do much in that movie and, as an actor, you want to go at 200mph – you want to be playing Lincoln!” he smiles.

Quick Guide

**Saturday magazine**

Show



This article comes from Saturday, [the new print magazine from the Guardian](#) which combines the best features, culture, lifestyle and travel writing in one beautiful package. Available now in the UK and ROI.

Photograph: GNM

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

In 2006, Strong was in a tiny play that was “as far off Broadway as you can get without being in the river”. [Philip Seymour Hoffman](#), along with the Pulitzer prize-winning playwright John Patrick Shanley, happened to see his performance. On the back of that, Shanley cast him in his play Defiance, and that led to his first film role, as the lead in the indie movie Humboldt County in 2008. Did he stay in touch with Hoffman?

“Not that closely, but the New York theatre world is pretty small so I’d see him around and he was always very kind to me. I remember when I was in rehearsals for Turgenev’s A Month in the Country and I was talking to Phil about my difficulties with it, he told me to ‘Err on the side of going for it.’ When I think about him, I think about that, his boldness, his ... ” He trails off, his eyes filled with tears. Hoffman died of a drug overdose in 2014, at

the age of 46. I apologise for bringing up something so sad. “No no, it’s just – he was a hero to all of us,” he says.



Strong with his wife, psychiatrist Emma Wall. Photograph: Getty Images

We move on to happier subjects, namely, his wife, Emma Wall, a psychiatrist, whom he never mentions without smiling. The two met at a party in New York in 2012, while [Hurricane Sandy](#) raged outside. They married in 2016 and live mainly in New York, but have a home in Copenhagen, and Strong proudly shows me the Danish labels on his clothes. “I love Denmark. I find it a very sane and gentle place. It feels like a refuge for me, and it’s great to have somewhere that’s a docking station after all this work, which I find very enervating and scary and stressful,” he says. I ask if his love for Hamlet motivated him to buy a home in Copenhagen. He laughs and says no, it’s because his wife is half-Danish, but adds: “I’ve always wanted to play Hamlet, and I may not get to, but I feel he’s embedded in Kendall, that thwarted will and inability to take action.” He has, of course, visited Helsingør: “Shakespeare never saw it, but you like to think, ‘There’s Hamlet’s castle,’” he says wistfully.

Strong and his wife have daughters aged three, 18 months, and another born just after our interview. “So three sisters,” he smiles. He has created a

Chekhovian family while living in Copenhagen like a Danish prince. I ask how his Danish is and he admits it's pretty bad. "The truth is – and my wife knows this, so it's OK for me to say, I think – I have an almost pathological lack of curiosity about most things. But when it comes to work, I'm inexhaustible. So if I had to learn Danish for a part, I would."

I ask him if it's possible that he does too much for his work. Does he really have to take on all of a drug addict's pain to play a drug addict?

"There have been times when it has felt really hard, but if the character is going through an ordeal, and you want the audience to experience that, then you can't spare yourself. I have a belief – and this may be a fallacious belief – that it has to cost you something," he says. Then he adds something that could be both Kendall's personal mantra and a description of Strong's work ethic: "I need it to be difficult."

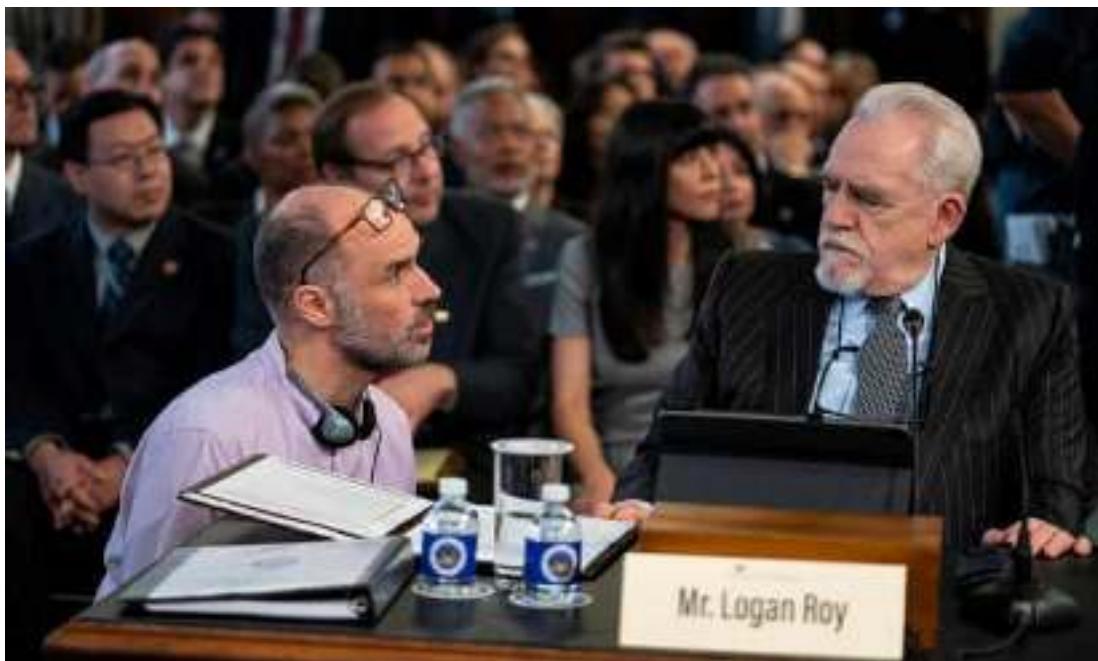
Season three of Succession begins on HBO/HBO Max in the US on 17 October, and on Sky Atlantic in the UK on 18 October.

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## Succession

# ‘Why do I want to write about these awful, rich, evil people?’: the making of Succession



Creator Jesse Armstrong with Brian Cox, who plays Logan Roy, on the set of Succession, season two. Photograph: Zach Dilgard/HBO



[Hannah J Davies](#)

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Sat 2 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

## **‘If we don’t get this right, it’ll be a problem’: the concept**

In early 2016, [Peep Show](#) co-creator Jesse Armstrong pitched his first solo project as a showrunner to HBO. Inspired by an unaired screenplay about Rupert Murdoch he had written a decade before, as well as other influences – including true crime documentary series [The Jinx](#) – Armstrong created a show about “the nature of very rich people and media power”. The table read for the pilot episode of Succession, directed by executive producer Adam McKay ([The Big Short](#), [Vice](#)) took place on the day Donald Trump was elected.

*Jesse Armstrong (creator and executive producer):* When we were starting the show, it was that great period when we all thought it was hilarious that Trump was doing what he was doing – he was a joke candidate whom the establishment would never let happen. We started shooting when the conventional wisdom was still that Hillary would win. Any similarities to

the family in the show are coincidental – that was us putting our aerial into the general political and cultural ether, rather than trying to reflect it.

The idea was something like Dallas meets [Festen](#) [Thomas Vinterberg's dark comedy about a family gathering]. I was super-involved with the casting. There's a lot of responsibility given to the writer – if you fuck up, you fuck up. Luckily we had a brilliant casting director, Francine Maisler, and Adam McKay knew people like Jeremy Strong [who plays Kendall] from The Big Short. Kendall was the hardest to cast. I felt like, if we don't get this right, it'll be a big problem.

So when I saw somebody in Jeremy who could do that incredibly engaged, real thing, that made me very happy. One of the first things we shot was him in the back of the car [in episode one] listening to a Beastie Boys track. So often in TV you're looking at the monitor thinking, "Oh, yeah, that sort of looks a bit like that other TV show that we're pretending to make." But I was there, thinking, "Yeah, this might work. This looks right."

## **'Why do I want to write about evil white men?': the writers' room assembles**

After the pilot, HBO ordered a series. A writers' room – staffed by both British and American writers – was assembled in Brixton, London. Among the group was playwright Lucy Prebble, as well as Georgia Pritchett, Tony Roche and Jon Brown, who had written for numerous comedies between them, including working with Armstrong on [Veep](#) and [The Thick of It](#).

*Georgia Pritchett (writer/producer):* There was definitely a part of me that thought, why do I want to write about these awful, rich, evil white men who are poisoning society? But having to really dig deep into the characters to find their humanity was an exciting challenge. I've always had a soft spot for Roman [played by Kieran Culkin], which is concerning. There's something about that evil little pixie that I really do love.



The Roy family, played by, from left: Jeremy Strong, Sarah Snook, Brian Cox, Alan Ruck and Kieran Culkin. Photograph: Vincent Tullo/New York Times/Redux/eyevine

*Jon Brown(writer/producer):* I think you could have a version of the show that's nihilistic and bleak that would be quite fun to write, but I don't think it would be very fun to watch. But we definitely had a lot of conversations about what we think these people have done in their pasts. Sometimes we talked about something that happened in a character's life to make them how they are, like Roman's sexual dysfunction. There's a temptation to put it in the script, but there's a risk of that trope where you're like: "Look at these fuckheads," but also, "This is what happened to them when they were younger ... "

*Tony Roche (writer/producer):* In the early days, anything was up for grabs. We wondered whether we should reshoot things from the pilot – maybe Logan didn't have to have a stroke at the end of episode one, things like that. But looking back, a lot of the building blocks of the show were there already. I remember Jon saying really early on, "Tom and Greg are a brilliant double act," and Jesse's face lighting up.

## **‘I was hauled over the coals for suggesting Marcia would cook a turkey’: creating the world of the Roys**

The writers used wealth consultants to factcheck the opulent reality they were creating – as well as conducting their own, occasionally intimate, research.

*Pritchett:* We got some stuff really wrong in the first season. This big American drama was written by a group of scruffy, shambolic British comedy writers who were excited that someone was paying for their Pret sandwich, so we had to get in some rich consultants. With the Thanksgiving episode in season one, I was hauled over the coals – I had Marcia [Logan’s wife] saying, “I’ll cook a turkey,” and they’re going, “God, she would never even go into the kitchen, she wouldn’t even know where it is.” I had the staff wearing maid’s clothes and they were like, “They would never wear that, they would wear polo shirts and chinos. And oh my God, you’ve got napkins in rings – that’s so gauche and poor.” We had them wearing coats and they were like, “They don’t wear coats, they go from their cars or their jets to their building, their shoes don’t walk on the ground.”



Tony Roche and Georgia Pritchett on set: ‘This big American drama was written by a group of scruffy, shambolic British comedy writers.’ Succession, season one. Photograph: Colin Hutton/HBO

*Brown*: I was tasked with researching Tom’s bachelor party at the sex club [for the episode Prague]. Initially it was going to be a full-on sex party, but we decided to make it more grotty. At one point I got an invitation to go to a swingers’ party on a boat along the Hudson River, and it did feel like an insane moment. I was at a gig with Tony and Jesse at Madison Square Garden, then I get an invite to join a waterborne orgy ...

## ‘Probably nobody’s watching it’: Succession airs

The show’s first season premiered in the US in June 2018, garnering middling to positive reviews. Some critics noted that, after a slow start, the pace picked up around episode six, when Kendall Roy aimed to depose his father at a shareholder meeting for the family’s company, Waystar Royco. Elsewhere, family dynamics slowly unfurled, before the season ended with a shock car crash.

*Armstrong*: We didn’t go, “Hey, let’s make it a gruelling assault course and then we’ll give some people some sweeties in episode six,” but I’ve heard from more than one person that that was a turning point, when the personal dynamics clicked. [Jeremy’s acting is method-derived](#), kind of [Lee Strasberg school](#) ... he likes to really try to be experiencing, so he was really running around New York for that episode.

*Susan Soon He Stanton (writer/producer)*: We were shooting in a highway tunnel with Jeremy running, we had to stop the traffic. I think he may have got a hairline break in his foot. Everyone’s personalities are coming to a head in terms of allegiances in that episode, but also there’s the question of whether he might have won if he had done less.

It’s got this Britishness in its tone. It’s quite irreverent towards its subject. Veep had that, The Thick of It had that

*Pritchett:* We definitely felt in the first season that nobody was going to watch it. So Jesse could do all of these complex business stories, and we could do a lot of Roman jerking off and doing outrageous things, and we wouldn't get in trouble. I think it was fun for people to see the politics of the family and not just the politics of the boardroom. I keep meaning to ask Jesse if he got the inspiration for Tom giving Logan the expensive watch from the royal family. There was a story about Princess Diana's first royal Christmas. She was terrified about what to buy for the Queen and bought some very expensive gift, and then she was mocked: they have everything, so they buy each other silly things like tea towels. Basically what I'm saying is, Tom Wamsgans is Princess Diana.

*Roche:* From the beginning I think Jesse took the view that the kids are quite international due to being incredibly wealthy, and they had lived in England for a while. One of the things that is maybe unusual about the show is that it's got this Britishness in its tone. It's quite irreverent towards its subject, it doesn't respect its betters. Veep had that, The Thick of It had that, and it's been really nice to see American audiences get it.

*Brown:* That's also true of the look and feel of the show. It can be plush and aspirational, but it also shows the disgusting edges.



Writer/producer Lucy Prebble & Kieran Culkin, who plays Roman, on the set of Succession, season one. Photograph: Ursula Coyote/HBO

*Roche*: There's something quite British about that, like, "Oh look at this amazing view ... but look at the bins over there." One of the things Jesse wanted to think about was that while great wealth can insulate you from a lot of life's problems, there are some things that are just inescapable. You can't make everything pretty all the time.

*Armstrong*: The season one finale, and the [Chappaquiddick-ish](#) car crash, was what they would call in America a big swing. We'd hummed and hawed over it ... Sumner Redstone, who ran Viacom, had this extraordinary thing halfway through his life where he was in a hotel fire and jumped out of the window. He was hanging on to the balustrade, clinging on to the metal railings that also got incredibly hot. He got terrible burns all over his body. His career took off afterwards, and he said it had nothing to do with that. But other people feel that maybe that catapulted him. If you look at the life of Redstone, or Robert Maxwell, you'll find [some acts of great heroism](#), as well as avarice and ill behaviour. Human lives contain a lot of stuff, and if you don't include some of that I feel like you're not showing the full picture.

*Pritchett*: It's also about: "How much can you get away with when you're rich?" Which is pretty much anything. I had a lot of ideas about how it might change Kendall and how he'd become a better person. But, no. It certainly affected him for a bit but – rather brilliantly – he's moved on.

## **'I'd been reading about Stalin': the show gains ground**

Succession's second series saw it gain a reputation as one of the most exciting shows on television. Logan's paranoia and control only increased, and Kendall ventured into startup culture.

*Lucy Prebble (writer/producer)*: At that point, it felt like people reassessed the show a little bit and really got on board. I think it took a while for people to click into that unique combination of drama and comedy. Season two really pushed the solidity of the tone, and the consistent dark comedy of it.

We were thinking a lot about Kendall sort of giving up to some extent, and being a beaten dog, who has been called to heel by his father. And also the idea of Shiv, who has been defined by not being part of the firm, finally being dangled the offer that she has really wanted all her life, and that psychological pain of giving up what it is that defines her.

*Brown:* A friend watched Hunting, the “[Boar on the Floor](#)” episode, recently and said it made them want to crawl out of their own skin. Logan was a monster in the first season, but we see him being even more of a monster. We went through our list of corporate things that the characters could do, and decided they could do a hunting trip – . Jesse liked this idea of Logan keeping his closest allies around him, with the pretence of camaraderie and having a good time, but actually torturing and bullying them psychologically – being paranoid himself, but also fostering that atmosphere of paranoia around him. We were quite nervous because we hadn’t done an episode like it before; we were worried it might feel a bit overblown and heightened compared to how real and closely observed other parts of the show are. But Brian did a phenomenal job and made it feel very real. Everyone on set was terrified.



The ‘Boar on the Floor’ episode: ‘Brian did a phenomenal job. Everyone on set was terrified.’ Succession, season two. Photograph: Landmark Media/Alamy

*Armstrong*: I was keen to get across the correspondence between some of these moguls and authoritarian regimes. I'd been reading a bit about Stalin, and how he would do these dinner parties where he would encourage everyone to get drunk, but he wouldn't drink. Then he would make horrible jokes to Molotov or whoever about their potential torture or the murder of their colleagues.

*Brown*: We were in the startup world quite a lot with Vaulter [the new media startup acquired and later shut down by Kendall] in season two, so we looked at lots of companies – at Vice in particular. Tony's amazing at writing all of that stuff you see on the screens in the office, the satirical versions of what might be on BuzzFeed. All the cards you see up in Kendall's office were handwritten by Jeremy, based on conversations with the show's business consultant, Merissa Marr. In New York, we went and toured a few offices. We were looking at locations, but what we were also doing was getting a look at those kinds of companies and the culture, so we sort of went in under a smokescreen. Often you pick up on things like 30 boxed plasma TVs that haven't been opened, that speak to a company that's out of control or is misspending.

## **'Hype you couldn't manufacture': Succession fever arrives**

Season two marked out Succession as the show that everyone was watching, with the series winning big at the [2020 Emmys](#), with prizes for acting, writing, best drama, and directing. The writers were also starting to see a marked change.

*Jamie Carragher (writer)*: I could see that shift happen on Twitter. If you did a cursory search for Succession mid-season one and then again by season two, it had caught people's imaginations in a way that you can't manufacture. It got its fanbase organically.

*Prebble*: Someone in New York put on an [off-off-Broadway production of Sands](#), the play which Willa writes in our show. That sort of thing makes you go: this has gone bonkers.

If you're a member of a family like the Roys, it's like being a royal: you don't get to leave. You're addicted to the pain

*Carragher:* One of our writers went to a wedding where they named the tables after TV characters that they liked, and Cousin Greg was one of them, which was a sign of how things had tipped over.

*Roche:* I suppose we often thought about it from the media element, but essentially, it's a family story, and it turns out a lot of people have families, so it's quite relatable. It is worrying when people say, "Oh, my dad is like Logan," because you think: "That's not good."

*Francesca Gardiner (writer):* So often as writers, in order to get the stakes that you need, you have a murder plot or a death, but Succession has proven that people are interested in the intricacies of family dynamics. The stakes feel as high as any Scandi noir.

## **'We wanted Kendall to wee on his divorce papers': the cutting room floor**

Such is the dense world-building in the series, much of the material that the writers pore over doesn't even end up making it to TV.

*Roche:* We film whole news pieces that run in the background on TVs, but even that might never get shown because the camera's always moving in response to what the actors are doing.



Jeremy Strong as Kendall in season three. Photograph: David M Russell/HBO

*Brown*: There's a scene in season three where Connor's going into a meeting. Jamie [Carragher] wrote a whole page of Connor's notes, but you literally never see them because I don't think the cameras are over his shoulder.

*Pritchett*: One of the writers was getting divorced this season, and went to the loo and accidentally weed on his divorce papers. We thought maybe Kendall could do that, but we never got it in.

## **'There's a civil war coming': season three**

For its third season, the writers' room moved to London's Victoria, recruiting more US names including Ted Cohen (*Friends*, *Veep*) as it continued to craft the conflict between Kendall and Logan. They wrapped in February 2020, just prior to Covid restrictions being imposed. However, delays in filming necessitated some later rewrites.

*Will Arbery (consultant)*: Before joining *Succession* I had written a play, *Heroes of the Fourth Turning*, which dealt with conservative politics in the US. And I think that this season touches on that more directly than past

seasons. I was especially interested in Shiv – because she worked for a progressive politician, and then pivoted back to her family – and the idea of toggling between ideological extremes. I’m also very interested in how Shiv navigates her intensely patriarchal world.



Sarah Snook as Shiv Roy in season three. Photograph: David M Russell/HBO

*Ted Cohen (writer):* I love writing for underdog characters. And they’re all underdogs, except for Logan, which is probably why it’s so much fun. Tom and Roman are just so heartbreaking. As an American, I always want to create a happy ending and you’re never allowed to do that on Succession. I’m a frustrated optimist. If you’re a member of a family like the Roys, it’s like being a royal: you don’t get to leave. You’re addicted to the pain. So I don’t think it’s done because we’re all sadists or anything like that.

*Pritchett:* After the finale of season two, Kendall gets to be Meghan. He’s putting himself outside the family. He doesn’t get his Oprah interview, but some other stuff goes down ...

*Prebble:* Because of the Covid delays, we ended up doing quite a lot of rewriting. I’m not sure that was so much pandemic-related as more political – more about how the world was changing. It needed to be imbued with

what was happening. Not that we live in a political reality in Succession, but we needed some sense that we didn't live in Trump's world any more.

## Quick Guide

### Saturday magazine

Show



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Photograph: GNM

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*Will Tracy (writer/producer):* We needed some sense of the political order crumbling and being replaced by something much more unpredictable. Because it's a show about a media company, we play it all through the way the message is changing, and how operations like ATN [the Roys' rightwing news channel] are trying to scramble and maybe shift their branding to reflect new political realities. I think we're always stronger when we

remember that [the business] part of it is really the most important thing to Logan and the family, more so than any actual political ideals, God forbid.

*Armstrong*: In terms of the Kendall/Logan dynamic, we knew there was a civil war coming in season three. At the end of the last season, Kendall effectively declares corporate and slightly personal war on his dad. People were going to have to pick sides, and that was going to be dramatic.

Watch the Succession season three trailer

## **‘This doesn’t happen every day’: making season three**

After a stop-start shoot due to Covid, during which the writers kept in touch via WhatsApp, season three finally wrapped in summer 2021. A growing fanbase had built up over lockdown, however, and followed them on to the set ...

*Brown*: It’s funny to be around the cast on location when people walk past and they’re like, “Oh my God, it’s Cousin Greg. Can I get a selfie?” It must be pretty exhausting to live in New York and be in the show. I don’t think I could do that. I was checking the Succession Reddit forum while we were shooting, and people were posting photographs of our lunch menu. Unlike in the UK, all the permits that they put up say the name of the show, so people knew where we were.

*Roche*: It’s a pretty relaxed environment with us – it’s not like Star Wars or anything, we don’t use secret code names – but one day we were walking back from set, and a woman was screaming really loudly on the sidewalk near all our trucks. I thought she’d spotted one of the cast, but she had just seen a sign that said the name of the show next to where our toilets are. And she was so excited. I was like, “Wow, this is unusual – this doesn’t happen every day.”

Season three of Succession begins on HBO/HBO Max in the US on 17 October, and on Sky Atlantic in the UK on 18 October.

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## Colm Tóibín: will the Brexit fallout lead to a ‘united Ireland’?



Illustration by Ana Yael. Illustration: Studio Pi/The Guardian

[Colm Tóibín](#)

Sat 2 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

In late 2010, I sat in a discreet space in the lounge of a Dublin hotel with two British diplomats who were planning the first state visit of Queen Elizabeth to [Ireland](#) the following May and were consulting widely. The questions were the basic ones: What should she say? What should she not say? Where should she go? Where should she not go?

When I said she should visit a stud farm and get to see some horses, the diplomats were uneasy. Would that not seem too posh? I explained that following horses in Ireland was part of ordinary life. And also, if she didn't see some horses, people would think that she was not enjoying herself, and, oddly enough, despite 700 years of strife, most people in Ireland would want the Queen to enjoy her visit.

There was one word, I said, that, no matter what, she should not utter. The word was not Cromwell or paratrooper or Paddy or Mick or potato; the word was sorry. The Queen should not say that she or her government or her people were sorry, even for the plantation of Ulster or the penal laws or the famine or the Black and Tans. The word "sorry" was debased. Everyone was always sorry. Very few people who said they were sorry really meant it. Nor should the Queen express remorse or apology. The Queen in Ireland should not say anything that she did not mean.

I did not know at that time that Tony Blair had not, in 1997, personally seen his own statement of remorse for the Great Irish Famine before it was released. It "was hastily written by aides because they could not reach him to approve it, newly released classified documents reveal," [according to the Guardian report](#). What we believed were the prime minister's words were read out by the actor Gabriel Byrne at a televised commemoration event in County Cork.

"In all the circumstances events could not have turned out better," the British ambassador to Ireland, Veronica Sutherland, cabled at the time. "The statement, which focuses on undeniable facts, is widely perceived as the apology long sought by many Irish people."

At the time, I found what I believed were the prime minister's words to be disheartening. The speech felt formulaic, manufactured, insincere. But there was, nonetheless, something sweet behind Blair's intention and those of his

officials and his ambassador who seemed to believe that “many Irish people” had “long sought” this “apology”. It seemed to me that many Irish people had many other things on their minds in 1997, one of the early years of the Celtic Tiger, when many Irish people were busy paying mad prices for property.

The diplomats who were preparing the Queen’s visit, unlike Tony Blair, planned things carefully; they put an immense amount of thought into every word the Queen would say in Ireland and every image of her that would be shown. It wasn’t as though such close attention to Ireland was new, but it had been sporadic. It was there during the negotiations for the Sunningdale agreement in 1973, but not in the aftermath. It was there too in the run-up to the Anglo-Irish agreement in 1985. It was there in the negotiations, perhaps Tony Blair’s finest hour, that led to the [Good Friday agreement](#) in 1998. It was not there during Brexit and its aftermath.

On 18 May 2011 the Queen spoke with great delicacy and tact [in Dublin Castle](#). She did not apologise for anything. She merely said something that happens to be true: “With the benefit of historical hindsight we can all see things which we would wish had been done differently or not at all.”

With the benefit of historical hindsight we can all see things which we would wish had been done differently or not at all

### *Queen Elizabeth*

The body of the Queen’s speech made clear something that might be important for anyone thinking about Anglo-Irish relations after Brexit. The Queen described the closeness between the two islands that prevailed despite political problems. “Many British families,” she said, “have members who live in this country, as many Irish families have close relatives in the United Kingdom. These families share the two islands; they have visited each other and have come home to each other over the years.”

