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[Opinion](#)[Assisted dying](#)

Claiming a monopoly on truth and decency is no way to win the assisted dying debate

[Kenan Malik](#)





A Dying With Dignity campaign in Australia featuring more than 3,000 hearts with a message from someone who supports assisted dying. The same issue was debated in the House of Lords last week. Photograph: Bianca de Marchi/AAP

Sun 24 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

A man is standing on the parapet of a bridge. He is about to jump. What should you do? Most people would agree that the moral act would be to talk to him to try to persuade him not to. Most people would also agree that giving him a push because “that’s what he wanted” would be committing murder.

Your grandmother is dying. She is in great pain, has only a few days to live and wants you to end her life now. It’s unlikely that most people could bring themselves to do that. But most would probably understand if you did accede to her wishes, however tormented you felt. And even more were a doctor to give her sufficient painkillers to allow her to die in peace.

The debate about assisted dying is one in which there are no simple answers; a debate in which we need to acknowledge that truth and moral decency lie on both sides and in which context is particularly important in judging what is right and wrong. On Friday, the House of Lords debated Baroness

Meacher's assisted dying bill, which would allow terminally ill adults assistance [to end their life](#). It's unlikely to become law, but the debate will undoubtedly continue.

The Lords debate was respectful, often moving. Much of the wider discussion on the issue, however, is mired in bad faith assumptions: on the one side, the idea that opposition to assisted dying is driven primarily by religious obscurantism and on the other that supporters are tantamount to murderers and "[not to be trusted](#)". Those are not good places from which to start a hugely significant yet highly sensitive public debate.

I am broadly in favour of decriminalising, in a limited fashion, acts of assisted dying but I also understand the force of the arguments from opponents and partly agree with them. This is a terrain to be carefully negotiated.

We can end up giving priority to the state of being alive over an individual's moral sense of what life means to them

The first, critical argument is about the sanctity of life. This is more than a religious argument. Most of us, religious or irreligious, place special meaning on human life, recognising that we are not merely machines or slabs of meat, but persons, moral agents to whom we accord dignity and respect by virtue of being human.

Few, however, view the sanctity of life in absolute terms. Many who oppose assisted dying support the death penalty. Most would defend the taking of a life in self-defence or accept killing other humans in a war they think is just or necessary. Again, context matters.

The philosopher Ronald Dworkin observed that we value life through three lenses: subjectively (treasuring the inner life of the individual); intrinsically (insisting that a human life is valuable in and of itself); and instrumentally (gauging people through their usefulness for society and other individuals). Opponents of assisted dying rightly stress the intrinsic value of life and worry that in expanding the legal capacity to end life we may be drawn to viewing human worth in more instrumental ways. One of the ironies,

though, is that in stressing the intrinsic, we may implicitly downgrade the subjective aspect of being human. We can end up giving priority to the state of being alive – of breathing or being conscious – over an individual’s moral sense of what life means to them. Yet it is that capacity for subjective evaluation that truly makes us human.

A second key argument is that of the “slippery slope” – the belief that one step towards any form of assisted dying would irrevocably lead to a world in which we accepted the culling of the old and the infirm.

There are few spheres of life in which slippery slope arguments have not been deployed. In the late 1960s, a *Times* leader warned that the new technique of IVF could lead to a race between nations, each “breeding a race of intellectual giants”. Any attempt to decriminalise marijuana becomes a downward path to smack being sold in the corner shop. And, for many, gay marriage is “a slippery slope to [polygamy and bestiality](#)”.

It’s a metaphor whose power derives from imagining social developments as though they were natural and inevitable, just as a ball rolls down a slope under gravity. What shapes human laws and conduct, however, are not invisible natural forces but political debate. There is nothing inevitable about social change and taking one step does not mean a slide all the way to the bottom.

Many critics point to developments in the Netherlands as an example of a slippery slope. In 2002, assisted dying was legalised for people with incurable illnesses facing “[unbearable suffering](#)”. Over the past decade, there has been a debate over extending the law to all those over 75 who feel they have “[completed](#)” their life. This, indeed, would be a calamitous move. The problem, though, is not the mythical slippery slope, but that critics have not yet convinced proponents that their proposals are dangerous and wrong. This, as much as any other contentious issues, from Brexit to immigration, should be worked out through public debate, not fear-mongering about slippery slopes.

Linked to slippery slope arguments are fears that assisted dying laws will devalue the lives of old or disabled people. Many might feel they are a burden on their families or on society and so feel a pressure to die. These are

important issues and a primary reason the proposed expansion of the law in the Netherlands is so troubling. Society should view the elderly and the vulnerable as people to whom we have obligations, not as inconveniences weighing us down.

The real issue, though, is less the law than wider social attitudes towards elderly and disabled people. During the Covid pandemic, there have been abuses of “do not resuscitate” orders, apparently given to care home residents and those with learning difficulties without regard for their wishes or welfare. The stories are shocking, but few would argue that the solution lies in getting rid of DNR notices. The same logic should shape the assisted dying debate, too.

There are many other questions – from the need for improved palliative care to the relationship between individual choice and the common good – with which to wrestle in this debate. Too often, though, these get entangled in a common refusal to see the significance of the argument from the other side. Compassion and moral righteousness don’t belong in bunkers.

Kenan Malik is an Observer columnist

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OpinionNHS

The Observer view on the winter crisis facing the NHS

[Observer editorial](#)



Prime minister Boris Johnson and health secretary Sajid Javid during a visit to Leeds general infirmary earlier this month. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Sun 24 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

The call to “protect the NHS” was at the heart of the government’s Covid messaging in the first year of the pandemic. Ministers did not always heed their own instructions: their delays in imposing necessary social restrictions, not just in March 2020 but again and again, intensified the intolerable pressures on the [NHS](#), increased the death rate and required longer lockdowns. But ensuring the NHS could continue to function was, alongside saving lives, one of the two main objectives of government policy in the earlier stages of the pandemic.

As we head into our second Covid winter, death rates from the virus are much lower, thanks to the vaccine rollout, although approaching 200 people are still dying from this disease every day. But the pressures on the NHS are no less substantial than going into last winter. It has suffered a quadruple crunch. Excess capacity is at a historical low after a decade of underfunding and a dearth of capital investment; even before the pandemic, NHS hospitals were operating close to full capacity during the quieter summer months and there have been several winters now during which elective treatments have had to be cancelled altogether. There is a [long-term staffing crisis](#) afflicting every level of the service, from consultants to healthcare assistants, which means that most hospitals are operating with serious staff shortages. Pressures on the NHS have been further accelerated by a crisis in social care, also caused by underfunding and understaffing, which the Care Quality Commission (CQC) has [forecast](#) will leave a “tsunami of unmet need” this winter. This will mean more people end up in hospital when they become ill and stay in hospital longer because the care they need to be discharged back home is not available. On top of all this, the NHS has had the most difficult 18 months in its history as urgent Covid cases have necessarily crowded out other types of healthcare and [waiting lists for cancer treatment](#) and pain-relieving surgery [have soared](#).

NHS leaders [are warning](#) of a system that cannot take much more. Even before the pandemic, the healthcare compact with citizens – if you need it, the NHS is there for you – was being steadily eroded by underfunding and understaffing. A year and a half into the pandemic and the situation is even worse. Several large hospital trusts have [been downgraded](#) by the CQC because of falling standards of care. One NHS hospital trust has had to [restrict the provision of chemotherapy](#). Pressures on the ambulance service have meant that some people are being [put on hold for up to 10 minutes](#) when they call 999, it can take [hours for an ambulance to arrive](#) even while people are lying in excruciating pain, and ambulances are having to [wait in long queues](#) to hand over patients outside A&Es.

There is probably worse to come. Vaccines have reduced the risk of hospitalisation and death, but they have not eliminated it altogether, while data shows that the immunity conferred by vaccines wanes after six months. New Covid infections have [reached almost 50,000 a day](#) and the number of deaths from Covid currently stands at more than 1,000 a week. Infection

rates in the UK are more than 18 times those in Spain and nine times those in France. Without some action to control infections, the risk is that Covid rates will continue to rise and heap further pressure on the NHS, leading to more deaths not just from Covid but from other conditions that go untreated as a result of the crisis.

The government is simply ignoring the warning signs. Health secretary Sajid Javid has maintained in recent weeks that the NHS is coping and that the pressures are manageable. This is incongruous with what hospital chiefs and frontline staff are reporting. Boris Johnson remains ideologically committed to misleading the country that everything is under control and there is nothing to worry about, while Jacob Rees-Mogg frivolously claimed that Conservative MPs do not need to wear masks in the Commons because they know each other. Labour's message on what it wants the government to do lacks clarity. Yet senior scientific advisers to the government have warned of the need for caution and for incremental restrictions to manage pressures on the NHS before it is too late.

The government is in danger of repeating the same mistakes it has made over and over again: throwing caution to the wind and leaving it so late to act that the restrictions needed to prevent a collapse in emergency healthcare will in the end be greater. Speeding up the vaccine booster rollout is unlikely to sufficiently control rates of infection. The government urgently needs to put in place its winter plan B, which includes compulsory mask wearing in public places, guidance for people to work from home if possible and vaccine certificates for entry to bars and restaurants, which could boost vaccination rates further. But it must go beyond this: improving sick pay so people on low incomes with Covid symptoms can afford to test and self-isolate and investing in proper ventilation technology in places such as schools. These are measures that will help avoid the need for any further social restrictions over the winter. It is better to implement them now rather than to require more disruptive measures for longer later.

Time and again, Boris Johnson has failed to take more moderate action in the here and now to prevent a greater number of deaths – and even more severe restrictions on our lives – later. All the signs are that he is set to repeat exactly the same mistakes again, but it is not too late for him to shift course.

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OpinionDonald Trump

The Observer view on Donald Trump's Truth Social

[Observer editorial](#)



'Abusing truth as only he can': a smartphone user checks the app store for Truth Social. Photograph: Chris Delmas/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 24 Oct 2021 01.30 EDT

In the life story of Donald Trump, to his mind an epic saga of unrivalled achievement, these are the wilderness years. After the US electoral college confirmed his 2020 defeat, an outcome he still mendaciously disputes, Trump plunged into despair. He sulked, he raged, he conspired. Yet the [6 January coup plot](#) was an egregious step too far. He was cast into outer darkness.

Trump lost the White House bully pulpit and a US president's ability to command instant global attention. Personally wounding was the ban imposed by Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, which belatedly agreed he

posed a threat to democracy. Trump was cut off from social media and his supporter base. He was all but silenced.

What worse fate could there be for a narcissist who craves constant attention and approval? Exiled to his luxury Florida estate, the Elba of the Everglades, Trump has struggled since to regain his voice. Last week, he made his move. The result: the so-called [Truth Social](#) media app, launching next year.

The newly formed company behind the app, Trump Media and Technology Group, plans to disseminate what it calls “anti-woke” news, debate and entertainment to Americans deprived of honest, impartial media outlets. This is total drivel, of course, coming from the mouth of the most shameless liar in modern US history.

Abusing truth as only Trump can, Truth Social will more likely prove both false and antisocial. It’s his way of regaining lost ground, prior to a wished-for presidential comeback in 2024. It’s a political propaganda platform intended to magnify and exploit the hate, ignorance and prejudice on which he feeds. MPs please note: Trump is the ultimate definition of “[online harms](#)”.

This self-serving bid to defeat “the tyranny of big tech” is a commercial long shot. The new app looks remarkably similar to Twitter, which has more than 200m users. Previous US attempts to grow alternative “conservative social space” have failed. Although shares in the new company initially soared, its USP is overly dependent on Trump’s [continuing appeal](#).

That appeal looks increasingly fractured. Trump is under fire from [Mitch McConnell](#), the Senate minority leader, and other Republicans who fear his obsession with overturning the 2020 result is deflecting attention from Joe Biden’s mistakes ahead of next year’s midterm congressional elections.

An early test will come on 2 November when Democrat-leaning Virginia elects a governor. Polls there currently suggest a dead heat. Trump, meanwhile, is taking legal heat, too. His family business faces a fraud investigation. He was recently questioned under oath for more than four hours in a [civil lawsuit](#) in New York.

Steve Bannon, one of his best-known former aides, has been found [in contempt of Congress](#) for refusing to testify to the 6 January inquiry and faces possible criminal prosecution. Since Trump ordered all his minions to act similarly, the legal bull's-eye pinned to his back grows ever more unmissable.

Yet for all that, Trump remains first choice among Republican voters for the party's presidential nomination. His average "favourable/unfavourable" rating is almost identical to Biden's among the electorate as a whole. And he has shown how dangerous he can be when he reaches a wide audience, which is why Truth Social is worrying.

Will Trump rise again from the depths, like the "shapeless monsters" imagined by the great 19th-century Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev? Life is akin to an unsuspecting man sitting in a small boat on a calm, limitless ocean, he wrote. "Then one of the monsters begins to emerge from the murk, rising higher and higher, becoming ever more repellently, clearly discernible... Another minute and its impact will overturn the boat."

For now, Trump's monstrous outline is blurred, his voice muted. He awaits Turgenev's "destined day", when he plans, once again, to capsize the ship of state. To which we say: all hands on deck!

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[Observer comment cartoon](#)

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Always look a Tory gift unicorn in the mouth – cartoon

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NotebookBBC

Laura Kuenssberg's ideal successor needs to be immune to likes and follows

[Tim Adams](#)



Political editor Laura Kuenssberg checks her phone outside No 10 Downing Street. Photograph: Keith Larby/Alamy Stock Photo

Sat 23 Oct 2021 10.00 EDT

Not long after she took over as BBC political correspondent, [Laura Kuenssberg](#) suggested that what she was most excited about “was to allow the voices of people outside this weirdo Palace of Westminster to be heard. I thought the whole social media thing might be really positive.”

Six years on, as [Kuennssberg appears to have come to the end of her tenure](#), she might have been careful what she wished for. The voices outside Westminster she has [mostly been hearing](#) are those toxic tones that have become the white noise of our fractured public life.

The old wisdom used to be that if you were getting stick from both sides equally as an “impartial” correspondent then you were doing most things right. Given the distracting levels of anger that Kuenssberg has attracted from right and left, Leave and Remain, I’m not sure that maxim still applies. The BBC’s director general, Tim Davie, has made the rebuilding of trust in [BBC impartiality](#) his chief priority, but he needs also to acknowledge that even-handedness within any single individual is always a goal, not an absolute. A headline-act correspondent, required to be both government insider and scourge, providing in-depth commentary and off-the-cuff tweeting, is no longer a viable role. Kuenssberg’s successor should embody those rare broadcasting traits: a total disinterest in his or her media profile, an antipathy to likes and follows; the duller the better.

Yikes!



Still socially relevant – Dennis the Meance and his faithful Gnasher.
Photograph: Royal Mail/PA

On Friday, I queued up for the [*Beano* exhibition at Somerset House](#) in London behind a boy in a hooped Dennis the Menace jumper clutching his dad's hand. The occasion for the show is Dennis's impending 70th birthday, though age has not withered his love of catapult and whoopee cushion. For anyone who recalls the excitements of poring over the comic with a torch at bedtime, the exhibition is in part an exercise in nostalgia, though through adult eyes it is alarming to realise how little the social observation of the 1950s has had to be altered to reflect contemporary Britain: with full justification, the show includes a cease-and-desist letter to Jacob Rees-Mogg, pointedly requiring the MP to stop “infringing the intellectual property rights and masquerading as our character Walter ‘the softy’ Brown”.

The rest is just gravy



Animal rights activists stage a protest amid an increasingly divided political climate between vegans and meat-eaters. Photograph: Paco Freire/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Before it was [swiftly removed from the government's website](#), I had read the 56-page report of the Behavioural Insights team (or “nudge” unit), entitled Net Zero: Principles for Successful Behaviour Change Initiatives, prepared in advance of the Glasgow climate change summit. The proposal in the document that apparently caused most alarm on the government benches is the belief that a meat-free future is a “desirable social norm”.

That disquiet points to an increasingly significant political dividing line: [between diehard vegans and red-in-tooth-and-claw steak eaters](#), each refusing to give an inch at the dinner table. In those arguments, it might be useful to recognise a more viable option – rather than no meat, much, much less.

The best articulation of that principle I’ve read is in chef Dan Barber’s seminal book, *The Third Plate*, which argues for a change in what a standard plate of dinner might look like: away from a slab of protein with a side of vegetables and toward a plate of great-tasting vegetables with perhaps a meat sauce. Barber’s guiding principle lies in the soil, letting its health determine where the balance of livestock and crops should lie. It’s a

reminder that in our all-or-nothing times, viable answers generally lie in the muddy middle ground.

Tim Adams is an Observer columnist

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OpinionGender

Romantic partner? Who needs one when it's friends who truly help us get through life

[Sonia Sodha](#)





Female friendship is often characterised as ‘face to face’. Photograph: Peter Cade/Getty Images

Sun 24 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

The importance of romantic love is drummed into us from early childhood. Popular culture and advertising conspire to tell us that there’s one route to a fulfilled life: finding the love of your life, who holds the key to your happily ever after.

Modern trends in romantic relationships get anxiously picked over through the cliche of happily ever after: people settling down and having children later, the fact that twice as many marriages [end in divorce](#) today than they did in [1970](#). But these trends don’t tell us that romantic happiness has become more elusive. Instead, they reflect social progress and the dismantling of taboos and that the belief in romantic love as the route to fulfilment is more myth than reality for many.

It is true that falling fertility rates pose a huge societal challenge – how to ensure people can age well with dignity in a society where there are more older people than working-age taxpayers. We should be rightly concerned if men and women are having children later than they want to [because they can’t afford it](#).

But people settling down later is a product of women having aspirations beyond “wife” and “mother”. And it is a good thing if people are getting married later as a result of making wiser relationship choices, and if relationships break down as a result of people escaping deeply unhappy, and sometimes abusive, relationships.

Like many, I bought into happily ever after as a teenager and spent my 20s searching for the love of my life. A decade and a small handful of lovely – and not-so-lovely – relationships later and I’ve realised that a happy romantic partnership that lasts a whole lifetime is probably something only a minority of people will ever achieve. Sustaining a lifetime relationship is actually quite an advanced emotional skill and, for various reasons, relating but not limited to their childhood and early adulthood experiences, it’s one lots of people don’t have.

The only way to force society into this mould comes at great cost: make marriage the only option to survive for half of humanity and reprogramme divorce as taboo.

The upside of understanding how much we’ve all been oversold on romance is the realisation that platonic love has just as an important role to play in our lives. My female friends have pretty much every relationship configuration covered between them: happily and unhappily partnered or single, children and no children, decades-long and honeymoon-fresh relationships.

The thing we have in common is how much we rely on our friendships with each other to get through it all. It’s no surprise to me that study after study shows that quality of friendships is a critical [predictor of wellbeing](#); conversely, isolation and loneliness are bad for our mental and physical health. Contrary to the sad-sack stereotypes, single people actually enjoy more social connection on average than [those who are married](#).

But as my friends and I often observe with respect to the men in our lives, there is a friendship gender gap. Despite everything that women face in our society – the threat of male violence and workplace inequality that affect women of every class – I would always, always choose womanhood, for the

simple reason I cannot imagine life without the rich intimacy of female friendship.

Male friendship and connection is something we should be talking about in relation to men's mental health

Female friendship is often characterised as “face to face” – therapeutic and relational – and heterosexual male friendship as “side by side” – focused around [activities and common interests](#). We should be wary of stereotypes, but various studies suggest that female friendships are characterised by more emotional intimacy.

[Data from the US](#) suggests men are more likely than women to say they have no good friends and only half as likely as women to say they have received emotional support from a friend in the last week. Levels of social isolation are worse [among older men](#). Perhaps this is why marriage appears to carry more health benefits [for men than women](#).

Male friendship and connection is something we should be talking about in relation to men's mental health: suicide is the biggest killer of [men aged under 45](#). Evolutionary theories of gendered friendship – the idea that male and female brains have evolved differently over thousands of years and that this affects capacity for emotional connection – have been overplayed to the [detriment of us all](#). In fact, developmental psychologist Niobe Way tracked hundreds of boys through their friendships and found that in early adolescence they enjoyed intimate friendships centred around secrets and feelings, but in later adolescence, around 16, a mix of societal misogyny and homophobia [drums it out of them](#).

This is toxic masculinity at work: the harmful gender stereotypes – boys are strong and don't cry, girls are sweet and passive – [that children get bombarded with](#) through TV, toys and even their clothes. Sure enough, they become a damaging self-fulfilling prophecy.

This is why challenging the pernicious impacts of patriarchal toxic masculinity on men is just as important as those on women: you cannot have one without the other. Feminists have rightly long challenged men-only

spaces that are about excluding women from power and progression. But boys and men do need different sorts of spaces to support and relate to each other in the face of damaging gender expectations. Michael Conroy delivers workshops with boys in schools to help them challenge these expectations, but reports encountering some resistance to single-sex work with boys. The Men's Sheds movement is an initiative to improve the health of older men, particularly through social connection; it, too has faced some controversy over its legitimacy as a men-only space.

An overdue recognition that marriage, kids and grandkids is not the only root to a fulfilled life is exciting – it opens the door to rebalancing the value we place on romantic and platonic love. But unless we find a way to stop impeding boys' natural capacity for intimacy and connection, men are at risk of missing out.

Sonia Sodha is an Observer columnist

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Names in the newsThe Sopranos

Surprise pandemic hit and now talk of a new series, *Sopranos* is still the boss

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



Writer David Chase is in talks with HBO Max about a possible new Sopranos-related series. Photograph: Matt Licari/Invision/AP

Sat 23 Oct 2021 12.00 EDT

There is a fitting *Sopranos*-esque vagueness to the phrase “in talks with”, as in, Tony is in talks with New York or Carmela is in talks with the priest. The US streaming platform HBO Max has announced that it is in talks with David Chase about bringing the surprising TV hit of the pandemic back to the small screen. “We’re talking to David about a new series, *Sopranos*-related, on HBO Max,” confirmed television executive Ann Sarnoff last week.

It would be surprising, at this stage of renewed *Sopranos* fever, if these talks were not happening. The last two years have brought flash-in-the-pan TV smashes, from *Mare of Easttown* to *Bridgerton* to *Squid Game*, but there has been nothing like the level of reverence still bestowed on *The Sopranos*, either by those rewatching it for the second or third time (I put my hand up here) or the people who have come to it fresh, having been too young to absorb it when it was first on air.

Now there is a whole cottage industry around the show. It used to be that if you wanted to dig deep into a television series, there might be a companion book to accompany it. How quaint that seems today. Now there are think pieces, a vast number of podcasts, a new interview with a surviving cast member at least once a week and a glutinous feast of information and analysis at which even Tony might balk.

Chase has already returned to its world for the recent prequel film *The Many Saints of Newark* and any new series would likely follow that time period, but precede the original show, which began in 1999. I have seen enough episodes of the fabulous TV insider soap *The Morning Show* to know that talks of this magnitude can be bumpy and my fingers are only tentatively crossed that it will come back.

Much of *The Sopranos*’s present appeal seems to be rooted in its existence during a different time and context. Does it appeal as a prophecy of the decline of America or a creation free from contemporary society’s more

puritanical cultural demands? Edie Falco, who played Carmela Soprano, talked to the *New Yorker* recently, and put forward her theory that it can be all things: “Maybe... one of the reasons it was successful is that it appealed to lots of different people for lots of different reasons.”

It is a position that seems almost impossible to inhabit now, in a world stripped of nuance and subtlety, while *The Sopranos* had both in abundance. I am infinitely curious about what Chase might decide to do with it.

Adele: all hail, queen of the earworms



‘Adele has Tyson Fury-ed her way to record-breaking listening figures.’
Photograph: Simon Emmett/Columbia Records/PA

It would only really count as news if Adele had not gone straight to the top of the British charts with Easy on Me, her first new song in five years, though bizarrely, only her third number one single.

She has returned to music emphatically, with Adele-esque gusto, setting the highest combined streaming/sales figures since Ed Sheeran’s ubiquitous Shape of You in 2017 and annihilating the previous streaming record for a first week of release, formerly held by Ariana Grande’s 7 Rings, which isn’t

even her best song. Grande set the bar with 16.9m streams of her song in one week; in seven days, Easy on Me was streamed 24m times.

A friend told me that they hadn't bothered streaming Easy on Me when it "dropped" as they knew they'd hear it soon enough; inevitably, they heard it three times that day, twice in the car and once in a shop. Adele has Tyson Fury-ed her way to record-breaking listening figures, but that doesn't begin to take into account the passive listening that goes on. As staggering as they are, these figures must barely scratch the eardrums of how many people have actually taken it in.

Fleetwood Mac: I never thought of The Chain as funereal...



Fleetwood Mac: favoured for the last rites. Photograph: Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

Of all the morbid parlour games that dramatic people love to play, "what song would you have played at your funeral?" is surely up there with "what's your death row meal?" (builder's tea and hot buttered toast, if you're asking).

Co-Op Funeralcare has released its annual list of the most popular songs played at funerals, which offers its usual insight into the changing British psyche, revealing that right now we love a good cry to Ed Sheeran.

There was a report of one request to play WAP by Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion, which seemed funny, until I realised it was probably a younger person's funeral, and then it became upsetting. In more traditional waters, the top 10 revealed a steady emotional range for funeral music. The most popular songs are either celebratory – My Way, Always Look on the Bright Side of Life – or consolatory, as with Time to Say Goodbye or We'll Meet Again. Robbie Williams's Angels, famously a staple of both weddings and funerals, has dropped out of the top 10, while Fleetwood Mac's The Chain has made a surprising first appearance at number seven.

I may have jumbled it up with the fractious Fleetwood Mac mythology, but I never thought of The Chain as being celebratory or consoling. "If you don't love me now, you will never love me again" struck me as a sad, pointed line; likewise, "damn your love, damn your lies". But the sentiment, I suppose, is an unbreakable bond, under any circumstances, and anger at a funeral may well be as fitting an emotion as any.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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Observer letters**Politics**

Letters: after David Amess' death, civility in politics is more vital than ever



A tribute to Sir David Amess outside the House of Commons. Photograph: Maureen McLean/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 24 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

It was refreshing to read Alison McGovern's piece, but I fear she is almost too subtle ("[Political debate has coarsened. We MPs can take the lead in restoring calm and respect](#)", Comment). How can parliament expect the public to be courteous when they promote extreme views, catcalling, drowning out the Commons Speaker etc?

The government encourages extremism by its use of such terms as "traitors" for anybody who disagrees and failing to correct a press that refers to the supreme court as "enemies of the people". The proceedings of the court are a model of reasoned debate that parliament could well adopt.

Bully-boy tactics and foul language of the likes of Dominic Cummings or Alastair Campbell can only be permitted by the encouragement or acquiescence of their political masters in pursuit of power.

Until parliament adopts a real measure of civility and courtesy, it cannot expect freedom from extremists. It should pull out the mote in its own eye. Such a change in attitude would be a lasting and meaningful legacy to Jo Cox and Sir David Amess.

David Canning

Earley, Reading

I read your editorial (“[This grim act comes amid a toxic shift in our politics](#)”) with interest and with the horrific killing of Sir David Amess could this indeed be a watershed moment for kinder and more consensual politics?

It is dire that our MPs face security problems when holding surgeries, but they are to be commended that the majority do not want to batten down the hatches and put a stop to this very important and democratic transaction between themselves and their constituents.