None of this was ever going to change after Brexit. Irish soccer fans will still support English teams; Irish people still have cousins in England and go to England looking for work; Northern Irish people will still see Scotland as close to home. England still represents freedom for many Irish people.

But there has been an interesting change. Up to now, there was an image spread of the former colonies including Ireland. It suggested that we were somehow hot-headed and given to soft patriotism and nationalist sentimentality, that we could not be trusted in negotiation, that we spoke with a forked tongue. Now, all of these qualities have been taken over by Whitehall itself. But it is worse on this occasion. We, at least, were actually colonised. The United Kingdom, such as it is, was only ever colonised in its dreams, and by the EU, of all things. Dealing with the UK now, as Lloyd George said about Eamon de Valera, is like trying to pick up mercury with a fork.

In Ireland now, Brexit is still viewed with disbelief. It is hard to think of any real advantage that has been gained from it. Slowly, its implications are becoming clear in the most ordinary ways. There is a feeling in the Republic that someday soon Britain will wake up from this bad dream and benefit from some daylight.

Yet while we, in southern Ireland, take our easy relationship to England for granted, we do not have a similar relationship to [Northern Ireland](#). In 1986, when I walked along the border in Ireland to write a book, I felt like a stranger much of the time in the north. Their hatreds were not mine, nor indeed their education system or their health service, not to speak of their police and the British army

In Fermanagh, I attended the funeral in a small, rural church of a part-time UDR man who had been murdered by the IRA, with the killers escaping across the border into southern Ireland. As I followed the ceremony, I realised that I had never been at a service in a Protestant church before. Then, when the sermon began, I heard a tone that was new to me. The clergyman read out the names of all those who had been murdered by the IRA in this border community since the Troubles began. He did this starkly, stopping briefly after each name. Many of those named were family, friends or neighbours of those in the congregation. As the clergyman wondered how many more names would be added to the list, the response was a stunned, troubled silence.



A wall facing the Republican area of Bogside, Derry, 2019. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

I wished that his sermon could have been used in full on southern Irish radio. When I went back to Dublin and told people about the sermon, they nodded in sympathy. But by that time the Republic of Ireland's interest in the north was, like that of the British government, at most sporadic.

Like many in the south, I was puzzled at the vehemence of Protestant opposition to the Anglo-Irish agreement in 1985. One day the following year, when I had interviewed a Protestant survivor of a sectarian attack, I added a question about the agreement. He explained that his problem centred on the matter of arbitrary authority. The Dublin government suddenly had a say in the affairs of Northern Ireland, but no one in the north could vote to remove the Dublin government. This opposition to arbitrary authority was at the very heart of Protestant identity, he emphasised.

Now, after Brexit, Northern Ireland may become subject to EU regulations on medicine, to take just one example, but has no democratic relationship to the EU and is not represented in the European parliament. Thus, arbitrary authority approaches from two directions – Brussels and Dublin.

The problem Northern Ireland has is serious. It has become low on everyone's priority list. The British government was prepared to negotiate a hard Brexit, despite the implications for Northern Ireland. It promised one thing and delivered another. While Dublin wants the Good Friday agreement, in all its ingenuity and sense of inclusion, to be preserved to the letter, there is no appetite in the Republic to take over Northern Ireland or become responsible for funding it or dealing daily with its factions. Dismantling partition would be a most dangerous process.

Over the past 50 years the policy of the Dublin government has been consistent. Dublin wants stability in Northern Ireland. It does not want territory, or trouble. Keeping the border open is a way to avoid strife at the border. Supporting parity of esteem for Catholics is a way to make Catholics more confident and more at home in Northern Ireland.

But just as the Tories had Ukip barking at their heels, there is a spectre haunting Ireland. It is the spectre of Sinn Féin. In an Irish Times column in June questioning proposed legislation for an increase in police power in the Republic, Michael McDowell, a former minister for justice, ended ominously with: "The constitutional privacy of the individual needs concrete expression and workable safeguards. You never know who may be directing police operations in the next few years."

His readers would have known instantly that he was alluding to Sinn Féin.

The loud and looming presence of the party as the main opposition in the Dublin parliament brings with it discussion of a united Ireland. The three main politicians in government in the Republic – Micheál Martin, Leo Varadkar and Simon Coveney – are not given to rhetorical flourishes. They tend to use language carefully, even thoughtfully.

It is thus depressing to find Simon Coveney in 2017 saying that he wants to see a united Ireland in his political lifetime, and adding this year that his party was "very ambitious" about Irish reunification. And Leo Varadkar, earlier this year, saying: "I believe in the unification of our island and I believe it can happen in my lifetime." And Micheál Martin last October insisting that his party was still committed to a united Ireland.

In this united Ireland of theirs, that will occur in their lifetimes, do they intend to foist the dysfunctional health system and the appalling housing crisis that exist in the Republic on the people of Northern Ireland? Do they want to import sectarian hatred and the politics of perpetual grievance from the north into the south?

Their talk of a united Ireland “in my lifetime” is mystical blather, but it has the power to unsettle a fragile political environment. Also, it will do nothing to keep Sinn Féin at bay. It will do nothing either to solve the more pressing and immediate problem of sour relations at official level between Ireland and Britain after Brexit. It is another example of politicians saying something they don’t mean. When Tony Blair did it, his intentions were harmless, an example of bumbling goodwill. In Ireland now, however, stirring up emotion on the subject of a united Ireland in order to hold back the tide of Sinn Féin is what a speechwriter might call “dangerous and unhelpful”, or, as the Queen might put it, something that might be “done differently or not at all”.

*The Magician* by Colm Tóibín is published by Penguin (£18.99). To support the Guardian and the Observer buy a copy at [guardianbookshop.com](https://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply.

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## Blind date: ‘I thought she might ditch me for the waiter’



Lottie, left, and Amber: ‘She’d never had an espresso martini.’ Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian

Sat 2 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

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## **Lottie on Amber**



### **What were you hoping for?**

A civilised evening, lots of paneer, and for my date not to be someone I've previously ghosted on dating apps.

### **First impressions?**

Pretty, with understated confidence. Who wears a white top to a date in an Indian restaurant? What a power move!

### **What did you talk about?**

Our love of cheese (specifically Babybels). Our weird phobias – hers is squash and mine is the ocean. Imagine an ocean of squash – harrowing for us both.

### **Any awkward moments?**

She'd never had an espresso martini. That's outrageous: the waiter brought one immediately. She also guessed my age as being 31 or 32 – I'm just 26.

## **Q&A**

### **Want to be in Blind date?**

## Show

Blind date is Guardian Weekend magazine's dating column: every week, two strangers are paired up for dinner and drinks, and then spill the beans to us, answering a set of questions. This runs, with a photograph we take of each dater before the date, in Guardian Weekend magazine (in the UK) and online at [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com) every Saturday. It's been running since 2009 – you can [read all about how we put it together here](#).

### **What questions will I be asked?**

We ask about age, location, occupation, hobbies, interests and the type of person you are looking to meet. If you do not think these questions cover everything you would like to know, tell us what's on your mind.

### **Can I choose who I match with?**

No, it's a blind date! But we do ask you a bit about your interests, preferences, etc – the more you tell us, the better the match is likely to be.

### **Can I pick the photograph?**

No, but don't worry: we'll choose the nicest ones.

### **What personal details will appear?**

Your first name, job and age.

### **How should I answer?**

Honestly but respectfully. Be mindful of how it will read to your date, and that Blind date reaches a large audience, in print and online.

### **Will I see the other person's answers?**

No. We may edit yours and theirs for a range of reasons, including length, and we may ask you for more details.

### **Will you find me The One?**

We'll try! Marriage! Babies!

### **Can I do it in my home town?**

Only if it's in the UK. Many of our applicants live in London, but we would love to hear from people living elsewhere.

**How to apply**

Email [blind.date@theguardian.com](mailto:blind.date@theguardian.com)

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

**Good table manners?**

Very. A confident and assertive eater. She insisted I took the leftovers home – a win as the food was wildly good.

**Best thing about Amber?**

Her tooth gap.

**Would you introduce her to your friends?**

As long as she didn't mind that most are my exes, or even more chaotic than I am.

**Describe Amber in three words?**

Refreshing, sincere and gracious.

**What do you think she made of you?**

A hot mess who talks a lot and swears more. All of these things are accurate.

**Did you go on somewhere?**

We ran to the tube in the rain and shared some of the ride home. I had an early train to catch next day, or I'd have insisted on a tequila shot or two.

**And ... did you kiss?**

No kissing before marriage!

**If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?**

One staff member looked like Daniel Radcliffe. I wish we'd asked for a selfie.

**Marks out of 10?**

A confident 7.5.

**Would you meet again?**

Why not – probably as pals. We have a shared love of tequila and cheese.



Lottie and Amber on their date.

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### **Amber on Lottie**



**What were you hoping for?**

To meet someone with energy and a great smile.

**First impressions?**

Lottie's positivity was evident from the second she sat down. Her bright blue eyes held warmth and intrigue. My second impression was that she's Daniel Radcliffe's biggest fan – I thought she might ditch me for the waiter, who looked scarily similar.

**What did you talk about?**

Our conversation seemed to grow arms and legs. One minute it was about her undying love for Nicolas Cage, the next about her wonderfully spiritual upbringing.

**Any awkward moments?**

I don't imagine Lottie has experienced an awkward moment in her life.

**Good table manners?**

Fine, although a very slow eater.

**Best thing about Lottie?**

Lottie is 100% unapologetically confident, tattoo and all. How lush!

**Would you introduce her to your friends?**

She'd get on swimmingly with my good friend, who shares her passion for history.

**Describe Lottie in three words?**

Delightful, insomniac, creative.

Quick Guide

**Saturday magazine**

Show



This article comes from Saturday, [the new print magazine from the Guardian](#) which combines the best features, culture, lifestyle and travel writing in one beautiful package. Available now in the UK and ROI.

Photograph: GNM

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

**What do you think she made of you?**

Organised but not terribly observant.

**Did you go on somewhere?**

No, but I think we were both surprised to be out past 10pm.

**And ... did you kiss?**

No.

**If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?**

The rain at the end of the evening. I almost fell over on the walk to the station.

## Marks out of 10?

Solid 10.5.

## Would you meet again?

Absolutely, I'm going to attend a speed dating night that Lottie is hosting and she is going to be very kind and discreet when she tells me I have no matches.

Amber and Lottie ate at [Brigadiers](#), 1-5 Bloomberg Arcade, London EC4. Fancy a blind date? Email [blind.date@theguardian.com](mailto:blind.date@theguardian.com)

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## 2021.10.02 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus live: global deaths pass 5m; UK care home workers refusing jab told to ‘get another job’](#)
- [US Pregnant people urged to get vaccinated amid abysmal inoculation rates](#)
- [‘Clearly not working’ How New Zealand’s consensus on striving for Covid zero is finally cracking](#)
- [Students California becomes first state to require Covid vaccines](#)

## Coronavirus

# Coronavirus live: global deaths pass 5m; UK to slash number of countries on travel ‘red list’ – as it happened

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## Coronavirus

# Pregnant people urged to get vaccinated amid abysmal US inoculation rates



A pregnant woman receives a vaccine for Covid-19 at Skippack Pharmacy in Schwenksville, Pennsylvania, in February. Photograph: Hannah Beier/Reuters

*Melody Schreiber*  
Sat 2 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

Pregnant and breastfeeding people are facing abysmal vaccination rates and increasing health risks from the Delta variant, and they urgently need to be vaccinated, experts warn.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Wednesday "[strongly recommended](#)" vaccination before or during pregnancy, echoing [calls](#) in August for the life-saving shots.

Only one-third of pregnant adults in the US have received the Covid vaccines – less than [half](#) the vaccination rate of all American adults. And stark disparities exist among different communities, with only 15.6% of Black pregnant people vaccinated so far.

At the same time, pregnancy is a risk factor for serious illness from the coronavirus. Being pregnant and unvaccinated doubles the risk of needing intensive care for those who have Covid, and leads to a 70% increased risk of death. In August alone, 22 pregnant people died from the virus.

Births are also more likely to be premature or stillborn, and newborns may also struggle with Covid infection.

It's also important to vaccinate breastfeeding parents, both to form a cocoon of immunity around newborns and to pass antibodies through the milk, experts say.

New research reveals the Delta variant is hitting pregnant people harder than ever before. A study [published](#) this month found the hospitalization rate for pregnant patients more than doubled since last year, because of the Delta variant.

“Prevention is really key here, because there’s no proven or approved cure for Covid-19,” said Emily Adhikari, lead author of the study as well as a maternal-fetal medicine specialist and assistant professor at University of Texas Southwestern medical center.

“We’re very concerned that this is hitting a relatively under-vaccinated group because pregnant patients have lagged behind the rest of the population in getting the vaccine. And because they’re more vulnerable to severe illness – it’s bad now,” Adhikari told the Guardian.

Anna Euser was 32 weeks pregnant when the shot was offered to her late last year, and she took it immediately.

At that time, there were no data from the clinical trials about how well the vaccines worked in pregnant people. But Euser is an obstetrician/gynecologist and an associate professor of maternal fetal

medicine for the University of Colorado School of Medicine. She had seen first-hand the way Covid wreaks havoc on pregnant people and their families.

“I felt very comfortable with the benefits of the vaccine, and the importance of getting it to protect both myself and my daughter, because that was one of the few things I could do to protect her,” Euser told the Guardian. “This was really the one strategy we have to try to protect both ourselves and our children.”

Now, thanks to volunteers like Euster, we do have data on how safe and effective the vaccines are among pregnant and nursing people. She was one of 827 participants in a [study](#) finding the vaccines were very safe.

But because of the rise of cases and lagging vaccination rates, Euser is now having difficult conversations with some of her unvaccinated patients: what happens if they need to deliver the baby early to help the parent fight off Covid? Who will make decisions for the baby if the parent is intubated and can’t talk?

“We really are trying to do the best for our patients and recommend vaccination, but there’s a lot of baseline hesitancy in many people,” Euser said.

Part of the reason is because pregnant and breastfeeding people are frequently bombarded by misinformation and disinformation campaigns.

“We’re dealing with coordinated misinformation campaigns, and they definitely target pregnant people,” Dr Cecília Tomori, director of global public health and community health at the Johns Hopkins School of Nursing, told the Guardian. “Fertility, reproduction and children are main anti-vax targets from way back.”

Because of the lag in established data on the safety and efficacy of the vaccines among these demographics, misinformation had plenty of time to take root, she said. And disparities in health mean that some communities are suffering more from low vaccination and high case rates.

“It’s just devastating to watch that unfold,” Tomori said. “It’s a rollercoaster cascade of disaster.”

Practitioners feel very confident recommending the vaccine as safe and effective, Euser said. “The vaccine is one of the best-studied things out there.” There’s much more evidence on the safety and efficacy of vaccines than there is, for instance, on experimental treatments like monoclonal antibodies and other medications, as well as using ECMO, a type of life support machine, in pregnancy.

Now, amid the wave of cases and deaths, experts are pleading with pregnant and breastfeeding people to speak with trusted sources of information, like their doctors, about getting vaccinated.

“We have still seen, with this last surge, younger and younger patients coming in extremely ill, and that tells us that we’re not quite getting through to all the patients,” Adhikari said. But the vaccines “really could potentially be life-saving”.

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## New Zealand

# ‘Clearly not working’: How New Zealand’s consensus on striving for Covid zero is finally cracking



New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern (centre) with opposition National party leader Judith Collins (right). Collins says the government’s Covid elimination strategy is ‘clearly not working’. Photograph: Dave Rowland/Getty Images

*Eva Corlett in Wellington*

Fri 1 Oct 2021 15.00 EDT

“Things have changed,” Judith Collins declares, sitting in her Beehive government office. New Zealand’s National party leader is fresh off [launching her alternative pandemic response plan](#), marking the first time the main opposition has significantly diverged from prime minister Jacinda Ardern’s largely popular elimination strategy.

The arrival of the Delta variant in [New Zealand](#) two months ago, causing an outbreak that the government is struggling to stamp out, has shown that elimination is “clearly not working,” Collins says.

Until now, New Zealand has been [widely lauded for its approach](#), enduring fewer lockdowns compared to other nations and suffering just 27 deaths.

Though the opposition has criticised the government for its slow vaccine rollout and the chaotic system to allow New Zealanders to come home, the elimination plan itself has enjoyed broad cross-party support.

But as Auckland, the centre of the Delta outbreak, toils through its second month of lockdown, the consensus is beginning to fracture. The country’s largest city is currently in a level 3 lockdown – the second highest setting – while the rest of the country is able to enjoy relative freedom, though with some limitations on gatherings and requirements for mask-use.



Judith Collins, New Zealand’s National party leader, says the country’s elimination strategy is ‘clearly not working’. Photograph: Getty Images

The government’s strategy to stamp out community transmission has relied on strict border measures, short lockdowns when cases emerge, and rapid contact tracing. It has been imperfect at times, but largely a successful one.

It has committed to pursuing this policy, despite recent moves deemed to be [“a calculated risk”](#), calling the strategy into question.

It is a method that has garnered both international curiosity and [widespread domestic support](#), so much so, that it led the government to an [overwhelming majority at the 2020 election](#), and has positioned Ardern well above her peers in the preferred prime minister ranks – [33 points ahead of her nearest competition](#).

## A death wish?

It may come as no surprise then that challenging a strategy delivered by one of the most popular leaders and governments in the country’s recent political history, as an opposition party, could be at best be construed as tone deaf, and at worst, a death wish. When the former National party leader, Simon Bridges did so in 2020, the public backlash led to a rapid [tumble in his popularity](#) and he was dumped from leadership.

But this week, as the number of Covid cases bounced from 12 cases one day to 45 the next, the political right pronounced elimination dead. Both National and its smaller rival, the ACT party, want to do away with it in favour of “vigorous suppression”. Both want to open the borders sooner rather than later, and both want to end lockdowns for good.

Until recently, Collins had been “very supportive” of the initial response to the pandemic.

“Even though it did take a little while to close the borders, they got on to it ... the soundest move seemed to be to go into lockdowns, until we could assess as a country what was the right response,” she says.

Then Delta came along, and Collins believes it has rendered the government’s response “inadequate”.

Options such as rapid antigen testing, saliva testing, stronger contact tracing methods and purpose-built managed isolation facilities should be seized upon, she says. “They have just slightly been asleep at the wheel.”

Collins says the country cannot continue down the path of lockdowns and is advocating for nation-wide lockdowns to be scrapped once 75% of the eligible population is vaccinated and reopening the border once 85% is vaccinated. Recent modelling from research centre [Te Pūnaha Matatini](#) suggests that at that rate, there could still be up to 7,000 deaths and 60,000 hospitalisations.

But Collins says that while “no deaths are acceptable”, she is a realist.

“When I get out of bed every morning, like everyone else does, and we go out and get into a car, we go on a cycle or a bike or a walk, there is always a danger.”

The party did not create their own modelling for their plan, instead opting to have it “thoroughly vetted” by experts working in the public sector, but Collins has declined to publicly name them for fear they will be ostracised.

The libertarian ACT party leader David Seymour, who released his own Covid response plan, has been less generous about the government’s Covid response, calling it “bumbling”.



David Seymour, leader of New Zealand’s opposition ACT party, says the government’s . Photograph: Getty Images

“I wouldn’t describe it as an elimination strategy, I would describe it as a sporadic eradication strategy,” Seymour said.

He said using short, sharp, lockdowns and then reaping the benefits of a Covid-free community “no longer stacks up” with Delta. He believes the government is aware of this by signalling a desire to end lockdowns and reconnect with the world, but says they don’t have a coherent plan to do so.

## ‘A positive future’

Earlier in the month, the government signalled that its reopening plan, unveiled just days before the outbreak would have to be completely re-worked after the outbreak. But perhaps the prospect of closed borders is not as undesirable as the political right believes – delays to the plan have not made a particularly large dent in the government’s popularity.

There has been ongoing high-level public support the government’s approach, which has been borne out in its election results and the most recent polls, says the co-director of the Public Policy Institute, Lara Greaves. One survey last month showed three-quarters of New Zealanders supported the use of lockdowns, at least until vaccination targets had been reached.

There is anecdotal data about more people breaking lockdown moods, but there is nothing to suggest there has been a large decrease in support for the government and its strategy, Greaves adds.

Being an opposition party during a crisis is a difficult place to be, Greaves says, and more so in New Zealand where the government has “objectively done extremely well”.

It makes sense then, for the political right to focus on the economy’s recovery, in order to define themselves in the response, even if the economy has done well by international standards, Greaves said.

“That’s the potential for where a centre-right party could present a positive future.”

For Collins, departing from the elimination strategy is just “the right thing to do”, she says, adding that to dwell on the government’s past mistakes is not going to fix anything.

“I actually see that one of the problems my predecessors went through is: it was seen to be not the right time to be talking about the failures, as the government was trying to deal with what was essentially a wartime footing ... So that is why we’re very focused on the future.”

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## California

# California becomes first state to require Covid vaccines for all students



Gavin Newsom announced that California will become the first state in the nation to mandate students to have a Covid-19 vaccination. Photograph: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

*Guardian staff and agencies*  
Fri 1 Oct 2021 14.43 EDT

California has announced the nation's first Covid-19 vaccination mandate for schoolchildren, a plan that will have all elementary through high school students get the shots once the vaccine gains final approval from the US government for different age groups.

The government has fully approved the Covid vaccine for those 16 and over but only granted an emergency authorization for anyone 12 to 15. Once federal regulators fully approve the vaccine for that group, the state will

require students in seventh through 12th grades to get vaccinated in both public and private schools, the governor Gavin Newsom's office said on Friday.

The state will require the vaccine for students in kindergarten through sixth grade only after the federal government has given final approval for anyone 5 to 11.

“Our schools already require vaccines for measles, mumps and more. Why? Because vaccines work,” the governor [said in a tweet](#). “This is about keeping our kids safe & healthy.”

California [currently has the lowest Covid case rate](#) in the country, although some regions, particularly those where resistance to vaccines and public health mandates remains high, are continuing to see a troubling surge in hospitalizations. Newsom, emboldened after easily defeating a recall effort last month, has emphasized his commitment to vaccine mandates to end the pandemic.

Los Angeles county has already [mandated vaccines](#) for all students 12 and over. In the nation’s largest school district, daily infections are down by half in the last month, when most kids went back to school.

“These numbers are amazingly low given that 3,000-plus schools are now open countywide,” said Barbara Ferrer, county health director, on Thursday.

The state’s vaccine mandate would take effect the semester after the federal government grants final approval. If it comes in January, then the mandate would take effect in July.

Students would be granted religious and medical exemptions, but the rules for how the state would apply those exemptions have not been written yet. Any student who refuses to take the vaccine would be forced to complete an independent study course at home.

Until now, Newsom had left the decision on student vaccine mandates to local school districts, leading to a variety of different orders across some of the state’s largest districts.

Los Angeles and Oakland Unified have mandated all students over 12 to be vaccinated, but Oakland's order has not set a deadline for when students must comply. LA set a deadline of 20 January. Earlier this week, the San Diego Unified school board approved a mandate that staff and students ages 16 and older be fully vaccinated by 20 December.

In August, California became the first state in the US to require all teachers and staff in K-12 public and private schools to get vaccinated or undergo weekly Covid-19 testing. Newsom also issued a school mask mandate earlier in the summer for indoor classes that applies to all teachers and students.

*The Associated Press contributed reporting*

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## 2021.10.02 - Opinion

- From polenta to lemons: the everyday foods demonised by Britain's class wars
- Poor countries must not be forced to take on debt to tackle climate crisis
- All women know they are prey – and that no one with any authority seems to care
- Losing my family caused a tsunami of grief, but also taught me how to live

## OpinionFood

# From polenta to lemons: the everyday foods demonised by Britain's class wars

[Jonathan Nunn](#)



'It is perhaps in the domain of food that Britain's sentinels of class stand guard the most sternly.' Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Sat 2 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

The British like to think that they have a uniquely profound understanding of class. In truth, it's the opposite. The arcane rules of the country's class system mean we have a deranged understanding of our divisions, one that is informed not by whether someone owns financial assets or capital or employs people, but by their accent, hobbies and choice of supermarket.

It is perhaps in the domain of food that Britain's sentinels of class stand guard the most sternly, dobbing people in for perceived culinary transgressions and demarcating what might, in a nod to Nancy Mitford, be

called W (working-class) and non-W foods. Over the past few years I've seen the following innocent foods accused of being markers of middle-classdom: quinoa, polenta, sun-dried tomatoes, coffee, loose-leaf tea, coriander seeds, gnocchi, kidneys, goji berries, hummus, falafel, lentils, croissants, muesli, wine, tofu, soy milk, oat milk, almond milk, avocados – and indeed the act of growing your own food. Added to this list, as former trade unionist and class chief constable Paul Embrey [helpfully suggested last month](#), amid a discussion about food shortages on Twitter, are lemons, parsley, spring onions, aubergines and risotto rice. All of which sound like a pretty solid box on Ready Steady Cook.

"Food in England," the novelist Huw Lemmey [recently wrote](#), "is very rarely about food, and that might be half of the problem." You can understand the policing of food boundaries in a few non-food-related ways – the more charitable one is that for a certain type of political commentator, it is extremely convenient to portray the working class as a homogeneous, socially conservative and incurious bloc, whose vision of food corresponds to a kind of political nativism. It's a bizarrely infantilising view, one that assumes that an interest in better or different foodstuffs is class treason and that puts people in clearly defined boxes, just as much as the identity politics that these commentators supposedly rail against.

A less kind analysis, but perhaps a more accurate one, is that assigning middle-classness to cheap staples from other cuisines – hummus, soy sauce, cumin, for instance – usefully disguises the reality that the working class is far more diverse than these commentators understand. The fact is that if a similar inventory of "working class" foods were to be undertaken across contemporary Britain, it would be less "gammon, pie and mash and ale", and more "ackee, pierogi and shatkora".

All of this is supercharged by post-Brexit politics and its discontents. The identification of the "liberal elite" with extremely everyday but European foods was perhaps achieved most readily through the popularity of the London restaurant River Café in the 1990s. Its choice to sell *cucina povera* (peasant food) at eye-watering prices – and its subsequent popularity [with the New Labour set](#) – meant that, to the bafflement of Italians everywhere, lentil eating and [polenta munching](#) became associated with rich and well-connected people. This is despite these foods being easily affordable (and in

the case of lentils, already being widely consumed in the UK by south Asians). When Alastair Campbell and Peter Mandelson dined there in late 2016 for a supposed anti-Brexit strategy meeting, all the rightwing press needed to do was point out how much the pasta cost.

The disapproval of a shopping list or what other people are eating these days is ultimately about insinuating that anyone concerned with Brexit-induced food shortages is a paid-up member of the Ocado elite; reinforcing a narrative that [Brexit](#) itself was simply about the divide between working-class towns (one Waitrose per 100,000 people) and middle-class urban centres (one Waitrose per person). Even that old war horse the “latte-swilling liberal” (a misnomer – liberals know not to swill lattes because it disturbs the crema) starts to make sense when you see it not as a marker of wealth, given that even in London it rarely breaks the £3.50 mark, but as a symbol of neoliberal globalisation, from Melbourne to New York.

While the right and the self-described “anti-woke left” associate certain foods with an urbane, multicultural leftwing politics, many liberals are guilty of fetishising foods solely for their Europeanness (the concept of 90% of BBC food shows appears to be “guys travelling around Italy”). Meanwhile, the left is happy to label anything slightly more expensive than the baseline – Green & Black’s chocolate, Tyrrells crisps – as Tory. But the truth is that food is a completely inadequate signifier for class, politics or even urbanism. Sixteen years ago, a coffee shop was set up in Soho to cater to the fact that it was near-impossible to buy a flat white in London; last week I had one on Iona in the Inner Hebrides (population 177). Today, all the foods that have been associated with a pro-European elite – lentils, quinoa, avocados, hummus – are a quotidian part of the national cuisine, and in all likelihood eaten voraciously by those who denounce them.

This is not to say that what we eat is not heavily informed by class and wealth. However, the peculiarly British tendency to regard food as an avatar for class or politics is doomed to blind us simply because the way we eat changes and evolves at a high pace, absorbing influences from immigration, from a wider pool of shared knowledge, and an increasing desire to experience things beyond our local and national boundaries. Politics is partisan, but food should be for everyone.

Except grouse, that is. That will always be Tory.

- Jonathan Nunn is a food writer based in London. He edits the food newsletter [Vittles](#)
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## The Secret NegotiatorEnvironment

# Poor countries must not be forced to take on debt to tackle climate crisis

The Secret Negotiator



The island of Barbuda after Hurricane Irma. The intensity of tropical storms will be increased by global heating. Photograph: Jose Jimenez/Getty Images

Sat 2 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

One of the biggest issues at [Cop26](#) is climate finance, the funding that is supposed to be provided by the rich world to developing countries to help us cut greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the impact of the climate crisis.

Back at the Copenhagen Cop in 2009, we were promised at least \$100bn (£74bn) a year in climate finance by 2020 and every year after that to at least 2025. But that target has been missed. Recently, we saw an OECD report which found that in 2019 [only about \\$80bn was provided](#).

These sorts of sums might sound small compared to what big countries are spending on Covid, but they would make a huge difference to us on the ground. The extreme weather that has been seen around the world in the past year, follows years of hurricanes, tropical storms, floods, droughts and all sorts of damage, which were caused by climate heating – as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has made clear.

Keep in mind that this promised climate finance is additional to what developing countries are spending on the climate themselves. An increasing proportion of national budgets are used dealing with the effects of the climate crisis – such as coping with natural disasters or repairing the damage.

We understand that developed countries are busy, putting their own economies back in order after Covid, and that's why we have not had much progress on climate finance ahead of this Cop. But \$100bn is a drop in the ocean, and that figure is not the only story here: the money is not spread evenly.

The biggest developing countries take most of the available funds. They can attract funding easily and have the infrastructure and renewable energy projects, such as wind farms and solar, that need investment and make a profit – which investors like.

But for us, who are nano-emitters on a global scale, cutting emissions is not a priority. Adaptation is.

What is worse, a lot of the money is coming in the form of loans, not grants – about two-thirds of climate finance is loans. This is creating a climate debt trap. We are already in a debt trap because of Covid, and it's getting worse. How do you expect us to take on more loans, get ourselves even deeper into debt, for something we did not cause in the first place?

The UN secretary-general, António Guterres, has called for 50% of climate finance to go to adaptation, which would benefit us and ensure that more of the money is spent with the least developed countries, not just the middle-income countries.

Here's another idea: developed countries could agree debt-for-adaptation swaps. So instead of developed countries insisting that we repay our current loans in hard currency, which is difficult for us, those repayments could be converted into local currency and spent locally on adaptation. That would boost our economy, save us from having to raise hard currency to repay loans, and make us better able to withstand extreme weather. This idea has been put forward by Germany and we hope other countries will take it up.

- Every week we'll hear from negotiators from a developing country that is involved in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations and will be attending the Cop26 climate conference.
- 

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/oct/02/poor-countries-must-not-be-forced-to-take-on-debt-to-tackle-climate-crisis>

OpinionCrime

## All women know they are prey – and that no one with any authority seems to care

[Marina Hyde](#)





Vigil in Walthamstow for Sabina Nessa, 28 September 2021. Photograph: Jack Dredd/REX/Shutterstock

Fri 1 Oct 2021 09.51 EDT

Cressida Dick must be the last woman in the country who thinks there may be “lessons” to be learned from Wayne Couzens’s rape and murder of Sarah Everard. At least 80 women in the UK have been [killed by men](#) since Everard. Only [1.6% of rapes](#) in England and Wales reported to police even result in a charge. Fifty-two per cent of police [found guilty](#) of sexual misconduct kept their jobs. Women already know all the lessons. Women live with the all-pervasive understanding that they are prey.

The women who love you have to communicate the fear to you when you’re still a girl, knowing that one day you too will have to communicate it to the girls you love. They pass you down their strategies – their defences – like your birthright. And when you’re big enough to be out in the world on your own, those same women spend their time hoping till it hurts that this fear, which they had to gift you out of love, will somehow save you. “In the evenings,” [said](#) Sarah Everard’s mother in her unforgettable [victim impact statement](#), “at the time she was abducted, I let out a silent scream: ‘Don’t get in the car, Sarah. Don’t believe him. Run!’”

Where do you even start? When will it ever stop? On the very same morning that Couzens was being sentenced in one Old Bailey courtroom, another Old Bailey courtroom was being used to charge the man accused of the murder of the primary school teacher Sabina Nessa, brutally killed two weeks ago on her way to meet a friend near her home in south-east London. The prosecution alleged it was a predatory and premeditated attack on a lone woman not known to him.

To all those who could be found pointing out that “we” have to remember these are extreme cases: thanks for dialling in. They are extreme, yes – but they are part of a continuum of male harassment and the fear of it that women experience every day of their lives. Women are constantly, constantly performing risk assessment. Dare I pass down this street at this time? Is this the routine sleazy comment that turns into something worse? Is he going to keep walking or will he turn around? To make a troubled peace with it, we have to euphemise this lifestyle as “being sensible” or “taking care”, but it’s really just a statistically justified fear as part of daily life. Every woman has experienced various things along that continuum.

But wait! Because excitingly, it turns out there are now even more things for ladies to add to their list of Shit I’m Advised to Do to Stay Safe Because It Saves Anyone Else Having to Do Anything. Today, the Met advised people approached by a lone plainclothes officer to ask very searching questions, such as “Where have you come from?” and “Exactly why are you stopping or talking to me?” Probably best not to try these while being black. If they fear for their safety, women are advised to run into a house or “wave down a bus”.

To which, I am afraid, the only acceptable reaction is: NO. No to this bollocks, no to thoughts-and-prayers, and no to accepting this standard of policing – though that’s clearly what everyone from the prime minister to the leader of the opposition to the mayor of London does, if they’re happy for Cressida Dick to have just been given another two years on her contract after this many huge mistakes. Who looks at that record and thinks: you know what, I think we need the same old broom?

But of course, we have a cross-party political culture where the women and equalities brief is still bundled with some other job as a kind of weird

afterthought/poisoned chalice. In government, Liz Truss is foreign secretary – AND women and equalities minister. For Labour, Anneliese Dodds is both chair of a party trying to reverse its calamitous electoral fortunes AND shadow women and equalities minister. What are these bizarre ministerial biathlons other than confirmation that the women and equalities position is something you tack on to a real job just so you can say that some overworked woman is “dealing with all that stuff”.

The message from women this week is loud and clear: no more learning. Our consciousness about male violence and how far it reaches is well and truly raised, and so is that of a vast number of men. That thing about having to devote 10,000 hours to something to be an expert in it? You really don’t have to be very old as a woman to have already spent way more than 10,000 hours thinking about your safety and, by extension, the safety of women in general.

So if anyone – ANYONE – in a position of authority would like to offer something more concrete than the equivalent of thoughts and prayers for how to tackle an epidemic of male violence and harassment, then let women reassure you: you don’t need to roll the pitch any more. Take it from us.

Alas, authority figures have not had a great week on this stuff. Or, indeed, a great few decades. When the Yorkshire Ripper’s killing pattern changed, a senior investigating officer made that [infamous statement](#): “He has made it clear that he hates prostitutes. Many people do. We, as a police force, will continue to arrest prostitutes.” (And to use them.) “But,” he went on, “the Ripper is now killing innocent girls.” That comment rightly became notorious. And yet, I was sorry to see that even the judge who yesterday handed down a whole-life tariff to Wayne Couzens [spoke of Sarah Everard](#) being “a wholly blameless victim”, a way of putting it that implies that there are victims of rape and murder who have to shoulder some of the blame. Would police have made an arrest so quickly had Couzens’s victim been one of the sex workers he is alleged to have been in the habit of using?

If only the unfortunate echoes ended there. Peter Sutcliffe [was nicknamed](#) the Ripper as “a joke” by some of his colleagues at a trucking firm; Wayne Couzens [was nicknamed](#) “the rapist” by some of his earlier colleagues *in the*

*police service*, also “as a joke”. I mean … I want to think there’s been some progress, but that particular detail suggests otherwise.

Certainly, there remains no major or even minor strategy to deal with this culture. We see Priti Patel down at Dover in a HOME SECRETARY coat, announcing action on asylum seekers arriving by boat. We hear Boris Johnson talking about a knife-crime strategy or a chain-gang strategy or an antisocial behaviour strategy. Could they please put their puffer jackets on to announce and follow through on a serious male violence strategy? Can we have a joined-up plan to tackle male violence that starts in primary education and takes an ambitiously holistic approach to a problem that riddles our society with poisons, from child abuse to terrorism?

If not, maybe all the people who fall back on the “one bad apple” defence can have the balls to stop omitting the second half of the saying. One bad apple spoils the barrel. And as any number of women can attest, this barrel is long past putrid.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist
  - This article was amended on 1 October 2021. Liz Truss is the minister for women and equalities, not Kemi Badenoch (who is equalities minister) as an earlier version said.
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**OpinionBereavement**

# **Losing my family caused a tsunami of grief, but also taught me how to live**

[Jen McPherson](#)



Jen McPherson with her family. Photograph: Jen McPherson

Sat 2 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

On my 30th birthday I realised I was totally alone.

My father had died five days earlier. My mother had died nine years previously, and my brother 21 years before.

I'm still living with the grief, but the journey I've been on since that day 18 months ago has taught me to seek joy; it has taught me strength; and in the end it has taught me how to live.

The death of my beloved older brother, Ian, had been my first experience of loss. Ian was my best friend, confidant and guardian. We did everything together, from playing the violin to cycling around our village. He died after a family holiday in Spain, five days before my ninth birthday.

I was sitting on his bed when it happened. Ian was vomiting. He seemed confused, so my mother asked him some simple questions. We knew something was seriously wrong when he couldn't remember his age. Sixteen, he said. Ian was 13. His eyes rolled back. I sat on his bed in shock. Paramedics arrived.

I couldn't mourn Ian at the time. My nine-year-old self was convinced he would return soon. My mother's Japanese stoicism and my father's Glaswegian grit meant we soldiered on as best we could. These cultural barriers to grief were helpful in the short term, less so in the long term.

The Japanese have the Zen Buddhist term “gaman”, which means “enduring the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity”. This was used after the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, when it was seen in the resilience of the Japanese people. It is how my mother dealt with the loss of her child.

The Christmas after Ian died, my father took an overdose. He had bottled all his grief inside, and it just exploded. When a child dies, Christmas seems worse than pointless. Juxtaposed with open, raw grief, the joy, the lights, the festivities seem like a cruel joke.

Days, weeks and months passed, and I realised that Ian was gone for good. Yet it wasn't until my teenage years had passed that I truly grieved for him. I wish I had done so sooner, but denial is a potent drug.

When I turned 18, my mother's cancer arrived. It marked my entry into adulthood; I was no longer just a girl but a young woman with a terminally ill mother. When your loved one is given a terminal diagnosis, you start grieving long before they die. The last Christmas with my mother was tranquil. My parents and I would snuggle up on the sofa together and watch Band of Brothers and The West Wing box sets. We knew this Christmas would be our last together; we just didn't want to say it out loud.

I asked my mother in her final week who I might talk to when she was gone. She pointed to her heart.

It was when my mother died that I started to feel my long-dormant grief for Ian. I found his clothes, which she had kept for all these years, unknown to me. I held them and smelled them to try to catch anything that could remind me of him. I kept his school rugby jumper, scarf and teddy bear, and donated the rest to charity.

My father and I dealt with my mother's death as badly as anyone could deal with a thing like that. My father, unable to bear the intense loneliness, became depressed. For me, the stress brought on many years of mental ill-health, sometimes so severe it included hospitalisations.

Research from the Childhood [Bereavement](#) Network has shown how long-lasting the negative consequences can be for someone bereaved as a child: increased risk of depression, substance misuse, lower self-esteem and academic performance. On the flip side, there is evidence that a high number of those bereaved in childhood become highly successful adults, possibly because of the strength and self-sufficiency they learn at an early age. Certainly, my father – who lost his own father in the second world war when he was just eight years old – fell into the latter category. His was a success story, though he also suffered from bouts of depression – which shows that these situations are not black and white.



Jen McPherson with her brother, Ian. Photograph: Jen McPherson

Looking back, I wish I had not inherited the Japanese stoicism of my maternal family. Stoicism can only get you so far; sometimes you must seek support. I wish too that my father and I had leaned on the local community more after my mother's death instead of shutting ourselves away from the world. And it would also have been helpful if I'd been able to recognise the difference between grief and depression.

Despite everything we went through in the decade after my mother's death, my father and I got better and became much closer. We received help from friends and professionals and began to rebuild our life together. As I approached the end of my 20s, I would visit my father, now in a nursing home, taking him crosswords, Scottish tablet and Jeffrey Archer books. We would talk for hours as he told me about his wartime childhood in Glasgow, and laugh and reminisce about my mother and brother. We found a new sort of peace together. For those nine years, my father was everything to me.

In 2020, as the first national lockdown began, my dad, then 83, rang me from his nursing home. He complained that another resident was coming in and out of the home without taking any precautions to prevent spreading the virus. "Why are you so angry?" I asked. "Because I want you to have a father still!" he replied.

He was right to worry. Shortly after this phone call, my father caught Covid. Like more than 10,000 other [people in care homes in Britain](#), he died from complications caused by the virus. I visited him in hospital wearing full PPE. He just looked as if he was asleep. I held his hand and whispered in his ear, telling him how much I loved him and thanking him for being the most incredible father. He looked so peaceful.

My father's death caused a tsunami of grief in me. I was unable to push it back. It was as though 20 years of emotion came flowing out of me all at once, and I didn't know what to do with it.

Many things helped at the time, but one thing saved me from despair. My psychologist would call me at the same time I would usually speak to my father. His calls were the tonic I craved. I needed someone to know how badly I was hurting inside, how desperately I wanted to speak to my father, and how severely the loss of my family had suddenly hit me two decades later.

I wish I had sought therapy, specifically bereavement counselling, earlier on. Perhaps it would have helped.

I had an epiphany shortly afterwards. I was drinking too much, smoking too much and eating too much. It suddenly dawned on me that my family did not waste a single minute of their lives; they lived and loved fiercely every single day. I needed to do the same. I went back to my studies at university, curbed my vices and started to live rather than just exist. After all, this is what my family would have wanted for me.

Grief will always come and go, but the tide is less strong and I can now reach the shore. All I feel now is gratitude to have had such wonderful parents and brother, and to have spent precious time with them. My family is my past, but as my mother expressed to me, they will remain for ever in my heart.

Though losing my family young seemed like complete darkness, with time I've come to realise there were chinks of light too.

- Jen McPherson is a student and freelance journalist
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## How the SPD relied on young rebels to win in north-east Germany



Olaf Scholz and Anna Kassautzki, who won the Vorpommern-Rügen – Vorpommern-Greifswald I constituency held by Angela Merkel for the past 30 years. Photograph: Dpa Picture Alliance/Alamy



[Philip Oltermann](#) in Torgelow

[@philipoltermann](#)

Sat 2 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Less than four years ago, Erik von Malottki's main objective was to keep the party he loved as far away from political power as possible. Inspired by young activist grassroots movements in the US and the UK, the trade unionist was one of a band of young Social Democratic Party (SPD) members who in January 2018 urged delegates to vote against joining another coalition with Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats.

Yet this week, the now 35-year-old and a band of similarly aged delegates propelled the German centre-left to an unlikely election victory. While the British Labour party remains entrenched in factionalism, the SPD has constructively channelled the energy of its youthful rebels, edging ahead in Sunday's vote through a seismic shift in the country's north-east.

The victory was narrow, with the SPD pulling ahead of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) of the outgoing chancellor Merkel by only 1.6 percentage points. Whether its leader, Olaf Scholz, will also become Germany's next chancellor depends on complicated coalition talks over the coming weeks.

But in the two northernmost states of the formerly socialist east, the SPD's triumph was comprehensive: in Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the party won a direct mandate in every single one of the 16 constituencies, all bar one of which were previously held by the CDU.

Its [most symbolic victory](#) came in the electoral district of Vorpommern-Rügen – Vorpommern-Greifswald I, where Anna Kassautzki, who was born in 1993, won a direct mandate held since 1990 by none other than Merkel.

At simultaneous state elections in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the Social Democrats emerged victorious with nearly 40% of the vote, a nine-percentage-point swing on 2016.

A deeper look into the electoral history of the region shows how remarkable the turnaround was. While Mecklenburg, the state's western region, has a history of tilting left, Vorpommern on the Baltic Sea used to be a conservative stronghold – partly a result of the CDU being able to inherit party structures built by its socialist East German counterpart after the fall of the Berlin Wall (the SPD, by contrast, was banned under the socialist regime).



Erik von Malottki was helped to victory by the SPD's minimum wage pledge, which appealed in the economically depressed Vorpommern-

Greifswald II constituency. Photograph: Dpa Picture Alliance/Alamy

In Erik von Malottki's constituency, Mecklenburgische Seenplatte I – Vorpommern-Greifswald II, the fight for first place used to be between the CDU and the far-left Die Linke. This year, the expectation was for a tight race between the CDU and the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD).

“No one expected us to win here when we picked our candidates a year ago,” said Patrick Dahlemann, a 33-year-old delegate in the regional state parliament and one of the architects of the SPD’s regional revival. “To be honest, it wasn’t something we would have even dared dream of three weeks ago.” Yet in the early hours of Monday morning, Von Malottki swooped into the top spot from fourth place, 796 votes ahead of the AfD candidate.

Much of the SPD’s popularity here is due to the party’s national campaign. The centre left’s promise to raise the minimum wage to €12 an hour (£10.25) has been dismissed as tokenism by its opponents, but in the structurally weaker regions of the north-east and the Ruhr valley, it made voters listen: 60% of workers in Von Malottki’s constituency are on low wages. “For people here, the new minimum wage would be an absolute gamechanger,” he said.



Olaf Scholz waves at the audience at the SPD's closing election campaign rally on 24 September. Photograph: Sascha Schuermann/Getty Images

Delivered by the monosyllabic northerner Olaf Scholz, a more familiar figure in the Baltic flatlands than the jovial Rhinelaender Armin Laschet, the promise had credibility. Had the anti-coalition campaigners succeeded in pushing the SPD into opposition in 2018, it probably would have had less. “Scholz would never have ever been such a carthorse for us if he hadn’t been finance minister for the last four years,” said Dahlemann.

Yet neither would Scholz’s promises have been championed with the same energy at a local level if it hadn’t been for the Social Democrats’ youthful rebels. After failing to stop their party from joining another “grand coalition”, they claimed a totemic victory in November 2019, when Scholz lost out on the party leadership to the leftwingers Saskia Esken and Norbert Walter-Borjans.

What seemed at the time like an upset created an equilibrium that made it possible for young members such as Von Malottki to throw their weight behind Scholz’s candidacy: “We knew they would have a seat at the table when it comes to coalition talks.” On the ground, the younger candidates lent a touch of populist aggression to Scholz’s statesman-like appeal.

Infrastructure problems in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern are plain for everyone to see: trains cut through the region intermittently, and ticket halls at smaller rail stops have been derelict for decades. , Despite local campaigns, the Karnin lift bridge across the Peenestrom estuary has lain moribund since it was destroyed by the Nazis in an attempt to halt the Red Army’s advance in 1945.

The SPD’s young candidates wasted no time pinning the blame on the federal transport ministry, run by the Bavarian CSU since 2009. “In Bavaria, they build motorways without end,” Von Malottki said. His party has pledged to set up a demand-responsive bus network in regions cut off from public transport lines.

Embroyled in numerous [corruption scandals](#) during the pandemic, Merkel's conservatives have done their bit to impersonate a party drunk on political power: the prodigal rise of the 28-year-old local CDU candidate Philipp Amthor was halted last year over his lobbying on behalf of an American IT company.

The SPD identified a chink in the Christian Democrats' armour. Von Malottki signed a pledge to donate any extra income to charity. On his Twitter and Instagram channels, he started using the hashtag #unbribable. Precisely because his odds of winning looked so low, he said, voters believed him.

“None of us decided to stand as a candidate because we had our eyes on a career,” said Von Malottki, whose father is a forester and whose mother works at post-reunification agency tasked with opening up Stasi files to the public. “We’re all idealists. I was expecting to lose, so I wanted to at least run a campaign that people would remember me by.”

The SPD may have painted the north-east red, but its victory remains fragile. In several constituencies, the AfD came in at a close-run second place – in some, it increased its share of the vote.

The centre-left won the fight by taking on the AfD over material questions such as wages but it has barely taken the fight to the far right on cultural questions, such as over immigration or gender politics. Should it fail to act out its ideals in government, the north-east could eventually be awash in the bright blue colours of the populist right.

“We’ve only just recovered from the Schröder years,” Von Malottki said. “If we don’t deliver on our promises, all our gains will be gone again in four years.”

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## [Chess](#)

# Fide sparks anger with ‘gross’ breast enlargement sponsor for women’s chess



‘Chess has struggled with sexism in the past, and this has done nothing to help prevent that.’ Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

*[Sean Ingle](#)*

*[@seaningle](#)*

Fri 1 Oct 2021 12.38 EDT

For a sport that has struggled to attract female players, the news that chess has just agreed the biggest ever sponsorship deal for the women’s game would usually be universally welcomed.

But the decision of chess’s governing body, Fide, to partner with the breast enlargement company Motiva is facing growing criticism from some female players, who have called the decision “gross” and “misogynistic”.

The new deal was announced earlier this week, with Fide announcing: “The agreement will continue through 2022, a year that has been designated as ‘The Year of Women in Chess’.”

However, several female players, speaking to the popular site Lichess, believe the move is blunder. “Shouldn’t chess – a game reliant on brains rather than breasts – be distancing itself from that kind of reductive and misogynistic line of thinking?” one anonymous female player said. Another was even blunter, calling the deal “gross”.

## Quick Guide

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Those comments were backed by another titled female chess streamer, who told the Guardian: “Fide does not have a strong track record in empowering women and I find it degrading and humiliating that an activity like chess, which is so cognitive, is being sponsored by a company which primarily profits from women’s insecurities. I highly doubt Fide would bring a penis enlargement company to sponsor the men’s World Championship.”

Chess has only 39 female grandmasters out of around 1,300 overall, but in recent years it has done far more to promote the women’s game. The success of the Netflix series *The Queen’s Gambit* [has helped](#), with several top

players, presenters and streamers – including Judit Polgar, Jovanka Houska, Jennifer Shahade and Alexandra Botez – also helping to broaden the game's popularity.