The [House of Commons](#) tribute to Sir David was a masterclass in warmth, friendship and humour from all parties. It was noted too that at PMQs Sir Keir Starmer reflected on this consensual way of doing politics without harsh, loud and counterproductive rhetoric. I sense the public are fed up with it, social media feeds on its toxicity and the prime minister needs to appreciate that warm words are not sufficient.

Judith A Daniels

Cobholm, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk

Labour’s trust problem

It’s depressing to hear again that the public doesn’t trust Labour with the nation’s finances (“[Starmer’s attacks on austerity not hitting home, says report](#)”, News).

Over the last four decades, there is no evidence that Labour has been worse with deficits and debt than the Tories. Recessions cause less economic

activity, less tax revenue and a strain on the social security budget.

Two of those recessions were overseen by a Tory party. The New Labour recession was caused by the banks but was kept shorter by Alistair Darling's imaginative reflationalary policies. David Cameron and George Osborne then came in and blew up the recovery with their shock doctrine – austerity – the effects of which linger to this day. Labour has to call out these lies, otherwise it is destined to be pushed around by a disgracefully biased and spiteful rightwing press.

David Redshaw

Gravesend, Kent

Johnson's disgrace

Fintan O'Toole eviscerated Boris Johnson's disgraceful, damaging, faux grievances about the Northern Ireland protocol and his shameless scapegoating of the ECJ ("[Facing chaos and needing a scapegoat, the Tories seek an endless fight with Europe](#)", Comment).

The Brexit project was always an economically illiterate rightwing fanaticism much more interested in operationalising xenophobia, a fictional sovereignty and as a vehicle for getting Johnson into No 10. He is using Northern Ireland to "mine for grievance" to misdirect the electorate from attributing the huge damage to our economy and society to the Brexiteers.

Philip Wood

Kidlington, Oxfordshire

Extremists come disguised

With reference to Eva Wiseman's enlightening article ("[The dark side of wellness](#)", Magazine), it is clear that the parallels between "spiritual thinking" and extremist far-right conspiracy theories are shockingly stark.

On many occasions, people who vaguely deem themselves to be leftists or educated liberals are promoting sinister conspiracies on important matters such as vaccines. There are often antisemitic overtones to such ideas. Those who push these dangerous anti-vaccine, anti-media, anti-science, anti-fact

agendas are never really leftwing or liberal, they are extremist. Extremism comes in many forms and must always be countered.

Sebastian Monblat

Sutton, London

Murder in Indonesia

As your report says (“[Slaughter in Indonesia: Britain’s secret propaganda war](#)”, Special Report), the Foreign Office has always claimed that the government had no involvement in or advanced knowledge of the mass murders of several hundred thousand alleged leftists in Indonesia. This claim has been dismantled by revelations of a government black propaganda special unit aimed at inciting violence against the Indonesian Communist party (PKI) in 1965.

Through advocacy, reports and supporting grassroots organisations, Tapol has highlighted the legacies of the killings, including the dangers that the military continues to pose to democracy in Indonesia.

Military businesses are flourishing in regions such as West Papua where it has muscled in on the region’s rich logging, plantation and mining potential, on the pretext of countering an insurgency by the West Papuan armed resistance movement. In an era where freedom of expression is as much threatened online as offline, the military deploys cyber-attacks against human rights defenders and other “enemies”.

In the meantime, the international community, keen to support the narrative of Indonesia as a democratic success story, for the most part looks the other way.

Steve Alston, Tapol chairperson
London N7

Unionising sex workers

Regardless of whether we approve or disapprove of sex workers (“[Sex discrimination: why banks shun workers in adult industries](#)”, Business),

those involved need as much help and support as possible, given that it must be one of the most unhealthy and potentially dangerous professions.

My trade union, the GMB, has a branch dedicated to the adult entertainment industry. Some members feel it might be encouraging prostitution. It is not. What it does do is help protect and support some of the most vulnerable workers in the community, also with its own credit union. As always, the solution for all workers is to work together to protect their interests, whatever their profession.

Vaughan Thomas, Norwich city councillor, GMB branch president
Norwich

Theatres for all

The plight of drama schools and their students (“[Why battles over race and sex now take centre stage at drama schools](#)”, Focus) prompts me to share something I have argued for some time.

Our drama tradition has been unequalled since the 16th century yet it is now inaccessible, marginalised, even unknown for many. We should have a live professional performance theatre in every community. Companies would work with children, writers and others eager to participate in the extraordinary past and present of theatre. But, as with public libraries, it will take political guts to give theatre the familiarity it deserves to all.

Ian Flintoff, former RSC and National Theatre actor
Oxford

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For the recordUK news

For the record

Sun 24 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

A picture showing empty shelves was taken at a Wilko store in Swansea, not at a TK Maxx (“[At last, a biblical kind of Christmas](#)”, 17 October, page 45).

Other recently amended articles include:

[Inside the murky world of Istanbul’s taxi cartels](#)

[The dark side of wellness: the overlap between spiritual thinking and far-right conspiracies](#)

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OpinionAusterity

‘Balancing the books’ look goods on paper, Rishi Sunak. But it’s not so pretty on the ground

[James Bloodworth](#)



‘Will stingy Sunak prevail, or will Boris Johnson be permitted to splash the cash on his pet projects?’ Photograph: Paul Marriott/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 24 Oct 2021 02.30 EDT

‘You never want to be in debt,’ my grandmother used to say to me as a child. For her generation, debt equalled subservience to higher-ups. She was also a firm adherent to the Micawber principle: “Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen pounds nineteen and six, result happiness.”

But it’s pretty obvious we don’t always see it as wrong to get into debt – many people have mortgages, after all. Nor, sadly, is it always avoidable.

The findings from [a new report](#) demonstrate as much. An analysis by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has found that nearly 4m low-income households in Britain have [fallen behind](#) on rent, bills or debt payments. The report warns of a debt crisis.

Also, according to the JRF report, around 4.4m low-income households have taken on new or increased borrowing since the pandemic hit; the number of low-income households in arrears has tripled. This is further evidence of a cost-of-living crisis. Things were bad before Covid-19 – employees had endured the longest period of average wage stagnation since the Napoleonic wars 200 years ago. But in the months ahead, spending power is likely to be depleted further.

This is the background against which the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, will deliver his autumn budget this week. The Institute for Fiscal Studies [is predicting](#) that the chancellor will have to cut billions of pounds from departmental budgets and increase taxes to plug the financial black hole created by coronavirus spending. Westminster pundits have been speculating as to whether the chancellor will announce a new era of austerity. Will stingy Sunak prevail or will Boris Johnson be permitted to splash the cash on his pet projects?

A more sombre tone would probably be more appropriate. The stakes are a lot higher for many Britons than the Punch and Judy show of Westminster politics. The previous round of austerity during the 2010 to 2015 coalition government may have contributed to the [deaths of 50,000](#) people, according to a study out this month. (Even those with savings in the bank are increasingly unable to find the things they want in the shops. This is not entirely the government's fault. Supply chains across the world have been hobbled by Covid and the rise in wholesale energy prices.)

Meanwhile, the remnants of the postwar settlement are beginning to unravel. Since the creation of the NHS in 1948, whatever else was going on in their lives, poor Britons have at least been able to see a doctor if they were sick. This can no longer be taken for granted. In many parts of the country, getting a face-to-face appointment with a GP is about as easy as pinning a jelly to a tree.

Then there's the crisis in social care. I spent several weeks in Blackpool in 2016 working as a home carer during research for a book. I saw a decrepit system that was creaking under the strain of an ageing population. The sector has long been deprived of sufficient funds. To its credit, the government has set out plans to reform the care sector. But working people will foot the bill. Instead of updating the archaic council tax system or taxing wealth and assets (a quarter of Britain's wealth is held by the richest 1%), higher [national insurance](#) contributions will further squeeze those already feeling the pinch.

Increasingly, the truth is that we are a nation where the well-off "make" rather than "earn" their money. House prices in Britain now outstrip wages to such an extent that first-time buyers [must save](#) for around eight years to afford a deposit to buy a home. The average home is now 65 times more expensive than in 1970, while average wages are only [36 times higher](#). Refusing to reform the tax system to account for this eye-watering transfer of wealth is shocking – but also entirely predictable.

Refusing to reform the tax system to account for this eye-watering transfer of wealth is shocking but entirely predictable

The picture is no less bleak for renters. Rents have surged by 8% in the year to September; the average monthly amount paid by tenants hit £1,100 for the [first time ever](#) last month, according to the estate agent Hamptons.

So what is the government doing to turn things around? Well, for starters, it recently introduced a £20 a week cut to the benefits of 5m households, the biggest overnight cut to state benefits in British history. Johnson has, however, pledged to "level up" deprived parts of the country, yet most of us still have no idea what that will entail (though this weekend it emerged that Sunak will commit [£6.9bn for public transport](#) in England's city regions).

To be sure, it isn't all doom and gloom right now for everyone. Thanks to a tighter labour market, some workers in traditionally low-paid jobs are able to demand higher salaries for the first time in years. My brother-in-law, an HGV driver, recently put it to me like this: "It's a driver's market and if that means a lack of McDonald's milkshake, then so be it."

But one shouldn't make too much of small mercies. The government has failed to plan ahead for domestic disruption that was always likely to occur as a consequence of Brexit. The country is short of around [100,000 HGV drivers](#). In response, the government has granted just 10,500 [temporary visas](#) to European drivers. Much as it won't reform Britain's archaic system of taxation because it fears a political backlash, so the government is reluctant to authorise enough emergency visas for fear of upsetting diehard Brexiteers.

Britain's problems run deep and can't entirely be blamed on the government. The economy is beset by profound structural problems. Still, by any measure Britain is one of the wealthiest countries on Earth. Yet ordinary people are increasingly working longer hours for less money in more insecure jobs. The "new normal" is a deteriorating standard of living, higher taxes and poorer public services.

Ahead of a further dose of austerity, it's worth then asking: is this just what we've come to accept?

- *James Bloodworth is the author of Hired: Six Months Undercover in Low-Wage Britain*
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OpinionOfcom

Taming the tech giants is one thing. Giving free rein to censors quite another

[Nick Cohen](#)



Paul Dacre, former editor of the Daily Mail: ‘likely to know little of modern media technology’. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Sat 23 Oct 2021 14.00 EDT

Opposition to censorship should not be based on sympathy for the censored but fear of the censors. To loud applause, the UK government says it wants to implement the most far-reaching web regulation of any western democracy. Too few are noticing that the Conservatives’ answer to the question of how to curb online hate is to give its politicians excessive powers and make Paul Dacre the country’s internet censor-in-chief.

The online safety bill will not only tell [Facebook](#), Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and search engines they must have systems to prevent illegal content but clamp down on “legal but harmful” posts. What does that mean? Commentators say the regulation of legal speech is in the bill to stop teenagers with anorexia being bombarded with unhealthy diet tips, or the algorithm sending suicide advice to people on the edge of taking their lives, or promoting Ivermectin as a cure for Covid.

For reasons I will get to, we don’t know that yet. We know with certainty, however, that a government that wants to uphold web standards is breaking every standard of good governance to guarantee that a former *Daily Mail* editor has a loud voice in deciding where the lines are drawn. Downing Street is desperate for Dacre to become the chair of Ofcom, at the moment when it expands its powers. The legislation will turn the broadcast regulator into a gargantuan [online moderator](#). Ofcom staff will have rights of entry and inspection and the ability to impose penalties on online companies of £18m or 10% annual turnover, whichever is greater.

Even his most devoted fans would not say Dacre was famous for his impartiality when it came to the BBC and *Channel 4 News*. Nor was his *Daily Mail* the first place you’d look for opposition to hate, either online or in print. Meanwhile, as the last of the old hot metal editors, Dacre is likely to know little of modern media technology and to think a network protocol is a Robert Ludlum thriller.

Last year, the government's own appointments advisers concluded Dacre's strong opinions on the British media precluded him from becoming Ofcom's chair. Ministers refused to accept the verdict. They are now [scouring the country](#) for unscrupulous interviewers, willing to earn favour with the powerful by authorising a Dacre stitch-up.

Although the favouritism appals many, civil servants console themselves that Dacre will be just one man on Ofcom's board and unable to impose his prejudices. Their confidence would be better founded if the legislation did not give Conservative politicians the right to tell everyone at [Ofcom](#) what they can and cannot regulate.

British regulators have always remained at arm's length from politics. The UK is party to a Council of Europe declaration, which spells out that governments must avoid "regulatory authorities that are under the influence of political power". The [online safety bill](#) tears that old principle apart.

Today's culture secretary, [Nadine Dorries](#), who, like Dacre, is in place to troll liberals, will not be constrained. The bill gives her the power to set Ofcom's "strategic priorities". Ofcom must submit each online code of practice to Whitehall so ministers can ensure it "reflects government policy". The Conservatives are not standing at arm's length. They want the regulators in a necklock.

William Perrin and Prof Lorna Woods of Carnegie UK helped develop the best ideas behind the bill. They emphasised the need to regulate systems, not content. They wanted to ensure that Facebook and Twitter did not just take profits for managers and shareholders but spent money on complaints systems that were properly resourced and lived by the standards they professed to uphold. In a warning the naive Labour frontbench should read before it carries on giving the government its support, [Perrin and Woods described](#) how the government was threatening "traditional checks and balances". Attempts to force regulators to follow political instructions were "crossing the line" in the most "egregious" manner.

Ministers want to use statutory instruments, which parliament rarely votes down, to direct a supposedly independent regulator. Because we do not know what Dorries's diktats will be, I cannot say whether supporters of

Black Lives Matter, LGBT rights or Extinction Rebellion should worry about their online presence. But I can show that online regulation has already been twisted for partisan purposes.

When the government put forward [proposals for policing](#) the web in 2019, civil servants showed a proper concern for attacks on democracy. Russian interference in western elections and the rise of dark money and targeted misinformation persuaded Whitehall to talk of the need to protect our “democratic values and principles”. Social media companies must “increase the accessibility of trustworthy and varied news content”. Earlier this month, the whistleblower [Frances Haugen](#) claimed that Facebook chose to amplify hate and misinformation because “civic integrity” was bad for business. Social media companies profited from the knowledge that “content that is hateful, that is divisive, that is polarising gets the most engagement online”. The 2019 proposals were designed to bring them to heel.

All that has gone now. Researchers from the Constitution Unit at UCL compared the first draft with the finished legislation. The [emphasis](#) shifted decisively away from acknowledging that online platforms have a responsibility for the impact their technology has on democracy, as the fight against fake news vanished.

The Conservative party is always the richest party. In 2019, it received two-thirds of all [political donations](#) over £7,500. It [benefited](#) in the general election from the propaganda campaigns of shadowy rightwing organisations, which did not have to declare where their revenue came from. The Conservative party is also the Vote Leave party, which pioneered the use of [targeting Facebook ads](#) at swing voters. I always thought a government dominated by Boris Johnson and Michael Gove would never allow an assault on fake news and so it has proved.

I sympathise with those who want to control the online promotion of suicide, anorexia, vaccine denial, murder, rape and every other evil 21st-century technology delivers to our phones. But just because we have new technologies does not mean we can abandon old rules. Before you give the power to censor, make sure you know who you are giving it to and what they intend to do with it.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/oct/23/taming-the-tech-giants-is-one-thing-giving-free-rein-to-censors-quite-another>

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MPs' safety: Dominic Raab reveals three threats to 'life and limb'



Dominic Raab: ‘The constant – sometimes surreptitious, sometimes ostentatious – vilification of politicians creates the kind of climate in which these episodes take place.’ Photograph: Michael Mayhew/Allstar

[Jamie Grierson](#)

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Mon 18 Oct 2021 04.50 EDT

The deputy prime minister, Dominic Raab, has revealed he has received three threats “to life and limb” in two years that have resulted in police intervention.

Raab was speaking as politicians and the public struggle to come to terms with the killing of Sir David Amess, the Conservative MP for Southend West who was fatally attacked while meeting constituents in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, on Friday.

A 25-year-old man, understood to be Ali Harbi Ali, was arrested at the scene on suspicion of Amess's killing and remains in police custody under terrorism legislation.

The prime minister is set to lead tributes to Amess in the House of Commons on Monday after his family urged people to be tolerant and "set aside hatred" in his memory.

Raab said he had had three threats to "life and limb" over the past two years.

He told BBC Breakfast: "There will be people who have worse abuse than me, and I particularly feel for the female MPs, and I know colleagues of mine who have come off, for example, Twitter because it's just so vile.

"I have had three threats to life and limb over the last two years."

He said those incidents "all resulted in an intervention". Raab later told ITV's Good Morning Britain that the most recent threat he had received was an acid attack. He said politicians deserved "maximum scrutiny" but added traditional and social media had a role to play in reducing hate.

"I think there has also been quite widespread vilification of politicians in the media," he added.

"The constant – sometimes surreptitious, sometimes ostentatious – vilification of politicians creates the kind of climate in which these episodes take place."

Appearing on BBC Radio 4's Today programme, Eleanor Laing, a deputy speaker of the House of Commons, called for a "culture of kindness" between the public, politicians and media.

"Lots of people have talked about what a kind and gentle man David Amess was," she said. "That's absolutely right. He was cheerful, he was energetic, he was always courteous and extremely kind and thoughtful.

"What a pity that the media don't say those things about more members of parliament while they're still doing their job as a member of parliament rather than waiting until they're not there anymore.

“It can be deeply upsetting when you know that MPs and ministers are working hard to solve one problem or other and when the matters are discussed in the media, MPs are vilified, ministers are spoken to very harshly and it does help to create a culture of aggression. Why can’t we just try and have a culture of kindness?”

Asked on Sky News if plainclothes police officers should be posted outside MPs’ constituency offices, Raab, the justice secretary, suggested private security guards would be made available.

“It depends on the individual, we’re more likely to look at things like private security guards … there’s already money available for that,” he said.

Raab said he personally would not want plainclothes officers outside his office because he would worry about the “chilling effect” and did not “want a wedge between me and the people who elected me”.

However, he said he would not prevent another MP from doing so if that is what they wanted.

“No,” he said. “I can’t legislate and prescribe for every MP, anyone who has nervousness and concern, and the [police] force needs to sit down with them to provide objective security, that gives them peace of mind.”

Raab said since he became an MP in 2010 he had “been very conscious that the risk to us as representatives has increased particularly at the local level”.

The deputy prime minister said online activity had surged during the pandemic and while some of that was positive, such as communicating with family, there was “also a dark side to what happens online”.

“It magnified the positive but also some of the vulnerabilities,” he said.

Raab signalled he could support closing anonymous social media accounts to tackle online hatred but said he did not want to “send a message to tyrants all over the world that they can expose” campaigners who need anonymity.

He told Sky News: “On balance I think there is a case for really looking very carefully at this. I don’t see why people should be able to abuse the position

on social media from a veil of anonymity.”

The Speaker of the Commons, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, will make a statement on Monday before Boris Johnson moves a motion for an adjournment, which will enable parliamentarians to open the tributes session, lasting until 5.30pm.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/oct/18/mps-safety-dominic-raab-reveals-three-threats-to-life-and-limb>

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

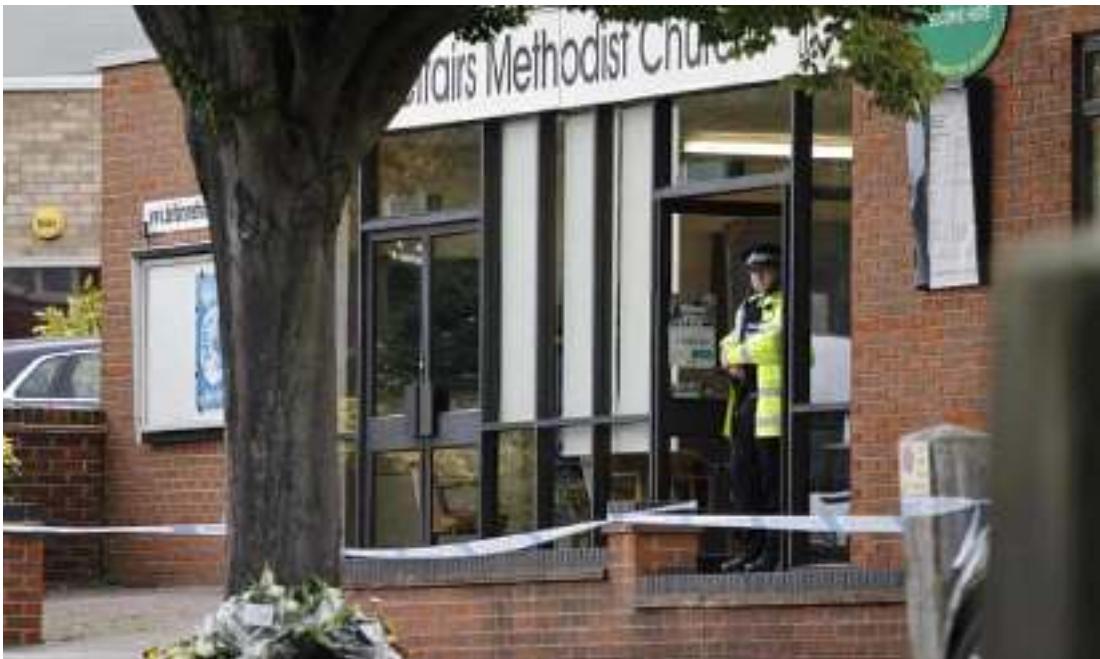
[**Politics**](#)

Boris Johnson says Southend to be given city status to honour Sir David Amess as MPs pay tribute – as it happened

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UK news

Killed in the line of duty: David Amess's final day in democratic service



Belfairs Methodist church where David Amess held his last constituency surgery. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

[Helen Pidd](#)

Sun 17 Oct 2021 14.07 EDT

Sir David Amess made no secret of where he was going to be on Friday 15 October: details of his constituency surgery at Belfairs Methodist church were [pinned at the top](#) of his Twitter account several days in advance.

Among those who turned up, according to witnesses, was Ali Harbi Ali, a 25-year-old British-born man whose family had fled to the UK from Somalia. Sources close to the investigation into Amess's killing indicated on Sunday that Ali had booked an appointment to see the MP.

Before Amess met Ali he took his final Zoom call. It was a meeting with the celebrity PR Richard Hillgrove to discuss plans for the Children's Parliament, an initiative that aimed to match 650 British schoolchildren with MPs to create a virtual parliamentary session on the eve of Cop26, the UN climate change conference. Hillgrove's daughter Lola had been matched with Amess, who visited her at school earlier in the week for photos to promote the event.

"He was in fantastic spirits, in a real 'go get 'em' mood, making loads of jokes," said Hillgrove. "We were going through the running order for the event and he had promised to get Sir Lindsay Hoyle, the Speaker of the House of Commons, to do a video to promote it."

The Zoom call ended at 12.02pm. Three minutes later, Amess had been stabbed multiple times in front of shocked aides. One of them called 999. Police arrived swiftly and arrested a suspect. He reportedly had made no attempts to flee the scene but was calmly sitting next to Amess's body.

"This was a difficult incident but our officers and paramedics from the East of England ambulance service worked extremely hard to save Sir David. Tragically, he died at the scene," the Essex police chief constable, Ben-Julian Harrington, said later.

Word soon spread across Leigh-on-Sea and a priest arrived to offer Amess the last rites. Father Jeffrey Woolnough had rushed to the church with his holy oils but police would not let him past the cordon. "A Catholic, when they're dying, would want a priest there, and for reasons that only the police know, I was not allowed in," he said.

He had found out about the attack on the news. "I got my clerics on, and got the holy oils, sort of expecting that I might be allowed on the crime scene to administer the oil of the sick. I didn't know at that time what kind of condition he was in ... but it didn't sound great, so it was a just-in-case matter.

"When I got there I showed my card to the police and I asked if there was any chance that I can get in. And in fairness the policeman there radioed through and said: 'I'm afraid not, this is a crime scene.'"

Instead, Woolnough prayed the rosary outside the police cordon with a parishioner. “Working with the police, we have to respect what they said. It would’ve been a great thing to do if I’d have had the chance, but it wasn’t to be,” the priest said.

Within 36 hours of the attack, the suspect was named in the media as Ali. His father, Harbi Ali Kullane, a former adviser to the prime minister of Somalia, later confirmed to the Sunday Times that anti-terrorist police from Scotland Yard had visited him since the attack.

“I’m feeling very traumatised. It’s not something that I expected or even dreamed of,” he said.

Police were granted a warrant of further detention at Westminster magistrates court which allows them to hold the suspect until 22 October.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/oct/17/killed-in-the-line-of-duty-david-amesss-final-day-in-democratic-service>

[UK news](#)

UK Muslim groups brace for rise in hate crime after killing of David Amess



Zara Mohammed, the leader of the Muslim Council of Britain, says hate crime is rife on the group's social media. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

[*Dan Sabbagh*](#)

Sun 17 Oct 2021 14.56 EDT

Britain's leading Muslim organisation is to issue new guidance to help British Somalis and other individuals and mosques deal with any incidents of hatred emerging in the aftermath of Sir David Amess's death.

Zara Mohammed, the secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain, said that mosques in and around Southend were devastated by the killing of the local MP and "they had regarded him as a member of their family".

“This is a heinous crime and we utterly condemn it,” Mohammed said. “Nobody in the local Muslim community could believe how anybody could brutally murder anyone, never mind Sir David, who was so engaged with them.”

But she added there was “definitely an apprehension for Muslim communities at this time” after it emerged that Ali Harbi Ali, the 25-year-old man arrested on suspicion of murder following the fatal stabbing, came from a British Somali family.

Details about Ali’s motivations remain scarce, although the investigation into Amess’s death at his constituency surgery on Friday lunchtime is being treated by police as terror-related following initial questioning of the suspect.

There has been anecdotal evidence of threats against some British Somalis since the tragic incident, Mohammed said, particularly towards “visibly Muslim Somali women” – and against some Somali organisations.

“Our own social media has been rife with hatred,” Mohammed added, after the MCB released statements over the weekend in support of the late Conservative MP and his family, and condemning the killing as “an attack on democracy”.

As a result the MCB was working on producing updated guidance on “reporting hate crime”, which would be also translated into Somali and would be partly shared via WhatsApp, a popular means of communication among the community in the UK.

Fresh guidance will also be sent out to all mosques, Mohammed added, “reminding them of simple things like making a risk assessment, ensuring CCTV are fully functional and working with local communities and friends”.

It would also include a particular emphasis on the safety of Friday congregations. Four years ago worshippers at two Finsbury Park mosques were rammed by a van driver in a violent incident that left one dead and nine injured.

The British Somali community dates back more than 100 years, and there are at least 100,000 British Somalis in the UK, according to census data, although the figure is generally believed by experts to be an underestimate. The majority live in London, although there are well-established communities in Cardiff, Liverpool and other major cities.

Kahiye Alim, director of the Council of Somali Organisations, which represents 200 groups including 40 mosques, said his organisation, which had condemned the attack on Amess, was also braced for a possible rise in community tensions. “We are preparing material for community safety and personal safety on how to report hate crime,” he said.

One of its members based in London had received a death threat on Friday, Alim added, and had reported the incident to local police. “We are concerned the way this story has been running,” he added, citing the focus on the family background of the man arrested.