Some players believe Fide's decision is a sacrifice too far. "I've already seen comments online from people saying that they hope prizes for women's events will now include breast enlargement," another anonymous titled female player said. "I've seen jokes citing specific top players' names as those who could be improved by it. Chess has struggled with sexism in the past, and this has done nothing to help prevent that." The players were speaking on condition of anonymity, Lichess said, because they often rely on Fide for invites to tournaments.

However, Fide's new deal was welcomed by others, including women's international master Sheila Barth Stanford. "We desperately need a sponsor," the Norwegian said. "We play for less money than the men, which makes it more difficult to bet on chess. I hope it makes it easier for women to play professionally."

Fide told the Guardian that it was the single largest corporate sponsorship ever signed specifically for women in chess, and the contract had been discussed by both the management board and the Fide council, "two bodies where women have a wider representation than they do in the chess community as a whole".

It added: "Fide is not encouraging plastic surgery, but if an adult freely makes this choice, our organisation endorses Motiva, a company that has demonstrated its strong commitment towards women."

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## Bees

# Australia's 'black summer' bushfires pushed 11 bee species closer to extinction



L. gracilipes, one of the bee species assessed as 'vulnerable'. Australia's 'black summer' bushfires have been found to have threatened 11 species of bees. Photograph: Tania Bawden/Ken Walker

*[Donna Lu](#)*

*[@donnadlu](#)*

Sat 2 Oct 2021 02.51 EDT

The devastating 2019–20 bushfires had a significant impact on native Australian bees, threatening 11 species, according to new research.

Australian scientists have analysed the effect of the fires on 553 Australian native bee species – one-third of all bee species discovered in the country to date.

They found that 11 species are now eligible to be listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) red list of threatened species.

Prior to the fires, only three Australian bee species were listed as threatened.

The researchers modelled the bees' extinction risk from the fires using publicly available data, including information about fire intensity and frequency as well as the bees' distributions.

Two bee species, *Leioproctus nigrofulvus* – commonly known as the solitary bee – and *Leioproctus carinatifrons*, now fit the IUCN's criteria for an endangered listing, as large areas of their native habitat were intensely burnt during the bushfires.

Nine bee species were assessed as being “vulnerable”.

Study co-author Stefan Caddy-Retalic, an adjunct lecturer at the University of Adelaide, said it was surprising that a single fire event – that killed or displaced nearly 3 billion animals – pushed the 11 bee species much closer to extinction.

There are 1,654 known bee species in Australia, but scientists believe the real figure may be between 2,000 and 3,000.

“There are so many native bees that are still left to discover – a lot of these species are at risk of being lost before they’re even found, which is an incredible indictment on the impact that we’re having on Australia’s biodiversity,” Caddy-Retalic said.

“This really highlights the need for the Australian government to act on climate change.”

Even the loss of a single bee species was significant, he added.

“Each organism that exists on the planet is an answer to the riddle of how to survive,” he said. “Every time we lose one of the organisms, we lose the interactions that it has with other parts of the ecosystem, we lose the

specialised services that they provide, and that has the potential to drag other species along with it.”

Introduced species such as the European honey bee and the bumblebee in Tasmania, which compete with native bees for resources, had the potential “to push some of our native species to the brink”, Caddy-Retalic said.

Few invertebrates are listed by the IUCN, suggesting they have not been considered a priority, he added.

“We’ve been a lot more focused on pandas and koalas and platypuses and things like that,” he said. “We’re really starting to see a groundswell [of attention for] some of these invertebrates, which after all represent the majority of animal life on earth.”

The team have submitted their findings to the IUCN, which is expected to provide an assessment on the status of the bee species by the end of the year.

The research was published in the journal [Global Change Biology](#).

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[Canada](#)

## ‘I’m overjoyed’: Canadian Michael Spavor speaks out after China release



Canadian citizen Michael Spavor poses with his brother's dog Ziggy in Calgary, after his release. Photograph: Spavor Family Handout/Reuters

*Reuters and staff*

Fri 1 Oct 2021 21.23 EDT

Canadian citizen Michael Spavor has expressed joy at being reunited with his family after being released from jail in [China](#) last week.

“I’m overjoyed to be finally reunited with my family. It’s humbling as I begin to understand the continued support that we’ve received from Canadians and those around the world, thank you,” Spavor said on Friday in a first statement since his release.

Businessman Spavor and Canadian former diplomat Michael Kovrig were released last week after being detained by Chinese authorities just days after Huawei chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou's arrest in Vancouver in December 2018.

They were released within hours of Meng reaching a deal with US prosecutors to end the bank fraud case against her, after being held for more than 1,000 days. Beijing has denied that their arrests were linked.

Spavor was accused of supplying photographs of military equipment to Kovrig and sentenced in August to 11 years in jail. Kovrig had been awaiting sentencing. The two men's families have said they were innocent.

Beijing gave no legal explanation for the Canadians' release or the timing of it, only later saying the two men had applied for and been granted bail on unspecified "medical grounds".

The surprise releases ended an impasse that tested the diplomatic resolve of Canada, which found itself caught in the middle of a broader feud between Beijing and Washington.

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## New Zealand

# NZ opposition leader says US and UK ‘left door open’ for China in Indo-Pacific



Judith Collins, New Zealand's National party leader, has defended the country's stance on China. Photograph: Getty Images

*[Eva Corlett](#) in Wellington and [Tess McClure](#) in Christchurch*

Fri 1 Oct 2021 22.05 EDT

New Zealand's opposition leader has hit out at the US and UK over China, saying their failure to adopt free trade agreements was “foolish” and increased Chinese dominance in the Indo-Pacific.

“If any criticism comes to New Zealand, as it often does about this close relationship with China and trade, my answer to everybody – whether they’re the US or UK – is: ‘So where’s our free trade agreement?’,” [Judith](#)

[Collins](#), leader of the centre-right National party, said in an interview with the Guardian on Friday.

Former US president Donald Trump withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal in 2017 and the US did not join its replacement, the CPTPP. New Zealand began talks with the UK last year on a post-Brexit free trade deal, but it has not yet been made.

Collins said the US had been “foolish” to walk away from those free trade agreements. In doing so, Collins said: “What they did is that they opened up the gates for [China](#) to be even more important in the Pacific and Indo-Pacific region. They opened that up, and they left the door open, and they were ultimately foolish to do so. And that has actually caused the issue.

“Stop judging New Zealand by the fact that we are a little country at the bottom of the world who has to trade. That’s how we do it. That’s how we pay for everything we need.”

China is New Zealand’s largest trading partner by a substantial margin and accounts for about a third of total exports. According to the NZ China Council, exports to China last year were \$16.7bn, more than New Zealand’s trade with Australia, the US and Japan – its next three largest trade partners – combined. That has led to speculation New Zealand is unable to take tough stances on Beijing due to its trade dependency.

The Ardern government has been walking a difficult line on China issues – making case-by-case statements on human rights violations or encroachment in Hong Kong or the South China Sea but avoiding the more strongly stated, hawkish condemnations coming from the US or Australia. It has been watching the experience of its trans-Tasman neighbour closely: Australia has been hit by a hugely costly trade war with China, with enormous tariffs on most of its export commodities.

Prof David Capie, director of the Centre for Strategic Studies at Victoria University in Wellington, said trade was the missing link for US policy in the region.

“Over the past few months there’s been a lot of attention paid to the US’s security role in the Indo-Pacific – for example, the rapidly evolving quad and the new Aukus deal. But for many regional countries the missing part of US strategy is trade,” Capie said.

“If the US is concerned about China’s growing influence, what alternatives is it providing to the huge gravitational pull of the Chinese economy? Free trade has always been a fraught issue in American politics and it’s only got more challenging in the last few years. The result is that Washington really doesn’t have a trade strategy to back up its wider aims.

“Shared values are all well and good, but they don’t keep the lights on.”

## **‘We’re not stupid’**

This year New Zealand, along with Australia, welcomed coordinated sanctions announced by the UK, US, the EU and Canada over Uyghur abuses, but did not institute sanctions of their own. In May, New Zealand shied away from using the word “genocide” in a motion on Xinjiang debated and unanimously adopted by parliament – opting instead to use more general, watered-down language of “human rights abuses”.

After statements from foreign minister Nanaia Mahuta that New Zealand was “uncomfortable with expanding the remit” of the Five Eyes alliance, a UK conservative MP accused Ardern of “sucking up to China”, and Australian media said the country had “sold its soul” to preserve trade agreements.

Collins said the opposition did not chime in with those criticisms. “We don’t attack them [the government] on it because we know their problem. Their problem is who’s going to pay the bills?”

Collins said there would be trade repercussions for New Zealand if it spoke out. “The problem is, [when] we go out there and we talk about the Uyghur people and what is clearly an appalling situation, what we know happens – and we’ve seen it before – is that suddenly there are trade issues.”

Collins cited the recent example of Zespri, New Zealand's largest kiwifruit cooperative, having Covid-19 detected on its fruit in China – and strongly implied the case was political.

"We're not stupid, we know what's going on," Collins said. Asked if the case was political retaliation, she said: "I don't know. But I've been around long enough in politics, and long enough in senior roles, to know that these things do happen."

Zespri's chief executive, Dan Mathieson, [told Stuff on Monday](#) that exports had been continuing as normal after the initial detection, and all subsequent tests had been negative.

Australia, the US and UK last month announced the new Aukus security pact – one that New Zealand were notably absent from and that experts said was an illustration of the distance between the country and its traditional allies.

"Aukus doesn't include us and it doesn't include Canada, so we've both been ignored from it," Collins said. "We're being left out."

She said she was a firm supporter of New Zealand's nuclear-free policy, which bans nuclear-powered vessels – including those constructed under Aukus – from New Zealand waters. However, she also said: "The information sharing, the artificial intelligence work, the technology-sharing agreement part of Aukus – that was important that we were left out of that. You'd have to wonder why Canada and New Zealand were excluded from that part of it."

Collins is languishing in the polls, polling at just 5% as preferred prime minister, compared with Jacinda Ardern's 44%. Across parties, Labour is at 43% and National at 26%.

The Guardian has approached the foreign minister's office for comment.

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## Headlines friday 1 october 2021

- [Sarah Everard case People stopped by lone officer could 'wave down a bus', says Met](#)
- [Live Minister admits Everard case has dealt 'devastating blow' to public confidence in Met](#)
- [Violence against women Police need 'clear message that tackling it is a priority', says victims tsar](#)
- [Sarah Everard Killer might have been identified as threat sooner](#)

## [Police](#)

# Sarah Everard case: people stopped by lone officer could ‘wave down a bus’, says Met



The Metropolitan police commissioner, Cressida Dick, gives a statement outside the central criminal court on Thursday after the sentencing of Sarah Everard's murderer, Wayne Couzens. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Jamie Grierson](#)*

*[@JamieGrierson](#)*

Fri 1 Oct 2021 11.47 EDT

Police will have to work hard to rebuild public confidence after the murder of [Sarah Everard](#) by a serving officer, a minister has said, as Scotland Yard said people stopped by a lone plainclothes officer should challenge their

legitimacy and could try “waving a bus down” to escape a person they believe is pretending to be police.

Wayne Couzens, who joined the Metropolitan police in 2018, was [handed a rare whole-life sentence](#) on Thursday for the kidnap, rape and murder of 33-year-old Everard as she walked home in south London in March.

On Friday, the policing minister, Kit Malthouse, told Sky News: “[The police] recognise that this has struck a devastating blow to the confidence that people have in police officers, but also in the Met police in particular. For those thousands and thousands of police officers out there who will have to work harder – much harder – to win public trust, it is a very, very difficult time.”

The Met announced on Thursday night that it would no longer deploy plainclothes officers on their own, after the sentencing hearing was told that Couzens used lockdown rules to falsely arrest Everard during the abduction.

The force encouraged members of the public to challenge lone plainclothes police officers if they are ever approached, asking where the officer’s colleagues are, where they have come from, why they are there and exactly why they are stopping or talking to them.

It also suggests verifying the police officer’s identity by asking to hear their radio operator or asking to speak to the radio operator themselves.

If a person still does not feel safe, the force said they should consider “shouting out to a passerby, running into a house, knocking on a door, waving a bus down or, if you are in the position to do so, calling 999.”

The Met said: “All officers will, of course, know about this case and will be expecting in an interaction like that – rare as it may be – that members of the public may be understandably concerned and more distrusting than they previously would have been, and should and will expect to be asked more questions.”

However the Met and government ministers were accused of having a tone-deaf response for suggesting women should flag down a bus.

Patsy Stevenson, who was arrested at a vigil for Everard in the days after her murder, said the advice was “almost laughable if it wasn’t so disgusting”.

She told the PA Media news agency: “I feel like they are just clutching at straws, because the advice isn’t relevant. It’s like a distraction because, number one, in that situation you can’t just stop and hail down a bus or a taxi or something.

“Can you imagine the distrust that people have right now where they have to protect themselves from the police in that manner? That is shocking.”

The Labour MP Bell Ribeiro-Addy [tweeted](#): “We want to know what the Met are doing to address the deeply rooted problems with violence against women within the force. This completely derisory advice shows they’re still not taking it seriously. And they wonder why trust is at an all-time low?”

Ruth Davidson, the former leader of the Scottish Conservatives, [tweeted](#): “This is so grim. If someone believe they are in ‘real and imminent danger’ - \*\*from a police officer\*\* they’ve to flag down a bus or start chapping doors. Horrendous.”

[Pressure is mounting](#) on the Met police commissioner, Cressida Dick, to resign over the case, which has sparked a national outcry over the safety of women on Britain’s streets.

The Conservative MP Caroline Nokes, Labour’s Harriet Harman and the Liberal Democrat MP Wera Hobhouse are among those calling for Dick to step down.

Malthouse backed the commissioner on Friday, adding that she had one of the “most difficult jobs in the country”.

“What I want in a policing leader is when awful calamities like this happen ... I want a police leader who is transparent, willing to learn, willing to change and has a conviction and a commitment not to be defensive about the failings of the organisation, and that’s what we’re seeing in [Cressida Dick](#),” he said.

“She is a dedicated and talented and committed police officer who is driving the [Metropolitan police](#) to ever greater standards of care and improvement and fighting crime.”

Jess Phillips, the shadow minister for domestic violence and safeguarding, said trust in police was “not going to be built back overnight”.

She told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “It is going to be built up if we see the government and police forces starting to actually take violence against women and girls, and the complaints that women make day in, day out, seriously.”

She said she wanted to see violence against women and girls prioritised in every police force across the UK and in the Whitehall offices of the Home Office, adding that it should be given the same resources as other crime types such as terrorism and county lines gangs.

“I want finally to not have to keep asking that this should be a priority,” she said. “The seriousness of this crime should never be underestimated.”

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

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

# **Scotland Yard vetting ‘not fit for purpose’, says former police chief – as it happened**

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## [Police](#)

# Make tackling violence against women a police priority, says victims tsar



A message among floral tributes left to honour Sarah Everard at Clapham Common in March. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

*[Alexandra Topping](#)*

Fri 1 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Police forces should be compelled to deal with violence against women and girls with the same level of resources, expertise and urgency as terrorism or organised crime, the victims commissioner for England and Wales has said.

After Sarah Everard's killer was given a full-life sentence on Thursday, campaigners said there was increasing frustration and the time for action was now.

Vera Baird said violence against women and girls should be made a strategic policing requirement to give the issue central direction and extra resources, particularly for specialist officers, so there was “no doubt what obligations the police have towards victims”.

She said: “There are many unanswered questions about how violence against women and girls is policed and I think if we have this clear requirement it sends a clear message that tackling it is a priority.”

Baird said requirements on agencies to fully investigate and take action in cases of violence against women could be included in the victims bill, which the Guardian understands was ready to be consulted on before the new justice secretary, Dominic Raab, took up his post.

“Without that it will just muddle on, being ignored as if it were a low-level crime,” she said. “We have seen in this awful case that what is seen as low-level offending against women and girls can mark out a predatory attitude to them which can speedily escalate if not tackled.”

The Labour leader, Keir Starmer, led calls for an inquiry into how Everard’s killer, Wayne Couzens, a Metropolitan police officer who had been reported for indecent exposure on three occasions, “slipped through the cracks”. “[We] have to understand why that happened, and whether there were any assumptions made when his previous wrongdoing was looked at,” he said.

The Labour MP Yvette Cooper went further, calling for a full independent investigation into violence against women and girls within the police service.

The home secretary, Priti Patel, said there were “serious questions that need to be answered by the Metropolitan police” while giving her backing to the Met commissioner, Cressida Dick.

The director of the Good Law Project, Jolyon Maugham, called for a public inquiry into “how cultural failings by the police and the broader criminal justice system contribute to the murder or rape of tens of thousands of

women a year”. He said: “Enough really is enough. How many more women must die?”

Baird’s call echoes the [recommendation](#) of a damning root-and-branch examination by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), which found “problems, unevenness and inconsistencies” in dealing with the “epidemic” of violence against female victims in the UK.

It was published as news emerged that Sabina Nessa, a primary school teacher, had been found dead in a park close to her south London home. A man [has appeared in court](#) accused of her murder.

According to the Counting Dead Women project, run by Karen Ingala Smith, 80 women were killed between the deaths of Everard in March and Nessa on 17 September.

Campaigners in the sector said there was a growing sense of anger and frustration that promises of change were not resulting in greater safety for women.

Farah Nazeer, the chief executive of Women’s Aid, said a public inquiry into men’s violence against women and girls would probably expose other institutional and government failings but was unlikely to lead to the action needed.

There was already a wealth of evidence and recommendations in the Inspectorate of Constabulary report, the government’s recently published [Violence Against Women and Girls \(VAWG\) strategy](#) and rape review, Nazeer said. “We all know what needs to be done. But making it a matter of priority, choosing to prioritise funding into this area, choosing to make that cultural shift – these are political choices that we’re not making.”

Women’s groups welcomed what some saw as an increased level of restraint in the reporting of Couzens’ trial, with many publications choosing not to feature a prominent photograph of the murderer, while BBC Radio 4’s Today programme chose to mention Couzens by name sparingly in its reporting on

Thursday and included the full victim impact statement of Everard's mother, Susan.

"We find that women's experience is lost so often when we talk about the impact of male violence against women and girls," said Jayne Butler, the chief executive of Rape Crisis England and Wales. "We welcome that some outlets have chosen to focus their coverage on Sarah."

Andrea Simon, the director of the End Violence Against Women coalition, said that despite the reviews and promises of change since Everard's murder, little had changed.

"Violence against women and girls is at an epidemic level, the police inspectorate has said the whole system needs an overhaul, the government has already apologised for the shameful low rates of prosecution of rape. What more do we need to uncover? We actually just need to move to doing something about it," she said. "We've had all of these reviews, and we've seen no material change. We need to get on with actually making a difference now."

The minister for safeguarding, Rachel Maclean, said the government was committed to radically changing how violence against women and girls is tackled with a whole-system approach. She said the VAWG strategy published this summer set out "the government's ambition to increase support for survivors, bring perpetrators to justice, and, ultimately, reduce the prevalence of violence against women and girls."

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## Metropolitan police

# Sarah Everard's killer might have been identified as threat sooner, police admit



New details of previous indecent exposure claims against Wayne Couzens emerged on Thursday. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

*[Vikram Dodd](#), [Alexandra Topping](#) and [Haroon Siddique](#)*

Thu 30 Sep 2021 15.37 EDT

Police have accepted they may have had enough clues to identify [Wayne Couzens](#) as a threat to women before he raped and killed Sarah Everard.

Couzens was handed [a rare whole-life sentence](#) on Thursday, meaning he will spend the rest of his life in jail. The judge said his crimes were as serious as a terrorist atrocity because he abused his powers as a police officer to commit them.

Amid signs of more troubling revelations to come, Dame Cressida Dick, the head of the [Metropolitan police](#), admitted the murder heaped shame on Britain's biggest force as she scrambled to make meaningful reforms.

The Guardian understands that an investigation into Couzens's phone, which was seized after he was arrested for the attack on Everard, revealed he was part of a WhatsApp group involving police officers now under investigation over alleged misogynistic, racist and homophobic messages, sources say.

Steve House, the Met deputy commissioner, said there was no getting away from the force's responsibility. "We should own this," he said. "He [Couzens] was one of us and we need to look at ourselves very, very carefully to understand ... how was he allowed to be one of us, and what does it say about us as an organisation. Organisationally, we own this guilt."

New details of previous indecent exposure claims against Couzens emerged on Thursday. A man was accused of being naked from the waist down in a car in Kent in 2015, and of twice exposing himself at a [London](#) McDonald's days before the murder, with details of cars linked to Couzens in both instances passed to police.

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'I am so sorry,' says Met chief after Wayne Couzens handed whole-life term – video

A simple registration plate check, available to police on systems belonging to the Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency, could have linked Couzens to alleged offending, but officers failed to identify him, the Met assistant commissioner Nick Ephgrave confirmed, and no action was taken before Everard's murder.

Ephgrave said: "It is one of the inquiries you could make when that gets allocated to you, absolutely. OK, we've got this vehicle, what can we find out about this vehicle?"

Asked if it was reasonable to conclude that police may have had enough information to identify Couzens as a sexual threat to women prior to the

murder of Everard on 3 March, for the first time a police chief accepted that that was possible.

Ephgrave said: “That is an obvious question to ask, and something I have thought about a lot. It’s hard to think about it without knowing what we now know.”

He added: “If any of those things had been in a different order, would the outcome have been different? Well, maybe.”

The Independent Office for [Police](#) Conduct is investigating whether chances were missed by Kent in 2015 and the Met days before the murder of Everard, to identify Couzens as a threat to women.

It is also investigating the group chat Couzens was a part of and, after consultations with prosecutors, has told two Met officers and one former Met officer they are under criminal investigation.

The victims commissioner for England and Wales, Dame Vera Baird, told the Guardian that chances had been missed. “He was accused of flashing when he was in Kent and nothing came of that and three days before he murdered Sarah, he was accused of flashing again,” she said.

“Where was the red flag that should have gone up after these incidents? Surely better notice should have been taken of that. There should have been an intervention. If he were arrested for that, the chances are he wouldn’t have been able to do what he did.”

Police say they have looked at whether Couzens committed any other serious violent crimes and they do not believe so. They appealed for anyone with claims about further offending by Couzens to contact them.

A senior Labour MP led calls for Dick, 60, to resign, and said women’s confidence in the police “will have been shattered”. Harriet Harman said it would be impossible for Dick to oversee the changes needed to rebuild trust.

But the home secretary, Priti Patel, said she would “continue to work with” the commissioner despite “serious questions” for the Met. This month

Dick's contract was extended by two years, meaning she will continue to lead the force until 2024.

The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) is investigating whether chances were missed to identify Couzens as a threat, and the findings could threaten further damage to police.

Ephgrave said the Met's way of protecting and serving women was under review and promised extra resources.

Asked if Couzens was a one-off or an extreme example of an alleged anti-woman culture in policing, Ephgrave said: "I'm wrestling with myself. It is tempting to say he is so extreme, he is an exception. But that cannot be an excuse to ignore more broader issues. We need to examine our own culture."

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## 2021.10.01 - Spotlight

- Mark Bonnar People say I'm in everything and they're sick of the sight of me!
- You be the judge Should my 25-year-old son tidy his room more often?
- 'Greasy fried eggs at least once a week' Daniel Craig on Bond, being buff and crying at British Gas ads
- No Time to Die Readers review film and big-screen experience
- 'I don't know where to go' Uncertain fate of the women in Kabul's shelters
- Shoeless, unpaid and afraid The fight to keep teaching girls under Taliban rule

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## **Mark Bonnar: ‘People say I’m in everything and they’re sick of the sight of me!’**



‘I certainly wouldn’t pack up and ship off to Hollywood’ ... Mark Bonnar.  
Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian



[Stuart Heritage](#)

[@stuheritage](#)

Fri 1 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

Two brothers are driving home from a wedding slightly the worse for wear. In the middle of an argument, the car careers into an old man, killing him instantly. The older brother, played by Mark Bonnar, snaps into focus. If they call the police and admit their crime, he says, their lives will be over. However, if they do exactly what he says – move the body, drive off, forget about it – then it will be like it never happened. But can they live with themselves afterwards? Could you?

That's how *Guilt* – the gripping, Hitchcockian show about their descent into more and more law-breaking – kicked off, instantly living up to its name. "I didn't need to read any more than that," says Bonnar, recalling his decision to take the role. "It's an amazing opening. I went: 'Absolutely, yes.'"