Mohammed said she hoped communities would remain united in response to the killing of the Conservative MP: “Division is what the terrorists want. A true remembrance of Sir David’s life would be about coming together and showing we can build a better Britain.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/oct/17/muslim-group-to-issue-hate-support-after-killing-of-david-amess>

2021.10.18 - Spotlight

- 'I've done 150 movies. I think that's enough' Michael Caine on Brexit, Boris Johnson and big breaks
- 'We have to better support women' MP leading the fight on menopause
- Dune Science fiction's answer to Lord of the Rings
- 'I feel hurt that my life has ended up here' The women who are involuntary celibates



Michael Caine: 'I've only watched Alfie maybe two or three times.'
Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

[The G2 interview](#)

Michael Caine on Brexit, Boris Johnson and big breaks: 'I've done 150 movies. I think that's enough'

Michael Caine: 'I've only watched Alfie maybe two or three times.'
Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

by [Xan Brooks](#)

Mon 18 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Michael Caine is 88 and walks with a stick. He has a gammy leg and a dodgy spine and reckons the only time he leaves the house these days is when his wife has the time to take him out for a drive. The other week he was sent a screenplay that had his character running away from a bunch of

crooks, and this made him laugh – the very idea he could play it. “I can’t walk, let alone run,” he says. “And I’m more or less done with movies now.”

He was winding down anyway, hadn’t shot a film in a year, and then sneaked in one last movie, *Best Sellers*, just before the pandemic struck. He doubts he will ever make another, which is fine by him, no great loss. He’s got his knighthood and his Oscars; what does he have left to prove? He says: “I’ve done 150 movies. I think I’ve done enough.”

Caine has been such a reliable fixture for so long – part of the furniture, a familiar face on the screen – that it’s unnerving to imagine the landscape without him, like walking into the Tower of London and finding the ravens all gone. It’s more unnerving still to realise that it may already have happened; that he might have retired without anyone making a fuss. Caine spent the first part of his career storming the barricades and the second enjoying the spoils of his success. One would have expected some big final act, a showstopping swan song. Instead, we have this: a clean getaway.

The actor is speaking via video link from his Surrey home near Box Hill (the first time, he says, he has done an interview this way). He’s supposed to be promoting his role in *Best Sellers*, an amiable enough enterprise that casts him as a dyspeptic old author who becomes a viral sensation. But the man’s not feeling it; he seems to have moved on. When I tell him I’ve heard he based the character of Harris Shaw on a monstrous old director he once worked with, he pleads total ignorance and says he can’t think who I mean. “I don’t remember. I might have done. It’s been two years since I did it, so it’s funny talking about it now.” He slurps his tea. “Also, I’m 88. My mind’s not as agile as it used to be.”



A swansong? Caine with Aubrey Plaza in Best Sellers. Photograph: Screen Media Films/Allstar

You see, he adds, that's another thing to consider. "I mean, I'm fine, I'm well. But I can't walk and I can't stand for very long and now I don't know whether my bloody memory's going. And I've worked with people like that. I worked with one actor who had all his bloody lines written on the wall because he never remembered any of them. And there are others who wear earphones and have the assistant director read the next line to them. Johnny Depp – he does that [Depp, for his part, has suggested otherwise]. I can't remember who the other bloke was. Older American actor. It was a long time ago now."

When lockdown happened, Caine was faced with a choice. He could either lounge about in the house and watch telly all day or he could add a fresh string to his bow. So he sat and wrote a novel, a thriller, his first stab at straight fiction after a number of memoirs. Fingers crossed, he's getting it published next year, although he's still rewriting and tidying, making it look more professional, "Paragraphs," he says, chuckling. "Punctuation, all that."

What's the title and what's it about? "Well," he says. "The title is If You Don't Want to Die. I only read thrillers. I'm an adventure man, I'm not a literature person, so I'm not trying to replace Shakespeare here. But it's

based on something I once read about two dustmen, two rubbish collectors in the East End.” Dramatic pause. “And they find uranium in the rubbish.”

As a boy in south London, his twin passions were always movies and books, the cinema and the library. He’s done cinema to death, so it’s only fitting that he should now be circling back to the library, albeit metaphorically – the actual building has long gone. The last time he visited Elephant and Castle he saw it had been replaced by a block of flats. But that’s progress, that’s history. It involves good changes and bad. When he was starting out as an actor, for instance, British film and theatre were the preserve of the posh. “It was: ‘Bunty’s having a party and everyone’s in their tennis whites.’” Another short laugh. “Then we came along and we changed all that.”



Get Carter. Photograph: Silver Screen Collection/Metro/Allstar

These days we view Caine’s early career in sweeping historical terms. He was the ordinary bloke with the alleycat swagger, the working-class hero with the undiluted Thames accent, a bespectacled poster-boy for 60s social mobility. He has now reached the point where he’s started to view himself in those terms, as part of an upstart generation of actors that included Albert Finney, Richard Harris, Peter O’Toole and Tom Courtenay. Whereas at the time, of course, he was living his life in closeup; no perspective whatsoever.

“I was just in the disco, pissed,” he says. “I didn’t know what the hell was going on.”

Sometimes, channel surfing, he’ll catch a glimpse of an antique Caine classic. It might be him playing deadpan Harry Palmer in *The Ipcress File*, hardcase Jack in *Get Carter*, or rollicking, ill-starred Peachy Carnehan in *The Man Who Would Be King*. But he says he has no interest in revisiting old glories and can rarely be persuaded to look back at his work. He reckons that *Alfie* was probably the best film he made, but he’s basing that on memory and hasn’t updated the files. “I’ve only watched *Alfie* maybe two or three times.”

What he misses, if anything, are the people, not the films. The films are there on his iPad any time he wants to watch them. But his mates have absconded; they’ve made their getaways, too. “My generation is going. All my friends are dying off. Because we all got so old. Roger Moore, Sean Connery – those are two of my closest friends who went. Then a couple of days ago, [Johnny Gold](#), who owned Tramp, the discotheque in London. And I have another very close friend who is very, very ill. If he survives until next weekend I’ll be surprised. And I won’t mention his name, but you’ll read about him in the papers.”

I ask if he thinks the country is in a better shape today than when he started out, or whether the social progress he epitomised has since been rolled back. “I don’t know,” he says. “It’s still not perfect. Probably never will be. Look at the state we’re in now. If you’re growing up today you’re in for a tough time.”

In the past, Caine has variously described himself as a leftwing Tory and a rightwing socialist. He traditionally (but not exclusively) votes Conservative. He adored Margaret Thatcher, respected David Cameron and [voted leave in the 2016 referendum](#). One day, I suggest, he’s going to reconsider that position, but he’s having none of it. He still fully supports Brexit, despite the current supply-chain chaos, despite the burgeoning winter-fuel crisis.



With Sue Lloyd in *The Ipcress File*. Photograph: Rank/Sportsphoto/Allstar

“Oh, that’s teething trouble,” he assures me. “It’s obviously not going to go well immediately.” Then he slightly shifts position. “I mean, I don’t know what’s going to happen. I’ve got to wait for Boris to come back off holiday. I mean, to do that, to go on holiday right now, it’s unbelievable. Empty shelves. People queueing for petrol. And you think: ‘Wait a minute. He’s [gone to Marbella?](#)’”

So wait – he thinks Brexit is good, but he’s unimpressed with Johnson personally? “Oh, I supported him. I thought he was great. But now I’m very disappointed in him. He made a big mistake there, going to Marbella. Let’s see if when he comes back he can settle it all. Otherwise we might have a socialist government.”

And he might be voting for it? “Might be. You never know. I did it before. I did it with Blair. I did it with someone else. I forget who – it was a long time ago. I always vote according to what I think. What’s good for us. What’s good for the country.”

He is, I suspect, your classic working-class Tory – raised in poverty, a self-made man. This perhaps partly explains the mass of substandard pictures that clog up his CV – quick-cash gigs such as *The Swarm* and *The Hand* and

Jaws: The Revenge, which he was off shooting the night he [won an Oscar for Hannah and Her Sisters](#) in 1987. If you've been brought up poor, money must matter more. You want to amass it. You want to keep it. Maybe he feels that there's somehow still a lack.

"No, no, no," Caine objects. He doesn't think that at all. He's flush with cash, awash with cash. "I've always lived to the highest limit that my money would allow. I mean, I'm not extravagant. I'm not silly. I'm not out buying caviar every day. But yeah, I'm talking to you from a great big house with 24 acres of land. Which is fantastic because it means that my grandchildren can come and visit, and they disappear instantly and just go running around. Two miles, running round and round the garden."

Once again, he checks himself. Here he is waxing lyrical about his house in the country, when the reality is that the place has now run its course. He bought it 30-odd years ago as a big family home, large enough to accommodate him, his second wife, Shakira, his two daughters and three grandchildren. These days it's mostly just him and Shakira, rattling around. "So I'm going to get a smaller one," he says. "Because the grandchildren have all gone now. They're all growing up. So I'm going to move back to be nearer to them, where it's easier for them to visit. I'm going to move to Wimbledon. My daughter, Natasha, lives in Wimbledon."

He was named Maurice Micklewhite, after his father, who worked as a fish market porter. I've read that he only officially changed it a few years ago, because he got sick of having to explain himself every time he lined up at UK passport control. But he says that's not true: he changed it ages ago, 10 years back at least. It felt like cutting the last link with his past.



With Shelley Winters in *Alfie*. Photograph: Paramount/Allstar

When he first became Michael Caine, of course, people still called him Maurice. "But I haven't got any family members now, so no one's called me Maurice for years. Everyone's dead. My brother, my mother, my father. If I have any other relations, they'd be living in Bermondsey." He shrugs. "And I don't go to Bermondsey."

What about him? Is he still Maurice deep down? "No. The day I became Michael Caine, that was it – I was Michael Caine. I wasn't Maurice any more, I was a completely different person. And it was amazing. It was fabulous."

What was wrong with Maurice? "Well, nobody knew him. He was broke. He was out of work. And the moment I became Michael Caine, I got a job and was on my way."

He swings with practised ease into an anecdote he has probably told 100 times before – at dinner parties, in discotheques and on prime-time chatshows to rolling audience applause. It's the tale of how he got his big break in the 1964 film [Zulu](#). How he met the American director Cy Endfield in the theatre bar only to be told that the part he wanted had already gone to

another actor. How he had thought that was that. Back to penury and obscurity. Back to being Maurice Micklewhite.

He says: “My entire movie career is based on the length of the bar at the Prince of Wales theatre, because I was on my way out and it was a very long walk to the door. And I had just got there, when he called out: ‘Come back!’ because he had decided that I could play the part of the officer instead. He said: ‘You look like an officer,’ because I was 6ft 2in, blond hair, very slim. The door was half-open; I was very nearly through it. I turned around and walked back in.”

His story makes me think of Dick Whittington, turning again on the road into London. “Exactly,” says Caine. “That’s exactly who I am: the Dick Whittington of acting.”

Best Sellers is available digitally on 18 October and screens on 27 October at the Raindance film festival.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/oct/18/michael-caine-on-brexit-boris-johnson-and-big-breaks-five-done-150-movies-i-think-thats-enough>

Menopause

‘We have to better support women’: MP leading the fight on menopause



Carolyn Harris is pushing a private member’s bill on menopause that has cross-party support. Photograph: Chris Fairweather/Huw Evans/Rex/Shutterstock



Alexandra Topping

Mon 18 Oct 2021 00.00 EDT

Carolyn Harris remembers hearing her mother and aunties talking about “the change”. She was told to make a cup of tea and sent out of the room. “I was 36!” hoots the [Labour MP for Swansea East](#). “Later I said to my mum, ‘What did you think you were protecting me from? It was always going to happen to me too’.”

Harris is now at the vanguard of a movement determined to smash the remnants of that taboo, pushing a private member’s bill to turn up the volume on a debate about the menopause that is growing louder by the day.

As an increasing number of countries, businesses and individuals mark [World Menopause Day](#) on Monday, Harris says she is ready to shame whoever stands in the way of progress.

“You don’t get change unless you ask for it, and you demand it, or you put people in a position where they’re going to look like right bastards if they don’t do something about it,” she says with typical candour. “I want to be in a position where the government can’t say no and where companies won’t say no.”

Harris will lead a small army of supporters to Parliament Square in London before her bill, which is due to be heard on the 29 October, to demand free prescriptions for hormone replacement therapy in England – already available in Scotland and Wales. The government is said to be “interested” in the bill, with Harris adding that she has cross-party support from dozens of MPs including the Tory grandes Bernard and Anne Jenkin, alongside Caroline Nokes and Tim Loughton, as well as Jess Phillips, Diane Abbott and Sarah Champion in the [Labour](#) ranks.

“In the last two years the narrative has completely changed,” says Harris, who adds that since the private members bill was announced she’s had calls from countries from Canada and the US, to Australia and Japan.

“People are waking up to the fact that we have to find a better way of supporting women through the menopause,” she says. “Women are enhanced coming through this process, but only if they get the support they need.”

The evidence suggests they all too often don’t. There are more than 13 million currently experiencing menopause or perimenopause in the UK. [Menopause](#) campaigners argue that medical sexism and a lack of training means many women are left to suffer the symptoms of menopause – which can include depression, anxiety, insomnia and brain fog as well as hot flushes.

The UK could be losing [14m work days a year](#) related to the menopause, according to recent research. One in four women who experience menopausal symptoms – many at the top of their career – [consider leaving their job](#).

Many more businesses are joining the menopause revolution, says Harris – pointing to companies such as Cult Beauty which has introduced comprehensive policies around miscarriage, IVF, pregnancy and the menopause and hosted Harris at an event last week. Alexia Inge, the company’s co-chief executive, says that with a 78% female workforce it was a moral and business imperative. “As a nation we’re actually losing people from the workforce at a time when we need people to work later in life,” she says. “Even if you take the really important social care elements away, we need to support people to go through this.”

But it's not enough to have a policy, says Harris. "This can't be a box-ticking exercise, companies and the government really have to genuinely want to help these workers."

Harris's own experience with the menopause was brutal. Twenty years after losing her eight-year-old son in a road traffic accident she blamed herself for not processing her grief when she was hit by a deep depression. "It took me six years, having conversations with women, for me to realise I was going through the menopause," she says.

Now she wants to use her voice in parliament to speak up for those who she says are often just too tired to fight. "There's a hell of a lot of women my age, working in supermarkets in shops and they are exhausted," she says. "A lot of those women are going through the menopause but they are not being treated, because in 2021 there is still not enough understanding about a condition that affects 51% of the population."

With Harris leading the charge, with an army of women alongside her, that may be starting to change. "I don't throw stones – I'll work with anyone to get this done," she says. "But if I've got to throw boulders to get what I want, I will."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/oct/18/we-have-to-better-support-women-mp-carolyn-harris-leading-fight-on-menopause>

Books

Dune: science fiction's answer to Lord of the Rings



Josh Brolin and Timothée Chalamet in the upcoming film adaptation of Dune

Photograph: Moviestore Collection Ltd/Alamy



[Alison Flood](#)

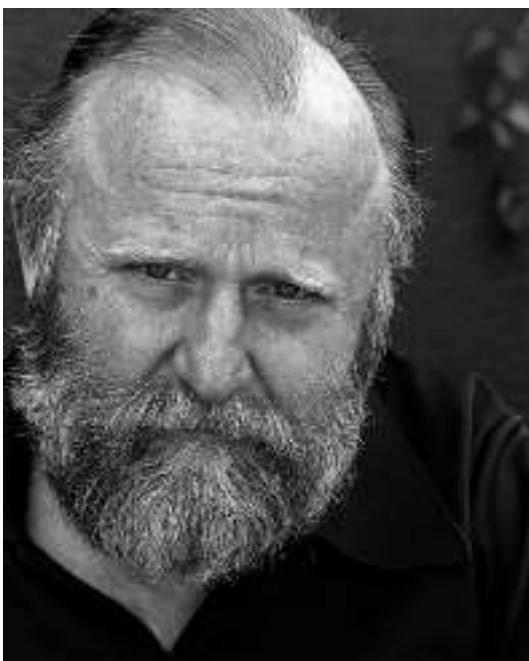
Mon 18 Oct 2021 03.34 EDT

If science fiction has an answer to fantasy's The Lord of the Rings – JRR Tolkien's epic saga of the battle to defeat the Dark Lord, Sauron – then Frank Herbert's Dune has to be a strong contender. Published in 1965, it is the story of the desert planet Arrakis, known as Dune; of the rare and priceless "spice" that can be found there; of the Atreides family, sent to Dune's dangerous surface to rule; of its native Fremen people, who are capable of surviving in this inhospitable environment. Of the giant sandworms, hundreds of metres long, which hunt beneath the sands, and of Paul Atreides' reluctant ascent to messianic status. And it is finally getting the mainstream attention it deserves, thanks to Denis Villeneuve's film adaptation, out in the UK on 21 October.

I first read Dune when I was 18. It left behind deep, haunting memories: Paul Atreides chanting the Litany against Fear as his humanity is tested by the Gom Jabbar; the first appearance of a sandworm, vast and magnificent; the complexity of Paul's rise to become the Bene Gesserit's Kwisatz Haderach, the Fremen's Mahdi (like much of the Fremen's culture, the word is lifted from the vocabulary of Islam). As one character puts it: "No more

terrible disaster could befall your people than for them to fall into the hands of a Hero.”

Director Denis Villeneuve, whose adaptation hits cinemas later this month – is the fourth attempt, after Alejandro Jodorowsky’s plans came to nothing, David Lynch disowned his 1984 version starring Kyle MacLachlan and Sting, and a television miniseries. “There are deep pleasures when there are images that you’re able to achieve that are close to what you had in mind as a teenager,” Villeneuve has said.



Frank Herbert. Photograph: Ulf Andersen/Getty Images

“I read it the first time when I was 11 or so,” says Kevin Anderson, the bestselling author who, together with Herbert’s son Brian, has continued the Dune series after his father’s death. “I had read all of HG Wells and Edgar Rice Burroughs and Andre Norton and Ray Bradbury and all these great classic science fiction books, but Dune is something above and beyond those. When I read it, I just felt so immersed in the world that everything felt real. He had come up with not just a desert planet with sandworms, he had the full ecology worked out, all of the culture, even the language and the religion of the people and the giant galactic politics and how there are wheels within wheels and everything fits together.”

Herbert's first inspiration for Dune came in 1957, when he went to research a magazine article about a research project in Oregon to stabilise sand dunes. The article, They Stopped the Moving Sands, was never published, but a letter he sent to his agent, published in The Road to Dune, shows how fascinated he was: "Sand dunes pushed by steady winds build up in waves analogous to ocean waves except they may move 20 feet a year instead of 20 feet a second. These waves can be every bit as devastating as a tidal wave in property damage ... and they've even caused deaths. They drown out forests, kill game cover, destroy lakes, fill harbours."

Herbert would toy with the idea of a desert planet for the next five years, spending time in a desert as part of his research, plotting a short adventure novel, [Spice Planet](#), but putting it aside for what would become Dune. He sent an early draft to his agent in 1963, and the story was published in serial form in John W Campbell's Analog magazine that year. It was rejected by publishers more than 20 times in book form, one citing "bursts of melodrama", another that "nobody can seem to get through the first 100 pages ... without being confused and irritated". A comment from one rejecting editor, that "it is just possible that we may be making the mistake of the decade in declining Dune by Frank Herbert", would prove as prophetic as one of Paul's own visions, as would another's remark that he would turn it down despite the fact that "it is the sort of writing that might attract a cult and go on for ever".

"For good or ill, Frank wrote a book that was at the time unpublishable. If you're a business person advising Frank, you would say don't write Dune, nobody will publish this book this long, with this much culture and background," says Anderson. "But we're glad that he didn't listen to anybody, he just wrote his own book and it's certainly one of the greatest science fiction novels of all time."

In the end, Chilton Books, better known for auto repair manuals, picked it up in 1965. It won a Nebula for the best science fiction novel of 1965, but sales weren't stellar at first, despite the quote from Arthur C Clarke emblazoned on its cover: "I know nothing comparable to it except The Lord of the Rings."

I'd say there's Dune DNA in Game of Thrones, that feeling of the grand sweep of realpolitik and how it affects human beings

Neil Gaiman

"It wasn't perceived as an instant classic; publishers saw this big book on ecological themes as rather peculiar, a sort of Lawrence of Arabia in the stars," says American Gods author [Neil Gaiman](#). "It worked but it hit slowly – it wasn't like [Robert Heinlein's 1961 novel] Stranger in a Strange Land, which came out and caught fire, was utterly of its zeitgeist. In a lot of ways the things that took Dune into the zeitgeist were 70s things, the understanding of and passion for ecology, the idea of people's place in the world."

By 1967, sales were picking up, and Herbert was working on a sequel by 1968. Dune Messiah would see Paul as emperor, presiding over a bloody jihad through the stars that eventually kills 60 billion people.

Gaiman describes science fiction as "a conversation with the last round of what went before". What Herbert brought to the conversation was ecology – as well as what Gaiman calls "giant multigenerational soap opera".

"I'd say there's Dune DNA in Game of Thrones, in the willingness to kill your characters, that feeling of the grand sweep of realpolitik and how it affects human beings", says Gaiman.

Jeff VanderMeer agrees. "It definitely has been very influential, and I think there's something very surreal about the navigators and the way the Dust is used, and then the absolute spectacle of the sandworms, whether it makes any ecological sense or not. That kind of thing really sticks with you on a wide canvas."

Side note: according to Brian Herbert's biography of his father, Dreamer of Dune, when Frank saw Star Wars he "picked out 16 points of what he called 'absolute identity' between his book and the movie, enough to make him livid". Together with other science fiction writers who thought they saw their work in the film, Frank formed a "loose organisation" he called, "with

his tongue firmly placed in his cheek, the We're Too Big to Sue George Lucas Society".



Timothée Chalamet and Rebecca Ferguson in the forthcoming Dune film.
Photograph: Chia Bella James/AP

The imminent release of Villeneuve's adaptation means Dune, and its story of a young white man leading a tribal people to victory, is being interrogated afresh. Is it a white saviour narrative? Why are no Middle Eastern or north African actors taking on the roles of the Fremen, given the clear influence of the Arab and Islamic world on Herbert's creations, [asked Syfy](#)? Academic Jordan S Carroll describes Dune as "a key text for the 'alt-right'" in [the Los Angeles Review of Books](#), adding that "for the alt-right, Paul stands as the ideal of a sovereign ruler who violently overthrows a decadent regime to bring together 'Europid' peoples into a single imperium or ethnostate".

But as Carroll goes on to point out, this is misreading the point of Herbert's story. "Fascist commentators ... overlook that their long-awaited sovereign Paul begins the series as a tragic character but ends it as a grotesque one," he writes. [Herbert himself said](#) that Dune "began with a concept: to do a long novel about the messianic convulsions which periodically inflict themselves on human societies". Far from revelling in Paul's immense power, his idea was, he said, "that superheroes were disastrous for humans".

For Hari Kunzru, [writing in the Guardian six years ago](#), “what makes Dune more palatable than, say, the gruesome spectacle of a blonde-wigged Emilia Clarke carried aloft by ethnically indeterminate brown slaves in Game of Thrones, is the sincerity of Herbert’s identification with the Fremen”. Arrakis’s people, writes Kunzru, are “the moral centre of the book, not an ignorant mass to be civilised”, and Paul “does not transform them in his image, but participates in their culture and is himself transformed into the prophet Muad’Dib”.

On top of this, Paul’s rise, to put it mildly, is no positive thing, and [Villeneuve, asked about the white saviour trope on his press tour for the film release](#), made this point. “It’s a critique of that. It’s not a celebration of a saviour,” he said. “It’s a criticism of the idea of a saviour, of someone that will come and tell another population how to be, what to believe. It’s not a condemnation, but a criticism.”

Herbert would follow Dune Messiah with Children of Dune, God Emperor of Dune, Heretics of Dune, and Chapterhouse: Dune. “It gets more and more abstract. I found the second and third to be deeply strange, stranger than the first one,” says VanderMeer. Herbert’s final Dune novel was published in 1985; he died of pancreatic cancer in 1986.

“The end of Chapterhouse: Dune is just this huge cliffhanger – clearly the story wasn’t over,” says Anderson. “In the back of my mind, I sort of always assumed that Brian Herbert would pick up the mantle and finish the last book, and after 10 years, I finally got impatient enough that I tracked down a contact for him and I wrote a letter and I said, so are you going to finish the story, because I want to read it?”

At this point, Anderson was winning awards for his own novels and penning bestselling titles set in the Star Wars and X-Files universes. He tentatively suggested to Brian that they might work together to continue the series.

“My greatest preference would have been for Frank Herbert to be alive and write it himself, obviously. I didn’t hear back from Brian for a few months – it was just a shot in the dark,” Anderson says. “It turned out he had been asking a bunch of other authors about me, and he called me up one afternoon

out of the blue. It became clear to him that I wasn't just some guy who read Dune once and wanted to make a buck off of it – that I was truly passionate about working in the Dune universe."

The pair struck a \$3m deal with Bantam for a new trilogy of prequels in 1997. "At the time it was the largest single science fiction book contract in publishing history," says Anderson. "We've counted up something like 5m words we've written together, and he's still my best friend."

While titles such as Isaac Asimov's I, Robot stories now feel passé, says author and critic Lisa Tuttle, the fact that Dune takes place on a "secondary world" prevents it from feeling outdated. "And since the 1980s, science fiction and fantasy has moved into the mainstream," she says. "There's a receptive audience willing to look at it – it's not seen as a specialist, niche, nerdy kind of thing; even when Dune was popular in the 70s it was very much a kind of narrow band of people."

Dune holds up today, says writer Alastair Reynolds, when many science fiction novels of its era don't, in part because Herbert future-proofed it, by setting his story 20,000-odd years ahead, after the "Butlerian Jihad" has replaced intelligent machines with human minds.

"What Dune did that was huge and important, was give us a lovely, complicated thing that felt like a movie. It feels grand, it's blood-stirring," agrees Gaiman. "It doesn't feel like it's been swept away into history. It was absolutely an important book, and I think it's remained an important book."

Dune is released in Australia and the UK on 21 October, and in the US on 22 October

The main picture on this article has been changed. The original picture showed an early storyboard image from the Dune film adaptation, rather than a film still, as described

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Sex

‘I feel hurt that my life has ended up here’: The women who are involuntary celibates



Women may find it harder to find a partner they are attracted to as they get older. Illustration: Nathalie Lees

[Lizzie Cernik](#)

Mon 18 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

When [a woman named Alana](#) coined the term “incel” in the late 90s, she couldn’t have predicted the outcome. What started as a harmless website to connect lonely, “involuntary celibate” men and women has morphed into an underground online movement associated with male violence and extreme misogyny.

In 2014, [Elliot Rodger](#) stabbed and shot dead six people in California, blaming the “girls” who had spurned him and condemned him to “an

existence of loneliness, rejection and unfulfilled desires". There have since been numerous attacks by people who identify with incel culture, including [Jack Davison](#), who killed five people in Plymouth this summer, before turning the gun on himself. In the darkest corners of the internet, incel groups have become a breeding ground for toxic male entitlement, putting them on hate crime watchlists across the UK.

But it is not just incel men who struggle to find sexual connections in the modern world. Some young women are turning to online "femcel" spaces to discuss the challenges they face as involuntary celibates.

Theirs is a non-violent resistance. Rather than blaming the opposite sex for their unhappiness, as some of their male counterparts do, femcels tend to believe their own "ugliness" is the root cause of their loneliness. Posting anonymously on platforms they have designed for themselves, they argue that they are invisible due to their abnormal appearance, and that our beauty-centric, misogynistic culture prevents them from being accepted. There is anger and open grappling with self-esteem, but no extreme hatred and no sense of entitlement within the community.

Meanwhile, a far greater number of women would not describe themselves as femcels, but live unintentionally celibate lives. They share many of the femcels' concerns.

Caitlin, 39, doesn't call herself a femcel, but she hasn't had sex for almost eight years and doesn't think she will find another sexual partner. "I'm not conventionally attractive and I never get approached by men," she says. "They don't look at me. I've had therapy to try to address these issues, but dating feels like a barren wasteland. It's worse as I get older, because I've missed that short window to marry and have a family."

I feel that a man who didn't find me attractive straight away would never learn to become attracted to me

She never tells people that she is celibate, because it makes her feel "abnormal" and inadequate. "I feel a lot of anger and hurt that my life has ended up this way. I struggle to cope with the fact I may never find a partner.

Society makes it harder because, after a certain age, people tend to pair off and form their own insular units and life gets lonely for single people.”

Although Caitlin is not morally opposed to casual sex, it is not an experience that feels right for her. She has had two short-term relationships, which ended in heartbreak. There is a popular notion among incel communities – and even in wider society – that women are privileged because they can get sex at any time. Not only is that untrue, as many women will testify, but also, as Caitlin points out, not all sex is enjoyable. “Generally, men who aren’t in a relationship with you don’t make it a pleasurable experience,” she says. “The risk of rejection afterwards is high, which makes the sex even less enjoyable. As a woman, you want to be desired, not treated like a piece of meat.”

Caitlin is aware that men also struggle with self-esteem issues linked to appearance, but believes the pressure is greater for women. “I’m not especially drawn to someone’s looks or height. I prefer to get to know someone and develop an attraction. But I feel that a man who didn’t find me attractive straight away would never learn to become attracted to me. I see lots of beautiful women dating men who aren’t good-looking, but rarely the other way around. Men have more ways to attract a partner than looks.”

Appearance-based discrimination, termed “lookism” by femcel communities, is not the only reason that some women struggle to find a sexual partner. The risk of male violence has always been a concern, but the semi-anonymous nature of app-based dating has increased these fears for many women.

Jane, 49, has been single for eight years and celibate for five. Although she would love to have a sex life, she is not prepared to compromise her principles by seeking a casual relationship with someone she has just met online. “I don’t want to invite someone I don’t know into my home, as you never know the risks.” She was once followed home by a man after their date. “I saw his car behind me and he said he was curious about where I lived. It made me extremely uncomfortable.”

In addition to safety concerns, Jane says apps make it hard to find the type of connection she is looking for. While this is also true for men, she believes

they tend to be more comfortable with the “fast-food”, casual-sex nature of online dating. Dishonesty is a common theme; she says it is impossible to build trust with a man who lies online. “Pictures will be 10 years old, or not an accurate representation of the person,” she says. “I look for men who take care of themselves physically, who are emotionally available, open and honest. You can’t see that on a profile.”

Since giving up on apps, Jane has stayed active through a walking group and has tried many other activities in the past few years. “I meet a lot of great women, but I never meet single men at classes or events. It’s hard to meet men who share your interests.”

This is also Mary’s experience. She is 53 and has been celibate for five years. “A lot of us feel that we’re not expressing ourselves sensually. It’s important to use the word ‘sensual’, not ‘sexual’. For women like me, it’s not about the act of sex. It’s about having the intimacy of emotions, as well as physical experiences.”

Like Jane, Mary has little interest in casual flings, but misses physical intimacy. She has even considered using escorts. It is a far cry from the close relationship she desires, but she would feel more comfortable with the idea of a no-strings sexual encounter if she knew exactly what it entailed. “I’m not really sure that safe, secure sex-worker services exist, but in a way it would be preferable to one-night stands. At least it would be a safe, secure transaction for which you and the man involved knew exactly what you were signing up, with no risk of violence, STIs or emotional hurt and confusion.”



Television presenter Katie Piper, who is building an online community for people who don't fit beauty stereotypes. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

Mary also refuses to use dating apps, due to the number of married men seeking affairs and the difficulties she has in building connections. “The [#MeToo](#) movement was extremely important, but, at the same time, it created polarisation in society,” she says. She believes that, as men attempt to “relearn” the best ways to approach women so that they feel safe and comfortable, it can discourage some from making a connection at all. “It’s like nobody knows how to date any more and the fast-paced culture of apps means nobody has the patience to get to know someone.” She says the men she encounters are almost always looking for someone younger than themselves.

According to Silva Neves, a sex and relationship psychotherapist with the UK Council of Psychotherapy, it is not uncommon for women to struggle to find a partner they find physically attractive, especially as they get older. “Society places a higher importance on women’s beauty,” he says. “We absorb and internalise this misogyny on every level and even women are more likely to criticise another woman’s body than a man’s. You often see women putting more effort into their appearance as they age because they have been taught it’s important in a way that men haven’t. But a lot of

women complain that they struggle to be attracted to men, because they have let themselves go.”

While many men still prioritise beauty, Neves says women’s other successes, such as education, wealth or a good career, may be deemed threatening. In a recent article in the [Wall Street Journal](#), Richard Vedder, an economist and senior fellow at the Independent Institute, a libertarian US thinktank, said that men make up only 40% of the university student population in the US. Women are outperforming their male peers academically and delaying having families in pursuit of financial independence and a career. While this might be considered a positive step forward for society, it has left some men feeling adrift.

The stereotype of the male hunter-gatherer remains quite prevalent and at times I think they feel they don’t have a role

Elaine, 37, who has been celibate for five years, feels her successful career has played a role in her dating difficulties. “Men don’t like the fact I don’t cook or clean, even though I pay for someone to do both jobs,” she says. “The stereotype of male hunter-gatherer remains quite prevalent and at times I think they feel they don’t have a role.” Like other women, she is seeking an intellectual equal and is not interested in finding someone who will take care of her. “If you don’t fit in a Barbie box and do all the domestic duties, it can be quite upsetting for some men.”

Yvonne, 28, recognises the same traditional values in men her age. Despite numerous attempts at dating on and offline, she has never had a relationship and doesn’t engage in casual sex. “I don’t necessarily need to be with a man who has a degree, but I want to meet someone who is intellectually curious, with the same values,” she says. “I think men can be intimidated by education and career success. In online dating especially, it always seems to come down to appearance only. I even know people who get professional pictures done as they know looks will be the first thing men see. As a Black woman, this can be especially hard, as even Black men seem to prioritise light-skinned women.”

Although she experiences loneliness, Yvonne is determined to stay positive. She has an active social life, enjoys a wide range of activities and subscribes to Nicola Slawson's [Single Supplement](#), a weekly newsletter that celebrates the joys of single life and supports people through the more challenging aspects. She also reads the work of the US author [Shani Silver](#), who writes candidly about single life. "There are lots of women who are joining communities of other single women and sharing their experiences," she says. "It's certainly a much healthier approach than some of the toxic, woman-hating platforms that some men inhabit."

Femcels and women who struggle to find relationships are sometimes accused of misandry, especially by male incels. Yvonne counters that any resentment women feel is more likely to be turned inwards. "The biggest difference between men and women seems to be that men feel entitled to sex and relationships, so it's the fault of women when they can't get it," says Yvonne. "Women seem to internalise the issues and be more likely to blame themselves."

Neves argues that while misogyny and misandry are both unacceptable, they have very different roots. "Misogyny is an ideology which dictates that women should be seen as objects, without the same rights as men. Misandry is mostly a reaction to misogyny and informed by evidence. We shouldn't put all men in the same bag, but at the same time it's hard to criticise women who have had negative experiences."

Like Yvonne, he believes that women are more likely to devalue themselves, rather than others. It is one of the reasons he would like to move away from the term "femcel": "When women label themselves as defective, it becomes part of who they are and how men define them, rather than something that can be overcome." Although he doesn't underestimate the trauma that some women experience due to bullying or poor self-esteem, he is hopeful that there will be healthier ways for women to fight back in future.

On Instagram, for example, which is known for perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards, a growing number of women are resisting these norms. Campaigners such as Lizzie Velasquez, who was bullied due to a congenital condition, and [Katie Piper](#), who survived an acid attack, are building online communities for people who don't fit beauty stereotypes, while others are

raising positive awareness about skin conditions and different body types. “I appreciate it can be incredibly difficult, but I would encourage women to surround themselves with these accounts,” he says. “You can have surgery or change your looks, but ultimately it shouldn’t be linked to your value as a person.”

It is something that Caitlin is exploring. “I’m trying to become more positive about finding alternatives to a sexual relationship,” she says. As well as channelling energy into building her self-esteem, she is trying new activities and communicating with other women. “Of course, not all male incels are involved in extremist online forums, but those that do are feeding off their hatred of women, viewing us as possessions or something to conquer,” she says. “Involuntary celibate women seem to be handling their anger and hurt in a more evolved way, throwing themselves into work, life and healthy communities where single life is celebrated. I hope it can inspire me to feel more confident in my own situation.”

Some names have been changed

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A friend displays a picture on her phone of Lenilda dos Santos, 49, who lost her life trying to cross into the US from Mexico last month. Photograph: Avener Prado/The Guardian

A nurse's journey from treating Covid in Brazil to death in the US desert

A friend displays a picture on her phone of Lenilda dos Santos, 49, who lost her life trying to cross into the US from Mexico last month. Photograph: Avener Prado/The Guardian

by [Tom Phillips](#) in Vale do Paraíso

Mon 18 Oct 2021 00.00 EDT

As coronavirus tore through the Valley of Paradise, a farm-flanked backwater in the Brazilian Amazon, Lenilda dos Santos, a nurse technician, stood on the frontline clutching hands most feared to touch.

“She was a warrior during the pandemic,” said Lucineide Oliveira, a friend and colleague at the town’s small, understaffed hospital. “She’d say: ‘If we

have to die, we'll die. But we must fight.””

But one morning in early August, as the two women sat at the entrance to their Covid ward, Lenilda announced she was leaving. “When?” Lucineide asked her friend. “Soon,” Lenilda replied, adding words of reassurance: “I’ll be back.”



The entrance to Vale do Paraíso, a rural backwater in the Amazon state of Rondônia where Lenilda dos Santos had lived and worked. The scripture reads: ‘The Lord will keep you from all harm.’ Photograph: Avener Prado/The Guardian

Two days later Lenilda, 49, headed out of town past a sculpture of a Bible open at Psalm 121. “The Lord will keep you from all harm – he will watch over your life,” the inscription reads.

She never returned. Five weeks later and more than 4,000 miles north, US border patrol agents found Lenilda’s body in the desert near the town of Deming, New Mexico. She was curled up by a mesquite bush, wearing light brown tactical boots and army fatigues, and had little with her but a blue Brazilian passport tucked into a waist bag.

The incident report said she was “positioned as if she was lying down on her right side, legs slightly bent and her hands covering her face.”

Capt Michael Brown, one of the law enforcement officers on the scene, said: “I’ll be honest with you, this particular case probably hit me harder than any other case that I’ve had with the migrants out in the desert. My heart just ached for her.”

Brazil-New Mexico journey

The nature of Lenilda’s demise was not the only thing that shocked the officer. Her nationality was also unusual in a region where most crossers are from Mexico or Central America.

“This was the first Brazilian person I’d encountered, alive or dead,” said Brown, who has worked on the [US-Mexico border](#) for 26 years. “It obviously says that the conditions where she is from are getting just as bad as they are everywhere else.”

A coronavirus-era depression is driving a new, perilous exodus from South America as middle- and lower-middle-class families flee the financial hardship, unemployment and inflation wrought by the health crisis.

“The world region that took the greatest hit to total economic output in 2020 was Latin America – a 7% decline. That’s roughly what you would expect from a year of civil war in a typical country,” said Michael Clemens, a migration expert at the Center for Global Development.

Other factors included the US recovery, the choking off of most lawful migration channels under Donald Trump, and the mistaken belief among migrants that Joe Biden would be less hostile than his predecessor.



Genifer Oliveira dos Santos, the 28-year-old daughter of Lenilda, looks at photo albums with pictures of her mother. Photograph: Avener Prado/The Guardian

Many of those abandoning South America are Haitians who [fled to countries such as Brazil and Chile](#) after their homeland was hit by [a deadly earthquake](#) in 2010. Covid has uprooted them again, with more than 90,000 Haitians marching through the [Darién Gap](#), a treacherous jungle passage between Colombia and Panama, towards the US this year.

But a growing number of South Americans are also on the move. More than 46,000 Brazilians were detained at the US southern border between October 2020 and August 2021, when Lenilda began her final journey, compared with fewer than 18,000 in 2019 and 284 a decade earlier. The number of [Ecuadorians has also soared](#), with nearly 89,000 apprehended over the same period, compared with about 13,000 in 2019.

“It’s hard to overestimate how much for some people this was a livelihood-destroying recession … Covid has set everything back,” said Andrew Selee, the president of the Washington-based [Migration](#) Policy Institute. “This has really taken us 30 or 40 years back to a time when the economies in South America were really fragile.”

Relatives say Lenilda, who spent three years working as a cleaner in Columbus, Ohio, from 2004 to 2007, began plotting her escape from Brazil earlier this year after a gruelling stint battling Covid at the hospital for just 1,100 reais (£145) a month.

“What can you do with 1,100 reais?” asked her daughter, Genifer Oliveira dos Santos, as she sat on the veranda of her mother’s bungalow on Paradise Avenue, a few doors down from the hospital.

Genifer, 28, said her mother had planned to return to Ohio, where she still had friends and family, to help fund her two daughters through college.



Lucineide Oliveira, a friend and colleague of Lenilda at the hospital where they both battled against the Covid-19 pandemic. Photograph: Avener Prado/The Guardian

In April Lenilda flew to Mexico and surrendered to [US immigration](#) officials near the town of Mexicali, hoping they would allow her to stay while her asylum request was processed. Instead she was arrested and spent three months in a warehouse-like Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Ice) detention centre in Calexico before being deported to Brazil in July.

“It was pretty cruel,” said her brother Leci Pereira. But Lenilda was determined to return.

Less than a month later, on 12 August, she left Vale do Paraíso for a second time. She boarded a plane to Mexico City and made for a different stretch of the border after agreeing to pay smugglers \$25,000 (£18,000) to guide her through the desert from Ascensión, in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, to a safe house in Deming.

“She said it would take two days and two nights, because it’s a long way – over 50km,” Genifer said.

In the early hours of Monday 6 September, Lenilda set off towards the US border with three childhood friends and a smuggler. “She was really confident. She just seemed so happy,” said Genifer, who remembered being assured that by Thursday her mother would have arrived.

Things quickly went wrong, however, as the group trudged north through mountainous terrain in what Brown said would have been punishing conditions. “From July to the middle of September is monsoon season for us, so we’re dealing with summer desert temperatures – anywhere from mid-90s up – and ... I’m guessing probably 70% humidity or more,” he said. “So it was extraordinarily hot.”



A weathered backpack left behind by a migrant in the desert between Mexico and the US. Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

Brown suspects Lenilda fell behind as a result of exhaustion and dehydration. “There was no water found anywhere near her ... and [in the] best circumstances in this area, at that time of year and temperature, she wouldn’t have lasted any more than three days tops without water.”

By Monday afternoon, Lenilda’s family believe, she had been abandoned as her companions pressed on. Panicked, she turned on her mobile phone to ask relatives for help. “Ask them to bring me some water,” Leci remembered his sister begging in a WhatsApp voice message. “I’m dying of thirst.”

Lenilda shared her live location, and over the coming hours distraught relatives thousands of miles away in the Amazon tracked her movements across a desolate outback inhabited mostly by coyotes, cattle and gophers.

Then, at 3.08pm local time on Tuesday, the orange circle marking Lenilda’s position ceased to move. “That was the moment we realised she hadn’t made it,” Leci said. “She saved so many lives, only to go off to Mexico and lose her own.”

It would take police another eight days to locate Lenilda’s remains. “It’s always a horrible thing to find. Your heart goes out to them. They are just trying to come across and find a new life,” said Brown, who believed the victim had come tantalisingly close to finding help.

“Had she made it 400 yards north she probably could have been able to make contact with somebody who lives in a caravan.”



A black ribbon commemorates Lenilda dos Santos at the hospital in Vale do Paraíso where she worked. Photograph: Avener Prado/The Guardian

Lenilda's death has rattled Vale do Paraíso, a close-knit farming community that was itself founded by migrants when Brazil's military dictatorship bulldozed a highway through the rainforest 50 years ago. A black ribbon was hung at the hospital's entrance in recognition of Lenilda's services during the pandemic. "She was so loved," said Pereira. "The whole town is in mourning."

He urged Brazilians to consider the dangers of joining the exodus. "My sister, poor thing, she went chasing a dream. But that dream was interrupted. And our dreams? Just look at what has happened to them now."

But as South America reels from Covid, such pleas appear likely to fall on deaf ears. "I know six or seven couples who went last week, all of them with their kids, even after what happened," said Genifer, who believes soaring food and fuel prices partly explain why so many are leaving.

At the town's now empty Covid unit, Lucineide recalled trying to talk Lenilda out of going. The pair had dreamed of opening a wound clinic together once Lenilda, who would have turned 50 this week, returned home.

“Oh, my friend,” Lucineide murmured, glancing up at the ceiling with incredulous, bloodshot eyes.

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Coronavirus

‘You reap what you sow’: Russians party despite record Covid figures



Passengers, many of them unmasksed, board the metro at Park Pobedy station in Moscow. Photograph: Vyacheslav Prokofyev/TASS

Pjotr Sauer in Moscow

Mon 18 Oct 2021 05.47 EDT

Moscow’s streets were buzzing with energy on Friday evening. At Simach, a trendy bar and nightclub in the city centre, the small, sweaty dance floor was packed and a long queue of chatty people formed outside.

Looking at the crowd, it is easy to forget that Russia is at the centre of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic, recording daily record deaths and infections just as global fatalities from the disease have fallen to their lowest level in a year.

“Thank God we can go to bars and there are no restrictions. I am against any lockdowns, they will destroy my business,” said Natalia Draganova, 34, who runs a small clothes shop in the city.

Russia [topped](#) the symbolic figure of 1,000 daily deaths on Saturday for the first time since the start of the pandemic, and hit a new record in infection numbers on Monday with 34,325 cases reported.

Officials say the country is quickly running out of hospital beds and Russia’s chief doctor, Denis Protsenko, [described](#) the situation on Friday as “near critical”, with vaccinations at a standstill.

[deaths](#)

Several regions reintroduced QR codes for access to public places last week as well as mandatory vaccination for certain groups, but Moscow and St Petersburg – home to by far the biggest clusters of infections – have so far opted against new measures. The two cities are among the most open places in [Europe](#).

For many like Draganova, talk of new restrictions brings back painful memories of March 2020, when Russia went into a full lockdown for more than two months. Small and medium-sized businesses were disproportionately hit because the authorities provided little support to [private firms](#), preferring to spend their resources on state employees seen as the core of the Kremlin’s support.

“I almost lost everything, so I would like to avoid that scenario at all costs,” Draganova said, a sentiment echoed by many.

During the first coronavirus wave, 60% of Russian households [said](#) they had [lost income](#) as a result of the economic crisis.

“Russians have consistently shown more concern about the economic situation than the epidemiological one,” said Christian Fröhlich, a sociology professor at Moscow’s Higher School of Economics who studies public dissent.

“People have very low expectations from the government and don’t expect to receive any support during a lockdown. This helps explain why many prefer for the country to stay open despite the deaths.”



Paramedics admit a Covid patient at Novomoskovsky medical centre in Moscow. Photograph: Vyacheslav Prokofyev/TASS

When Moscow did briefly introduce QR codes this summer, it quickly abandoned the programme after business owners complained of reduced revenues.

But it is not only the economy that has led Russians to seemingly accept life alongside Covid-19.

Polls show that 55% say they are unafraid of [contracting](#) the virus, and experts argue the Kremlin’s contradictory messaging has sown confusion and suspicion among the population.

The deputy speaker of Russia’s parliament, Petr Tolstoy, on Saturday issued a rare admission of the state’s failure to communicate the dangers of the pandemic to the public effectively.

“We have to be honest, the government lost the information campaign on the fight against coronavirus,” he said.

Denis Volkov, the director of the independent polling organisation the Levada Center, said the government had sent “far too many mixed messages to the public about the pandemic”, while state-owned media had spent an excessive amount of time downplaying the pandemic and ridiculing other nations for their harsh lockdowns.

“When the authorities finally started to take a more consistent position, it was already too late and many distrusted the official line,” he said.

One study also [showed](#) that nearly two-thirds of Russians believed coronavirus was a bioweapon created by humans.

Volkov also said the Kremlin had [repeatedly](#) declared victory over the pandemic, lifting lockdown measures ahead of politically important events.

At the height of infections in the summer of 2020, Moscow abruptly lifted all restrictions to push through the Victory Day parade, Russia’s annual show of military hardware, as well as the referendum on constitutional changes that [allowed](#) Vladimir Putin to run for further terms as president.

“You reap what you sow. Many stopped taking Covid seriously after being told over and over that pandemic was finished. This in turn is reflected in the lack of urgency to get the jab,” Volkov said.

[cases](#)

Only a third of Russians have been vaccinated and opinion polls show that more than half of the population do not plan to get a shot. The country’s sluggish vaccination campaign has meant it has not broken the link between infections, hospital admissions and deaths as countries in the west have.

In an emotional post on Friday that underlined the nation’s perceived lax attitude towards the pandemic, Protsenko urged people to take the jab.

“People, it’s true, the coronavirus is not a joke or fiction,” he [wrote](#) on Telegram. “It’s amazing that you still need to convince people of that in the second year of the pandemic.”

While Moscovites partied and went out for brunch over the weekend, doctors on the coronavirus frontline also painted a dark picture of their reality.

“We can’t go on like this. We don’t have the stamina for another wave,” said Katerina, 24, a nurse working at the flagship Kommunarka hospital in Moscow. She is one of the many medical students mobilised since the start of the pandemic to work in hospitals across the country.

“Every day I see people die while the vaccine is just out there. It makes me so angry.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/18/you-reap-what-you-sow-russians-party-despite-record-covid-figures>

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The Observer[Vaccines and immunisation](#)

Pregnant women at risk from NHS workers' mixed messages over safety of jab



A vaccinator holds a swab after delivering the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine to a woman at a vaccination centre. Photograph: Dinendra Haria/Sopa Images/Rex

[Hannah Summers](#)

Sun 17 Oct 2021 02.45 EDT

Pregnant women are being advised by some health professionals not to have the Covid vaccine despite [an edict from the NHS](#) that they should encourage them to get the jab. One in six of the most critically ill Covid patients requiring life-saving care are unvaccinated pregnant women, [figures released last week](#) show.

Yet messages sent to the Vaccines and [Pregnancy](#) helpline, launched on 20 August to help pregnant women navigate information about the vaccine, suggest that some midwives are advising against the jab.

One said: “I was initially keen to have the vaccine and then advised by a midwife not to have it.” Another wrote: “I had my first dose before I knew I was pregnant. Now I’m pregnant I’ve been told I’m not allowed my second.” Another reported: “I’ve been advised by midwives not to get the vaccine due to the impact on ovulation and menstruation.”

The helpline was set up by the organisation Full Fact in partnership with the campaign group Pregnant Then Screwed. Many of those contacting it complained of conflicting advice while others were pushed from pillar to post. One said: “I’m pregnant and really confused about getting the vaccine. I’ve spoken to my health visitor, who said speak to your GP, the GP said speak to your midwife, and the midwife said they can’t advise me.”

Full Fact’s deputy editor, Claire Milne, said the helpline was established to counter misinformation about the vaccine. She explained: “It’s not right so many pregnant women have been left scared for their safety and that of their unborn children.

“Messaging around the safety of the vaccines in pregnancy has been, at times, confused. It’s vital that up-to-date information is available – especially when speaking with health professionals.”



Rebecca Bottriell-Adams of west London said it took four months of ‘chasing and pleading’ and the intervention of her MP to get double-jabbed. Photograph: Andy Hall/The Observer

The latest concerns came after a letter was sent by [NHS](#) England on 30 July to senior managers advising that all healthcare professionals have a responsibility to encourage pregnant women to get vaccinated.

Pregnant women were first offered the vaccine in December 2020, if they were health or care workers or in an at-risk group. Since April 2021, it has been recommended that pregnant women should be offered the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine.

However, Joeli Brearley, founder of Pregnant Then Screwed said that mixed messaging on vaccine safety had left pregnant women frightened about their choices. She said: “While this is happening less we are still hearing of judgmental comments made when pregnant women come to have their jab, such as ‘this is at your own risk’ or ‘on your head be it’, which is causing alarm.”

Brearley added: “Pregnant women are being completely sidelined. We are hearing reports that many of those needing their second jab are being turned away from vaccine centres because booster jabs are taking priority. This is

despite the worrying data around the number of unvaccinated pregnant women who are seriously ill in hospital with Covid.”

Rebecca Bottriell-Adams from west London had her AstraZeneca shot before becoming pregnant. She said: “I’ve had a nightmare getting double-jabbed. It’s taken me four months of chasing and pleading, and I only got my Pfizer shot this week thanks to intervention from my local MP. I applied to my GP to have my second jab changed to Pfizer but didn’t hear back. I was turned away at one vaccine centre and then went to a drop-in for pregnant women, but the vaccinators failed to show up.”

The 33-year-old, who is 30 weeks pregnant, added: “The problem is that at no point during the rollout have pregnant women been prioritised, which is ludicrous if you consider that they are more at risk of serious illness if they catch the virus.”

Gill Walton, chief executive of the Royal College of Midwives (RCM), said the organisation had been working hard to provide up-to-date guidance to midwives. She said: “The initial delay in getting official information and advice out to pregnant women, as well as to healthcare staff delivering the vaccine did, at times, cause confusion among pregnant women and staff. It’s something both the RCM and RCOG [Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists] had been lobbying heavily for since the vaccination programme began, and we would have liked a more widespread government public information campaign about the vaccine in pregnancy earlier on to address the misinformation that was out there.”

Dr Jo Mountfield, consultant obstetrician and a vice-president of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said: “It is very concerning to hear pregnant women are still being advised not to have the Covid-19 vaccine by some healthcare professionals. The vaccine is safe in pregnancy, and is the best way to protect both mother and baby from becoming seriously ill from Covid-19. We are also encouraging all pregnant women who are currently eligible to take up the offer of the Covid-19 booster vaccine (third dose), which can be given six months after receiving the second dose.”

Access the Pregnancy and Vaccines helpline by messaging +44 7521 770995 via WhatsApp.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/oct/17/pregnant-women-at-risk-from-health-professionals-mixed-messages-over-safety-of-jab>

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The weekly stats uncoveredCoronavirus

What's the value of a confirmatory PCR test?

[David Spiegelhalter](#) and [Anthony Masters](#)



A medical worker holds a test tube after administering a nasal swab to a patient. Photograph: Stéphane Mahé/Reuters

Sun 17 Oct 2021 04.30 EDT

After a wave of cases in which a positive lateral flow device (LFD) test was followed by a negative PCR test, a private laboratory handling swab tests [has been suspended](#).

But conflicting results are not a new problem. Back [in June](#), when secondary school students with a positive LFD were retested with a PCR check, over one in eight came back negative. And [even without laboratory problems](#), it is unclear why a negative PCR should trump a positive LFD.