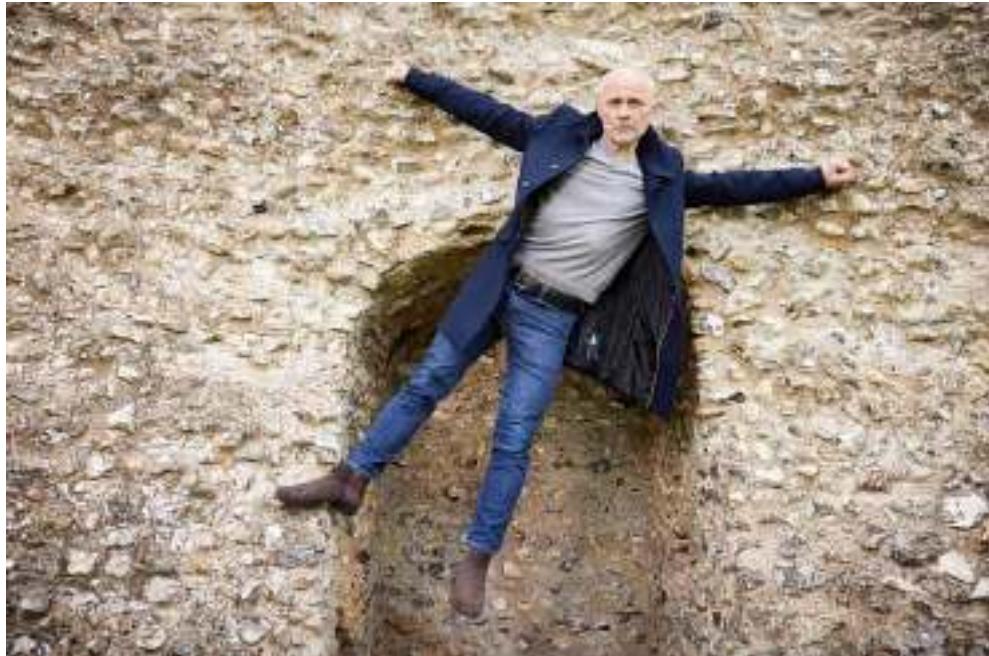
We should be glad he did. Not only did Neil Forsyth write the role of the sociopathic older brother with Bonnar in mind, but the actor excelled in it, with the series launching to acclaim in 2019. As Max, he is quick and angry and sharklike. He deserves to go down alongside the top tier of violent screen sociopaths – *Trainspotting*'s Begbie, *Sexy Beast*'s Don Logan, Daniel

Plainview from *There Will be Blood*. He's an unshackled force of nature straining to bend the entire world to his whims.

And yet – at least over Zoom – the Edinburgh-born actor bears no trace of him. He's a warm and twinkly presence, munching on a slice of toast. While his role is something of a revelatory performance, he is keen to emphasise that it was hardly a breakout role. “According to a lot of people I am in everything and they're sick of the sight of me,” he smiles. “I've been doing this for over 25 years. But I think if you believe you've got a voice that can hold you apart a little bit and you stick at it, people eventually go: ‘All right. Come on.’”

It is true that Bonnar has certainly been around. After concentrating on theatre work in the 1990s, he has steadily clawed up television's ranks, from cop show bit-parts and *Casualty* to grabby supporting roles in the likes of *Line of Duty* (where he played a corrupt police officer), *Unforgotten* (where he played a violent victim of abuse), *Eric, Ernie and Me* (where he played Eric Morecambe) and *Catastrophe*, in which he was the world's least happily married man. But *Guilt* represents yet another leap forward. He's a leading man now, and a spectacular one at that.

The second season of *Guilt* is about to start, building upon the relentless propulsion of the first by dropping Max into an altogether new situation. There's less guilt this time; rather, the motivating force is vengeance.



On the up ... Mark Bonnar. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

“In the first series, Max was always on the run, from either himself or the situation,” says Bonnar. “But in this series you experience him in all kinds of different situations. [He’s lost his] status, and he’s out to seek revenge.”

Luckily, the show’s eye for comedy is just as present as it was last time around, and it remains just as inescapably dark. Max’s full-throttle rage is so close to the surface that it still bubbles up at inopportune moments; the first episode could easily double as the pilot for a sitcom about the world’s most furious interior decorator.

“Neil’s bugbear was that all these hard-hitting heavy dramas have absolutely no sense of humour,” Bonnar explains. “And the one thing that you rely on in a crisis, or in times of extremes, is your sense of humour. Some of the best jokes are about funerals or people dying or whatever. Laughter and tears are two sides of the same coin.”



Late bloomer ... Bonnar in *Guilt*. Photograph: Robert Pereira Hind/BBC/Expectation/Happy Tramp North

Despite the glut of roles he's taken on in the past two decades, the 52-year-old was a relatively late bloomer. After a childhood spent moving around Scotland to accommodate the career of his father Stan, the environmental artist responsible for creating Glenrothes' iconic concrete marching hippo sculptures, he settled in Edinburgh in the early 1980s. "But also my mum drove a bus," he says. "She worked for the NSPCC, and was a social worker and a playgroup leader on a playbus. So yes, my dad was an artist and there was all kinds of stuff around the house, but I also had this mum who was at the forefront of, not women's lib, but quietly getting on with driving a doubledecker bus around Edinburgh."

Did having a parent in the arts make it easier to become an actor? "Probably," he says, nodding. "I'm damn sure my mum and dad got nervous when I said I was going to be an actor. But they stood behind me in everything I did, even when I was a ..." He pauses. Was a what? "Actually, no, they didn't really enjoy me being a door-to-door salesman," he replies. In his late teens, Bonnar took a job selling burglar alarms door to door. It's a time in his life that still rankles. "That company was a bunch of shysters," he scowls. "They just basically got impressionable young kids who were a bit lost, as I was at the time, and trained them up to get leads. Not to sell burglar

alarms, but to get leads for salesmen to go in afterwards. And if the salesman didn't make the sale, we didn't get the money."

That doesn't sound like much fun. "It was the worst of all worlds," he nods. "Getting threatened on a myriad of doorsteps as a 19-year-old because you're not allowed to allow them to say no. Even if they say: 'I'm not interested,' you've got an answer for that."

It is quite *Glengarry Glen Ross*, I say. "I love that movie for that very reason," he grins. "I know the language. I know what they're talking about. I know how hard it is seeing ... Oh man, Jack Lemmon in that movie. They're all great, but Jack Lemmon, he's astonishingly good. I just saw his gravestone." And then he's up on his feet, patting down his pockets so he can show me a picture of the gravestone on his phone.



Bang-up job ... Bonnar in Guilt. Photograph: Robert Pereira Hind/BBC/Expectation/Happy Tramp North

More constructive, meanwhile, was his time working for the local council, first in a library and then in the planning department. "There were a couple of guys in the office who were members of this amateur company called Leith Theatre," he says. "I did three shows for them then realised you could

act as a job. I owe Mikey and Duncan everything. We're still pals – they're the reason that I'm here."

"Here", let's not forget, is the lead role in one of the best shows of the year. And, while series two of *Guilt* kicks off here, series one is still busy winging its way around the world. ("It's just started airing in Sweden and France, and they're remaking it in India.") More impressively, it is currently airing to rave reviews on PBS in the US. Max is such a great role, and Bonnar so uniquely terrifying, that I wonder if there has been any feedback from America. Basically, has Hollywood come knocking yet?

"No," he replies, giving the first hint of his onscreen steeliness I've encountered. Really? I ask. "Don't think so," he shrugs. But if Hollywood did come calling, would he consider it?

"No," he repeats. "Why would I do that? I love it here. This is my home." That sounds pretty definitive. He sighs. "I take each job on its merits. If a job's good, and it's worth doing for the reasons you want to do it, then I make that decision at the time. But I certainly wouldn't pack up and ship off. I love being here."

There's another explanation for his eagerness to hang around, too. "I think for many years America has been held up as some kind of promised land in the film and television landscape," he explains. "And certainly in the last 10 to 15 years, I think the UK has shown it can punch far above its weight. *Guilt* and its success is certainly proof of that."

He isn't wrong. Both Bonnar and Forsyth hint that *Guilt* was planned as a trilogy. If that's the case, the third series cannot come quickly enough.

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*Guilt returns on BBC Scotland and iPlayer on 12 October, and BBC Two on 14 October.*

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## You be the judge: ‘Should my 25-year-old son tidy his room more often?’



‘My son hasn’t hoovered his room for weeks.’ Illustration: Joren Joshua/The Guardian

*Interviews by [Georgina Lawton](#)  
[@georginalawton](#)*

Fri 1 Oct 2021 05.40 EDT

## The prosecution: Grace

*My adult son lives at home and his room is a tip – leftovers and clothes on the floor. It's my house: he should live by my rules*

Curtis hasn't hoovered his room for weeks, and there are often pizza crusts and half-empty bottles of ketchup lying around, and dirty shirts and pants on the floor. He just says: "It's my room, so I'll do what I want." But it seems I am still asking him to do the same tasks I was 10 years ago when he was a teenager.

He's 25, and I don't want him living like a slob in our home. He needs to develop more life skills. I worry what will happen when he meets someone – no girl should have to put up with this. I'm doing it for his own good.

When I threaten to go into his room myself to tidy it, he gets annoyed and tells me to stay out; it often turns into an argument. But I don't think it's over the top to expect him to keep his part of the house clean if he lives with me. Curtis pays £250 rent a month, which helps with food and bills. I don't expect him to pay more as he's saving up for his own place.

When I threaten to go into his room myself to tidy it, he gets annoyed and tells me to stay out

I'm retired and the mortgage is paid, but I do feel the financial pressure of maintaining a four-bedroom house – there's always a task that needs doing.

My husband passed away five years ago and he was very tidy and excellent around the house. When he died, Curtis had to help out more. He repainted the dining room and did a pretty good job, but there are still things I need a hand with. In the garden we used to have a pond, which my husband maintained, but it became too much work. I still need to get a wall replastered and the driveway needs to be cleaned.

Curtis could do the handyman tasks if he applied himself, but he often says he's busy or tired so I end up having to pay someone.

Curtis works full-time, so I am trying to be mindful of that, but sometimes I need more help. Maybe I am comparing him to my husband, but if Curtis kept his room tidy and offered to help out without being asked, it would take the stress off me a bit.

## The defence: Curtis

*I pay my rent. I should be able to live how I like in my own room. She's a clean freak and shouldn't go in if it bothers her*

My room is the one place I have a bit of privacy in our house, so I feel that I shouldn't be obliged to keep it the way my mum wants. It's not that messy: yes, there are some shirts and socks on the floor, but that's my problem, not hers. Why does it bother her? Just don't go in! I say that all the time. There might be a bit of dust on the shelves, or the odd empty packet of food left on a plate at the weekend, but there's certainly nothing going mouldy or been sitting there for weeks.

Mum is a clean freak – she always has been – and her reaction to my room is really over the top. I think she's bored: she retired before the pandemic, has been sitting inside too long and needs to focus on other things. When she tries to come into my room and order me to tidy it I get angry. It's not like I don't help out around the house, but my room is my responsibility.

Mum is a clean freak – she always has been – and her reaction to my room is really over the top

I'm a teacher, and work six days a week, 7am-7pm. During term time I don't have much free time, and when I do I want to go out and see my friends or relax. This can cause arguments with mum: she calls me lazy and says I'm not doing enough to help her when, really, I'm just not able to work to her schedule.

Since dad died I've had to take on the role of handyman. In lockdown I painted the walls, cleared out the spare rooms, and I also cook most of the dinners. I try to help out but I have a very busy schedule. Lifting heavy things is hard for her, so I know that's important and I don't mind, but when mum wants something done she gives me very little notice.

To be fair, she has got a bit more relaxed. I think dad's death taught her not to sweat the small stuff as much, but she still has "certain standards" as she calls them, and if I don't meet them she can be unreasonable and argumentative. When it comes to my room, though, I don't feel like I have to change my habits. If I want to keep it messy, I will.

## Quick Guide

### Saturday magazine

Show



This article comes from Saturday, [the new print magazine from the Guardian](#) which combines the best features, culture, lifestyle and travel writing in one beautiful package. Available now in the UK and ROI.

Photograph: GNM

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

## The jury of **Guardian** readers

We all need our own space to be truly our own sometimes, even at home with mum. Grace believes she's giving Curtis a good deal with cheap rent, but expects it to be topped up with DIY duties. Maybe it's not such a good deal after all.

**Hilary, 32**

Being an innate slob I initially sided with Curtis. Why clean what will get dirty? Successive lockdowns, however, have given me a new perspective. My cleaning and tidying routine has been a reliable source of small joy. While I'm in no way a "clean freak", I'm on Grace's side: tidy your room, Curtis!

**Maan, 24**

Grace is doing her role as a mum, teaching her son valuable life skills. If Curtis does not want to play by her rules he should move to a shared house where he might also see this sort of sloppy behaviour in the kitchen and bathroom.

**Mia, 43**

Curtis chose to live at home because he can't afford to move out, a problem Grace probably didn't face when she bought her four-bedroom house for the price of avocado on toast and a flat white. Living in dirt is maybe his grim way of gaining a sense of control.

**Stephen, 30**

Curtis is entitled to have a private place in the house: he pays rent for it and as long as he is helping out with other housekeeping matters relating to shared spaces, there should be no problem. Given that Curtis is working and is not the sloppy and lazy person Grace paints him as, they seem very disconnected from each other's realities.

**Aybike, 22**

# You be the judge

Click on the poll below to tell us: should Curtis tidy his room?  
We'll share the results on next week's You be the judge.

**The poll closes on Thursday 7 October at 9am BST**

## Last week's result

We asked if it is ever OK for Ben to put broken eggshells back in the box, something which disgusts his girlfriend, Cat.

**89.6%** of you said no – Ben is guilty

**10.4%** of you said yes – Ben is not guilty

[Have a disagreement you'd like settled? Or want to be part of our jury?](#)

[Click here](#)

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‘There’s a kind of dark underbelly to Bond that we can’t show in the movies but I want to be there’ ... Craig. Photograph: Greg Williams/ Danjaq LLC/MGM

[You ask the questions](#)

## **‘I eat greasy fried eggs at least once a week’: Daniel Craig on Bond, being buff and crying at British Gas ads**

‘There’s a kind of dark underbelly to Bond that we can’t show in the movies but I want to be there’ ... Craig. Photograph: Greg Williams/ Danjaq LLC/MGM

by [Catherine Shoard](#)

Fri 1 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Most movie stars look tiny up close. Action lads especially. You can’t stop thinking: Vin Diesel is dinky! Statham’s a titch! *Am I actually taller than Fassbender?*

Daniel Craig is different. He doesn't loom, but he is bulky. Stonehenge legs, whacking hands, just right for killing a man or mending a washing machine.

He is also wearing a *lot* of clothes: pinstripe suit, navy vest, dotty tie, shirt, rose-gold watch, cufflinks, brogues. Perhaps it's just cold in the ballroom of the [Corinthia](#) hotel. Perhaps promoting James Bond means you have to simultaneously flog a lot of clobber. He looks, obviously, fantastic. And also, a bit, as if he has been dipped in glue and rolled round Mayfair to see how many swatches will stick.

At 53, Craig is cheerful and clever and friendly. He has bright blue eyes in a tanned and tired face. It is day five of six at the junket which may or may not decide the future of cinema, and he is about 36 hours off quitting Bond for ever. After 2015's Spectre (most of which he filmed with a broken leg), Craig notoriously claimed he would rather slit his wrists than return to the role.



Daniel Craig with Lashana Lynch in No Time To Die (2021). Photograph: MGM

Six years and a sweetener deal later, he is immaculately on-message. The run-up to [No Time to Die](#) has been quite a puff: it was originally due to have come out in November 2019, but the release kept being pushed back, first

because [director Danny Boyle jumped ship](#), and next because [Craig did his ankle in during the rescheduled shoot](#). And then came Covid.

Yet its star has religiously stuck to the [Bond producers] Eon song sheet. Yes, some of old 007's interactions were pretty iffy. No, the next Bond won't be a woman; they should have their own blockbusters, not just the crumbs of the patriarchy. And no, he's not going to tell you who will replace him.

So: none of that today. Instead, he rattles through a selection of questions set for him by friends, colleagues and Guardian readers, as brisk and bouncy as if he was [chucking himself round that building site in Casino Royale](#). At the end, he cackles and chuck the sheaf of paper behind him: "And I'm out!" Actually, he had forgotten one. He gets up, smiles and puts his glasses back on.



## [George Lazenby](#)

### **Actor**

**Daniel, we both made our 007 debuts in films (unusually for the series) based closely on Ian Fleming's source novels. What do you think about**

**Fleming's work and the challenge for an actor of imparting some genuine human feeling and emotion in the material? What do you think of my attempt in On Her Majesty's Secret Service?**

It's one of the best movies, because it had a love story. And what is life without love? Fleming was very ambiguous about Bond. He hated him sometimes, I think. Barbara [Broccoli, Bond producer] said today that Fleming called him "a shadow". I kind of lifted from Fleming Bond's ambiguity, conflict and passions. You could take 1952 passions or you could just transpose them to modern passions. And that's what I did. There's no point taking 1952 passions because they don't exist any more – thankfully, a lot of them. So I thought: he's a passionate man. He loves, he cares, he's honourable, he's incorruptible, and I love that he's a complex character.

## **duffdawg**

**Which is the Fleming Bond novel that influenced your Bond the most?**

It's probably Live and Let Die, because I read it first – it was my first one at the cinema and there were lots of differences. He goes to the quartermaster in the book and pulls out his gun and what are basically speed pills. And you think: "Oh, right, wow, OK: a gun and some speed pills, that's a safe combination." But it does sort of indicate that he's twisted. There's a kind of dark underbelly that we can't show in the movies but I want to be there.



## Anne Reid

### **Actor**

**Is there any role you regretted playing? Any job you wish you hadn't done?**

Not with you, Anne, that's for sure. But yes. I don't want to say which movie, because that's not fair. I used to walk into Blockbuster – which shows you how old it is – and it would be on the shelves, maybe even not the DVD but the VHS. I'd grab it and throw it under the counter. I know it was only a small protest – it was only my Blockbuster – but it was some way of my never seeing that movie again. But I've never really desperately regretted anything. I think once you commit to something you go: this is it, it is what it is, good or bad.

## Kay Reed

**Which was your favourite of your Bond films, and which is your favourite of the franchise over all?**

This one and Goldfinger.



## Toni Collette

### Actor

**What is your favourite art form? By which I mean: which speaks most immediately to your soul?**

Gosh. I love all art forms. I love a good show. I love being taken somewhere and I love being fooled. I love to cry, I love to laugh. When art does that – and it does, very often, do that to me – I'm moved. It can be music, it can be anything; it can be a commercial on the TV if it's the right one. There was a great British Gas one a couple of years ago that was just this family having a bath. When I watched that I was like: "Oh my God, it's so moving." Maybe because I missed England.



Southern man ... Craig as Benoit Blanc in Knives Out (2019). Photograph: Lionsgate/Allstar

## Anbaric

**Of these scenes, which is your favourite:**

- 1. Being tied to a chair and cruelly tortured by Mads Mikkelsen in Casino Royale?**
- 2. Being tied to a chair and gently tortured by Javier Bardem in Skyfall?**
- 3. Being tied to a chair and painfully tortured by Christoph Waltz in Spectre?**

A mix of 1 and 2. [Laughs] There's some fun in having a rope smack you round the nether regions. And Javier, you know ...



## **Jamie Lee Curtis**

### **Actor**

**Obviously you have now been freed from the bonds of Bond. As you deliciously showed what you can do with that freedom with your Benoit, what is a bigger jump for you to take: a musical, or mime?**

Perhaps both! In some sort of weird musical-mime show with Jamie. I don't know. I'm very fortunate to have been given Benoit Blanc [in [Knives Out](#)] to play with. I can't quite believe I'm James Bond; I can't quite believe I'm Benoit Blanc, but it's true.

### **cmbg68**

**Who is your favourite actor/role model for acting and why?**

[Michael Shannon](#)'s one of my favourite actors. [Mark Ruffalo](#)'s one of my favourite actors. [Isabelle Huppert](#) is one of my favourite actors. I have so many. I don't have role models because I just admire them. I can't aspire to be them; they're just fantastic, amazing people. My favourite Huppert? The

movie where she cuts herself [The Piano Teacher]. It's just phenomenal, but it's so scary. It's like: something's gonna happen, something's gonna happen, something's gonna happen, oh my God, it's happening!



## Kathy Burke

### Actor

**You have a lovely body, Mr Craig. I assume you spend a big part of your day at the gym and have a very healthy eating regime. Do you ever get the chance to have a gorgeously greasy egg or is there really just no time to fry?**

Yes, for God's sake, I do eat greasy fried eggs at least once a week. For sure. They're my favourite on toast with Worcestershire sauce.



'I can't quite believe I'm James Bond' ... Craig. Photograph: Greg Williams/ Danjaq LLC/MGM

## arashikage

**At the end of Our Friends in the North (the 1996 TV series in which Craig co-starred), your character walked across the Tyne Bridge. What's your favourite bridge that you've walked across?**

I walk across the Brooklyn Bridge at least once a week. It still gives me a thrill to look at Manhattan. I still go: "Oh my God, I live in New York."



## Naomie Harris

### **Actor**

**Free of all restraints (the only constraint being that you can no longer act), and imagining that you can acquire at will whatever skill you want, where in the world would you choose to live? And what would you choose to be doing with your life?**

I'd like to be at sea. I'm terrified of the ocean. It's a fearful place, but also just unimaginably beautiful as well. If I had a choice I would do something where you had to go and be challenged by it. A lifeboatman? I always had a fantasy of taking a boat across the Atlantic, but I didn't really see myself on cruise liners. You can actually do it on cargo ships, I think, as a captain's guest. That is very appealing. To have no light pollution, underneath a canopy of stars, would be spectacular.

### LivesInThePictures

**Is there a particular skill that you have had to learn for a role that has stayed with you and has had a positive impact on your life?**

It's not a skill, but I've got over my fear of heights.



## **David Morrissey**

### **Actor**

#### **What is your favourite Liverpool football club memory?**

I couldn't be there but it sort of has to be Istanbul [the 2005 Uefa Champions League final] when we came back from three-nil down against Milan. I watched the first half at home in Hoylake, which is where I grew up, which was very, very depressing and we all went: "Fuck this, let's go to the pub." It was packed with very sad people. And then we scored and the pub erupted and then it was just like 100 people staring at a small television. And then tears and beers going everywhere: mayhem. And this was usually quite a quiet pub.



When strangers meet ... Craig with Samantha Morton in *Enduring Love* (2004). Photograph: Paramount/Allstar



## [Samantha Morton](#)

**Actor**

**You have always made such brave/incredible choices. From early TV to film – The Mother, Love Is the Devil – to groundbreaking theatre. What informs your choices? Has this process ever changed?**

I was very lucky to have a couple of mentors, including Mary Selway, a casting director who has sadly died. I wanted to make interesting, groundbreaking movies, but I had no idea how to. I was pushed in gently by people like Mary. The Mother and Love Is the Devil were two movies she helped me make decisions about.

## **Oiauwe**

**Was Bond ever a role you fancied playing when you were in drama school?**

No. It was a role I fancied playing when I was about 10. But then I wanted to be Spider-Man, Columbo, Kojak and Starsky and Hutch.

## **Livesinthepictures**

**Is there a particular role/type of part that you would like to play in the future that you have not already had the chance to play?**

I sort of take things as they come. I don't think about what I want to play. I like letting life happen to me and getting surprised. Rian Johnson is a prime example – he sent me Benoit Blanc and I could not see that coming.



## Rian Johnson

### **Director**

**Here's the only question I want to ask anyone who came up doing theatre: what is the worst experience you've ever had while performing on stage? Give us a real horror story.**

Being bombarded with Opal Fruits [AKA Starbursts] at the Tyne Theatre and Opera House when I must have been around 16 or 17. We'd do three afternoon matinees a week and it was just school buses of kids who were not into seeing Romeo and Juliet. They had bags of Opal Fruits and they'd just throw them constantly on to the stage. Eventually I just got so weary of it I started eating them, which got a round of applause.

## ThreeGirlRumba

**Which former Bond do you think would host the best dinner party?**

George Lazenby must be up there.

## Welshman

**We all know what Bond's favourite alcoholic drink is. What's yours?**

I'd like a vodka and soda with fresh lime right now. But tomorrow I might like a whisky. I don't drink as much as I used to, but when I do drink I like to keep it clean.



## Finn Wittrock

### Actor

**Having seen you do Shakespeare up close [the two of them worked on a production of Othello together; Craig played Iago, Wittrock was Cassio], it doesn't surprise me that you have taken on some roles that require some bigger transformations (Knives Out and Logan Lucky come to mind). But I think it may be a surprise for the general public. Does drawing a contrast to Bond play into your decision-making when taking on a role?**

When I first started Bond I did try to contrast my roles. I thought I had to go

and do something completely different. I stopped doing that because I realised I had to do what I'd always done, which is wait for the good stuff to arrive. I've never really gone searching for work; ordinarily, when I've waited and had patience, good things have turned up.



Highland adventure ... Craig with Judi Dench as M in *Skyfall* (2012).

Photograph: François Duhamel/Allstar/COLUMBIA PICTURES/EON/DANJAQ

## **Whoeveryouare**

**In what ways have the other actors who have played James Bond informed your approach to playing him?**

Not at all, because the way they played it was the way they played it, and they're each individually brilliant. I can't do an impression to save my life, so I wasn't even trying to emulate them. All I wanted to do was put my stamp on it and make it the best thing I could.



## **Judi Dench**

**Actor**

**Have you missed me?**

Yes. Yes, Judi Dench, I miss you. Every day I miss you, Judi Dench. What, specifically? The light in your eyes.

## **cakesxandxale**

**Have you kept any mementoes from the sets you have been on? If so, which is your favourite?**

This is the question I get asked the most; everybody clearly thinks I'm a kleptomaniac. I have a watch that was given to me by Barbara Broccoli and Michael [G Wilson, her fellow producer]. I wore it in Casino Royale in the crane-jumping sequence and it still has red dust around it from the Bahamas.



## [Jason Isaacs](#)

### **Actor**

**You are as famous and successful as it gets. So ... what next? More movies? Producing? Directing? Or something else? Others have leveraged their brands into business empires, activism or even elected office. What's your plan?**

Go home, put my feet up, have a cup of tea. I don't have plans. I like acting. Producing is a natural extension; I helped produce these movies. Directing always seems to me too much like hard work. I'm not a great spokesman, but I really try to actively involve myself with good causes. Business empires ... it's not my thing. And elected office: you must be fucking joking.