Imagine a (rather strange) legal case with the prosecution alleging that you harbour the virus. In court, it is becoming common to quote a “likelihood ratio” provided by forensic evidence — the relative support for the prosecution versus the defence.

First, the positive LFD is presented by the prosecution. If the virus were present, a [recent study](#) estimates around an 80% chance of a positive LFD – higher if you were infectious. Alternatively, if the defence is correct, there is a less than one in 1,000 chance of a [false positive LFD](#). The likelihood ratio is therefore at least 800 ($0.8/0.001$). As a comparison, the curvature of the spine found on the skeleton in a Leicester car park contributed an estimated [likelihood ratio of 200](#) in favour of the remains being those of Richard III.

The defence retorts with the negative PCR test. If you were infected, the PCR test might miss it around [one in 20 times](#). If there were no virus, then that test is almost certain to be negative. Here, the likelihood ratio is around one in 20.

Combining these two conflicting pieces of evidence gives an overall likelihood ratio of about 40 (800 divided by 20). In a court, that might be reported as “[moderate evidence](#)” in favour of you having an infection.

As viral prevalence changes, then the probability of infection following conflicting test results also changes. At the current infection rate in England of [one in 60 people](#), and with labs working well, out of 100 people with a positive LFD followed by a negative PCR, around 40 would actually have the virus and be falsely reassured.

The negative PCR does not outweigh the positive LFD.

David Spiegelhalter is chair of the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication at Cambridge. Anthony Masters is statistical ambassador for the Royal Statistical Society

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2021.10.18 - Opinion

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[Opinion](#)[Brexit](#)

The gap between reckless Brexit promises and reality will soon be too big to ignore

[John Harris](#)



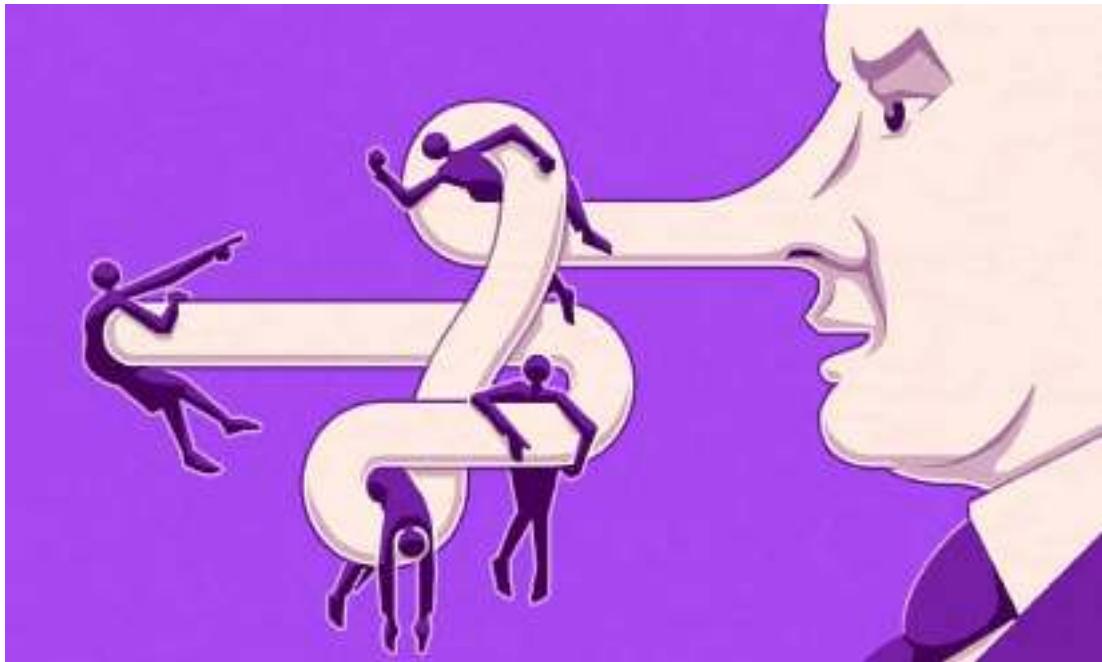


Illustration by Matt Kenyon
Mon 18 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

What must it be like to be in the inner circles of this government, watching the economy bounce from crisis to crisis? Shortages mount, while livestock that suddenly cannot be put into the food chain is slaughtered and sent to rendering plants. Ships are diverted from UK ports because no drivers can be found to transport their cargo once it is offloaded. In response to ministers' threats to suspend the trading arrangements for Northern Ireland – that we are now told the government never believed in to start with – there is reportedly pressure within the EU to begin preparations for a trade war.

The prime minister goes off to Marbella, where he pretends to paint pictures; the business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, is said to be pinning his hopes for an easing of the current energy crisis on a “wet, windy and mild” winter. Yet the Conservative party is still ahead in the polls, apparently shored up by the weakness of the Labour party and the clear, optimistic narrative that Boris Johnson has so far managed to project on to events. And I wonder: in cabinet meetings and ministerial get-togethers, do they laugh at the apparent absurdity of it all, or anxiously exchange estimates of when the roof might finally start to fall in?

After all, the central political fact of life in the UK could not be more stark. Whatever the effects of the pandemic and supply-chain issues that are evident all over the world, we are fundamentally living with the gigantic consequences of a gigantic act of recklessness, led by many of the people in charge – and now unravelling.

In Scotland, the results of Brexit [sit at the heart](#) of Nicola Sturgeon's drive for independence; in Northern Ireland, they are the focus of no end of anxiety. But in England and Wales, the contrast between the realities of life outside the EU and what we were promised seems like some cruel deceit at the heart of a family or marriage: silently acknowledged and understood, but so far largely unspoken. Looking to the future, one big political question surely demands to be asked: what happens when some watershed point is reached, and the fact that people were conned becomes inescapable?

We all know the promises made by Brexiteers in pursuit of what they wanted – of [cheaper food](#), easy trade deals, that £350m extra a week for the NHS, and all the rest. What is still underestimated is how much hope a lot of people were thereby encouraged to invest in the idea of leaving the EU. When some people backed leave, it was the first time they had voted in their lives. Many did so not out of bigotry or nastiness, but a kind of desperate belief that things might finally get better. Europe, they had endlessly been told, was a drain on both the UK's attention and money: as one Brexit voter [told me](#) in 2018, the simplest available solution was to “get out, and repair the country”. If that collective belief has so far shown no obvious signs of fading (indeed, it lives on in the implied links Johnson draws between Brexit and “levelling up”), that is probably an indication of how much faith some people still have in it – and, by implication, what a seismic moment we will have reached when it no longer makes any sense.

Brexit was also an expression of a dire breakdown in public trust, which had been under way for several years, furthered by the effects on politics of the internet, intensified by the MPs' expenses scandal, and [traceable in large part](#) to the war in Iraq. That conflict and its aftermath, as the former UN ambassador Jeremy Greenstock later [put it](#), was “one of those things that got people in this country thinking [that] our elite, our toffs, our leaders up there are not listening to us, are not looking after us in the way that we want”. It

also alerted us to how far institutions could be pushed away from the demands of truth and sense.

For any serious politician, Iraq should have been a salutary lesson in how big deceptions change things in messy and unpredictable ways, and the pretext for a profound rethink about how politics and power operate. But it did not quite play out like that. One of the most overlooked aspects of modern British history is the fact that the [supporters of military intervention](#) included such Conservatives as Johnson, David Davis, Iain Duncan Smith, John Redwood and [Michael Gove](#). In that context, their eventual championing of Brexit represented something grim: people using a collapse in trust they themselves had contributed to, to build support for a course of action that risked squashing trust yet further. (It is telling that in July 2016, Davis used the publication of the Chilcot report about Iraq to accuse [Tony Blair of being a liar](#) – and then, three months later, brazenly told the House of Commons that if leaving the EU went to plan: “There will be no downside to Brexit at all, only a considerable upside.”)

Among some of the people we once termed remainers, there seems to be a belief that the chaos Brexit causes will sooner or later have beneficial political effects. When people realise their error, perhaps the political mainstream will realign in a pro-European direction; eventually, Labour may rediscover its European voice and lead us back in. It is an appealing vision, but I am not sure the world works like that any more.

One of the surest signs of England’s strange political condition is the way that the right seems to benefit from the very chaos it causes. Eventually, if people’s anger rises and cannot be quietened, Johnson will doubtless put out the union jack and direct it towards the French and Germans; if their fury grows so uncontrollable that it somehow sweeps him away, it may well benefit altogether shadier forces. Put another way, taking such a vast, historic gamble with this country’s future was irresponsible enough, but doing it in the age of [QAnon](#) and Tommy Robinson was reckless beyond words.

All this enforces a duty on the politicians who might eventually lead us towards something better. Dysfunctional circumstances give rise to dysfunctional politics, particularly if bad faith is allowed to run rampant and

plain truths remain unspoken. So people in the political mainstream – by which I chiefly mean Labour MPs – need to start loudly talking about [Brexit](#), the promises of the people who led the campaign for it, and what life outside Europe is doing to us. Whatever happens, the resentments Brexit causes are likely to benefit some dark political forces, but without voices trying to direct people's exasperation towards something positive, that problem will be even worse.

Such realisations have seemingly yet to arrive in the minds of Tory Brexiteers. It may take a few years of queues and chaos for everything to become clear; Johnson's undoubted political skills and the opposition's shortcomings will probably delay any moment of reckoning yet further. But when it eventually comes, the cleverer politicians among them will surely feel it as a pang of remorse – realising, perhaps, that whatever their aims, hindsight will cast them not as visionaries, but people whose hubris and carelessness were always going to have disastrous consequences.

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionInequality

From childlessness to the climate crisis, why is the blame always on us?

[Nesrine Malik](#)



‘Not having children is either a conscious decision, or the result of uncertainty and circumstance.’ Photograph: Steve Parsons/EPA

Mon 18 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

Nothing in this world can be said to be certain except death, taxes and that women will regularly be told they should not forget to have children. That badgering, a favourite of the press, particularly a rightwing press that trades in moral panics about modern life and its liberties, came round again last week in the form of [reports about a women’s college](#) at the University of Cambridge, where students have been warned not to leave it too late to have a baby, and will be having lessons on fertility.

It is a trope so old that pop culture satirises it in variations of a cartoon where a woman in distress says: “I can’t believe I forgot to have children!”

The joke, of course, is that women can't "forget", because there are subliminal and overt reminders everywhere. Not having children is either a conscious decision, or the result of uncertainty and circumstance. For many women, "forgetting" is not absent-mindedness but, in fact, a constant malaise of ambivalence, a general sense of foreboding. It's a prickling awareness that the introduction of a child into the wobbly equilibrium of your life will come with huge costs, in the absence of decent state support for childcare and mental health services, and flexible working hours. This state of "forgetting" is also a paralysis triggered by circumstances – a less than ideal partner or no partner, fertility issues that need more support than the NHS or [employers](#) are willing to provide.

But it's everywhere, this recasting of inability and powerlessness as failures of focus, maturity and determination. It constitutes a huge transfer of responsibility from governments and corporations to individuals whose actions cannot offset the impact of the systems that they live in. This con can be summed up in the genre of news features that show you how a certain young person managed to save to buy a house by some improbable age, along with tips on how to do so which don't quite add up, with a small buried detail about the inheritance they received from their parents. But that's neither here nor there, of course: if *you* can't afford to buy a house then you simply must stop eating so much avocado toast and start making your own coffee.

These shamings are heaped particularly on a younger generation of people who find their jobs more precarious, labour markets more deregulated and their ruling and opposition parties focused not on fixing the system, but in shouting platitudes about "levelling up" and earning their support as "working people". The more vast our structural inequalities, the more we are told that everything is down to our personal responsibility. To the British generation that came of age in a post-financial crisis world and were slammed into a decade of rightwing government, the line was that the calamity was brought on by individuals overspending, drunk on cheap credit and affordable housing, when the reality was that the global financial system was (and remains) so unregulated that it turned people's loans into gambling chips and literally bet their houses.

The assigning of culpability to the powerless can also be seen in the way the impact of our consumer habits in relation to the climate crisis is overemphasised. Only 100 private and state-owned fossil fuel companies [produce approximately 70%](#) of the world's greenhouse gases emissions. But your average consumer is bombarded with high-profile campaigns about banning plastic straws, which [constitute only 4%](#) of plastic pollution on the planet. Little of this disproportionate focus is an accident. The fossil fuel industry engages in both greenwashing and shifting the focus to our own actions.

That hegemonic corporate power, combined with our shrinking ability to unionise, save or depend on state support in times of need, means that we constantly resort to the market as a remedy to soothe our un settlement. We think we have freedom of choice, when really what we have is freedom of consumption. As a mother in England, you won't get any meaningful subsidy for your childcare, but what you will get is cultural validation in a society that has fetishised parenthood – while offering little to cushion its blows. [Women](#) "forgetting" to have children sit between two contrasting worlds, one in which having a child feels economically and psychologically infeasible, and another where everything is drenched in bubblegum filters of postnatal perfection and media celebration. Just take a look at "mummy Instagram". It is both the brightest place, alight with love and gummy laughter, and the darkest: an online performance of spotless motherhood, designed to pacify people's minds in a world where community-based child-rearing has disappeared, and the state has not stepped in to replace it. When your identity is collapsed so fully into a child, then that child must become a trophy, because the alternative is that it is a diminishment.

Our societies are expert at turning the huge systems that distribute our freedoms unevenly into matters of personal volition. Last year brought us the largest [global racism protests](#) in history, triggered by a cry against institutional prejudice everywhere, from justice systems to the history we are taught as children. This profound demand resulted broadly in more empty [corporate and political gestures](#), and an explosion in "self-improvement" anti-racism literature. The result is that the concept of a "micro-aggression" has become more mainstream, but overhauling policing systems to help marginalised people of colour remains a "radical", "unrealistic" goal.

Bringing about a world of racial justice, sustainable population growth and a slowing down of the climate crisis cannot be done without the cumulative work of individuals pulling in the same direction. But we cannot do this when our hands are tied.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionUK news

I don't want a life hidden by security, but we need to prevent violence against MPs

[Rupa Huq](#)



‘Parliament, Essex and beyond have been cruelly robbed of his youthful grin.’ David Amess. Photograph: Chris Radburn/Reuters

Sun 17 Oct 2021 11.20 EDT

“So therefore I will be suing the council,” the greying gent, sat on the opposite side of the table from me, said triumphantly.

I nodded but felt distracted. Not only was my mobile incessantly pinging, I was still trying to process the bombshell news. Here was I in my Friday constituency surgery in a church. Meanwhile the revelation that a fellow [MP had been fatally stabbed](#) while doing the very same was sinking in.

The brutal killing of David Amess has shocked the nation. I felt numbed. Last week, I served on a parliamentary delegation to the Middle East with other MPs that was led by him. On Thursday night, my last WhatsApp was from him to the group of 14, thanking us for our service. By Friday lunchtime, he was gone.

The distinctly unglamorous in-person surgery, where politicians sit with the public in order to resolve issues, is a uniquely British phenomenon. It always surprises international observers just how accessible UK MPs are. I've only recently restarted mine since Covid pulled the plug on them in March 2020, so was a bit rusty on routine. Pre-informing the police, as recommended since the murder of Jo Cox MP in 2016, had slipped my mind; I texted my borough commander hastily en route to the location.

There is little sympathy for politicians in modern Britain. Women and ethnic-minority MPs face the worst, visceral hatred – and I'm both. [After an Islamophobic package was sent to my office](#) in 2018 – an event that required police attention and led to the hospitalisation of a member of my staff – my parliamentary post is now screened offsite before it reaches me. Social media haters are a constant background hum, though I brush them off as coming with the territory. Nobody would ever clap for MPs, yet we are, in a sense, frontline key workers.

Prior to my afternoon surgery I'd acted as mediator between a housing association and disgruntled residents in a community centre, visited a building site and spoken to students about [Cop26](#). Our job has elements of Citizens Advice, Acas, Relate, court jester and chatshow host rolled into one. Parliament's physical home dates back to about 1080 but only for the past 30 years have proceedings been televised. Now our every action is pored over by trolls looking to trip us up on social media.

Away from the cameras, though, there are good friendships across party lines. David Amess was always an exemplar of decency and courtesy. Though being an Essex leaver – unlike west London remainiac me – a common interest in the Middle East qualified me to join last week's delegation with him to find out more about issues such as the resettlement of Afghan refugees, and the UK's energy crisis. David was so enthusiastic,

commenting on how the region had changed so much every time that he visited. Tragically there will be no return trip.

At one meeting it fell to me to introduce our group leader. “Sir David’s parliamentary career dates back to the last century. Yet he never ages,” I declared. Indeed his smiling features would be familiar to anyone who remembers the 1992 general election: the moment he won his Basildon seat signalled the Tories’ unprecedented fourth consecutive election win. Parliament, Essex and beyond have been cruelly robbed of his youthful cheeky grin for ever.

We need to drain our politics of the bitter rancour: more being cross-party and less being cross. Referring to the adversarial nature of the Commons layout, Winston Churchill once reportedly remarked that it’s not the enemy who are opposite, they are the opposition: the enemy is behind you. Yes, MPs are fiercely competitive. David had friends across the political divide and was never promoted to a ministerial position by his party, but this tragedy shows that politics is about much more than Westminster rivalries – it is indeed life and death.

I don’t want a life hidden behind layers of security, but this is now the second time in my career as an MP that one of our own has been killed in this way. When our unseen staff are also fair game, new risk reassessments are needed.

My own Friday surgery, which overran, saw four local police officers turn up. I embarrassingly told them I’d rather they apprehended Ealing’s criminals. However we cannot rule out copycat attacks, and all MPs will now be questioning their arrangements. Lasting measures should occur to prevent this happening again. After two killings, serious thinking and action is needed to drastically reduce the chances of there being a third.

- Rupa Huq is the Labour MP for Ealing Central and Acton

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OpinionFeminism

Don't write off radical feminism – it's always been ahead of its time

[Finn Mackay](#)



'There are as many different understandings of feminism as there are people who would say they are feminist.' Pro-choice supporters in Parliament Square. Photograph: Wiktor Szymanowicz/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Sun 17 Oct 2021 09.21 EDT

Feminism is often portrayed as a dinosaur rudely dying right in the way of progressive change. Younger people today are much more fluent in their understandings of sex, gender and sexuality. There are more terms available than ever before to describe identity categories (Facebook has more than 50 different choices for gender alone). Indeed, research has found pupils in UK secondary schools using more than 23 different labels for gender identity. In this climate, feminism, a movement led by the experiences of one identity, has become seen as backward, trapped in the past. Added to this are

misconceptions that radical feminism in particular is uniquely transphobic, with the label of “terf”, or trans-exclusionary radical feminist, applied to anyone expressing trans exclusionary views, regardless of their politics or whether they are even a feminist at all.

In fact, far from being behind the curve or opposed to such changes, radical feminism was ahead of its time. The radical feminists of the 1970s were some of the first to take seriously the gender and sexuality debates currently raging through our society. Many of them looked forward to a gender-fluid world of polyamorous and pansexual relationships, where social roles were no longer defined by people’s sexed characteristics at birth. Their work helped to secure structural equality for women, more expansive definitions of the family and greater freedom of expression for gender and sexual identities that cut against the grain of heterosexuality.

A key tenet of radical feminism has always been the rejection of biological essentialism – the belief in innate, biological sex roles. The end goal of feminist revolution, said Shulamith Firestone, author of *The Dialectic of Sex*, must be “not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally”. As the radical feminist, poet and artist Kate Millett wrote in her classic 1970 text *Sexual Politics*, “whatever the ‘real’ differences between the sexes may be, we are not likely to know them until the sexes are treated differently, that is alike. And this is very far from being the case at present.”

The work of radical feminists put gender under the microscope, including masculinity. This was highly controversial at the time, and still is. They were among the first to study why masculinity is defined through violence, and how it might be changed. Far from promoting a war of the sexes, radical feminists had an even more radical message: women and men, all of us, however we define, are all human beings, and together are capable of growth and humanity. In 1970s Britain, feminists went beyond theorising what family life might look like without the nuclear model, and started building it themselves. They established lesbian communes, ran self-insemination classes and organised networks of gay men to become sperm donors and co-parents. Some raised children collectively. In doing so, they created egalitarian communities freed from the pressure of gender roles.

These second wave feminists started the first refuges and rape crisis centres; occupied the courts of sexist judges; burned down sex shops; launched campaigns against the institution of marriage and wore badges urging the destruction of the nuclear family. This was happening long before people started using terms such as chosen family or queer kinship.

Their movement was united with other social justice movements: for Black power, for the environment, for peace and anti-militarism. Perhaps it is because of their radicalism, and the potential of the cultural change they were involved in starting, that such a backlash ensued to stop them. Unfortunately homophobia, and perhaps lesbophobia specifically, is still a powerful deterrent to women's engagement with feminism, and, from early on, radical feminism was picked as the cautionary tale, of the certain spinsterhood and rejection that would follow from taking feminism too far.

We should remember that these rebels are not residing in archives. Most are still with us. Radical feminism is not our past. If anything, it's become increasingly relevant to our future. No social movement has healed the structural fractures of racism, class oppression or homophobia, and feminism is no exception. It is also affected by these same fractures – racism, the dominance of Whiteness, classism and transphobia. Just as activists look outwards towards fighting inequality and oppression in society, they also need to look inwards at the forms of oppression within their own movements.

While it was not perfect, there were many successes of that time. The women who started [Reclaim the Night in 1977](#) founded a method of organising we still turn to today after tragic cases such as the murder of Sarah Everard. Then, as now, women said they would not accept a curfew, nor the lie that these tragedies are isolated incidents, or one-offs, or perpetrated by crazed monsters. Women set up Women's Aid and Rape Crisis, alongside their own publishing houses, music labels and journalism. We do not always need to reinvent wheels; we can find answers in radical feminism that can help us move forward now.

There is no one agreed definition of feminism; there are as many different understandings as there are people who would say they are feminist. This is

a strength, but there is also a risk that if feminism means everything, it can become meaningless. At the very least, feminism is a movement for women's equality with men in terms of legal rights, recognition and access in the world. But men are not a homogeneous group, and they do not enjoy rights equally. Because of this, feminist activists over the centuries have pointed out that this movement is not a struggle merely for rights with unequal men.

Radical feminism is a revolutionary social justice movement, working for the world as it could be, and for the liberation of women and society; through challenging, changing, and, one day, ending patriarchy as a form of social governance.

- Finn Mackay is the author of Radical Feminism: Feminist Activism in Movement, and is a senior lecturer in sociology at the University of the West of England in Bristol
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2021.10.18 - Around the world

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Chinese economy

China economy slows as power cuts, property woes and Covid take toll



An employee works on the production line at a textile factory in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. China's economy has grown at the slowest rate in a year.
Photograph: VCG/Getty Images

[Martin Farrer](#) and agencies

Mon 18 Oct 2021 00.17 EDT

China's economy grew slower than expected in the third quarter, official data showed on Monday, thanks to power outages, supply bottlenecks, Covid outbreaks, and concerns about the struggling property sector.

Although China's central bank governor said the country is "doing well", independent economists predicted that the mounting array of headwinds suggest a "deeper downturn" resulting in the country's weakest growth for more than a decade next year.

Gross domestic product (GDP) expanded 4.9% in the July-September quarter from a year earlier, the national statistics bureau said on Monday, slowing from 7.9% in April-June and compared with expectations for a rise of 5.2% expected by economists.

The result was the weakest reading since last year's third quarter, when GDP also grew 4.9%, and marked a further deceleration from a record 18.3% expansion in the first quarter.

However, more worryingly for Beijing's economic managers, on a quarterly basis, growth was just 0.2% between July-September from 1.2% in the second quarter, the data showed. This is the weakest ever recorded since quarterly figures were first published in 2010.

New construction starts in September fell 13.54% from a year earlier, the third month of double-digit declines, according to Reuters calculations.

Along with concerns that the property developer China Evergrande Group may officially default on its offshore debts this week, it will add to concerns that the property sector, which accounts for up to 25% of GDP, could drag the whole economy into a slump.

Stocks were sold off across Asia in the wake of the news, with Hong Kong the worst hit with a loss of 0.53% on the Hang Seng. The price of crude oil rose by more than \$1 to \$85.89

Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital [Economics](#), said his consultancy's "activity proxy" measure now pointed to a "sharp contraction" in GDP.

"Although some of the recent weakness in services is now reversing, industry and construction appear on the cusp of a deeper downturn.

"For now, the blow from the deepening property downturn is being softened by very strong exports. But over the coming year, foreign demand is likely to drop back as global consumption patterns normalise coming out of the pandemic and backlogs of orders are gradually cleared. All told, we expect

growth of just 3% on our China activity proxy next year, the slowest pace since the global financial crisis.”

The world’s second-largest economy has staged an impressive rebound from the pandemic but the recovery is losing steam. Problems including faltering factory activity, [power cuts in the country’s crucial northern industrial heartland](#), and a slowing property sector have fanned speculation that policymakers may announce more stimulus measures in coming months.

Chief among the concerns about the giant property sector is the future of China Evergrande Group, the country’s number two developer which is struggling under a \$300bn mountain of debt.

It has already missed three repayments on bonds that it owes overseas investors in US dollars, and trade in its shares in Hong Kong has been [suspended since 4 October](#).

The crisis could reach a head this week when the 30-day grace period is up on the [first tranche of repayments – worth \\$83.5m – that were missed in September](#).

But the head of China’s central bank, Yi Gang, said on Sunday the economy was “doing well” although it faced challenges such as default risks for certain firms due to “mismanagement”.

Yi said default risks for some firms and operational difficulties among small and mid-sized banks were among the challenges for China’s economy, and that authorities were keeping a close eye “so they do not become systematic risks”.

Despite setbacks from coronavirus infections, China’s economy was expected to grow 8% this year, Yi said at an online meeting of the Group of 30 international banking seminar, which coincides with the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

“Economic growth has been slowed down a little bit, but the trajectory of economic recovery remains unchanged,” he said.

Authorities will first try to prevent problems at Evergrande spreading to other real estate companies to avoid a broader systematic risk, he added.

The rumbling crisis at Evergrande and other major homebuilders drove debt market risk premiums on weaker Chinese firms to a record high last week and triggered a fresh round of credit rating downgrades.

“The interest of creditors and shareholders will be fully respected strictly in accordance to law,” Yi said. “The law has clearly indicated the seniority of liabilities.”

Authorities will give the highest priority to the protection of consumers and homebuyers, while respecting the rights of creditors and shareholders, he said.

China’s central bank was taking various steps to fend off financial risks, such as replenishing capital for small and midsize banks, Yi said.

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[India](#)

India floods: at least 25 dead after heavy rains spark landslides in Kerala



Rescue workers push an overturned vehicle stuck in the mud and debris at a site of a landslide following heavy rains and floods in Kokkayal in India's Kerala state on Sunday. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Agence France-Presse

Sun 17 Oct 2021 18.42 EDT

At least 25 people have died in landslides and floods triggered by heavy rains in south-western [India](#), officials said on Sunday, as rescuers scoured muddy debris for survivors and the military flew in emergency supplies.

Residents were cut off in parts of the coastal state of Kerala as the rains, which started to intensify from late on Friday, swelled rivers and flooded roads.