### [DVR001](#)

**If you could give one piece of advice to your younger self, what would it be?**

To my younger self when I started Bond? No, because I think I was naive and open-minded and that would have been the advice to my younger self: be naive and open-minded.



## **Elliot Daly**

### **Rugby player**

#### **What was your training plan for Casino Royale?**

It was not great, Elliot. We did our best but I just wanted to get big and look like I'd just come out of special forces, which I think I got right. I wish I'd spent more time running. I kind of glocked myself up a bit. It was heavy weights.

#### **LivesInThePictures**

#### **What is the project that you have been most proud of in your career and why?**

This one. It's been a long time coming. Covid aside, it's been a struggle to get the movie made – as it always is. But I think we had a great story and we

got together an amazing cast and an incredible crew.



## **Kim Basinger**

### **Actor**

**My favourite role of yours was Perry Smith in Infamous. Infamous or Knives?**

Mark Ruffalo was supposed to play Perry Smith and he recommended me; I'm such a fan of Mark's, so the fact he did that was so moving for me. So, yes, I remember Infamous with a lot of fondness. I love playing Benoit Blanc; but they're *slightly* different.

### **Yohdur**

**Have you read much of Ted Hughes's poetry, or Sylvia Plath's? If so, do you have any favourite poems?**

I have read lots of both of them. Daddy, by Plath.



## **Naomi Watts**

### **Actor**

#### **What's left on the bucket list?**

I don't have a bucket list. Maybe that's just because I don't want to be disappointed. There are things that I want to do that I feel will trigger other things in life, but I don't have specifics. It's sort of about the people you meet. I feel like that's kind of the ambition in life: the more people I can interact with, or be with family – that usually sends up some pretty amazing times.



On her majesty's secret service ... Craig and Gemma Arterton in Quantum of Solace (2008). Photograph: Mgm/Allstar

## [Shivermetimbersnow](#)

**What are the top three things you have learned (about yourself, the movie business or anything else) being James Bond?**

It's a team effort. Having to work with all sorts of different people from all sorts of parts of the world takes a lot of give-and-take. You've got to allow people to be creative and to get on with their job. I drive things on set and I have learned to do that because I was given the opportunity to do so. You need a lot of energy to do a Bond shoot – a six-to-eight month shoot – and you've got to be as excited each day as the day you started.



## Gemma Arterton

### Actor

**Which living director would you like to work with who you have not yet had the chance to?**

I always fantasised about running off and working with [Peter Brook](#). That's probably not gonna happen now. But all the way through my younger years I just had this fantasy of going round the world with him and learning different languages.

### Thaigh

**Have you ever taken some elements of James Bond's character into a real life situation?**

No, thank goodness.



## M Emmet Walsh

### Actor

**In the film Knives Out, did you start out thinking you'd create such a quirky character or did he develop as you explored him?**

He was on the page. Rian Johnson sent me the script; I giggled all the way through it. It said in the stage direction: “A lilting southern accent.” Rian came to see me and I sort of pointed to it on the page and he went: “Yes”, and I went: “OK!” That’s kind of where it came from.

### [JonRoper25](#)

**Which member of the Liverpool squad would make a good Bond and why?**

All of them.



## **Jonathan Joseph**

### **Rugby player**

**How many takes did you have to do for that famous James Bond coming out of the sea scene?**

One, actually. It was kind of an accident. The beach was about 3ft all the way out, like a sandbank. It didn't drop off, so I wasn't swimming into the ocean. I think I just walked into shot and then sort of got up.

### **Scudman**

**What has been the most enjoyable event/occasion related to your promotional duties as James Bond?**

I was in Switzerland for Casino Royale. I was very naive and green and was trying to be open-minded. I knew people had loved the movie in London. The next stage was: does the movie make any money? I didn't even consider that. I'd gone to bed and I'd got a call from Barbara who was with Amy Pascal, who was running Sony at the time, and they said: "Get down here

now”, and I thought I’d lost my job. And they just went: “The figures are in and they’re through the roof.” That was just mind-blowing for me – a success I didn’t even consider.

## **YoloSwagg**

**What scenes do you remember that were completed for Bond but ultimately left on the cutting room floor?**

I never remember the scenes we shot; I stopped doing that a long time ago. You can get into this thing as an actor of wondering why someone has cut your part; it’s to make the movie better, unless the director hates you. Scenes that didn’t make it don’t exist to me any more.

## **BabyStrange**

**I love the film Love Is the Devil; it’s an underrated British masterpiece, with a great cast. What was that like to make, and would you like to do more ‘arthouse’ (for want of a better word) films in the future?**

Oh, that’s so kind. I’ll make anything, arthouse or not. That was a coming together of so many wonderful things – John Maybury, Derek [Jacobi], John Mathieson [the director of photographer], all this talent, no money, John firing on all cylinders and Baillie Walsh, his partner, who was helping him write the script and injecting things into it. Students on set painting huge Francis Bacon-like pictures because we weren’t allowed to use any of the real pictures. All of the young British artists of the time. Extraordinary. Just a way of making movies that I would definitely do again; an amazing experience.



## **John Maybury**

### **Director**

**Did your Bond experiences change your life in ways you didn't expect?  
And are you still an enthusiastic gamer?**

It did change me, in more ways than I could ever expect. I had a vision of what might happen but it's impossible to imagine. When you're an out-of-work actor, gaming is a way of passing the time. I had a Sega Megadrive on the TV in my flat and hours wasted on that. But I don't have time any more to play video games, which is probably just as well because we've got kids and there's always something to do.

### **Leobatch**

**Which Bond villain would you most like to have played?**

Mads's part: Le Chiffre.

### **SwindonNick**

**When filming the various Bond films, did you actually get to enjoy many of those exotic locations or was it all work, work, work?**

Yes, it was all work, work, work, but what you get to do is get to know people very quickly because you get to work with them very intensely, and that makes the experience very special.

## Sagarmantha1953

**What's it like to be brutally shot to death in the bath by supposedly the nicest man in the movie business, Tom Hanks?**

Remarkably pleasant.



## Ana de Armas

**Actor**

**What will you miss most about playing James Bond and being part of these films?**

It's this massive collaborative effort. I came up through theatre and was taught very early on that you've got to look after each other. And never more so than on a Bond set, because Barbara Broccoli and Michael G Wilson's attitude is: it's one big family. They gave me a chance to be creatively involved. And to be creatively involved in a Bond movie, I will miss.

## **Voltarox**

**Every Bond actor leaves a legacy of interpretation of the character. How did you approach such a well-storied character and are you satisfied your efforts will endure for the generations to follow?**

Fucking hell! It's kind of up to other people to decide that, I think, but thank you for the question.

No Time to Die is in cinemas now

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## No Time To Die

# What did you think? Readers review No Time to Die and the big-screen experience



Classic machismo ... Daniel Craig in No Time To Die. Photograph: Nicola Dove/AP



[Rachel Obordo](#)

[@bordeaux8](#)

Thu 30 Sep 2021 12.13 EDT

Daniel Craig has returned for the final time in [No Time to Die](#), which was released in cinemas on Thursday, six years after the previous Bond film. Here, Five readers share their reactions to the film, whether it met their expectations, and what it was like returning to the cinema.

## **‘Perfect to draw crowds back to the big screen’**



Debi Bose

I thought it was a fitting tribute to [the end of Craig being Bond](#). A beautifully crafted, quintessential British-made film. It was a story that gripped me throughout. I usually fall asleep when watching a film but I watched the entire thing during the midnight showing rarely blinking. There was outstanding characterisation and acting – nostalgic and well overdue.

It's my fourth trip [to the cinema] since the start of the pandemic; I'm lucky that I can go to my local Everyman cinema, which is never overcrowded. I don't think I would have gone to see the other films otherwise. Having seen the Bond film, I think it's perfect to draw back the crowds to the big screen following lockdown. **Debi Bose, 51, lawyer, London**

**‘Really emotional’**



Alex Strang

I went to the premiere at the Royal Albert Hall – what's not to like? The film felt like a really big finale teed up from the start. I liked it a lot, but I'm not sure it felt like a Bond movie. I enjoyed both 007s and Ana de Armas was awesome. It was also a really emotional movie – [Daniel Craig has made a Bond whose journey we've shared](#) and it's sad to see him go. Safin [played by Remi Malek] was a bit disappointing at first but the more I thought about it, the more I think he doesn't actually matter – this movie is about Bond, Madeleine [Léa Seydoux] and Mathilde [Lisa-Dorah Sonnet]. It was a very moving finale. **Alex Strang, 48, Buckinghamshire**

01:51

James Bond: royal premiere for Daniel Craig's final film in the franchise No Time To Die – video

**'The busiest cinema I've been to'**



Lily Orset

As a longtime and perhaps unlikely fan of the franchise, for me No Time to Die was refreshing – a more sensitive, emotional Bond tempers the classic machismo and gunfire. The opening sequence made you want more, but there's enough small moments to keep you going in a softer way. Seydoux, Lashana Lynch and Ana de Armas shine, and it's the intimacy – platonic, familial and personal – that really brings a new dimension to Bond in a film that is as much about loss as it is opportunities for new beginnings.

It was nice to see the cinema busy – I've been to two smaller independent venues with social distancing, but this was the busiest I've been to in the past 18 months. There was a mix of people wearing face coverings, and the fancier seats that are now more common in large cinemas meant it didn't feel excessively crowded or claustrophobic. Also ventilation and air con meant it felt cool and comfortable. **Lily Orset, 21, illustrator, Leeds**

### **‘A little long’**

I enjoyed it and felt it moved away from the more formulaic films – the nods to previous characters and films were more discreet and touching than previous Craig outings. It was a little long, particularly in the third act, and for that still rates below Casino Royale for me. **Pete Morrison, Edinburgh**

## ‘Quite simply the best Bond’



Andy Payne

Quite simply the best [James Bond](#) film I've seen, and I've seen them all, many at the cinema. The plot, craft, wit, acting, production and the numerous hat tips to previous Bond films were simply brilliant. The denouement was up there with Skyfall. And the title is once again perfectly apt.

My wife and I were lucky enough to go to a screening on Wednesday as Bafta patrons at White City House – it was our first time back at the pictures. Everything was really well handled and people were respectful of personal space, and very polite and considerate. Seeing and hearing the film on the big screen was just wonderful and made me realise what a treat going to the cinema is. **Andy Payne, 58, Wiltshire**

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/sep/30/readers-review-daniel-craig-in-no-time-to-die-film-cinema-james-bond>

[Women report Afghanistan](#)[Global development](#)

## ‘I don’t know where to go’: uncertain fate of the women in Kabul’s shelters



Taliban members in front of a mural depicting a woman behind barbed wire in Kabul, Afghanistan. Photograph: Felipe Dana/AP

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# HUMANITY UNITED

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*Amie Ferris-Rotman and Zahra Nader*

Fri 1 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

Zari was seven years old when her parents died, forcing her to move in with her uncle. But when he died four years later, his two widows beat Zari and forced her to work long hours weaving carpets. During her teenage years, Zari tried to kill herself.

After her suicide attempt, Zari, now 28, moved into a shelter for abused women. For the past eight years she has held on to the belief that things would get better. She made friends and learned to sew clothes, eventually teaching others to do the same.

But with the Taliban now in control of [Afghanistan](#), she risks losing everything all over again.

Shortly after the hardline group swept to power in mid-August, ending the American-led war, the small shelter sent several of its residents home. Zari and four other women who also have no family are the only ones remaining.

Overnight, the unmarked building tucked away in the Afghan capital went from her sanctuary to a place of danger. “The (staff) curse us, they tell us,

‘Your life is in your own hands. You can go anywhere you want.’ I am scared. I don’t know where to go,” said Zari, who spoke to the Guardian on the condition that we didn’t use her real name.

The shelter is one of nearly 30 such facilities in Afghanistan. Built up over the past 20 years, they operated as a discreet and often hidden part of the international community’s commitment to advancing the rights of Afghan women. Most of the women’s cases were resolved within months, but some spent years at the shelter, learning new skills so they could reintegrate into society.

Over the past six weeks, this crucial lifeline has all but disappeared. Most of the shelters have closed their doors at the request of the [Taliban](#), meaning women have either been sent home, often back to their abusers, or moved to secret locations. For those still operating, such as Zari’s, the future is uncertain. Of the three shelter directors who spoke to the Guardian, none are taking in new women.



Women and their children in Pul-e-Charkhi prison in Kabul last week. When the Taliban took control of Pul-e-Khumri, 20 women in the northern city’s only shelter were given a choice: return to their abusive families, or go to the abandoned women’s section of Pul-e-Charkhi. Photograph: Felipe Dana/AP

The fate of the shelters symbolises the struggle for gender equality and the capacity to tackle violence against women in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. The Islamist group has closed the women's affairs ministry, replacing it with the headquarters for its “morality police”, created an all-male government and banned girls from attending secondary school. [Human Rights Watch](#) has documented Taliban abuses against women since they took over, including seeking out high-profile women, compulsory dress codes and denying freedom of movement outside their homes.

[Mahbooba Seraj](#), a veteran women's rights activist and manager of a shelter for 30 women in Kabul, says the Taliban are still figuring out what to do about women's refuges. “They're afraid that women in the shelters will leave, and end up on the streets and enter prostitution, which is very possible,” she says by phone from Kabul. “And they do not want that.”

Two weeks ago, 15 Taliban police officers , including secret police, visited Seraj's shelter over several days, noting residents' names and snooping around. The women wore veils so they could not be identified, Seraj said.

Seraj told the Taliban that their visit was exceptional – a man had never crossed her shelter's threshold before. “They looked at me as if they didn't believe me. And one policeman asked, ‘Even the Americans?’ I laughed and said, ‘Neither American nor Afghan. Period.’ Why they thought Americans visited is beyond me.”

Now Seraj, the 73-year-old founder of the Afghan Women's Network, an umbrella rights group, wants to know what the Taliban are planning for abused women. Even before the group seized power, Afghanistan regularly topped the list of countries with the poorest protections for women.

“The problems of the women of Afghanistan are the same as they were before the Taliban came to power. Women are still being abused, still have abusive families and are still drug addicts.” Despite a landmark 2009 law on the elimination of violence against women, more than half of all Afghan women reported physical abuse and of those who were married, 59% were in forced unions, according to [government studies](#).

The past 20 years have proved how invaluable protection services are for Afghan society, said Kevin Schumacher, deputy executive director at Women for Afghan Women, a Washington-based nonprofit that manages the largest network of shelters in the country. “Next time there’s a gross violation of human rights … and the victim happens to be a woman, where is she going to go? Society does not function based on our ideological views. If the Taliban want to run a country, they need to have answers for these very real social needs.”



A 17-year-old holds her month-old son at a women's shelter in Kabul in 2017. Managed by the charity Women for Afghan Women, the shelter provides sanctuary in a country where rape, abuse and forced marriages are common. Photograph: Rebecca Conway/AFP/Getty

However, this is not the first time Afghan women have been at risk of losing their safe houses. The previous, American-backed government repeatedly tried to bring the shelters under its control, describing them as corrupt brothels full of drug-addled women. In 2011, the government wanted to subject women entering shelters to medically baseless and humiliating “virginity tests”. International donors who fund the refuges successfully prevented the takeover.

The US state department, which had split funding of the shelters with the UN, estimates that about 2,000 women and girls – mostly in Kabul – have used the shelters each year. A state department spokesperson said it spent \$11m (£8m) on the shelters annually.

It is now unclear what funding, if any, the shelters can expect. Afghanistan is bracing for economic collapse and humanitarian disaster, compounded by the worst drought in decades. During the Nato-led war, foreign aid propped up the Afghan economy, and its fate will now depend on whether or not the Taliban can garner support from its former enemies. Despite the [Taliban's plea to the UN last week](#) for legitimacy, no country has recognised its government.

Earlier this month the UN managed to secure \$1.2bn in emergency support for Afghanistan, but there is no guarantee these funds will be gender-sensitive. A 2019 report by the [International Rescue Committee](#) found that only 0.2% of global humanitarian funding from 2016–18 addressed gender-based violence.

“As donors look to try to stem the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan they should remember to put some of that effort specifically toward helping women,” said Heather Barr, associate director of the women’s rights division at Human Rights Watch. “As the Taliban have cut off so many women’s ability to earn a living, it is also urgently important to save, as much as possible, protection services for women and girls facing violence.”



Since the Taliban takeover, images of women advertising beauty salons have been removed or covered up. Photograph: Bernat Armangué/AP

When a Kabul-based shelter that once housed 80 women closed during the Taliban takeover, its cook lost her income as well as a way to provide for her extended family. “My mother and I were the breadwinners but now we both sit at home, not knowing how we will survive,” says the 30-year-old, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Since last year she cooked, twice a day, receiving £190 a month and independence from her abusive husband, who was a crystal meth addict. Her mother, who was the cook at another shelter funded by the same western NGO, also lost her job.

“Now that I am locked up in my house, I suffer a lot, mentally and financially,” the daughter says. She fears for her own two daughters, who were meant to enter secondary school next year. “As an illiterate Afghan woman, I was working to help my two daughters go to school but now they can’t even get an education.”

In the UK, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 and the [domestic abuse helpline](#) is 0808 2000 247. In the US, the [suicide prevention lifeline](#) is 1-800-273-8255 and the [domestic violence hotline](#) is 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).

In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is on 13 11 14 and the national [family violence counselling service](#) is on 1800 737 732. Other international helplines can be found via [www.befrienders.org](#)

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## [Afghanistan](#)

# Uncertainty hovers over Helmand's schools as Taliban ban older girls



Primary school girls in Malalay school in Lashkar Gah, Helmand, where the principal said the Taliban had told him to restart classes for younger pupils.  
Photograph: Emma Graham-Harrison



[Emma Graham-Harrison](#) in Lashkar Gah

Thu 30 Sep 2021 08.00 EDT

The walls of the Malalay school, in the centre of Lashkar Gah, Helmand, are pockmarked with bullets from the last weeks of bitter fighting between the [Taliban](#) and government forces, the glass in its windows shattered by a blast.

Its teachers have not been paid for two months and several say they were bombed out of their homes in the final battles, but they are staggering on, somehow, for their students, most of them girls.

“My home has been destroyed by a bombing, even my shoes have been ripped to pieces, but I am still willing to come here and work,” said one geography teacher, Arezoo Sayedi, who shared photos of fragments from the shell that ripped apart her home weeks earlier. “We are all crowded into just one room, to try and avoid the mosquitoes.”

They are missing almost half their students and unclear about the future of their jobs. The Taliban have brought in a [de facto ban on education for teenage girls](#). Boys in grades 7 to 12 have been back at school for nearly two weeks, while girls have been ordered to stay at home.

Those girls make up 1,600 of the Malalay school's 3,600 female students, and it is unclear if they will ever be allowed back, or what will happen to the jobs of the women employed to teach them. The school also educates 600 boys in segregated classes in grades 1 to 3.

Teachers who are mothers of teenage girls say they will leave [Afghanistan](#) unless their daughters are allowed to study, even though they want to stay in their homes and jobs. "My daughter is in 8th grade and she is still at home," said one teacher, whose family fled Afghanistan the first time the Taliban came to power, a generation ago, allowing her to get an education. "If schools don't restart here, our family is ready to go and be refugees again."

The Taliban have asked women – many of them educated abroad last time the group were in power – to return to work in the healthcare and education sectors, while blocking the training of a new generation. The irony is not lost on Afghan women.



A damaged school on 8 August 2021 after airstrikes in Lashkar Gah.  
Photograph: Abdul khaliq/AP

"A society without women is not a society. We need educated women to become professionals. Women need female doctors, they shouldn't have to

go and see a man when they are sick,” said the Malalay schoolteacher who plans to leave if her daughter cannot study. She asked not to be named.

There has been no official statement about plans for women’s education, although several Taliban officials have said that girls secondary education will resume soon. But without any details of why girls are still at home, many Afghan women who lived through the Taliban’s rule in the 1990s are sceptical.

Then the group claimed to recognise women’s right to an education under Islam, but said security was not good enough for girls to attend school. That near total ban lasted throughout the five years they were in power, though some girls were educated in underground schools, or went to primary classes dressed as boys.

The trend was repeated in parts of Helmand that the Taliban controlled before they seized the rest of Afghanistan this August, leading to fears they would ban girls’ education nationwide.

However, in Lashkar Gah, Abdullah Spilanay, a school principal, said that the Taliban had and told him to restart classes for younger students, although they had not provided any money for the school or its teachers.

“The Taliban contacted us, and said there is no problem with women teaching girls, the teachers can carry on working,” said Spilanay, who has been at the school for two decades and is the only male teacher working there. “It was a surprising day. They came here and met with 40 teachers, called us brothers and sisters, and what worries we had in our hearts [about being able to continue work] have been dispelled.”

The joyful chatter of young girls heading to and from class filters into the staffroom where we talk.

This reassurance has not been converted into the funds the school needs, however. “Economically there is no reason for them to keep teaching,” Spilanay said of the staff, who have not been paid for two months.

They are mostly still showing up, nonetheless, although there are some gaps. A mother who had come to collect a sixth grader said her daughter was back at school but was not being taught. “We’ve been coming here for three days because we were told classes have restarted, but no one can tell her where the teachers are.”

Some teachers are trying to patch up their homes, damaged in the intense fighting; others are having to look for ways to support themselves after so long without a salary. They want the international community, which has heavily subsidised education in Afghanistan, to start cash flowing again.

“I’m very happy seeing our students back, but it is difficult without a salary,” said Seema. “For this country and the Afghan people, the foreigners should give [funds] for that.”



Taliban commando fighters stand guard in Lashkar Gah on 27 August 2021.  
Photograph: Abdul khaliq/AP

While the ban on secondary education continues, those in charge of international funding face painful decisions. There is no appetite to pay for a system that excludes girls from high school, but unless schools such as Malalay get money, they may struggle to keep their doors open for younger students.

Education for women has always been an uphill struggle in Helmand, especially at secondary level, even though the UK has [built 90 schools](#) and spent tens of millions of pounds on girls' education nationwide.

Two years ago, [officials admitted](#) that outside Lashkar Gah and the neighbouring Gereshk district not a single girl had graduated from high school. Overall, just 4,000 girls had completed high school in Helmand in the two decades to 2019, the province's education department said.

Obstacles to girls' education included insecurity, Taliban opposition, poverty, child marriage and a shortage of female teachers and of schools.

The years of war have been damaging in Lashkar Gah, and devastating in rural areas. In the city, Taliban threats against girls education and militant attacks on female students in other parts of the country cast a long shadow. In the countryside, well-built school compounds were often co-opted as military bases, teachers were hard to find or keep, and fighting meant parents were reluctant to allow their children to attend those schools that somehow remained open.

For some teachers in Malalay, the relative calm the Taliban has brought means now is the time to try to expand education and recover from that troubled legacy. "There are no security issues now. We lost too many people like teachers – one bullet, one bomb blast and 20, 40 years of education and experience are gone," said one teacher, who did not want to give her name.

"If they offered us all of America, I wouldn't go. We should join together and help this country, help Lashkar Gah. We are secure here now, so we should build."

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# **Coronavirus live: one in 20 secondary school pupils in England had Covid last week – as it happened**

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## Health

# Australia set to restart international travel in November, Scott Morrison says



A Qantas aircraft prepares to take off at Sydney airport. Changes coming when Australia reaches 80% vaccination mean there will be no travel restrictions for vaccinated Australians entering or leaving the country. Photograph: James D Morgan/Getty Images

*[Paul Karp](#) and [Amy Remeikis](#)*

Fri 1 Oct 2021 04.11 EDT

Australian states will be able to reopen to international travellers in November once they hit their 80% vaccination targets, under a plan outlined by [Scott Morrison](#) on Friday.

The plan would see states follow the New South Wales lead in allowing travel for vaccinated passengers with pre-flight Covid testing and one week of home quarantine.

States with existing community spread of Covid-19 will likely be first to join the plan, including Victoria which welcomed the announcement. But it provoked fierce pushback from the Queensland premier, [Annastacia Palaszczuk](#).

Palaszczuk said it was “disappointing” state and territory leaders were not briefed ahead of a national cabinet meeting on Friday and Queensland would not open until it was safe to do so. She called on the federal government to boost hospital funding.

Stakeholders hoping for the resumption of travel – including business groups, the university sector and the airports association – welcomed the news.

Qantas on Friday announced it would bring forward the resumption of international flights by a month, to 14 November, beginning with three return flights a week from Sydney to London and Sydney to Los Angeles.

In July [the national cabinet agreed](#) to gradually reopen international travel once 80% of people aged 16 and over were vaccinated nationally and in the relevant state.

South Australia and NSW are currently trialling one-week home quarantine for vaccinated travellers – which will vastly increase the number of people the states can accept.

The NSW government, with Morrison’s endorsement, has announced it will restart travel once it reaches the 80% target regardless of the vaccination rollout’s progress nationally.

On Friday, Morrison announced other jurisdictions would also be able to reopen once that mark was reached, with fully vaccinated Australians, permanent residents and family members prioritised first for travel to Australia.

In a statement, Morrison and relevant ministers said that following the NSW and SA trials “it is anticipated that states and territories” will reopen allowing:

- Seven-day home quarantine for Australian citizens and permanent residents fully vaccinated with a vaccine approved for use in Australia or “recognised” by the Therapeutic Goods Administration.
- Fourteen-day hotel quarantine for anyone not vaccinated or vaccinated with a vaccine not approved or recognised by the TGA, with increased arrival caps for these travellers

The federal government will also offer facilitated flights into any state or territory that agrees to commence seven day home quarantine trials for returning Australians.