Eleven bodies have been found so far in Idukki district and another 14 in Kottayam district, officials told Agence France-Presse, after the areas were hit by landslides and flash floods.

Thousands of people have been evacuated and at least 100 relief camps have been set up, Kerala's chief minister, Pinarayi Vijayan, said on Sunday.

The army, navy and air force were assisting with flood relief and rescue operations. Officials could not say how many people were missing.

"It was my livelihood. Everything is gone," a distraught man told Kerala news channel Manorama TV in Koottickal town in Kottayam, which was hit by a landslide.

00:21

[India: floodwaters sweep away house in Kerala – video](#)

Another woman from the town added: "The hill broke off near us. There has been a lot of damage and loss. The house has gone. Children have gone."

Video shared on social media showed buses and cars submerged in flood waters.

The prime minister, Narendra Modi, tweeted his condolences and said authorities were working to help those who were affected by the deluge.



A Kerala resident carries a dog amid the debris of his home after flash floods hit. Photograph: Appu S Narayanan/AFP/Getty Images

The India Meteorological Department said the heavy rains, caused by a low pressure area over the south-eastern Arabian Sea and Kerala, were expected to ease on Monday.

In northern India, some states including the Himalayan regions of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh are forecast to experience “heavy to very heavy rainfall” in the next two to three days, the weather bureau said.

The northern weather system would be caused by a low pressure area over Afghanistan and its surroundings interacting with strong winds from the Bay of Bengal, it added.

In 2018, nearly 500 people were killed in Kerala when it was ravaged by the worst floods to hit the state in almost a century.

05:22

The climate science behind flooding: why is it getting worse? – video explainer

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Global development

‘I was born a fighter’: the champion boxer changing young lives in Zimbabwe



A young boxer in training at the Mosquito Boxing School of Excellence in Harare. Former Commonwealth flyweight champion Arifonso Zvenyika wants to nurture Zimbabwe’s future champions. Photograph: Nichole Sobecki/VII

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Zoe Flood](#)

Mon 18 Oct 2021 02.01 EDT

Beneath a corrugated iron roof in the Harare suburb of Mbare, a group of boys darts back and forth across a smooth concrete floor, firing a series of rapid punches into the air.

A wiry older man, dressed in low-slung tracksuit bottoms and flip-flops, watches their moves, encouraging them to “Jab! Jab! Jab!”.

It’s a long way from a glamorous black-tie occasion in Glasgow in January 1998, when Arifonso Zvenyika beat Scotland’s Paul Weir to take the Commonwealth flyweight title for [Zimbabwe](#).

Nicknamed “Mosquito” – reflecting his 50kg fighting weight and his deadly skills – Zvenyika is one of the country’s most successful boxers.

However, there is little to show for those early triumphs. Now 45, Zvenyika lives hand to mouth, like so many others in a country where up to 90% of working-age adults are [not formally employed](#).

When he's not struggling to put food on the table for his own family, he trains young people for nothing at the Mosquito [Boxing](#) School of Excellence.

"I grew up without anything – even now I don't have anything, but I can share boxing with less privileged children," says Zvenyika, who is proud to have been born and raised in Mbare.

"The champions always come from the ghetto," he says.

Three times a week, up to 20 young people – aged from eight to their early 20s – gather for fitness training and to develop their technical skills.



Arifonso Zvenyika at his Mosquito Boxing School of Excellence in Harare.
Photograph: Nichole Sobecki/VII

Zvenyika says that he particularly focuses on boys and young men who struggle to remain in school and spend time on the streets.

"Some of the kids are totally poor and not even going to school. Some draw back from training as they don't have shoes," says Zvenyika.

One of the boys, 16-year-old Noel Sunday, says: "Both my parents are unemployed. I only did four years of school. I haven't done my O-levels."

A chalkboard in the gym reminds the young boxers to “Go hard or go home” and lists 10 rules. Eating, smoking and even laughing and jokes during sessions are prohibited.

“Boxing not only teaches discipline, but also positive values. It’s a low-cost, high-impact sport,” says David Mutambara, a former chair of Zimbabwe’s Sports and Recreation Commission.

People paint a bad picture of Mbare, but it’s a talent hub

Arifonso Zvenyika

“But there is a scarcity of resources in this country. We get people who have natural, raw talent. The skills development needed to polish that raw talent is lacking.”

Zvenyika is reliant on others to provide training space, and is constantly on the hunt for more equipment. The school is short of gloves, pads, punchbags and headgear.

The rest of the time he spends looking for work.

“I’m shy to say it, but I can’t afford to feed my family properly,” he says. “We eat bread without butter, we drink tea without milk.”

A few miles from the centre of Harare, Mbare is chaotic and densely populated. It’s a first stop for arrivals to the capital who come looking for work.

“My family makes money running around the marketplace and helping to carry people’s luggage,” says Tatenda Kachepe, 22, who has trained with Zvenyika for five years and is one of the club’s star boxers.



Children playing in Mbare, Harare's first high-density suburb, which was established in 1907. Today the buildings are dilapidated and overcrowded.
Photograph: Nichole Sobecki/VII

The pandemic pushed [many people already struggling to earn a living into desperation.](#)

“We are now 15 people living together at my father’s place,” says Kachepa, who is still trying to complete his schooling. “During Covid, we haven’t made any money. It’s been a dog-eat-dog situation.”

Substance abuse has become endemic in Harare’s low income areas. [Illicit alcohol](#), marijuana and methamphetamine – better known as [crystal meth](#) or by its street name *mutoriro* – are all popular among young people.

“I’ve been there myself,” says Zvenyika. “It hurts me to see these young kids doping. I’m trying to find ways to stop them.”

Zvenyika’s story is a familiar one – from rags to riches, followed by a slide into bad choices and prison.

“My mother tried her best, but she didn’t have money to send me to school,” says Zvenyika, who turned professional at 17. “I took up boxing as something to resolve my pain and calm me down.”

After his talent took him to Zambia and Australia, as well as to Scotland, Zvenyika crashed back down to a very different reality.

Accused by a neighbour of stealing a radio – Zvenyika insists he was framed – in 2000, the boxing champion was sentenced to two and a half years in prison.



Young boxers training at the Mosquito school. They lack gloves, headgear and punchbags, but levels of enthusiasm remain high. Photograph: Nichole Sobecki/VII

Zvenyika's imprisonment – and a stroke while in jail – effectively ended his professional career.

"I've been in prison, in hospital, in a hooligan's cell. I don't want others to fall into that pit," says Zvenyika. "I'm trying to move them to be good people."

And Mbare's younger generation has sporting potential: "People paint a bad picture of Mbare, but it's a talent hub. Young guys can get into bad things, but training keeps them busy."

Lockdowns closed the club for much of the past 18 months, but as of last month Zvenyika has welcomed back his students.

He is determined to keep the Mosquito boxing school open, despite the challenges.

“I was born a fighter and I’ll die a fighter,” he says. “Boxing might leave me, but I’ll never leave boxing.”

- *Reporting was supported by the International Women’s Media Foundation’s Howard G Buffett Fund For Women Journalists*
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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/oct/18/i-was-born-a-fighter-the-champion-boxer-changing-young-lives-in-zimbabwe>

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Haiti

Group of 17 missionaries and family members kidnapped in Haiti



Police in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince. The country been struggling with a sharp increase in gang-related kidnappings. Photograph: Rodrigo Abd/AP

[Peter Beaumont](#)

Sun 17 Oct 2021 16.33 EDT

A group of 17 missionaries, including five children, have been kidnapped by an armed criminal gang in [Haiti](#).

The group – 16 Americans and one Canadian citizen – were on their way home from building an orphanage, according to a [statement](#) from the Ohio-based Christian Aid Ministries, which supports 9,000 children in Haitian schools and sent out a message asking supporters to pray for its members.

The statement said the mission's field director was working with the US embassy, and that the field director's family and one other unidentified man

had stayed at the mission's base while everyone else visited the orphanage.

The notorious 400 Mawozo gang – known for brazen kidnappings and killings in the region – kidnapped the group in Ganthier, Haitian police inspector Frantz Champagne told [the Associated Press](#) on Sunday.

The group was reportedly taken between 8am and 10am on Saturday morning while some of the missionaries were travelling to Port-au-Prince's Toussaint Louverture airport to return home.

According to the Washington Post, one of the abducted Americans managed to send a message on WhatsApp calling for help as the kidnapping took place. “Please pray for us!! We are being held hostage, they kidnapped our driver. Pray pray pray. We don’t know where they are taking us.”

The kidnapped missionaries, some of whom were on their first visit to Haiti, were reportedly returning on Route 8 from the area of Ganthier, east of the capital, when they were stopped by heavily armed men who had set up road blocks near the Boen crossroads and in La Tremblay 17. As well as the five children, the group comprised seven women and five men.

[Map](#)

The area in which they were seized is the territory of the 400 Mawozo criminal gang, which has been blamed for previous kidnappings earlier this year including those of a priest and a French nun in April.

The 400 Mawozo gang, based around Ganthier on Lake Azuei, has a history of targeting religious groups and has more recently begun more large-scale kidnappings employing barricades on well-travelled roads to scoop up any passersby in the cars and buses that they stop. The group’s name roughly translates to 400 “inexperienced men”.

According to Gédéon Jean, the director of the Center for Analysis and Research in Human Rights in Port-au-Prince, those captured appeared to be 16 Americans and one Canadian citizen.

A US government spokesperson said they were aware of the reports about the kidnapping. “The welfare and safety of US citizens abroad is one of the

highest priorities of the Department of State,” the spokesperson said, declining to comment further.

A senior US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told the Associated Press that the US was in touch with Haitian authorities to try to resolve the case.

Haiti – which currently has the worst global record for kidnapping – has been struggling with a sharp increase in the gang-related crimes that had diminished after the president, Jovenel Moise, was fatally shot at his private residence on 7 July, and after a 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck south-west Haiti in August and killed more than 2,200 people.

Gangs have demanded ransoms ranging from a couple of hundred dollars to more than \$1m, according to authorities.

Last month a deacon was killed in front of a church in Port-au-Prince and his wife kidnapped, one of dozens of people who have been abducted in recent months.

At least 328 kidnapping victims were reported to Haiti’s police in the first eight months of 2021, compared with a total of 234 for all of 2020, according to a report issued last month by the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti, known as BINUH.

Gangs have been accused of kidnapping schoolchildren, doctors, police officers, busloads of passengers and others. In April, one gang kidnapped five priests and two nuns, a move that prompted a protest similar to the one organised for this Monday to decry the impoverished country’s lack of security.

“Political turmoil, the surge in gang violence, deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, including food insecurity and malnutrition, all contribute to the worsening of the humanitarian situation,” BINUH said in its report. “An overstretched and under-resourced police force alone cannot address the security ills of Haiti.”

The kidnapping of the missionaries comes just days after high-level US officials visited Haiti and promised more resources for the country's police force, including another \$15m (£11m) to help reduce gang violence, which this year has displaced thousands of Haitians who now live in temporary shelters in increasingly unhygienic conditions.

Among those who met with Haiti's police chief was Uzra Zeya, the US undersecretary of state for civilian security, democracy, and human rights. "Dismantling violent gangs is vital to Haitian stability and citizen security," she recently tweeted.

While the kidnapping of such a large group of foreigners is unusual, the epidemic of kidnapping in Haiti has become increasingly commonplace and brazen. Both rich and poor have been targeted and children have been snatched on the way to school as gangs, many with political connections, have extended their stranglehold on Haitian life again.

Agencies contributed to this story

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/17/up-to-17-us-missionaries-and-family-members-kidnapped-in-haiti-reports>

Haiti

Kidnap of foreign missionaries confirms the power held by gangs in Haiti



Criminal gangs provide some support to people in the slums of Port-au-Prince, which helps entrench their position in Haitian society. Photograph: Chandan Khanna/AFP/Getty

[Peter Beaumont](#)

Sun 17 Oct 2021 11.53 EDT

The [kidnapping of 17 foreign missionaries](#) in Haiti marks the latest escalation in a wave of criminality in the impoverished and politically fragile Caribbean state, which has long seen waves of gang-related crime coincide with heightened political turmoil.

According to some estimates, Haiti's powerful gangs, numbering about 90 criminal organisations in total, control territory amounting to half of the sprawling capital of Port-au-Prince and cost the country over \$4bn a year.

location of kidnapping

Often more heavily armed than Haiti's hollowed-out police force, the country's gangs have become more aggressive in recent years as they have become more powerful. Some have joined forces to create dangerous alliances, such as the G-9 and Family gang network in the capital formed under the aegis of notorious gang boss Jimmy "Barbecue" Chérizier.

First emerging as a serious threat after the "Baby Doc" Duvalier era in 1990s in poor slums like Port-au-Prince's Cité Soleil during the ascendancy of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his Lavalas movement, the gangs would over the intervening decades be used by politicians and oligarchs as muscle for everything from straightforward criminal enterprise, including involvement in drug trafficking, to street protests and assassination.

The current reach of gangs in Haitian society was laid bare in a 2020 report by the National Human Rights Defence Network – [Assassinations, Ambushes, Hostage-taking, Rape, Fires, Raids: The authorities in power have installed terror in Cité Soleil](#) – that showed how in some of Haiti's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods the criminal organisations had become conduits for assistance.

"Today," said the report, "organisations led by armed bandits regularly receive from the private business sector as well as the authorities in power, exorbitant amounts or large amounts of equipment for interventions for the benefit of people in difficulty."

"This allows gang leaders to provide food for the most vulnerable, pay for the tuition of a few children, provide healthcare funds to some families, and so on."

In recent years, kidnapping has emerged as a crime of choice for many gangs, not least the 400 Mawozo gang – blamed for the missionaries' seizure – which operates in the country's east and which has recently begun to turn kidnapping on the roads into something of an industry.

With Haiti currently the world's worst hotspot for kidnapping, it is an issue with an increasingly broad socioeconomic impact, with everyone from

children to poor street vendors, religious figures and businessmen targeted.

At least 328 kidnap victims were reported to Haiti's national police in the first eight months of 2021, compared with a total of 234 for all of 2020, according to a report issued last month by the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti known as BINUH.

The scale of the increase in violent criminality was laid bare earlier this year in a report by the UN children's agency, Unicef, which estimated that "since the last trimester of 2020, 73 women and children in Haiti have been targeted by gang violence", an increase of 62% compared with the previous report from September 2020.

Unicef quoted the Haitian Brigade for the Protection of Minors (BPM), which disclosed that at least 31 children had been kidnapped between 2020 and 2021.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/17/kidnap-of-foreign-missionaries-confirms-the-power-held-by-gangs-in-haiti>

Headlines

- [Coronavirus Minister denies there is a Covid ‘plan C’ to ban Christmas mixing in England](#)
- [Live UK Covid: ministers should act now to prevent need for lockdown, urges Tony Blair](#)
- [BMA Body says ‘time is now’ for Covid plan B](#)
- [Education Covid disruption could cost pupils in England up to £46,000, finds report](#)

Coronavirus

Minister denies there is a Covid ‘plan C’ to ban Christmas mixing in England



A sign for a Covid-19 vaccination hub in Manchester. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

[Alexandra Topping](#)

Thu 21 Oct 2021 04.40 EDT

Current pressure on the NHS is “sustainable”, according to a health minister, who denied the government had a “plan C” that would ban the mixing of households at [Christmas](#) in England if cases continued to rise.

Edward Argar told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme that while the NHS was “under huge pressure” it was not the right time to introduce any additional measures to control the spread of Covid.

The British Medical Council chair, Dr Chaand Nagpaul, accused ministers of being “[wilfully negligent](#)” after the health secretary ruled out immediately implementing the government’s [coronavirus “plan B”](#).

Nagpaul said: “It is wilfully negligent of the Westminster government not to be taking any further action to reduce the spread of infection, such as mandatory mask wearing, physical distancing and ventilation requirements in high-risk settings, particularly indoor crowded spaces. These are measures that are the norm in many other nations.”

Argar urged people to get vaccinated to help “ease that pressure on the NHS”. He said plan A was still working, adding: “It’s a race … between the vaccines, and getting those in people’s arms, and the virus. We’re still winning that race at the moment, but it’s narrowing, that lead is narrowing. So what we need to do is that sprint for the line.”

On Wednesday the health secretary, [Sajid Javid](#), predicted new infections could hit a record 100,000 a day and urged millions of eligible people to come forward for booster jabs. Javid urged people to wear masks in crowded places and test themselves before going to Christmas parties.

But the government has been accused of sending mixed messages, with most Conservative MPs [declining to wear masks](#) in the House of Commons or in [packed cabinet meetings](#), and the business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, [encouraging the public](#) to book Christmas parties.

On Thursday a leading virologist said the UK was probably already close to 100,000 cases a day. Dr Chris Smith, from the University of Cambridge, said half of Covid cases were asymptomatic, meaning the number of active cases in the UK was likely far higher than currently recorded, “we just don’t know about lots of them”.

Pushed about Conservative MPs wearing masks, Argar said there was a “leadership role for members of parliament on all sides”, adding: “I think it’s for those individual members of parliament to read the guidance, consider it, bear in mind what Sajid has said and reach their own views.”

Argar was asked about comments from the UK government's chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, who said it was important to act before it appeared necessary.

Argar told Sky News: "I think what Patrick's saying there is you've got to look ahead. We know that you have a lead time of two weeks roughly between infections and hospitalisations, and for the two weeks between, sadly, hospitalisations and deaths in the most serious cases."

"I think what Patrick saying is always look to the future, consider when is the right moment to act ... I don't think we're at that point yet."

Argar denied there was a plan C being considered by the government which would ban the mixing of households at Christmas, as reported [in the Daily Telegraph](#). "That isn't something that is being actively considered," he said.

Asked on Sky News how bad the situation in the NHS would have to get before the government moved to plan B, he said it would not "be appropriate to set an arbitrary figure, X number of infections, X number of hospitalisations".

Bed occupancy levels were one measure of whether the pressures on the NHS were sustainable, he told Times Radio. With 95,000 beds across the hospital system available, 7,000 were occupied with Covid patients and 6,000 were unoccupied.

"We do have a degree of headroom at this time, we continue to monitor it hour by hour, day by day, to see what's happening with those figures, both in terms of infection, but also crucially in terms of hospitalisation," he said. "Our assessment at the moment is the most effective way to continue to control that is for people to get those booster jabs."

He said people should no longer wait to be invited to get their [booster vaccine](#) if the right amount of time had passed, as they could book it themselves online.

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

[**Politics**](#)

UK Covid: over 50,000 cases reported for first time since July as Johnson rejects calls to move to ‘plan B’ – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2021/oct/21/uk-covid-coronavirus-live-news-plan-b-lockdown-vaccines>

NHS

British Medical Association says ‘time is now’ for Covid plan B



Nagpaul accused the government of taking ‘its foot off the brake’ and suggesting that life had returned to normal when the UK has more than 10 times the number of cases as France. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

[Nadeem Badshah](#)

Wed 20 Oct 2021 17.18 EDT

The British Medical Association has said the “time is now” for the government to enact plan B in England to prevent the [NHS](#) being overwhelmed by growing numbers of coronavirus cases.

The doctors’ trade union believes that not taking further action would constitute “wilful negligence” by ministers and a failure to learn the lessons from [the report last week](#) by the Commons health and science committees on the government’s handling of the pandemic.

Infections have been rising sharply since the start of October, but the government is resisting introducing the extra restrictions set out in its [winter plan](#) such as masks, vaccine passports and advice to work from home.

Dr Chaand Nagpaul, the BMA's council chair, said plan B was devised to prevent the NHS from being overwhelmed. "As doctors working on the frontline, we can categorically say that time is now," he added.

"By the health secretary's own admission, we could [soon see 100,000 cases a day](#), and we now have the same number of weekly Covid deaths as we had during March, when the country was in lockdown. It is therefore incredibly concerning that he is not willing to take immediate action to save lives and to protect the NHS."

On Wednesday [Sajid Javid](#) rejected calls for plan B measures despite predicting that infections could reach unprecedented levels.

"Don't get me wrong, there are huge pressures, especially in A&E, in primary care," he said. "If we feel at any point it's becoming unsustainable ... we won't hesitate to act."

Nagpaul also accused the government of taking "its foot off the brake" and suggesting that life had returned to normal when the UK has more than 10 times the number of cases as France and almost four times as many deaths per million.

He added: "It is wilfully negligent of the Westminster government not to be taking any further action to reduce the spread of infection, such as mandatory mask wearing, physical distancing and ventilation requirements in high-risk settings, particularly indoor crowded spaces.

"These are measures that are the norm in many other nations. Only last week two select committees found the UK was an international outlier when it came to public health policy during this crisis.

"We are rapidly approaching a position where, yet again, the government is delaying for too long, and equivocating over taking action. This is the time

to learn the lessons of the past and act fast, or else we will face far more extreme measures later.”

The NHS Confederation, which represents healthcare providers, urged the government on Tuesday to immediately press ahead with plan B for containing the virus or risk derailing efforts to tackle the backlog of 5 million patients.

Matthew Taylor, its chief executive, said Javid’s warnings of up to 100,000 cases a day emphasised the need for action to prevent the health service “stumbling into a crisis”. Taylor said: “We are right on the edge – and it is the middle of October. It would require an incredible amount of luck for us not to find ourselves in the midst of a profound crisis over the next three months.

“The government ought to not just announce that we’re moving to plan B, but it should be plan B plus. We should do what’s in plan B in terms of masks [and] working from home, but also we should try to achieve the kind of national mobilisation that we achieved in the first and second waves, where the public went out of their way to support and help the health service.”

Ministers should encourage the public to do their bit by using the NHS responsibly, looking out for neighbours, volunteering or even re-entering the healthcare workforce, Taylor added.

Javid said he had great respect for the NHS Confederation, but said he would not be moving to plan B “at this time”. He underlined the fact that ministers would be “staying vigilant, preparing for all eventualities”, however, and said that fresh restrictions might need to be imposed if people did not behave cautiously and the situation worsened.

Among the numerous criticisms in last week’s Commons report was that the UK’s preparation for a pandemic was far too focused on flu, and that ministers waited too long before imposing lockdown measures in March 2020.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/oct/20/british-medical-association-says-time-is-now-for-covid-plan-b>

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Schools

Covid disruption could cost pupils in England up to £46,000, finds report



Students in the north and Midlands have been disproportionately affected by Covid disruption, the report found. Photograph: Jon Super/AP

[Sally Weale](#) Education correspondent

Thu 21 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Pupils in England whose learning has been severely disrupted by the pandemic could lose up to £46,000 in lifetime earnings, costing the economy hundreds of billions of pounds, without additional government investment, according to research.

The report by the Education Policy Institute (EPI) identified stark regional differences in learning loss – with pupils in parts of the north and Midlands worst affected – which it warned would undermine the government's levelling-up agenda.

It also said the government's national [tutoring](#) programme, set up to support disadvantaged children who have lost out the most, was faltering with low take-up in the north, where it is most needed, and that schools were struggling to meet growing costs.

The EPI's modelling found that pupils in [England](#) would lose at least £16,000 in earnings – rising to £46,000 for those who have experienced the most learning loss – if the government fails to intervene. Researchers estimated that the total cost to the economy in the long run could be as high as £463bn.

Natalie Perera, the EPI chief executive, said the government's £3.1bn education recovery programme fell well short of the £13.5bn funding package the EPI believes is required to help children catch up, and called on the Treasury to prioritise education recovery in the forthcoming [spending review](#).

“Without a bold [education](#) recovery funding settlement targeted at those pupils who need it most, any wider plans from the government to address longstanding regional inequalities are consigned to fail,” she said.

According to the EPI, the government is spending about £310 a pupil on education recovery, compared with £2,000 a pupil in the US and the Netherlands. On regional disparities, it said average learning loss in primary maths measured last December ranged between 0.5 months in the south-west and 5.3 months in Yorkshire and the Humber.

Dr Mary Bousted, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union, accused the government of seeking education recovery on the cheap. “Recovery will require years of work and investment. It is for the government to meet that funding challenge in the comprehensive spending review to make sure no child is left behind.”

Nick Brook, the deputy general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said the government's tutoring “revolution” had the potential to help level the playing field between rich and poor pupils. “But unless government shift up a gear, this revolution is set to stall,” he added.

A government spokesperson said: “We are significantly expanding the national tutoring programme this year, building on the progress from last year when more than 300,000 children benefited, and giving schools more flexibility to deliver tutoring that works for them and their families.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/oct/21/covid-disruption-could-cost-pupils-in-england-up-to-46000-finds-report>

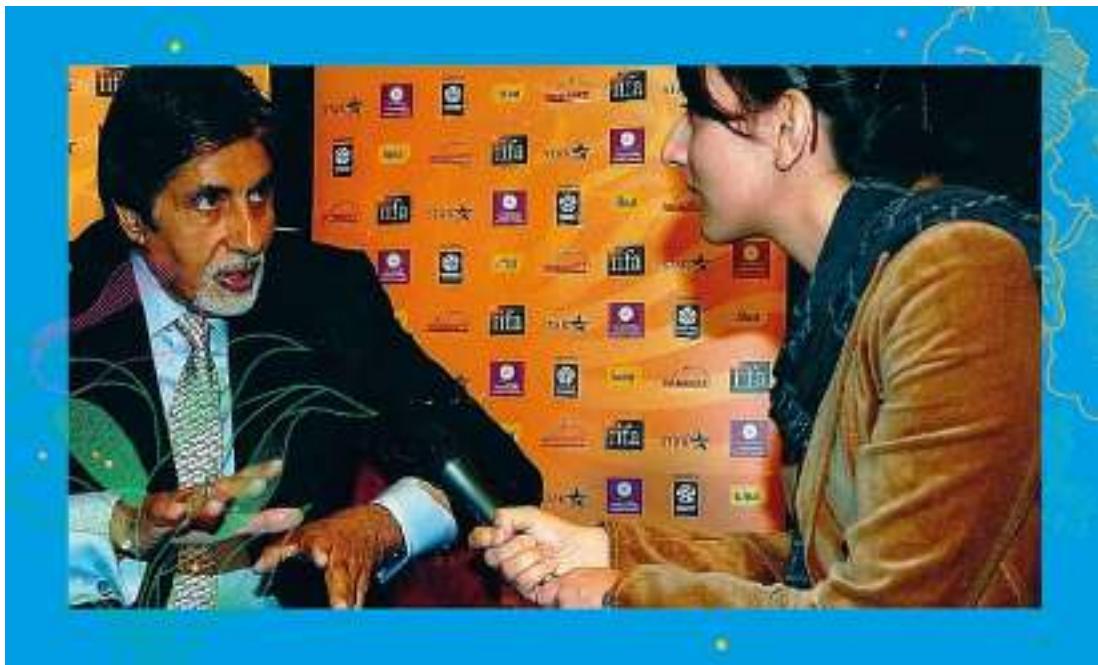
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2021.10.21 - Spotlight

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- The long read Great betrayal: how the Hillsborough families were failed by the justice system
- Balloon World Cup How it blew up to become your new favourite sport
- ‘Clay feels perverse’ Theaster Gates on working on Obama’s library and going back to pottery

Life after lonelinessLoneliness

Life after loneliness: ‘I was a single, isolated workaholic – until I learned to love my own company’



Saima Mir meeting film star Amitabh Bachchan. Composite: Guardian Design; Courtesy of Saima Mir

[Saima Mir](#)

Thu 21 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

I have had several periods of loneliness in my life, but none more intense than after my second divorce. I was single for almost a decade, and despite being busy, and having a great job in TV, the reality was that I was incredibly lonely.