Morrison told reporters in Canberra that vaccinated Australians would not face “red lane” arrangements banning travel to certain countries, but the government would continue assessing a “green lane” for quarantine-free travel to certain countries, such as New Zealand.

Morrison revealed that in addition to Pfizer (Comirnaty), AstraZeneca (Vaxzevria), Moderna (Spikevax) and Covid-19 vaccine Janssen, the TGA had advised that Coronavac (Sinovac) and Covishield (AstraZeneca/Serum Institute of India) should be recognised.

Australian citizens and permanent residents who cannot be vaccinated, including children and those with medical exemptions, will be treated as vaccinated for the purposes of their travel.

“The government’s intention is that once changes are made in November, the current overseas travel restrictions related to Covid-19 will be removed and Australians will be able to travel subject to any other travel advice and limits, as long as they are fully vaccinated and those countries’ border settings allow,” Morrison said in the statement.

“These changes mean there will be no travel restrictions if you are a vaccinated Australian entering or leaving our shores.”

The federal government has [developed vaccine passports based on QR codes](#) that will certify a passenger's vaccine status, to be ready by the end of October.

Palaszczuk said states had not seen detail of the plan ahead of a national cabinet meeting on Friday afternoon, and she would not agree to it sight unseen.

"It's a bit disappointing we haven't been given that due courtesy before national cabinet," she told reporters in Brisbane.

Asked about the fact residents of Sydney will probably be able travel overseas before they can go to Cairns, Palaszczuk noted "Sydney is in lockdown" and Queenslanders would not want "a massive outbreak of Delta in Cairns".

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Palaszczuk said international travel would resume when it was safe to do so, which would depend on achieving "high rates of vaccination" – including a plan to vaccinate children – and improved hospital capacity.

"And that means a big injection of funds from the federal government into the states to make sure that the hospitals will be able to cope with the growth in cases that will happen," she said.

Morrison brushed off the demand, telling reporters running public hospitals was a state responsibility and warning the pandemic should not be used "as an excuse for shake-down politics".

"They just need to get on with the job, get their hospitals ready. We have showered the states in cash when it comes to the health system."

The Victorian premier, [Daniel Andrews](#), told reporters in Melbourne opening the international border was a "fantastic announcement" and

promised at 80% vaccination rates there would be greater “freedom of movement”, including for those wanting to travel into Victoria from interstate.

Ahead of the meeting, the Australian Capital Territory chief minister, Andrew Barr, said fully vaccinated Canberrans were likely to be able to travel overseas this year.

## Q&A

### **Where can I get vaccinated in Australia?**

Show

The majority of Australians aged 18 and over are now eligible for a Covid vaccination if they are willing to consider the AstraZeneca vaccine, and provided they do not have a history of specific health conditions.

In addition to the government’s official eligibility checker, which lists some clinics near your location which might have vaccination appointments available, there are a number of other helpful resources that can help you to find somewhere that has appointments open.

You can find our comprehensive guide to finding a vaccination appointment [here](#).

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Barr said he was aware the issue would be discussed on Friday but it was “pretty disgraceful” national cabinet papers were not available to states and territories, until late the night before or “immediately before” a meeting.

National cabinet later met for just over two hours to discuss the day’s events, but no major decisions were made.

[NSW premier Gladys Berejiklian announced her shock resignation at 1pm on Friday](#) and therefore was not present for the meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for 5 November, when jurisdictions will have a much better idea

of how the second and third phase of the national plan targets will be met, including an update on the health system capacity, and how the home quarantine trials have played out.

Before the announcement of the reopening plan, [foreign airlines said international tourism was unlikely to resume](#) at scale by Christmas due to uncertainty and low demand from international tourists to come to Australia, given the one-week quarantine.

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Photograph: Tim Robberts/Stone RF

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

The Qantas chief executive, Alan Joyce, said “the early reopening of Australia’s international borders will mean so much to so many people”.

“We know Australians can’t wait to travel overseas and be reunited with their loved ones, and literally thousands are waiting to come back home, so this faster restart is fantastic news.”

The Flight Centre chief executive, Graham Turner, welcomed the reopening plan as “positive” but said it was “a pity it wasn’t announced earlier” and it is still “very conservative” because other countries opened up “well before 80% vaccination rates”.

“Even seven days of quarantine is pretty unreasonable if a passenger is fully vaccinated and tests negative,” he told Guardian Australia.

Turner said his company was prepared to be the “lead challenger” in a high court case if premiers don’t release “reasonable” plans to reopen.

“One thing everyone will accept is that all states will have to totally open – whether it’s next month, or in six months, it’s got to happen at some time,” he said. “There will be Covid, whether it’s from overseas or interstate.”

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## [Air transport](#)

# Demand for private jets soars as rich travellers try to avoid ‘mosh pit’



Private jets emit about 20 times more carbon dioxide per passenger mile than commercial flights, according to industry data. Photograph: EXTREME-PHOTOGRAPHER/Getty Images

*[Rupert Neate](#) Wealth correspondent*

*[@RupertNeate](#)*

Thu 30 Sep 2021 11.45 EDT

Private jet providers are experiencing “unprecedented demand” from wealthy customers seeking to avoid the “mosh pit” of commercial flights on autumn getaways as coronavirus travel restrictions ease.

Flexjet and PrivateFly, which supply private jets to rich families and business executives, said they were “experiencing exceptionally strong

demand” for September and October travel at a time of year when bookings normally fall away.

Flexjet, which offers shared ownership in its fleet of private jets in [Europe](#), said it operated 53% more flights in September than the previous month, bucking the usual seasonal trends.

Marine Eugène, the European managing director of Flexjet and PrivateFly, said: “Our industry in Europe traditionally sees a significant peak in July and August, followed by a tailing off in September – but not this year.

“We are currently experiencing exceptionally strong demand, with the appetite for personal travel not yet sated after a later start to summer due to restrictions, and now business flying is also taking off alongside.”

Eugène said the UK government’s [relaxation of travel restrictions from 4 October](#) and the [US relaxation of rules for vaccinated European visitors](#) propelled the demand for increased private jet flights, with wealthy travellers continuing to make plans for short breaks or holidays by private jet into the autumn period and later than usually seen.

She said business destinations such as Paris, Zurich, Munich, and Amsterdam had climbed back into the top 10 list of European destinations, which were previously dominated by holiday hotspots.

“Many of our Flexjet owners and PrivateFly clients are starting to fly for business again and we are witnessing a release of pent-up demand for in-person meetings,” she added. “We have senior executives and entrepreneurs in sectors such as finance and technology, booking multiple itineraries to see investment targets, or make site visits.

“The US easing of its ban on UK and European travellers from November is also adding to the unusually high demand in the final quarter of the year.”

During the early stages of the pandemic, wealthy people had turned to [chartering private jets for “evacuation flights”](#) out of countries hit by the coronavirus outbreak.

Private jets emit about 20 times more carbon dioxide per passenger mile than commercial flights, according to industry data.

Brian Foley, an aviation analyst, said demand for private jet flights had started to feed through to increased orders for new plane construction after a decline in 2020 that was the first annual fall in new jet deliveries in more than a decade. Foley said the demand was being driven by “well-heeled travellers look[ing] for alternatives to the airlines’ crowded terminals and being shoehorned into a middle seat next to strangers”.

“[They are] looking to private jet charter or fractional ownership to avoid the mosh pit. Objective data showed business jet travel quickly climbing back toward pre-pandemic levels, while airlines continued to languish.”

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Foley said the big private jet manufacturers were reporting twice as many orders for jets as the number they were currently producing, leading to “meaningful ramp-up” in production capabilities.

“Since aeroplane production can’t be increased with the flip of a switch, overall 2021 deliveries won’t be all that different from previous years over the past decade,” he said. “However, as OEMs [original equipment manufacturers] gain confidence that the increased demand is real, and that they can crank out more planes without the risk of unsold units becoming expensive lawn ornaments, the spin-up will become more pronounced.”

His consultancy, Brian Foley Associates, has predicted that about 700 new private jets will be delivered in 2021 – roughly the same as previous years. However, he said a “meaningful ramp-up will begin in 2022 and continue unabated for several years, easily surpassing the 900-unit level for the first time since 2007”.

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## IPOs

# Oxford Covid biotech firm makes stellar debut on London stock market



Sequencing at an Oxford Nanopore laboratory. The firm has provided rapid Covid tests to the UK government, under contracts worth £144m. Photograph: Oxford Nanopore

*[Julia Kollewe](#)*

Thu 30 Sep 2021 13.30 EDT

Oxford Nanopore, whose DNA sequencing technology has been essential in tracking Covid-19 variants globally, has made a stellar stock market debut in London. A rise in its share price of as much as 47% has left the firm valued at almost £5bn.

[The flotation of the Oxford University spin-out](#) has given its chief executive and co-founder, Gordon Sanghera, a fortune on paper of £63m.

Sanghera has not sold any of his 10.3m shares, while the co-founder, Spike Willcocks, the firm's chief business development officer, sold 368,000 shares for £1.56m as part of the initial public offering (IPO). He now holds 4.9m, worth nearly £30m after the jump in value. Clive Brown, the chief technology officer, sold 191,066 shares for £812,000 but still owns 1.7m, worth £10m.

The shares closed up 44% at 612.6p, giving the company a value of £4.9bn, in the first major biotech listing in London since the allergy specialist Circassia floated in 2014.

Nanopore shares had been priced at 425p in the IPO, towards the upper end of its targeted range, which valued the firm at £3.4bn at the start of trading.

Nanopore sells a range of devices for DNA and RNA sequencing, ranging from handheld sequencers to desktop machines that can sequence a whole genome in two hours. Its technology has been used in tracking the spread of Ebola [and Zika](#) in recent years, and Covid-19 variants in the past year across 100 countries. Its vision, says Sanghera, is to enable the “analysis of any living thing, by anyone, anywhere”.

The business was established in 2005, with funding from IP Group, by three scientists who met at Oxford: Sanghera, Willcocks and Hagan Bayley, a professor of chemical biology at the university. It is unclear what Bayley’s holding is in the company and whether he sold any shares, as he is no longer on the board.

Sanghera said: “Today is a very proud day for the entire Oxford Nanopore team, but we believe we are only in the foothills of a long and exciting journey. We are living on the cusp of the genomic era.”

Neil Wilson, analyst at Markets.com, said: “The company has really hit a sweet spot since it makes devices to sequence Covid variants, and it’s in a sector that will only become more important, attract more attention and more investment over the coming years.”

Nanopore sold £524m of shares in the IPO and issued 82.4m new shares, raising £350m, while existing shareholders sold 41m shares.

Other technology stock market debuts in London have been mixed this year, with the [cybersecurity group Darktrace](#) seeing its shares more than triple in value since its April float, while the much-hyped IPO of the food app [Deliveroo flopped](#).

Nanopore has laid out plans to tap into the growing genomic sequencing market, estimated to be worth \$5.7bn globally. At present, the company's sequencing technology is mainly used by universities and labs conducting scientific research, but it sees great potential in areas such as infectious disease, immune profiling and cancer diagnostics, food safety and agriculture.

It has also provided rapid Covid-19 tests to the UK government, under contracts worth £144m. Its revenues more than doubled to £114m last year, and it is aiming to reduce its losses and break even in the next five years.

The company has given Sanghera a “limited anti-takeover” share, approved by shareholders, that would enable him to veto any hostile takeover.

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## 2021.10.01 - Opinion

- Britain needs clear laws to protect LGBT+ people from ‘conversion therapies’
- A winter of discontent is unlikely to dissolve the Tories’ support
- The rail franchise system is so confusing, no wonder Southeastern mislaid £25m
- Slamming the cell door on Wayne Couzens won’t fix women’s fragile faith in the police

[Opinion](#)[LGBT rights](#)

## Britain needs clear laws to protect LGBT+ people from ‘conversion therapies’

[Helena Kennedy](#)



A 'ban conversion therapy' protest outside the Cabinet Office in June.  
Photograph: May James/SOPA Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Fri 1 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

In May, at the opening of parliament, the Queen finally announced that her government would bring forward legislation to ban the damaging practice of “conversion therapy”. These practices cause untold harm to millions of LGBT+ people around the world, leading many to believe the only way to deal with their psychological trauma and shame is to take their lives.

These practices, motivated by a misguided belief that being gay or transgender is wrong, are degrading and psychologically damaging, and constitute a serious violation of the basic human rights of LGBT+ people under international law. Indeed, in some cases it can even amount to torture. A proper reading of international law requires states to take measures to protect LGBT+ people – so this legislation is long overdue.

The government is undoubtedly under pressure from some religious institutions to severely limit such a ban, on the fallacious grounds that it would interfere with religious freedom. Consequently, a group of lawyers, campaigners and parliamentarians have co-authored [the Cooper report](#), in memory of our dear friend and human rights champion [Jonathan Cooper OBE](#), who died while bringing us all together to work on a framework for this legislation. [It sets out](#) how law can best be framed to ensure that we end these practices in Britain. Research shows they are [still being carried out](#) in a variety of medical, religious and cultural settings around the UK.

Many have questioned whether it is possible to agree a clear definition of so-called conversion therapy. We recommend that it is simply referred to as “any practice that seeks to suppress, ‘cure’ or change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity”. This then captures both the practices of those who are intent on trying to “heal” people to make them “normal” as well as those so-called therapies whose purpose is to suppress or hide a person’s innate sexual or gender identity. This is tragically demonstrated in the powerful film [Boy Erased](#), where a religious minister tries to “heal” young gay men through prayer while also endeavouring to teach them to act in more “manly” ways, so as to conform to accepted patriarchal norms in their community.

To combat this, we recommend the government consider a two-pronged approach, utilising both the criminal and civil law. We see criminalisation as essential when dealing with human rights abuses, as this draws a clear line as to what acts will and will not be tolerated in a civilised society. This should sit alongside new civil law measures, such as protection orders, which will help provide immediate support to those most at risk – such as LGBT+ children or vulnerable LGBT+ adults. This will ensure that perpetrators are left in no doubt that, if they continue their harmful practices,

they will face the full force of the law. At the same time, victims will be reassured that the state is there to protect them if they are able to reach out and call for help.

A raft of other measures is needed to help ensure we can bring these practices finally to an end – such as whistleblowing mechanisms and bans on the promotion, advertising or advocating of conversion practices. Critically, we must also consider educational programmes targeting religious and cultural communities, to help them understand the harm caused by these abusive practices, and how they feed into a culture that undermines the safety of the whole LGBT+ community.

The panel heard too many testimonies of the harm and shame suffered by those who have been subjected to hours of prayer and other spiritual practices to know that we must ensure that *all* forms of conversion practices are criminalised. The most common forms of conversion practices in Britain are in religious and cultural settings, making it imperative that the ban includes these practices.

We therefore recommend legislation that criminalises specific types of condemnatory prayer, including exorcisms, that attempt to suppress, “cure” or change sexual orientation or gender identity. This will then stop LGBT+ people being prayed for at “ex-gay” conferences, such as shown in the Netflix drama Pray Away, or in one-to-one “ministry sessions”.

However, it would rightly permit any prayer that seeks to help a person come to terms with who they are. It would also permit people to preach to their congregations on these sensitive topics in an inclusive way. The report’s approach is welcomed by the UN special rapporteur for freedom of religion or belief as it provides limited restrictions on the right to manifest one’s religion that are necessary, justified and proportionate.

Finally, it is our view that it is not possible for an individual to consent to any form of conversion practices, given the significant levels of coercion involved. Many survivors have testified how they actively sought out and “consented” to conversion practices but then experienced severe, long-term psychological trauma as a result.

The government should be urged to implement legislation without delay. We question why yet further consultation is needed – too many lives have already been affected by this form of abuse and countless more are still at risk. What is needed is action that utilises the full breadth of the law and leaves no loophole open for perpetrators to continue abusing the human rights of others.

- Baroness Helena Kennedy QC is chair of the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute
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## A winter of discontent is unlikely to dissolve the Tories' support

[Andy Beckett](#)



London's Leicester Square in February 1979, during the winter of discontent, as public service workers went on strike, leaving uncollected rubbish piled up in streets. Photograph: PA News

Fri 1 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

National crises can reveal the landscape of power in a society, and how it's changing. Who's losing power and who's gaining it; who has less power than was previously thought; and who has more.

A crisis can alter the distribution of power or accelerate changes that are already under way. In a democracy, if voters like the new world the crisis has created, it endures.

Britain may be entering a [protracted period of crisis](#) now, one that matches or even exceeds the emergencies of the 1970s. Despite all the shocks that have happened since, from the [riots under Margaret Thatcher](#) to the financial crisis under Gordon Brown, in chaotic times it is the comparison with the 1970s, and specifically the 1978-9 [winter of discontent](#), that much of Britain still instinctively reaches for. What can the dramatic transfers of power during that winter tell us about what might happen to power in Britain if this autumn's disruption continues?

In the late 1970s the Labour party was in office, but only in a limited sense was it in power. [Trade unions](#) were at the peak of their political and social influence. At two general elections in 1974 – the first producing a minority government, the second a government with a majority of three – voters had narrowly decided that Labour was the best party to work with the unions, hopefully to the benefit of the country. The two Labour premiers that followed, Harold Wilson and then Jim Callaghan, were not dominant figures but fixers – political lion tamers to those Labour voters who, rightly or wrongly, feared the unions.

For four years, the lion tamers' tricks worked reasonably well. A "social contract" was negotiated between the unions and the government, which met union demands such as increases to welfare benefits in return for workers accepting modest, often below-inflation pay increases. The arrangement did not produce a particularly dynamic economy but a fairer one: by the late 1970s, Britain was as equal as it has ever been.

Yet in the autumn of 1978, workers who had had enough of pay restraint started to rebel. Strikes spread, and the government failed to persuade trade unionists to call them off. As everyday essentials from food delivery to healthcare were disrupted, just like now, the government's lack of power was suddenly obvious.

Contrary to the story usually told about the 1970s – which has been set by the right – the Callaghan government's support did not collapse. At the 1979 election, the [Labour](#) vote actually went up by 75,000. Many Britons refused to accept that Labour's power-sharing approach to government – which much of Europe still follows – was now obsolete. For anyone hoping that

this autumn's crises will quickly dissolve support for Boris Johnson's government, the loyalty of voters to Callaghan is a cautionary tale.

What decisively changed the balance of power in Britain in the late 1970s was a surge of support for the [Conservatives](#). With clear rhetoric and ruthless timing, as the winter of discontent raged, Thatcher offered voters not compromise with the unions but domination of them: a Britain where employers would be much more powerful than workers once again. That is the world we still live in – for now. The value suddenly placed on lorry drivers and other essential workers this autumn could just be the beginning of that world's unravelling.

Yet in other ways, the crises of the 1970s and now are worlds apart. Much of the current chaos stems from a government having not too little power but too much. The Conservatives' long hold on Downing Street, their supposedly impregnable majority, and their increasingly obvious belief that they will never be seriously punished politically for their mistakes have all contributed to Britain's supply-chain, essential worker and energy market problems. Only a hugely overconfident government would have risked worsening Britain's well-known vulnerabilities in these areas by insisting on the hardest-possible Brexit, or would have reacted so slowly and casually when this year's crises began.

Yet in the public mind the connection between excessive power and incompetence is not always easily made. Now, as in the 1970s, much of the British media are more interested in exposing political weakness, such as Labour's divisions, than they are in attacking a government for arrogance and excessive strength. Rightwing newspapers are often bullies, and they respect politicians who behave in the same way.

Similarly, many voters like the Tories, and Johnson in particular, precisely because they seem so dominant. Modern Conservatism, with its open contempt for opponents, its rhetorical aggression, and its puffed-up policy concepts such as "global Britain", is often a display of strength – disproportionately appealing to male and older voters whose own social and physical potency may be ebbing. To accept that much of this strength is a delusion – that Britain is just another European country and the Tories are just another party struggling to govern – would be a big climbdown for

many Tory voters, after all the bragging and big hopes on the right over the last few years.

But such a moment of realisation could happen. In a crisis, voters can be surprisingly placid and then suddenly shift. During the winter of discontent, the Tories' poll ratings were flat for the first few weeks, then shot upwards, as many voters concluded that they liked Thatcher's anti-union solutions.

Keir Starmer is no Thatcher, in political craft or charisma. And his party, with its sometimes confusing mix of green, leftwing and rightwing policies, does not offer as clear an alternative to the status quo as the Tories did in 1979. So the likely outcome of any plunge in Conservative support is a situation where neither main party is particularly strong – a scenario that is already beginning to play out in the polls.

As the mid-1970s showed, that sort of political stalemate can last for quite a long time. It would be an improvement on now – ending the Tories' increasingly disastrous supremacy. But a return to weaker governments might be unsettling for a country that since Thatcher has got used to strong ones. Power corrupts, but it also reassures.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Rail industry](#)

## The rail franchise system is so confusing, no wonder Southeastern mislaid £25m

[Jonn Elledge](#)



‘As recently as Monday there was no reason to think it was in trouble.’ A Southeastern train at London Waterloo East station Photograph: Steve Hawkins Photography/Alamy

Fri 1 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

Here’s what we know for sure. Southeastern, the train operating company (TOC) owned mostly by the UK’s Go-Ahead Group and partly by the French/Canadian Keolis, has been running routes in south-east London, Kent and Sussex since 2006.

Its passenger satisfaction ratings placed it pretty much in the middle of the pack – not great, not terrible – and there were no signs of imminent financial crisis, so none of the usual reasons that TOCs flunk out applied. As recently as Monday there was no reason to think it was in trouble.

It was in big trouble. On Tuesday morning, the [Department for Transport announced](#) that the company had breached its franchise agreement, by hanging on to more than £25m in taxpayer funding it should, by all rights, have paid back. As a result, the operator was to be ejected from the franchise, and management transferred to the operator of last resort – in normal human language, the state – on 17 October. The change should be invisible to passengers, but, not for the first time, the Conservative government has effectively nationalised a train operating company.

By my count, [it's the third](#). Virgin East Coast gave up the LNER franchise in 2018, citing financial difficulties (in short: not making enough money). Arriva's Northern [followed in January 2020](#) after years of poor performance, partly the result of government infrastructure investment that had been pledged but never appeared. Outside England, the Labour government in Cardiff [did the same](#) with the Welsh network, after operator Keolis Amey struggled with the collapse in passenger numbers brought on by the pandemic. All these were precipitated by big, and visible crises. Southeastern was not.

This is where it gets complicated because as things stand the DfT and the TOC have different versions of events. According to Southeastern, all this has been a misunderstanding. A technical note buried deep in last year's accounts acknowledged the problem, and warned shareholders that "outflow of resources could be in the region of £8m" – a big underestimate – in such dry language as to suggest management had little idea where they would soon find themselves without a paddle.

The company has since [admitted its error](#), apologised, repaid the money and accepted the resignation of its finance director. "We recognise that mistakes have been made and we sincerely apologise to the DfT," Go-Ahead's chairwoman Clare Hollingsworth said, making exemplary use of the passive

voice. “We are working constructively with the DfT towards a settlement of this matter.”

The DfT, though, seems not to be buying it. In its statement, it said [it considers the underpayment](#) to be “a significant breach of the good faith obligation within the franchise agreement”: you hardly need the Enigma machine to decode that. For good measure, the government said it would consider “further options for enforcement action”, including fines. Whether the government is really as angry as it claims, or whether it’s meant as a warning to others, is not exactly clear.

Something else that’s not clear is which of these two competing versions of events is correct, in large part because the rail franchising system implemented by the Conservative government of the mid-1990s is so horrendously complicated. Contracts formalise the relationship not just between government and operator, but the infrastructure agency Network Rail and often suppliers, too. As a result, they can run to hundreds of pages, and it can cost £10m just to bid. All of this is brilliant if you’re, say, a specialist lawyer or consultant. How the rest of us benefit is rather less clear.

In this specific case, the issue seems to have been the complicated track access fee Southeastern had to pay to run trains on HS1, the line constructed for Eurostar, which doubles as a fast route to eastern Kent. Unusually, that line isn’t managed by Network Rail, but by the private HS1 Ltd, and so required special arrangements in which the government pays the variable access fee up front but expects any unspent money back. It’s the difference between the money the taxpayer provided to fund that access and the money it cost that’s lain unnoticed by the government for seven years. It’s a mark of how complicated the system is that it is even plausible it was genuinely unnoticed by the team at Southeastern, too.

Many problems with current rail contracts will be cleared away with the demise of the franchise system, trailed in the [Williams-Shapps plan](#) published last May. In future, rather than all this mucking about with contracts, everything will be run through a new state agency, Great British Railways, which will simply tell operators how many trains to run and pay them a fee for running them. There’ll be no more pretence at transferring financial risk from public to private sectors, as if the government could ever

really allow a network to just stop, and rather than sharing in profit or loss operators will simply take a fee to deliver a service.

If that had been the system for the past few years, HS1's weird relationship to the rest of the network means that the track access payments would still be necessary. The TOC might even have failed to pay money back. But it seems extremely unlikely that, in a simpler system, it would have gone unnoticed for seven years. Simpler rail contracts would have meant less trouble all round.

- Jonn Elledge is a former assistant editor of the New Statesman and the author of *The Compendium of (Not Quite) Everything: All the Facts You Didn't Know You Wanted to Know*
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[OpinionPolice](#)

## **Slamming the cell door on Wayne Couzens won't fix women's fragile faith in the police**

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)





Demonstrators turn on their phone torches at a vigil for Sarah Everard, Clapham Common, London, March 2021. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

Thu 30 Sep 2021 12.40 EDT

The haunting thing is that it happened in such plain sight.