By divorcing, and for a second time, I’d stepped away from what was considered acceptable by the British Pakistani culture of my heritage. I didn’t want to tell anyone about my past, or answer questions about why I’d

made the choices I had – or about how far my culture and religion had influenced those decisions – because I was still grappling with them myself.

I know now that by refusing to accept my fate, and an unhappy marriage, I was breaking the bonds of intergenerational trauma, and that comes with a price. But back then all I felt was alone.

I lived on my own, and worked shifts that had me up either at 4am, and at my desk by 5.30am for the breakfast news bulletin, or working the late shift that ended at 11pm. Those who saw me on screen would have had no idea of how I really felt inside. I was well dressed, young and attractive – how could I be lonely? One year I covered Bollywood actor Shilpa Shetty's glamorous birthday bash. People who had watched the piece on TV may have imagined I had partied the night away. But as soon as it was recorded, I drove home and went straight to bed. Because loneliness has nothing to do with how many people surround us, or how successful the world thinks we are. It is a state of mind, which results from things we can't control – and a few things that we can. Understanding this has helped me find ways to get through it.

The empty swathes of space and time (which, as a mother of three, [I now crave](#)) were excruciating. So I put plans in place to counteract them. I would make sure I always had two things in my diary for the week. It could be dinner with a friend, an event, or even something practical such as getting a haircut. It didn't even matter if the thing was cancelled; just having it in my diary meant I had something to look forward to. It was like creating monkey bars to cling to, to cross the week. Because I loved foreign films, I would always have two discs ready to watch beside my DVD player. My solitude resulted in my becoming quite a cinephile.

Oddly, my lowest periods have always coincided with my most productive, because feeling that I had nothing to lose made me freer to take creative risks in my work. So I used the time I was alone to write scripts, and attend screenwriting courses. I wrote novels, none of which saw the light of day, but all of which helped me develop my craft, and paved the way to my current career as a writer.

What I learned from my therapist was that no one was coming to rescue me – and that was OK

As a single workaholic, I sometimes wondered how long it would take for someone to notice if I was missing – if I ever fell down the stairs, or had an accident. This added to my loneliness. It was when I looked at a packet of paracetamol and thought how easy it would be to take them all that I knew I needed help. I wasn't suicidal, but even that fleeting thought frightened me, and I started seeing a therapist. We would meet every Wednesday lunchtime. That hour was like a stepping stone to the middle of the week, and a boost to the weekend.

What I learned was that no one was coming to rescue me – and that was OK. I found acceptance, and even began to love my own company. Offering an empathic ear to others also set me free. As I stopped trying to be heard, and started listening, I found myself surrounded by women who were going through similar things.

I know now that I actually needed to be lonely. When I finally met the man who would become my husband, I knew what I wanted from life. I wasn't looking for someone to be my “world” or rescue me, because I had built my world myself, and had already rescued myself. I was simply looking for someone to sit beside me, so we could look out at the world together – and that's what I found.

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Liverpool's ground Anfield on 20 April 1989. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

[The long read](#)

The great betrayal: how the Hillsborough families were failed by the justice system

Liverpool's ground Anfield on 20 April 1989. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

by [David Conn](#)

Thu 21 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

On a grey morning in [May](#) this year, the English legal system's epic failure to secure justice for the families devastated by the Hillsborough disaster finally ground to its dismal conclusion. Ninety-seven people were killed due to a terrible crush on an overcrowded terrace at the FA Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest at Sheffield Wednesday's

Hillsborough football stadium on 15 April 1989. Since then, the families have endured a 32-year fight for the truth to be accepted – that the main cause of the disaster was police negligence, and for those responsible to be held accountable.

The first bereaved parents I met when I began reporting on the disaster and the families' implacable campaign for justice, in 1996, were [Phil and Hilda Hammond](#), whose son, Philip, had died at Hillsborough, aged 14. Hilda, who worked as a senior intensive care nurse at Liverpool's Walton hospital, told me that, unbearable as their loss was, she had still been able to understand that disasters can happen. She expected that the authorities would hold prompt and rigorous proceedings. "I thought they would find the truth of how Philip died, how they all died, and if anybody was found to be to blame they would be punished," she said. "I was so naive."

Instead of committing to a process that would lead to justice for the people who had died, their families and those who were injured, South Yorkshire police mounted a campaign of lies, and the courts, through a series of proceedings, piled on more trauma.

The people who died at Hillsborough were trapped against a high metal fence at the front of the Leppings Lane terrace, the kind built at many grounds to prevent people invading the pitch, in an era when hooliganism by a minority of thugs led to the demonisation of all football supporters. Behind the fence, railings divided the terrace into a series of "pens". Built to enable greater police control of supporters, when the pens were overcrowded they became iron cages from which there was no escape.

When Lee Nicol, 14, died two days later, 95 people had been killed. Then in 1993, Tony Bland, 18 when he went to the match, became the 96th when his life support was turned off. In July 2021, [Andrew Devine](#), who was 22 at Hillsborough, died 32 years after suffering brain damage in the crush, and was certified to be the 97th fatality.

The lies began even as people were dying. The police officer in command, Ch Supt David Duckenfield, failed to take control of the chaos and organise a concerted rescue operation, but he started the false narrative that would form the foundation of enduring injustice. In an episode still profoundly

shocking decades on, at 3.15pm Duckenfield lied to the Football Association official, Graham Kelly, telling him that Liverpool supporters had forced open a gate, and rushed into the Leppings Lane end of the ground. That story was given to the media and at 3.25pm, [John Motson reported in a live BBC broadcast](#) that a gate was said to have been broken down, and that non-ticket holders had forced their way in. Right away, the victims were being blamed for their own deaths and injuries.

The South Yorkshire police chief constable, Peter Wright, admitted hours later that the gate had not been forced open – Duckenfield himself had given the order for it to be opened. The police had failed to organise a safe way for the 24,000 [Liverpool](#) supporters to access the stadium, through the nasty, obstacle-strewn bottleneck approach to the turnstiles at the Leppings Lane end. Congestion built up at those entrances, then at 2.52pm Duckenfield ordered a wide exit gate to be opened, to relieve the pressure by allowing many people into the ground at once. About 2,000 people then came in together, and most headed down a tunnel facing them that led straight into the already packed central pens. If Duckenfield had ordered officers to close access to the tunnel and direct people to the side pens where there was still room, the crush would have been avoided. Yet despite Duckenfield's original story being exposed as a lie, the police nevertheless constructed a case that Liverpool supporters caused the dangerous situation outside the ground, by arriving without tickets, late, drunk and misbehaving.

The essential truth was established by Lord Taylor just four months after the disaster, in his report after the official inquiry. He concluded that the main cause of the disaster was “the failure of police control”, and described Duckenfield neglecting to close off the tunnel after ordering the exit gate to be opened as “a blunder of the first magnitude”. Taylor severely criticised the South Yorkshire police for failing to accept responsibility and pressing a false case against the victims. Yet even then, the police advanced the same allegations at the inquest the following year, and all the legal proceedings that followed, in which the families sought the truth and justice for their loved ones.

The legal system that dragged bereaved families through 32 years of adversarial battles finally concluded its work in May. The result is that nobody has been held accountable for 97 people dying, nor for the police

campaign of lies designed to shift blame on to the victims. The families and their advocates are now calling for reform, for a “[Hillsborough law](#)” and a [public advocate](#) to repair some of the system’s worst injustices. Valuable as that will be, when you consider the whole ordeal, it makes the case for a complete overhaul.

On the weekday night 25 years ago that I first met Phil and Hilda Hammond, Hilda just back from work in her nurse’s uniform, we sat around the kitchen table for hours at their immaculate semi-detached home in Aigburth, south Liverpool. Their younger son Graeme, still a teenager, popped in and out, as his parents related the events that devastated their family. Phil, a post office manager, was vice-chair of the Hillsborough Family Support Group (HFSG), at the forefront of the struggle for justice. When I asked what their son Philip was like, Phil grimaced, his face reddened; he said he struggled to talk about him. Then they did tell me about Philip’s talents, his leadership qualities, enthusiasm for sport, how well he was growing up. Eventually Phil said simply: “He was a great lad, a great person to know.”

They talked about the unbelievable shock of his death, the pain of the police lies, the poison published by the Sun under the headline “The Truth”, the betrayal by the West Midlands police, which was appointed by South Yorkshire police to investigate the disaster. They recalled the nightmare daily slog to Sheffield for the inquest – the legal process to determine how, when and where a person has died where there is some doubt or issue of public concern. The South Yorkshire coroner, Dr Stefan Popper, gave serious credence to the police allegations against the victims. Bereaved families had no right to legal aid funding and could afford only a single barrister, who was outnumbered by those representing the police, who were paid for using public money. In March 1991, the jury returned a verdict of accidental death. The Hammonds, and all the families, felt it was a grievous miscarriage of justice.



Andy Burnham speaking at a Hillsborough vigil in Liverpool, 2016.
Photograph: Liverpool FC/Getty Images

I wrote about these travesties in a 1997 book, *The Football Business*, contrasting football's escalating fortunes after the disaster with the families' abandonment to a terrible fight that prevented them from rebuilding their lives.

In the same year, Prof Phil Scraton, the principal academic expert on the Hillsborough injustice, exposed that South Yorkshire police had an operation to amend officers' accounts of the day to minimise criticism of senior officers. Yet despite that scandal and more revelations, years passed, into the bleak 00s, with the justice campaign building strongly in Liverpool but too little media coverage, and nothing solid moving for the families.

The 20th anniversary wasn't news, it was just a dreadful landmark, but one the media would cover. I was working for the *Guardian* by then, and was determined that we would use the moment to highlight the enduring injustice. My article, [published on 13 April 2009](#), focused on the issues the Hammonds had outlined 13 years earlier, the amendments to South Yorkshire police officers' statements, and deepening concerns about the role of West Midlands police.

I went to see Anne Williams, whose son Kevin, 15, died in the crush, and who pursued repeated challenges to the Popper inquest. Maria Eagle, the Merseyside MP who had made an excoriating speech in parliament in 1998, accusing South Yorkshire police of running a “black propaganda unit” to shift blame on to the innocent victims, stood by this view, and [we ran that on the front page](#).

On the morning we published, Andy Burnham, then Labour’s culture secretary, called me to say he had read it, and had resolved to do something to address the injustice. He had formed the view that if the South Yorkshire police and other authorities published all the documents they held in their files, it could break the legal deadlock. Two days later, he [addressed the memorial service at Anfield](#), attended by 30,000 people. As Burnham read a statement from the prime minister, Gordon Brown, that expressed sympathy but did not address the injustice, he was interrupted by calls from the crowd, for justice.

Confronted with that strength of feeling, Brown’s government finally understood that this was an unresolved scandal, and gave Burnham support for his initiative. The Hillsborough Independent Panel was formed, tasked with producing a report, for publication, that would set out what the documents added to public understanding of the disaster and its aftermath. South Yorkshire police and the families agreed to participate with the panel as constituted, after the families had held out for Scrutton to be on it. [Paul Leighton](#), recently retired as deputy chief constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, was appointed as the police expert, [Dr Bill Kirkup](#) as the medical expert, and James Jones, the bishop of Liverpool, as chair.

The panel presented its report, after two and a half years’ work, on 12 September 2012, beneath the soaring vaults and gleaming light of Liverpool’s Anglican cathedral. The families were given the report first, with an explanation from Scrutton and Jones of how completely the evidence had vindicated their struggle. Then the prime minister, David Cameron, [made a double apology in parliament](#): for the police failings that caused the deaths, and “the injustice of the denigration of the deceased”.

It was a momentous breakthrough. Many people affected still refer to it as “truth day”. Walking through Liverpool that night, I met survivors hugging

one another in disbelief, cradling the 395-page report as if it were a holy book.

The Independent Office for Police Conduct launched [its biggest investigation](#), in October 2012, into the campaign of victim blaming and alleged cover-up. A new police investigation, Operation Resolve, was also mounted into how the disaster had happened, and whether any criminal charges should be brought.

In December 2012, three high court judges [took just an hour to quash the verdict](#) of the inquest the families had campaigned against to no avail for 21 years. In a dark, cramped, wood-panelled courtroom in the Royal Courts of Justice on the Strand, the lord chief justice, [Igor Judge](#), lamented the “falsity” of the South Yorkshire police campaign to blame the victims and how “disappointingly tenacious” it had been. He criticised Popper’s conduct of the inquest, and stated that, after Taylor’s August 1989 conclusions that failure of police control had been the main reason for the disaster, “That should have been that”.

Judge said the changing of the police statements seemed “reprehensible” and referred to them as “efforts made by some of the authorities to conceal evidence”. He ordered a new inquest to be held, in effect calling for the truths established by Taylor, and now by the panel, to be accepted. “We should deprecate this new inquest degenerating into the kind of adversarial battle which … scarred the original inquest,” he stated, in his [written legal judgment](#).

It was a great landmark, an extraordinary victory for the families. But in that courtroom, it all still felt a very long way from good enough. There was a self-satisfied air around the room and among the judges, in their wigs and gowns on the raised platform. But this represented a monumental failure of their system. The families, bereft, had been forced to fight this unequal battle that had robbed them of so many years.



The mural of the mother of Hillsborough victim Kevin Williams, on a building in Anfield, Liverpool. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

In that long span of time, family members had suffered, many had become ill, some had died. Phil Hammond, HFSG chair by then, had banged his head on a shelf in the group's office in 2008, and suffered a near fatal brain haemorrhage. Hilda had had to give up her job to help nurse him. Margaret Aspinall, whose son James, 18, had died at Hillsborough, had taken over as the chair.

Anne Williams had been one of the family members who had applied for the inquest to be quashed in 1993. Now she was brought to the Strand by her brother [in a wheelchair](#), having been diagnosed with cancer just after the panel reported. She had promised herself that when she eventually won her fight, she would live a little, but she died four months later, never seeing the new inquest for Kevin that she had sought for all that time.

Even before the new inquest fully started in March 2014, the families were made to understand that [lord chief justice](#), Lord Judge's comment, that it should not become another adversarial battle, had no legal power. Duckenfield's barrister, John Beggs QC, and lawyers for other former senior police officers and junior officers in the Police Federation, [stated at a](#)

[preliminary hearing](#) their intention to argue yet again that Liverpool supporters' drinking was a factor in causing the disaster.

The law had no mechanism to enable the call by Judge, [the head of the judiciary](#), to be heeded. Court proceedings start with the illusion, for a new jury, that no facts or conclusions have ever been established before. South Yorkshire police officers and their lawyers came to the new inquest and rolled out the same discredited case against the victims. Adversarial battle, and the hurt and scars it inflicts, are what the English legal system provides.

It has a chance of working only if there are equal forces doing battle. This time, the families had their own battalions of lawyers to fight back. The new inquest, presided over by Sir John Goldring, was held under article 2, the right to life, of the European convention on human rights. Incorporated into British law as the Human Rights Act 1998 by the Labour government, its more enlightened provisions allow for bereaved families to have "exceptional funding" for lawyers at an inquest, if the state may have been at fault for the deaths.

The families, for the first time, had enough committed solicitors from some leading law firms specialising in human rights, including [Birnberg Peirce](#) and [Bindmans](#). In Liverpool, solicitor Elkan Abrahamson, of [Broudie Jackson Canter](#), had represented some families for years, including Williams, for no payment. Now his firm was funded to steward 22 families through this next battle. The barristers, led by Michael Mansfield QC and Pete Weatherby QC, were rigorous, experienced at fighting miscarriages of justice, and not shy of accusing police officers of lying.



Hilda and Phil Hammond, whose son, Philip, died in the Hillsborough disaster aged 14. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

They argued successfully that the families had to be at the heart of the process this time, so the inquest opened with bereaved relatives making personal statements about their loved ones, telling the court about the people whose deaths were the subject of the evidence. This has since become a humanising force in our system, with family statements made at inquests and inquiries, including those for the victims of the Grenfell fire, and the Manchester Arena bombing.

The families' loving, detailed reminiscences were shattering. They recalled the men, women and many children whose disastrous misfortune it was to be in those vile pens. They remembered their characters, sense of humour, friendships, schooling, careers, interests, religious observance, how much they loved them, how much they missed them.

Steve Kelly, speaking about his older brother Michael, 38, set the tone. In a deep, controlled voice, he told the silent room that his brother was "our Mike", not just a number, one of the 96. "I have come here to reclaim him," he said.

[Mary Corrigan said of her son Keith McGrath](#), 17, that when he was born “a love I had never experienced before surged out of me for him”. When Keith died, she said, “a part of me died”.

They told some funny stories too. [Brenda Fox recalled](#) that on her son Steve’s 21st birthday his colleagues at the chocolate factory had chucked him in a vat of the stuff. The next day, she brought a picture in to show everyone, of Steve standing dripping in the chocolate, with a rueful smile on his face.

Jenni and Trevor Hicks talked about [their teenage daughters](#), Sarah, 19, and Vicki, 15, and the total impact of their loss. Three sets of brothers also died: [Nick and Carl Hewitt](#), [Kevin and Christopher Traynor](#), [Stephen and Gary Harrison](#). A father and son, [Thomas Howard and Tommy Jr](#), died next to each other.

The contours of the loss were mapped: the youngest to die was Jon-Paul Gilhooley, 10. [The oldest was Gerard Baron, 67](#), a war veteran then a Royal Mail employee. Thirty-seven teenagers had died. Twenty-five of those who died were fathers; 58 people lost a parent. Three babies were born after their fathers died at Hillsborough. One woman, [Inger Shah, was the single mother of two teenagers, Becky and Daniel](#). After she died, they had to be taken into care.

Then, after all these cherished memories of the 96 were heard, the police and their lawyers reheated the long-discredited allegations against the victims, and adversarial battle commenced.



Trevor Hicks, with a photograph of his daughters Vicki and Sarah.
Photograph: Don McPhee/The Guardian

The families' lawyers fiercely challenged every allegation, depicting the false narrative as a cover-up orchestrated from the top of the South Yorkshire police. A very obvious feature of the disaster became steadily apparent: the police had told their stories, but the whole day had been filmed and photographed. Hundreds of photographs of the crowd were shown on the court screens, and BBC and CCTV footage played repeatedly. It showed congestion at the too-few Leppings Lane turnstiles started at 2.15pm, 45 minutes before the scheduled kick-off, not "late", the police doing nothing effective to address it until the panicked opening of the exit gate, the people walking through, the open tunnel straight ahead. The inquest addressed in unbearable detail the horrific crush that followed, the piles of bodies at the front of pen 3, how people died, of compression asphyxia. The chaos of the police response was clear, and the heroic efforts of supporters who emerged from the pens then did their best to help, running with dead and injured people placed on advertising hoardings because only two ambulances came on to the pitch.

In all the film and photographs, Liverpool supporters were not misbehaving, and nobody was carrying a drink. Many survivors came as witnesses; they included off-duty police officers, doctors and nurses, and the humanity of

the people who suffered made the police portrayal of them as an out-of-control mob look cruel, and evidently false.

Then [Duckenfield crumbled as a witness](#). He admitted he had not done sufficient preparation, did not know the basic layout of the ground, did not take effective action to enable 24,000 people to get through that bottleneck in time and ultimately, that in the crucial moments after ordering the gate open, he “froze”. He admitted when questioned by his own barrister, that his “serious professional failures” had caused the deaths of the 96.

The jury returned their verdict on 26 April 2016. They determined that the 96 were unlawfully killed, due to gross negligence manslaughter by Duckenfield, to a criminal standard of proof – beyond reasonable doubt. And they concluded, having been explicitly asked the question, that no behaviour of Liverpool supporters had contributed to the dangerous situation at the ground. The truth was accepted, and the families, their loved ones, survivors, all the victims, were finally vindicated.

The Guardian’s front page the following morning had a picture of some family members – Brenda Fox, mother of Steve, in the centre – standing in the sunshine outside the court building, arms aloft, [singing You’ll Never Walk Alone](#), Liverpool’s anthem of hope and endurance. Above was the headline: “After 27 years, justice.”

Many families have since lamented how much better it would have been if that could have stood as the end of the ordeal. Yet if 96 people have been unlawfully killed, and the accounts given by a police force and its officers wholly disbelieved by a jury, the system has to provide some accountability.

But the system is not coherent. It does not adopt the conclusions and facts as established by one legal process, and determine how to hold accountable the people and organisations whose fault has been proved. Every stage is entirely separate. To seek accountability, the law moved to criminal prosecutions – a wholly new set of proceedings.

The Crown Prosecution Service, the public authority responsible for bringing criminal cases, [charged Duckenfield in June 2017](#) with gross negligence manslaughter. The former Sheffield Wednesday secretary and

safety officer, Graham Mackrell, was charged with safety offences. Sir Norman Bettison, a South Yorkshire police inspector at the time, who later became chief constable of Merseyside police, was charged with misconduct in a public office, but [that prosecution collapsed in 2018](#). Two other former South Yorkshire police officers, Ch Supt Donald Denton and Det Ch Insp Alan Foster, and the force's then solicitor, Peter Metcalf, were charged with perverting the course of justice, by having the officers' accounts amended.

The facts of how the 96 were killed were, by definition, exactly the same as those the inquest jury had heard. But Duckenfield's trial, which began in January 2019 at Preston crown court, would be conducted in front of a new jury, with the facts up for grabs again. The families found themselves on the sidelines again, spectators to an English court and its ceremonials: wigs and gowns, the judge, Sir Peter Openshaw, in red robe, [the royal coat of arms](#), dating back to 1399, on the wall behind him.

Victims and their families in a criminal trial have no right to legal representation, and very limited participation in the process. "The Crown" is still the prosecutor. The family members who did regularly attend in the downstairs gloom of court No 1 at Preston – Jenni Hicks, Christine Burke, whose father, Henry, 46, was killed at Hillsborough, and Louise Brookes, who lost her older brother Andrew, 26, were regulars – sat in seats for the public, separated from the main court area by glass screens. Margaret Aspinall described it as "horrible, like we families were in the dock, not Duckenfield". Like many, she chose mostly to attend a live broadcast in Liverpool, at the council's Cunard building. An effort was made there to make the families comfortable, with a small room where they could sit, and have tea and biscuits.

The CPS had appointed Richard Matthews QC, an expert on health and safety and gross negligence manslaughter, to lead the prosecution. Very quickly, families became alarmed by the way he presented the case, and the direction it took.



Stephen Kelly, Margaret Aspinall (centre) and Mary Corrigan attend a press conference after David Duckenfield was found not guilty of manslaughter, November 2019. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Despite a 30-year fight for justice, Duckenfield's barrister, Ben Myers QC, was able to advance the same case the inquest jury had rejected three years earlier, that supporters created the dangerous situation outside the ground because many arrived without tickets, late, had been drinking, and did not comply with police orders. The families' lawyers had successfully challenged it all at the inquest, but now, Matthews barely contested it at all.

The families had to watch as the conclusions of the inquest were ignored. On [13 February 2019](#), a former South Yorkshire police officer, Insp Stephen Ellis, broke down while recalling people heading down the tunnel to the central pens after the exit gate was opened. The court took a break, during which Matthews and Myers agreed to have some of Ellis's 1989 statement read, instead of him having to continue giving evidence. This meant whatever was read would stand as evidence, unchallenged by the prosecution.

But the sections agreed included severe allegations against supporters; Ellis had stated that supporters had been drinking, were pushing, that they were "gripped by a mania" to get into the ground at any cost, that fans had dived

over turnstiles to get in. There was a great deal of similar police evidence, not borne out by the video footage, and the families' lawyers at the inquest had challenged every officer who made such claims, [including Ellis](#).

In response to my questions after the trial, the CPS explained that it couldn't challenge the evidence due to the rules of court. The Crown had a duty to "prosecute the case fairly and call a cross section of witnesses", the CPS said, which included calling police officers to give their account of what happened. According to the rules: "The prosecution is not permitted to 'challenge' the evidence of its own witnesses."

So a series of police officers, called by the prosecution, gave evidence that had been discredited at the inquest, and the prosecution allowed it to stand. The families, having fought 30 years against this narrative, made their views known very directly, urging Matthews to fight harder, and the atmosphere became fraught.

Stephanie Conning, a regular attender in Preston, is a survivor, having been at Hillsborough aged 18 with her older brother Rick Jones, 25, and his partner, Tracey Cox, 23, who both died in the crush. They were among those who were outside the ground at 2.52pm and came through the exit gate when the police opened it. She told me: "It has always been traumatic to have these accusations made against us, against our loved ones, and it has taken a great toll on the families to have to fight this, for so long. But we've also seen this can work on a jury, and it's maddening that the CPS won't challenge it."

The families also had concerns that Openshaw was sympathetic to Duckenfield. The judge allowed him to sit in the court with his lawyers, rather than in the dock, where accused people routinely sit, isolated, to be studied by a jury. Openshaw later explained in a ruling that this was part of making allowances for Duckenfield's mental health, including post-traumatic stress disorder. But such a concession to a defendant is rare. Sitting next to his solicitors, wearing his dark suit, made Duckenfield appear less like the accused, more like a victim himself. Myers played hard on that impression, portraying Duckenfield as a pitiful old man who had been "hounded" for 30 years, and was being made a scapegoat for wider failings.

“Just look at him!” Myers pleaded with the jury during his closing speech.

In his summing up, [which began on 21 March 2019](#), Openshaw solemnly recited as credible evidence all the allegations of supporters drinking, not having tickets and being late, including Ellis’s evidence of supporters’ “mania”. But the judge also added his own explanation about Duckenfield’s lie. He suggested to the jury [that it had not been a lie at all](#). As the crisis at Hillsborough was developing, before Duckenfield ordered the exit gate open, two other police officers had briefly said in Duckenfield’s hearing, mistakenly, that a gate had been forced. The judge told the jury that Duckenfield may have genuinely formed that impression himself, and it was “not at all surprising”.

It was, after everything, still a shocking experience to hear Openshaw say that. Everybody in the courtroom – except the jury – knew that Duckenfield himself had always admitted that he lied, as far back as the Taylor inquiry, where he had apologised for it. Yet in that Preston courtroom, everybody was powerless to say anything. Journalists are prohibited, while a trial is proceeding, from commenting or writing anything other than reporting what is said in court that day. My work on the disaster had always involved investigating the past miscarriage of justice, the first inquest, but this was a new feeling, of being trapped in a miscarriage of justice as it was happening.

The families had to endure it, silently, in the public seats. I saw Jenni Hicks during a break, near the top of the dark curved steps up to ground level. She said listening to Openshaw’s summing up was rolling the years back, like sitting through Popper’s travesty all over again. “I feel like I’m back in 1991,” she said.

After eight days considering their verdict, the jury returned to say [they could not reach the required minimum majority of 10-2](#). Matthews immediately told Openshaw he would be applying for a retrial.

Over the summer, some families held a heated meeting with senior CPS officials, protesting at Matthews’s handling of the case, and saying Openshaw should be asked to withdraw. The CPS say they took advice about the judge and decided not to make such an application. They told

families they were making improvements to their case, and urged them to remain positive.

So [the retrial began on 7 October](#), in the same court, with the same barristers, and Openshaw still presiding. Everybody had to stand again and bow when he walked in. Some differences were made in the CPS presentation of the case, but broadly it followed the same pattern: Myers and individual police officers alleged yet again that supporters misbehaved outside the ground, Matthews barely challenging that narrative.