A couple driving home through [London](#) late at night saw a man putting police handcuffs on a young woman on the street. Something unspeakable was unfolding right before their eyes but they didn't know – how could they have known? – what they were seeing. They simply thought it was an undercover arrest.

Heartbreakingly, at first Sarah Everard would have thought so too. When Wayne Couzens [drove up beside her](#) as she walked home from a friend's house, brandishing his police warrant card and claiming she was under arrest for supposedly breaching lockdown regulations, she didn't resist. She did what the policeman said, just as millions of women would have. Only once she was in his car, powerless to escape, would she have realised something was terribly wrong.

There could be no more grotesque betrayal of trust, no more rank abuse of power. The judge who this week sentenced Couzens to a rare [whole-life](#)

[sentence](#) for Sarah's kidnap, rape and murder [rightly cited](#) police officers' unique responsibility to use their "powers of coercion and control" for the public good. But slamming the cell door won't fix shattered faith in the force, and nor will Met commissioner, Cressida Dick, promising merely to "[learn lessons](#)" when her force seemingly failed to spot a killer in its midst.

For Couzens was, in a sense, hiding in plain sight for years. He made female colleagues in his first job so uncomfortable that they nicknamed him "the rapist". He would reportedly stop female motorists, noting their details and then return to [watch their homes](#), and park his patrol car outside schools, checking out teenage girls and their mothers. Most shockingly, he was reported twice [for indecent exposure](#) in London in the weeks before Sarah's murder, yet still somehow managed to continue working. Two fellow officers are [under investigation](#) by the Independent Office for Police Conduct over their handling of those reports. But women will also want to know what lies behind former Met Ch Supt Parm Sandhu's claim, post-sentencing, that female officers are [frightened to report](#) suspicious colleagues, in case the men close ranks and leave them in the lurch when they need backup in a dangerous situation. If policing in this country is by consent, that consent feels suddenly very fragile.

Women are now anxiously asking questions that for some would once have been unthinkable. If you're driving home alone, and an unmarked police car signals for you to stop, should you? How should you respond to a lone woman being arrested on the street? What if a detective knocks on your door, supposedly with a warrant, late at night?

This may all sound naive to some black and brown Britons who learned their suspicion of the police the hard way, and for whom these questions will be nothing new. Some may wonder, too, why cases like that of [Dalian Atkinson](#) – a black ex-footballer who died after being repeatedly Tasered and then kicked in the head by police officer Benjamin Monk, who was jailed this summer for his manslaughter – didn't trigger this kind of national outrage. Of course, it's a form of privilege to have grown up trusting the police, or to have a faith still capable of being shaken.

But "privileged" isn't quite the word for women who have met with callousness or disbelief when reporting their own experiences of sexual or

domestic violence, yet are nonetheless still shocked by the idea of an officer actually committing cold-blooded murder. Now rage at Sarah's betrayal is reaching the places where the police could once count on unthinking support, causing some perhaps to understand for the first time what others have felt for much longer, driving a clamour for change. Dick, who earlier this year said that with a workforce of 44,000, you will occasionally get a 'bad 'un', apologised for an officer who she said had brought shame on his force and acknowledged that for some "a precious bond of trust has been damaged". But she has yet to show she grasps the scale of response needed to restore it. Harriet Harman, the former Labour justice secretary, is right to say Dick should now offer her resignation – but more importantly, that sweeping changes must follow. And so must an independent inquiry.

Murder is rare, and murders like this one vanishingly more so. But Couzens wasn't the only rotten apple in the barrel. Since 2009, at least 15 serving or former police officers have been convicted of murder, in most cases of their wives or girlfriends, according to the Femicide Census database. Over the last two years, more than 125 women have come forward alleging that their police officer partner abused either them or their children, and that may be the tip of the iceberg. Imagine mustering the courage to call 999, knowing it might be one of his mates who is sent to respond. Former Scotland Yard deputy assistant commissioner David Gilbertson has warned of an "epidemic" of hidden violence, including cases where officers in domestic violence units "actively searched out vulnerable women for sexual gratification, and in order to gain access to their children for sexual purposes". Among a grim catalogue unearthed by the Observer was a Met officer dismissed for taking advantage of a rape victim whose case he was investigating.

And yes, that's a handful of rogues among countless decent (and doubtless appalled) officers. But every one is a reminder that predatory men will seek out jobs offering control over women, or cover for exploiting them.

Kate Wilson, an environmental activist duped into a sexual relationship with a man she'd never have slept with had she realised he was an undercover police officer, won a landmark human rights case against the Met on the very day Couzens was sentenced. Heaven knows how many women have stories of more minor, but still disturbing, creepiness.

What happened to Sarah is its own unique tragedy. But in its wider impact the closest comparison is to men exploiting positions of trust – as headteachers, priests, or politicians – to abuse children, or even perhaps with Harold Shipman, the GP thought to have murdered at least 218 elderly patients before being caught. Worried that people would be too terrified to go to the doctor, the Department of Health ordered an independent inquiry to identify the loopholes that allowed Shipman to kill with impunity, and to close them. Restoring female trust in the police now requires the same. The “boundless love” with which Sarah’s family told the court they would remember her must be matched in the criminal justice system by a boundless resolve to change.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
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## China orders energy firms to secure winter fuel supplies at all costs



More than a dozen provinces and regions in China have been forced to impose curbs on energy usage in recent months. Photograph: Yangphoto/Getty Images

*[Phillip Inman](#) and agency*

*[@phillipinman](#)*

Fri 1 Oct 2021 03.12 EDT

China has ordered state-owned energy companies “to do whatever it takes” to secure fuel supplies, putting further pressure on the price of gas paid by already struggling UK energy suppliers.

The vice-premier, Han Zheng, told China’s energy companies to make sure there is enough fuel to keep the country running as Beijing battles to manage

a power crisis that threatens to hit growth in the world's second-biggest economy.

Britain's energy suppliers have come under severe strain in recent months after a [spike in gas prices](#). Several have gone bust after they made promises to customers of maintaining fixed prices that they were unable to honour.

Ministers have faced criticism from business groups for a lack of planning that has left the UK acutely vulnerable to price swings on international energy markets.

A rise in global gas prices, coupled with the soaring cost of diesel and petrol at the pumps after a driver shortage, is expected to help push UK inflation above 4% over the coming months, hitting the living standards of millions of people.

China has been hit by widespread power cuts that have closed or partly shut factories, hitting production and global supply chains.

Beijing is seeking to secure supplies of gas and coal for its power stations, which still provide more than 50% of the country's electricity generation.

The crisis has been caused by a confluence of factors, including rising overseas demand as economies reopen, record coal prices, state electricity price controls and tough emissions targets. More than a dozen provinces and regions have been forced to impose curbs on energy usage in recent months.

Gazprom, the Russian state-owned gas producer, is understood to be preparing further price increases, though it mainly supplies continental European countries.

US liquified natural gas (LNG) suppliers have increased production in recent weeks, but not by enough to cope with rising demand as winter approaches in the northern hemisphere.

Britain still has large gas resources in the North Sea, but has become dependent since it decommissioned most storage facilities on a steady stream of ships from the Middle East carrying LNG.

Prices have risen more than fivefold over the past 12 months in Europe and Asia, in what Toby Whittington, lead energy economist at Oxford economics, described as “the perfect storm in global natural gas markets”.

Longstanding supply issues, depleted inventories, surging demand, and the coming northern hemisphere winter mean that prices are likely to remain elevated until spring 2022,” he said.

Beijing has reduced its reliance on coal since 2017, bringing down the proportion used to generate electricity from more than 80% to just over 50%, by Whittington said China was likely to increase production again, threatening carbon emission targets.

“Coal supply will improve as Beijing has restarted several mines, but reserves will take time to ramp up, and consequently, the market will remain tight this winter,” he said.

Han, who supervises the nation’s energy sector and industrial production, made the demand for energy companies to secure supplies at an emergency meeting this week with officials from Beijing’s state-owned assets regulator and economic planning agency, the report said.

Data published on Thursday showed [China's factory activity contracted unexpectedly](#) in September and for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic took a grip in February 2020. The weaker than expected manufacturing survey reflected the curbs on electricity use and rising prices for commodities and parts.

Han’s statement raised concerns that already high commodity prices could soar even higher. The order “to me implies that we are in no way on the verge of a cool-off. Rather it looks like it is going to get even more crazy,” said Bjarne Schieldrop, an analyst at SEB.

The power crunch prompted the banks Nomura and Goldman Sachs to this week cut their growth forecasts for China, as they expect more disruptions to supply chains and production.

Factories that supply multinationals such as Apple and carmaker Tesla are among those affected and told to halt production.

A note from Capital Economics on Friday said: “Power shortages seem unlikely to ease any time soon.”

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One factory worker in the industrial hub of Dongguan told AFP this week they were working overnight after being forced to cease daytime production.

“Of course we’re unhappy..... but we’re going along with the hours that the power curbs take place,” he said.

Chinese coal futures on Thursday soared to a record high as the country grappled with shortages in the run-up to a national holiday, with many factories shut for the week-long break.

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## Sexual violence

# WHO ‘should pay reparations to victims of sexual abuse by staff’



Julienne Lusenge, the inquiry co-chair, urged the WHO to draw up a plan for reparations that met the ‘real needs of the victims’. Photograph: Fabrice Coffrini/AFP/Getty

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[Lizzy Davies](#)

Fri 1 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Survivors of sexual abuse by World Health Organization aid workers during the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Ebola outbreak in 2018 should receive "substantive" reparations, the co-chair of an independent inquiry into the scandal has said.

Julienne Lusenge, a prominent Congolese human rights activist, said it was "essential" that the UN's global health body drew up a workable plan for reparations to respond to the "real needs" of women and girls who became victims of abuse.

"The issue of reparations is very, very important," said Lusenge, executive director of the [Fund for Congolese Women](#). "Babies were born; women were left unwell. So we think it's important to have a holistic programme in which the alleged victims themselves will be the stakeholders."



Julienne Lusenge, the Congolese activist who co-chaired the inquiry, said a ‘strong message’ had to be sent to those who would abuse women and girls. Photograph: Ryan Brown/UN Women

In [a damning report](#) published this week, the independent commission found 21 of the alleged perpetrators of serious abuses, including a number of rape allegations, were employed by the WHO. The scandal led to 29 pregnancies, with some women later being forced to have abortions by their abusers, the inquiry found.

In total, the commission interviewed 75 alleged victims aged 13 to 43. The youngest survivor recalled being offered a lift home by a WHO driver in the small town of Mangina in North Kivu. She said that instead of taking her home, the man raped her. She became pregnant and had a child, the report noted.

Lusenge and her fellow commission members called on the WHO to draw up a plan for making reparations to the survivors once the investigation had been completed. Many victims, they noted, had complained of receiving no help and being “left to deal with the physical and moral consequences” of the abuse on their own.

“So we are now waiting for the WHO to ... provide substantive reparations,” Lusenge told the Guardian on Thursday.

“We think it’s important that a strong message be sent to all those who might one day embark on humanitarian programmes and abuse and exploit girls and women. For us, this is essential. We must make sure this reparations programme is properly drawn up and responds to the real needs of the victims.”

The report said some of the victims had suffered trauma as a result of the abuse, with some of the men administering abortion pills or injections to girls and women they had impregnated. Other victims had seen their financial insecurity worsen as a result of the abuse and exploitation. Two said that, after their pregnancies became public, they had been forced to stop their studies.

On Tuesday, as the report was released, the WHO’s director general, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, vowed that there would be “zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse, and zero tolerance for inaction against it”.

He said four people who were still employed by the WHO when it was made aware of the allegations had had their contracts terminated. Two other employees have been placed on administrative leave pending an investigation into their handling of complaints. Apologising to the victims and survivors, Tedros said the WHO’s “central concern” now was providing them with “services and support”.

However, Dr Gaya Gamhewage, the WHO’s director of prevention and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, appeared to rule out formal reparations.

“We acknowledge that we need funds easily available on the ground for victim and survivor support. That’s very clear,” she said. “However, there is no provision in the UN system for financial reparations to the victims.”

Marcia Poole, a WHO spokesperson, said the body was working with UN partners to ensure that “all victims and survivors” were provided with

support in accordance with the [UN protocol](#) on assisting victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, including medical and psychological support.

She said: “Some are receiving support through the UN system for the education of children born out of [sexual exploitation and abuse] as well as livelihood support, such as dressmaking, livestock farming and basket-making, so that they can sustain their families.

“We need to work with others to make sure such support is predictable, effective and provided at scale, as needed.”

Information and support for anyone affected by rape or sexual abuse issues is available from the following organisations. In the UK, [Rape Crisis](#) offers support on 0808 802 9999 in England and Wales, 0808 801 0302 in [Scotland](#), or 0800 0246 991 in [Northern Ireland](#). In the US, [Rainn](#) offers support on 800-656-4673. In Australia, support is available at [1800Respect](#) (1800 737 732). Other international helplines can be found at [ibiblio.org/rcip/internl.html](#)

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[Italy](#)

## ‘In Rome, nothing works’: citizens despair in run-up to mayoral elections



Rubbish spills from bins in Trastevere, a neighbourhood in central Rome, Italy. Photograph: Andrew Medichini/AP

[Angela Giuffrida](#)

Fri 1 Oct 2021 05.45 EDT

Elio Perugini can’t remember the last time he had a decent night’s sleep. “It’s a disaster, the noise just doesn’t stop,” he said. “I hardly sleep any more. The worst of it is on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.”

Sleepless nights have become the norm for many in Trastevere, a neighbourhood in central Rome once treasured for its charm and old-world feel, but now known for its rowdy nightlife, petty crime, piles of rubbish and graffiti-scarred walls.

The district's problems are considered emblematic of what Romans repeatedly decry as the Italian capital's *degrado* (decay), and as residents prepare to vote in mayoral elections on Sunday and Monday, they are asking themselves once again if anyone is capable of getting a grip on the city.

Perugini has lived in Trastevere all of his life. "It was poorer, but much more liveable. Today it's richer, but we're ruined."

He said he hasn't decided who to vote for, but it won't be Virginia Raggi, the current mayor seeking a second term. "Most definitely not Raggi, enough of Raggi."



Rome's mayor, Virginia Raggi, won a landslide victory in 2016. Photograph: Alessandra Tarantino/AP

Raggi, a politician with the Five Star Movement, became Rome's first female mayor in June 2016, winning a landslide victory after promising "winds of change". But it didn't take long for disappointment to set in as rubbish piled up, ageing buses spontaneously exploded, parks became scrappier and wild boar sightings more frequent.

Raggi has made improvements to the city over the last year, including mending some of its roads. She has introduced cycle paths, electric bikes

and scooters, even if the latter have become another menace for the streets as riders use them with abandon.

Raggi also spoke about improvements made to schools and the opening of libraries during a rally in Trastevere last week. But onlookers were in no mood to listen to such achievements, with one woman reminding her of “the streets invaded by rubbish and boar”.

“Trastevere, like other neighbourhoods in central Rome, has become run down for various reasons, from nightlife that is out of control to potholes,” said Fiorella de Simone, a member of Vivere Trastevere, a group of residents who have held protests over the area’s decline while taking it upon themselves to clean the streets.

“But it’s got worse in the last few years. I can’t walk out of the front door in the morning without stepping over rubbish. Trastevere is a reminder that there have been no solutions to the problems affecting the entire city.”



The far-right Brothers of Italy mayoral candidate, Enrico Michetti, right, with Matteo Salvini. Photograph: Antonio Masiello/Getty Images

But whether those problems will be fixed anytime soon remains to be seen.

Enrico Michetti, a candidate from the far-right Brothers of [Italy](#) competing in a coalition backed by Matteo Salvini's far-right League and Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, was leading in polls before the blackout period began. Michetti, a lawyer and radio host, glorified ancient Rome during his campaign, saying its role as "*Caput Mundi*" (capital of the world) needed to be restored. He also said that the stiff-armed Roman salute, which has fascist connotations, ought to be revived as it was more hygienic during times of Covid-19.

Behind him in the polls was the centre-left candidate and former economy minister, Roberto Gualtieri.

Raggi was in third place followed by Carlo Calenda, the leader of Azione, described as a liberal centrist party.

But with neither of the four candidates expected to win more than 50% of the votes in the first round, two – most probably Michetti and Gualtieri – will go on to compete in a runoff on 17 October.

For his book, *Roma il coraggio di cambiare* (Rome, the courage to change), the author Claudio Cipollini analysed the promises made in the election campaigns of Rome's last five mayors, including Raggi, and compared them with what was achieved.

"I found that what they said during election campaigns didn't correspond with that they actually did," he said.



The centre-left mayoral candidate Roberto Gualtieri. Photograph: Antonio Masiello/Getty

Cipollini also studied the programmes of the current mayoral candidates, with the findings published in a report by Monitoroma, an observatory on the elections.

“The programmes contained some beautiful ideas for Rome, but nobody said when and how they will carry out their promises let alone how much money they will need,” Cipollini said. “Some themes were handled better by some, and badly by others. Some candidates have long-term visions for the city, others don’t.”

Cipollini said the main problem is the “incapacity of the public administration to manage a modern city”.

Before Raggi took the helm, Rome was also a city where progress had been hindered by decades of inefficiency and corruption, leaving her saddled with €13bn worth of debt.

“Raggi has done a few things over the last year or so but she hasn’t solved the waste collection or public transport problem, and the parks are still a mess,” said Cipollini.

“In Rome, nothing works, and I think politicians need to realise that politics is not enough to get things done. They need to know how to organise and manage all of these difficulties and move the city forward.”

This article was amended on 1 October 2021. An image caption in an earlier version misidentified Enrico Michetti and Matteo Salvini.

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[Japan](#)

## Princess Mako wedding announcement stirs up media frenzy in Japan



Princess Mako in September. The wedding will be shorn of the ritual usually on display when a member of the imperial family ties the knot. Photograph: Masatoshi Okauchi/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo*

Fri 1 Oct 2021 04.32 EDT

When they [announced](#) their unofficial engagement four years ago, they were cast as a perfect match: the young princess and the clean-cut trainee lawyer, for whom she was prepared to sacrifice her imperial status.

Now the sound of wedding bells is within earshot, after the Imperial Household Agency announced on Friday that Princess Mako, the niece of Japan's emperor, would marry her non-royal fiance, Kei Komuro, on 26 October.

But rather than bringing the country together in celebration, their nuptials will take place against a backdrop of scandal, tabloid intrusion and public disapproval of the kind usually associated with British royals.

Japan celebrated when, in May 2017, Mako and Komuro, contemporaries at the International Christian University in Tokyo, [said they planned to get engaged](#) later in the year and marry in November 2018.



Princess Mako, left, with her fiance, Kei Komuro, at a press conference to announce their engagement in 2017. Photograph: Shizuo Kambayashi/AFP/Getty

But in February 2018, the household agency said the wedding had been put off for two years after reports that Komuro's mother was embroiled in a financial dispute linked to ¥4m (£26,700) she had received from her former fiance, some of which was used to pay for her son's education.

The revelation triggered a media feeding frenzy and waves of public opprobrium that will pursue the couple, who are both 29, all the way to their wedding day and beyond.

“Weekly magazines and daytime TV shows are reporting frantically on this because it helps their sales and viewing figures,” said Kaori Hayashi, a

professor at Tokyo University who specialises in media and journalism studies, adding that the tabloid media had declared open season on Komuro and his mother. “They are particularly critical of the Komuros because they are not fully protected by imperial household agency.”

An attempt by Komuro to publicly explain the dispute – amid disagreement over whether the money was a gift or a loan – did not impress a skeptical public, while his offer to return the sum to his mother’s former fiance reportedly came to nothing.

Komuro, who recently returned to Japan with a law degree from Fordham University in New York, has become easy prey for the tabloids and conservative commentators.

Aside from triggering speculation about an impending announcement about the timing of their wedding, his arrival at Tokyo’s Narita airport, where he was greeted by more than 150 reporters, triggered snippy tabloid and social media commentary over everything from his body language to his choice of coiffure, a ponytail he had grown during his time in the US.

Even the usually hands-off broadsheets have felt compelled to devote space to the scandal that refuses to lift from the couple’s relationship.

After confirming that they planned to start a new life in the US, the couple drew inevitable comparisons with Harry and Meghan, although the Japanese media’s treatment of Mako and Komuro pales beside the vitriol regularly heaped on the Sussexes by their British counterparts.

The scandal surrounding their relationship means this will be a royal wedding like no other. Mako, who, like other princesses who marry commoners will have to leave the imperial family, has said she will forgo a \$1m (£742,000) payment traditionally given to women who give up their royal status.

The decision, unprecedented in the postwar period, is being seen as an attempt to ward off yet more public criticism, since the payment is funded by the taxpayer.



Kei Komuro has been criticised in the press for his ponytail. Photograph: Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP/Getty

The wedding itself will be shorn of the ritual usually on display when a member of the imperial family ties the knot.

The couple will not have an official engagement ceremony and will forgo a formal meeting with Mako's uncle, Emperor Naruhito, before the wedding. Instead, they will register their marriage at a government office before moving to New York, where Komuro has lined up a job with a leading law firm.

But the couple is expected to continue to attract media attention on the other side of the Pacific. Just before his recent visit to Japan, his first trip home for three years, Komuro was reportedly chased through the streets of New York by Japanese reporters.

Komuro and Mako, who can never be a reigning empress due to Japan's male-only succession law, will leave behind a deeply divided Japanese public. In a poll by the Mainichi newspaper, 38% of respondents supported the marriage, while 35% opposed it and 26% expressed no interest. Aera, a weekly magazine, found that just 5% of respondents felt like celebrating the marriage, while 91% said they were in no mood to share in the couple's joy.

“Even the most minuscule details – like his hair – have became fodder for daytime television,” said Akinori Takamori, an expert on the imperial family who is a lecturer at Kokugakuin University in Tokyo, and suggested that media scrutiny of Komuro’s family amounted to a human rights violation.

“It’s not desirable to have the people split over this matter when the imperial family should be a symbol of unity for the country.”

Mako’s parents have hardly been effusive in their support. Earlier this month her mother, Crown Princess Kiko, said she would respect her daughter’s feelings “as much as possible”, adding: “While there have been matters that I could empathise with, there were also areas where our opinions differed.”

Akishino, who is first in line to the throne, said last December that he “approved” of the marriage, “if marriage is what they truly want”.

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## US Capitol attack

# Far-right militia group membership surged after Capitol attack, hack shows



Oath Keepers members at the Capitol on 6 January. The post-Capitol attack membership surge is evident in payment records from the Oath Keepers website. Photograph: Jim Bourg/Reuters

*[Jason Wilson](#)*

*[@jason\\_a\\_w](#)*

Fri 1 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

Hacked materials from the website of the rightwing militia group the Oath Keepers show that hundreds of people either joined or renewed their membership after many of the group's members participated in the attack on the Capitol on 6 January.

They included people who joined under their military ranks, including combat veterans, retired servicepersons, at least one serving national guardsman, several members of the clergy and others involved in security contracting and the firearms industry.

Other materials in the hack show signups to petitions under government or military emails, and private email addresses being provided in response to appeals for assistance from military and service personnel.

But with many of those addresses apparently not functioning or invalid, the extent of prior involvement by government and military employees in the group was not immediately clear.

The post-Capitol attack membership surge is evident in payment records from the Oath Keepers website.

They show that 801 people either joined the organization or made donations after 4 January, when founder Stewart Rhodes posted an [article](#) on the website headlined “Oath Keepers Deploying to DC to Protect Events, Speakers, & Attendees on Jan 5-6: Time to Stand!”

But almost all of that number – 788 altogether – joined or donated after Oath Keepers members participated in the incursion into the Capitol building on 6 January, with the records showing that the surge built momentum in January before slowing in February, March and April, where the records end.

There were no email addresses linked to military or government employers in the trove, but 10 sign-ups noted their military ranks in an optional “title” field, which ranged between corporal and colonel, including three men who offered the rank of lieutenant colonel.

The Guardian’s investigation of the record showed that the majority of these are retired, but some have gone on to work in other sensitive roles.

The records show, for example, that one sign-up was a former lieutenant colonel in the US Marine Corps and that his service included stints at the corps’ headquarters in Quantico, Virginia, before taking a position at Northrop Grumman, a defense contractor.

Another sign-up, on 7 January, was apparently another Marine veteran who also worked as a bodyguard for the military contractor Blackwater, in a [US government program](#) to provide personal protection in theaters of war like Afghanistan and Iraq.

Several other men joined who used the religious title of Reverend, including one man who appears to have run for office in Wyoming as a pro-Trump Republican candidate.

The hacked materials were provided to reporters by the transparency organization Distributed Denial of Secrets after an anonymous hacker broke into the Oath Keepers' infrastructure.

It was not immediately apparent whether the hack exfiltrated all of the Oath Keepers' data, or just a segment, but as delivered it contained email threads, message archives and extensive records on membership and calls to action on specific issues.

Many of the records reveal direct communications to and from Rhodes, the Oath Keepers' founder and leader.

[Previous reporting at the Daily Dot](#) described hundreds of military and government emails in the trove. While many older member records and records of petition campaigns do show such addresses, Guardian attempts to contact them resulted in extensive email bounces and notices that the addresses did not exist.

Similarly, many private addresses were associated with explicit calls for military and law enforcement volunteers.

In each case, it was not immediately clear whether all the addresses represented currently serving military or law enforcement officers, and in some cases it was not clear if or when the email addresses were valid.

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