This time, on 28 November 2019, the jury, having done their civic duty of assessing what was presented to them, [acquitted Duckenfield](#).

Perhaps as they left the court the jury members saw [the incensed reaction of the families](#), finally released from their enforced silence, Jenni Hicks, Christine Burke and Louise Brookes raging in interviews under TV lights. Only then could the previous findings be reported again, so perhaps the jury members learned for the first time about the inquest determinations, and the new legal position their verdict had established. Ninety-six people had been unlawfully killed due to Duckenfield's gross negligence manslaughter, and the victims, Liverpool supporters, were fully vindicated. But now, Duckenfield was not guilty of the criminal offence of gross negligence manslaughter, and the police accusations against the victims had been reinstated.

The venue for the last act in the legal system's Hillsborough saga could look like a cruel, knowing joke. Hilda Hammond told me years before that the stage-managed moves of the Popper inquest were "like going to the theatre". Now, due to Covid requirements, the concluding trial, of Metcalf, Denton and Foster, charged with perverting the course of public justice, [started on 20 April](#) in an actual theatre: the Lowry in Salford.

The families who attended – Jenni Hicks and Christine Burke, with her daughter Cherine, were regulars – were given seats in the upper circle. The judge, Mr Justice William Davis, was up on stage in his wig and crimson robe, the coat of arms behind him. The barristers, in wigs and gowns, were arranged in rows on the floor of the theatre, under lights. As they stood to

make their speeches, the unavoidable illusion was created that this was a scripted drama, conceived by a playwright as an indictment of England's archaic legal system.

Given the national outcry that the changing of statements had always caused, the prosecution seemed strangely lame. The opening speech by CPS barrister, Sarah Whitehouse QC, was restrained, and seemed to minimise the families' outrage that the police had perpetrated a cover-up. She said the trial "is not about the causes of the disaster" or whose fault it was, but this was confusing, given her own allegation that the statements were changed to "mask the failings" of the police. It meant that original police allegations against supporters were read out in court without context or challenge.



The Hillsborough memorial at the club's training facility featuring all 97 names. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

Steve Kelly, who watched the live broadcast in Liverpool with dismay, wrote to Max Hill, the director of public prosecutions, after the trial. He described the prosecution as "a feeble effort," saying he was "constantly in a state of shock" hearing the allegations, which he considered to be direct accusations against his brother Mike.

Hill has fully defended the CPS's work, [telling the House of Commons justice committee](#) in June 2021: "I maintain that we did everything we could, and we applied all of the vigour that we could."

The case did not even make it as far as being decided by the jury. The curtain came down on 26 May when Davis stopped the trial. He cleared Denton, saying that the chief superintendent had only been following advice from Metcalf, the solicitor, about having the police officers' statements amended. The judge's wider reasoning makes for a seriously concerning set of assertions about the law itself. The criminal offence of "perverting the course of public justice" could not have been committed by any of the three defendants, he ruled, because the Taylor inquiry, to which the amended statements were sent, was not a "course of public justice", like a court case. But Popper's inquest could not have been perverted either, because its scope was narrower before the Human Rights Act, Davis said. That appears deeply questionable, because Popper's inquest did consider the circumstances of the disaster, dwelt on the police allegations particularly the claims about drinking, and the lord chief justice had [quashed it in 2012](#) partly on the basis that the police case was false.

Davis also decided that the South Yorkshire police and Metcalf, as the force's lawyer, had no legal "duty of candour" to the inquest, meaning they were not required to be fully open and truthful.

So the legal findings delivered as the final scene of the Hillsborough tragedy were these: police and their solicitor can falsify evidence to a public inquiry without committing a criminal offence, and they did not have to be wholly truthful to an inquest. Also, there was a section about a solicitor's duties under English law, in which Davis noted that if a solicitor "realises that the court is acting on a false basis", there is "no duty to correct the court or to draw the court's attention to the true position".

So, a solicitor can be aware that a miscarriage of justice is being perpetrated, and has no duty to correct it. Whitehouse rose and, to the families' surprise, said the CPS was not going to appeal this ruling.

Up in the circle, Burke stood up, as she had in Preston when Duckenfield was acquitted, and in front of the jury, she said calmly again, that her father

had been killed at Hillsborough, and that nobody had ever been held to account for it. Davis told her to sit down and be quiet.

The judge told the jury foreman to state formally that Metcalf, Denton and Foster were not guilty. And that was it. Thirty-two years of legal proceedings were over. After 97 people were unlawfully killed at an FA Cup semi final, and a major police force constructed a false case to blame the victims, nobody had been held to account. Only Mackrell, the former Sheffield Wednesday secretary, has been convicted, of a safety offence related to allocating only seven turnstiles for the 10,100 people with tickets to stand on the Leppings Lane terrace. [He had been fined £6,500.](#)

In the grey and unseasonal cold on the forecourt outside the Lowry, Burke, Hicks and the family of Brian Matthews, a married financial consultant who died at Hillsborough aged 38, stood and talked to the media, lambasting the ruling and the process. At a press conference outside Liverpool's Anfield stadium, [Aspinall, standing alongside Burnham, raged](#) at what the families had been put through, calling it "a complete and utter disgrace", and said the whole system needed to change.

Like many family members, Hicks reflects now that after so long a fight, she must now try to live her life.

"Who knows what was lost that day when my daughters didn't come home? There may have been grandchildren, and their children. My daughters went to watch a football match and I feel like their lives were just ripped away, through the lack of police control.

"And these 32 years, what they put us through: I feel betrayed, by judges and by police. It has been a betrayal of everything I was brought up to believe about my own country. Your brain can't compute why it's acceptable in a British court to bring back evidence that was dismissed years earlier. The injustice and grief run alongside each other; it's like a knife in your heart.

"We've fought for our own loved ones, but there has been a strong feeling of responsibility, too: that if there is no accountability, this can happen to other

people.”

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[Sport](#)

How the Balloon World Cup blew up to become your new favourite sport

02:11

Don't let it drop: Peru win the first ever Balloon World Cup – video

[Gregg Bakowski](#)

Thu 21 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

Who hasn't been at a children's party and started an impromptu game of keep-ups with a balloon? It's fun, addictive and can get fiercely competitive. Well, that same game has just had its own World Cup, [won by Peru](#), after a thrilling final watched by a sellout crowd in Spain and around eight million Twitch viewers online.

If you're wondering how a seemingly childish activity could become a legitimate source of sporting entertainment, we need to go back to Covid lockdowns and how those experiencing cabin fever became creative to stay active at home. Some [juggled toilet rolls](#), did [indoor parkour](#) or [ran marathons on their balconies](#).

Antonio and Diego Arredondo, and their sister Isabel, relived their childhood by leaping around their Oregon living room in spectacular fashion as they tried to keep a balloon in the air.

"We started arguing with each other over if [the balloon] hit the ground or not, so we started taking videos in slow-mo to see if it did and then finally it got to the point of: let's post this video of us on Tik-Tok," Antonio told Reuters. [Their hugely entertaining games](#) soon went viral.

In Spain, the celebrity streamer [Ibai Llanos](#) became a huge fan, as did the Barcelona defender Gerard Piqué, who loves a bit of fun and has form for getting involved in other sports, having [overhauled the Davis Cup](#).

Llanos joked on Twitter in August that the game should have its own World Cup, with [Piqué replying he would make it happen if Llanos's tweet received more than 50k retweets](#). It got far more. With a bit of nifty marketing, Llanos's throwaway remark became a reality in Tarragona last weekend.

Thirty-two teams of competitive ballooners were invited to take their skills to the limit in a battle to be crowned world champions at the PortAventura theme park.



Morocco's Yahya El Hajouji in action with Sweden's Nicklas Hallbeck.
Photograph: Albert Gea/Reuters

Diego Arredondo, one of the siblings largely credited with inspiring the tournament, was among those competing in an eye-catching arena that resembled a glass-encased living room. In later rounds, rather bizarrely, a car was parked in the middle, but every successful sport needs a sponsor.

The rules are simple: the balloon always has to be struck upwards and a point is won if it hits the floor. Matches last between two and five minutes and the player leading when the clock stops wins and, much like squash, competitors must not hinder their rival's path.

Match highlights are wild fun to revisit, with the Spanish commentators, Llanos and Ander Corts, regularly losing it as they revel in the sneaky tactics of competitors who play drop-shots behind obstacles or when a player leaps over furniture to save a point. Unlike some sports, men can play against women and helmets must be worn to guard against head injuries – a collision with the corner of a dining table could be nasty.

Estamos haciendo historia!!! Menudos puntazos estamos viviendo@Mentos_Esp | # BalloonWorldCup
pic.twitter.com/K9VqzQMVS1

— Balloon World Cup (@BalloonWorldCup) [October 14, 2021](#)

Officials drawn from the world of football take their jobs very seriously and refer close calls to the VAR room, where slow-motion is used to determine whether the balloon touches the floor or not. The veteran former La Liga assistant referee Rafa Guerrero is particularly officious as he keeps a close eye on play, with pundit Piqué regularly asked for his opinion as though he is a veteran of the nascent sport and not a legend of Spanish football.



Peru's Francesco De La Cruz lifts the World Cup trophy after beating Germany's Jan Spiess 6-2 in the final. Photograph: Albert Gea/Reuters

There's a thrilling first-round derby between Andorra and France that goes to sudden death with the score 6-6 before a rookie French error (a downward kick) gifts the tiny principality a huge victory. There's an angry reaction from Italy as they are controversially knocked out by Morocco and there is a shock first-round defeat for one of the sport's founding fathers as Arredondo, representing the US, is dumped out by Cuba.

The UK also fall at the first hurdle with Equatorial Guinea proving far too crafty with a mix of powerful strikes and feather-fingered taps to advance 6-3.

This was intense 😱

(via balloon_league, antonio_arredondo_ /Instagram)
pic.twitter.com/uBmy3lyj4x

— SportsCenter (@SportsCenter) [August 20, 2021](#)

Online figures raced up towards 600,000 concurrent viewers as the tournament reached the final between Peru's Francesco de la Cruz and Germany's Jan Spiess. The 300 fans packed into the venue (among them Sergio Agüero and Jordi Alba) got their money's worth as the players threw themselves around the court in epic style, bouncing off furniture and toppling chairs in a thrilling spectacle.

It was the 18-year-old De la Cruz who emerged victorious after using the car expertly for balloon drop shots. "I am very, very happy, I thank God that I have been able to achieve this," he said after lifting the golden balloon (the Balloon d'Or?) and earning a cool €10,000 (£8,430).

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It is unclear whether the event was a one-off or if it will be back again next year. But if people keep buying the array of [snazzy #keepitup Balloon World Cup merchandise](#) and posting videos of their own skills online, then expect it to become an annual event. Some World Cups are worth having more regularly.

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[Theaster Gates](#)

Interview

‘Clay feels perverse’ – Theaster Gates on working on Obama’s library and going back to pottery

[Alex Needham](#)



Theaster Gates: ‘Clay feels perverse because it’s lowly.’ Photograph: Theaster Gates



[@alexneedham74](#)

Thu 21 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Theaster Gates likes to get his hands dirty. His [two](#) new [London exhibitions](#) are dedicated to clay, and in one there’s a film of him singing with great gusto as he throws a pot. So it feels a shame not to be meeting one to one, but via laptop. The artist decided at the last minute to stay at home in Chicago while the shows were mounted, directing things on Zoom. (He finally made it to the UK this week; on Thursday he will [give a talk](#) with potter [Magdalene Odundo](#).)

“I’m really mindful of my health and of the truth of these contagious times,” he tells me. “I just wanted to give myself time to be in the best shape so my body would be as resistant as possible. Even if the world is opening up, I’m happy to move slower.”

Gates is speaking from his library – “the brain!” – which, as well as books, contains shelves of records and magazines, turntables, and vintage speakers a hi-fi buff would kill for, through which he is currently listening to Etta

James, early Miles Davis, and the house music that rocked, or rather jacked, his city when Gates was a teenager. (“House music is on my mind all the time,” he admits.) Now 48, he spent most of lockdown in the library with his band [the Black Monks](#), who formed a bubble together. “We were writing new music,” he says. “I was making pots, and sometimes my guys would come over just to get out of the house. I feel really fortunate that I was able to spend time with my best friends, sometimes every day.”



‘I feel really fortunate I was able to spend time with my best friends’ ... Gates with his band the Black Monks. Photograph: Alexander Tamargo/Getty Images for Prada

There were other upsides, namely that Gates didn’t have to be a non-stop superstar artist. “I didn’t have to go to 20 dinners, do a bunch of interviews. I felt like an everyday guy who once or twice a year something special happens to, like you go to a funeral, or a wedding.” Before Covid, he says, “every week I was in a different country.”

Using everything from ceramics to sculpture to music, Gates’s work reaches out far beyond gallery walls, powered by his can-do attitude, urge to think big and deep sense of social responsibility. His most ambitious work, [the Dorchester Projects](#), saw him buy up abandoned buildings, including the [Stony Island Bank](#) on Chicago’s South Side, for as little as \$1, and refurbish

them as cultural centres, libraries, artists studios, and mixed-income housing.

Early in the pandemic, at a time of mask shortages in Chicago, he joined with the fashion label Citizens of Humanity [to produce and give away thousands of face coverings](#). He also converted Stony Island into a food bank, and continued to fund local artists. “There was deep acknowledgement of the fact that people continued to matter, even though we couldn’t be as proximate to each other,” he says. “Covid made me be more careful in my dealings, but I still felt present and affected and sharing the love.”



‘My art needs people’ ... the Archive Library building, part of Gates’s Dorchester Projects, Chicago. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Working with clay represents a return to the source of his original inspiration. As a child – the youngest of nine, and the only boy – Gates spent summer holidays in Mississippi with his family, where he would love to poke around in the dirt: “You could just dig anywhere and get this beautiful bright orange sticky mud and make things.” He studied urban planning and ceramics at Iowa State University, then spent a year in Tokoname, Japan, to learn from the pottery masters there. His film at the Whitechapel includes some footage from around the same time, of Gates as an eager student stating his ambition – now satisfied – to make an art movie about clay.

Twenty years ago, ceramics were regarded as the products of craft; these days, critics accept them as art, but Gates's renewed embrace of clay was more due to a desire, in lockdown, to work with something humble. "I think in this moment where everything is kind of bombastic and plastic and prefabricated, that clay feels perverse because it's lowly," he says.

I think all people have a responsibility to all people. We should all have a commitment to the oppressed

His exhibitions take in items ranging from simple "sake bowls and tea cups and bottles" at the White Cube, to a large white vessel inspired by the Greek-American ceramicist [Peter Voulkos](#) at the Whitechapel, along with pieces by other makers, including a jug by [David Drake](#), AKA Dave the Potter, who was born a slave in South Carolina in 1800 and whose pots, simply glazed and unadorned apart from his signature and sometimes lines of poetry, now go for \$1m at auction. Carefully placed together with Gates's own work, the ceramics tell stories of global trade and racial oppression, of Black spirituality and celebration.

Next year, Gates will become the first artist to design the [Serpentine Pavilion](#), a structure that will stand in London's Kensington Gardens all summer. Usually only architects get the honour. "If I'm going to be given the title of the first artist, then I want the pavilion to feel artful," he says. "I don't want it to just be an exploration of architectural principles or tectonic theory. I want to reflect the hand and the artist's creativity, the importance of looking at things and discovery."



David Drake's storage jar (1862), far right, alongside racist ceramics from the Ed J Williams collection and Gates's own art at Whitechapel Gallery. Photograph: © Theo Christelis/Whitechapel Gallery

Gates is also working on Barack Obama's [presidential library](#), which will display the 44th president's papers. "I want to participate in all levels of culture-making, of society-building, of nation-building, so I feel really fortunate that I have a president – I still call Barack my president – that I really believe in. Anything he and Michelle want from me, I'm probably going to be down to do it." Is he friends with the Obamas? "That would be a stretch," he laughs, "but I definitely respect him and I think that they respect me."

Gates also sees himself as a custodian of African-American culture. He has bought up and preserved items of significance, ranging from the joyful (the pioneering house DJ [Frankie Knuckles' record collection](#)) to those of intense sorrow. On the lawn of his building the Stony Island Arts Bank stands a gazebo. Seven years ago, when it was situated in a park in Cleveland, Ohio, someone sitting in it called the police to say that a black male was pointing a "probably fake" pistol at passersby. When the police arrived on the scene, they shot 12-year-old [Tamir Rice](#) dead.

“We use [the gazebo](#) all the time, with public activations, live music, and it’ll remain there until [Tamir’s mother] Samaria Rice finds a permanent home for it. It reminds me of how important moments like the Serpentine pavilion are – and monument making and site making – and how creatives and artists need to practise so that when moments like Tamir’s death happen, we know what to do.”

Gates says he is acutely aware of his privileged position as an artist. No one else in his family had any artistic leanings, “but my mom made doilies and Christmas wreaths. She was crafty. And my dad could fix a pinball machine and a refrigerator motor and a car motor. He was a mechanic, an entrepreneur and eventually a roofer. So you know, my skillset is probably no greater than my mom and dad, yet it allowed me access to one of the most privileged professions in the world. Those are the moments when I realise that access matters even more than skill. It’s someone saying, ‘I love what you do, can you do it here?’”



Civil Tapestry (Dirty Yellow) by Theaster Gates, made with a decommissioned fire hose. Photograph: Ben Westoby/courtesy of White Cube

Gates thinks that this is work everyone – of whatever race – should be doing. “It’s not just that white corporations have responsibility. I think all

people have a responsibility to all people. Black artists should have a commitment to designers and artists of colour, but I think we should all have a commitment to the oppressed. We should all be creating opportunities, not only for the people who are just like us, but for people who deserve opportunity.”

As with his [Civil Tapestry](#) series, which took the kind of fire hoses turned against civil rights protesters in the 60s and turned them into seductive abstract sculptures, Gates’s work fuses history with beauty and a burning social conscience. Ultimately, however, there is something in his work that just speaks to a love of being around other people, whether mourning, dancing, working, or in quiet contemplation. The last piece you see before leaving the Whitechapel is a chair and a large pot standing on a loudly patterned rug, taken from the offices of Johnson, publishers of Black-interest magazines Jet and Ebony, and dirtied by years of meetings and parties.

“My art needs people in order to be its best self,” Gates says. “The spaces need to be activated and I need help. Ultimately, when I’m building things, I’m building not just for myself but for the people around me.”

- [Theaster Gates: A Clay Sermon is at Whitechapel Gallery, London until 9 January 2022. Oh the Wind, Oh the Wind is at White Cube Masons Yard, London until 30 October.](#)
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2021.10.21 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus: Bulgaria records highest cases since April; India administers billionth jab](#)
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Coronavirus live: UK sees daily cases rise to over 50,000; WHO warns indoor socialising driving infections

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Singapore

Singapore hospitals risk being ‘overwhelmed’ after record daily Covid deaths



Passengers from Amsterdam arrive at Changi airport on Wednesday under Singapore's expanded quarantine-free travel scheme. The city-state reported 18 Covid deaths on Wednesday and 3,862 more cases. Photograph: Edgar Su/Reuters

Staff and agencies

Wed 20 Oct 2021 21.01 EDT

Singapore's healthcare system is at risk of being “overwhelmed” by surging coronavirus infections, government officials warned on Wednesday, a day after the city-state expanded quarantine-free travel as it shifts its approach to dealing with the pandemic.

The health ministry reported 18 deaths on Wednesday – Singapore’s highest toll in a single day – and 3,862 more cases, just shy of the record 3,994 tallied the day before.

“At the current situation, we face considerable risk of the healthcare system being overwhelmed,” Lawrence Wong, co-chair of a government taskforce fighting Covid-19, said before the new figures were released.

Wong, who is also the finance minister, said nearly 90% of isolation beds in hospitals have been filled and more than two-thirds of intensive care unit beds are occupied.

His comments come a day after the city-state expanded its quarantine-free travel to fully vaccinated passengers from eight countries, including key trading partners the United States, Britain and France.

The prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong, has said the global business hub cannot remain closed indefinitely, and the city-state has shifted from a zero-tolerance strategy with lockdowns and closed borders to taking the approach of living with Covid-19.

Analysts said the travel lane scheme, which started with Brunei and Germany last month, could provide a shot in the arm for the pandemic-hammered airline and tourism industries. But it nevertheless stirred fears among some ordinary Singaporeans as the city grapples with its latest outbreak.

Most of Singapore’s cases are mild or asymptomatic with patients recovering at home, allowing hospitals to focus on seriously sick Covid patients.

“We are trying to add capacity, but it’s not simply a matter of having extra beds or purchasing new equipment because ... our medical personnel are stretched and fatigued,” Wong said.

“And while we are trying to reinforce the team, it will take time for these reinforcements to come in.”

Taskforce co-leader and health minister, Ong Ye Kung, said the number of infections among unvaccinated people aged 60 years and above “continues to be high”, accounting for two-thirds of patients in the ICU and those who have died.

Singapore has reported more than 158,000 coronavirus cases and 264 deaths.

The recent spike in infections after the relaxation of some restrictions has prompted Singapore to pause further reopening.

The city-state extended its social curbs on Wednesday to contain the spread of Covid-19 for around a month in order to ease the pressure on the healthcare system.

More than 80% of Singapore’s total population has been vaccinated against the virus.

Agence France-Presse and Reuters contributed to this report.

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Vaccines and immunisation

Complacency slowing England's Covid booster jabs rollout, says NHS leader



A vaccination centre in Cwmbran, Wales, giving booster doses this month.
Photograph: Huw Fairclough/Getty Images

[Denis Campbell](#) and [Ian Sample](#)

Wed 20 Oct 2021 11.09 EDT

The Covid booster jabs programme in England is being undermined by the public's complacency about the threat posed by the virus, a senior [NHS](#) leader involved in the rollout has said.

The number of people getting their top-up shot is too low because the lifting of lockdown restrictions means many people do not see the point, said Ruth Rankine, the director of primary care at the NHS Confederation.

This week the head of the NHS in England was urged to "turbocharge" the booster programme. NHS England has denied the programme is

significantly behind schedule and said more than 4m top-up shots had been delivered in the last month alone.

But on Tuesday Jeremy Hunt, the former health secretary who now chairs the Commons health select committee, told the NHS England chief executive, Amanda Pritchard, that just 200,000 doses a day were being provided, half the 400,000 a day seen in the spring.

Pritchard said: “While it is great that people are coming forward for their boosters, they are not coming forward as quickly when they receive their invitation as seen for first jabs.”

Rankine said: “The issue with the boosters is that the uptake is not where they [ministers and NHS leaders] want it to be. Our members in primary care – GP federations and primary care networks – are telling us that people are a bit more laissez-faire about it [vaccination] now. When we had first and second doses, a lot of it was still in lockdown and people saw it as a way out, a way to freedom and [fewer] restrictions.

“Now there are very few restrictions, so it’s like: ‘why do I need to be vaccinated then because I’m already double vaccinated?’ or ‘I’ve already had Covid so what difference is this going to make?’ We haven’t got those same restrictions we had previously. Mask wearing is voluntary. There’s no restrictions on going to events. There’s no restrictions on going on holiday. So I think people are a lot more complacent than they were before.”

She added: “Whilst people may feel that things are back to normal, you just have to look at the [Covid] numbers to know that we are still in the height of Covid. My concern is that a lot of the public don’t seem to realise that.”

Rankine said there was less motivation to be triple vaccinated than double vaccinated. “When we were getting first and second doses people thought: OK, well if I want to go on holiday I need to be double vaccinated. We haven’t got that now. Countries aren’t saying that you have to have had your booster to get in. The requirement is still to be double vaccinated.”

The Royal College of GPs said fewer practices were taking part in the booster shots programme and many were instead concentrating on

administering flu jabs and the huge demand for care they are facing.

“GPs are already facing intense workload and workforce pressures as we approach what will be an incredibly challenging winter, so it’s understandable that some practices have had to prioritise other essential care and services for their patients,” said Prof Martin Marshall, the college’s chair.

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US news

FDA backs Moderna and J&J boosters as it OKs mixing Covid vaccines



The FDA's decisions mark a big step toward expanding the US booster campaign, which began with extra doses of the Pfizer vaccine last month.
Photograph: Apu Gomes/AFP/Getty Images

Associated Press

Wed 20 Oct 2021 18.21 EDT

US regulators on Wednesday signed off on extending Covid-19 boosters to Americans who got the Moderna or Johnson & Johnson vaccine and said anyone eligible for an extra dose can get a brand different from the one they received initially.

The Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) decisions mark a big step toward expanding the US booster campaign, which began with extra doses of the Pfizer vaccine last month.

But before more people roll up their sleeves, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will consult an expert panel later this week before finalizing official recommendations for who should get boosters and when.

The latest moves would expand by tens of millions the number of Americans eligible for boosters and formally allow “mixing and matching” of shots, making it simpler to get another dose, especially for people who had a side effect from one brand but still want the proven protection of vaccination.

Specifically, the FDA authorized a third Moderna shot for seniors and others at high risk from Covid-19 because of their health problems, jobs or living conditions, six months after their last shot. One big change: Moderna’s booster will be half the dose that’s used for the first two shots, based on company data showing that was plenty to rev up immunity again.

For J&J’s single-shot vaccine, the FDA said all US recipients should get a second dose at least two months following their initial vaccination.

The FDA rulings differ because the vaccines are made differently, with different dosing schedules – and the J&J vaccine has consistently shown a lower level of effectiveness than either of the two-shot Moderna and Pfizer vaccines.

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2021.10.21 - Opinion

- Farmers don't have to contribute to the environmental crisis – we can solve it
- The harsh truths of partition in Ireland can't be avoided in the name of reconciliation
- All you can eat? I take those words as a promise – and a challenge
- Yes, we have to live with Covid – but not with such irresponsible ministers

[A just transitionFarming](#)

Farmers don't have to contribute to the environmental crisis – we can solve it

[Jyoti Fernandes](#)



Jyoti Fernandes with fellow farmer Brian Pearcy, who managed his farm as an ecosystem. Photograph: Jyoti Fernandes

Thu 21 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

Last week, I went to the funeral of an old farmer named Brian. Until he died, Brian managed his farm, with its traditional orchards, hedgerows, and meadows, as an ecosystem. I could see from the age of the farmers who came to pay their respects that this way of farming was dying out and being replaced by a farming system that is one of the greatest contributors to the climate and nature crisis we face. However, there is hope. My husband and I, like the many new farmers emerging, learned our approach from these old farmers, who have been through drastic changes in the farming industry, yet have managed to keep alive their knowhow.

Our family-run farm in Dorset produces meat, cheese, vegetables and apple juice, using many of these same agroecological farming methods. [Agroecological farming](#) means we nurture the soil, insects, grassland, plants, animals and trees on our land to provide healthy affordable food for our local community. For us, farming isn't just a business, and it isn't just about feeding human beings – it's about feeding all living things on the planet.

Over the past 40 years, many food-producing farms have become more industrialised and integrated into the globalised food system. To produce the higher yields and uniform crops demanded by supermarkets, many farms converted and got bigger, buying fuel-hungry tractors and carbon-intensive nitrate fertilisers. Farmers started using pesticides that kill bees and earthworms. Instead of raising animals on homegrown feeds and pasture, they started using soya grown on land reclaimed from forests.

We are now in a situation where industrial farming is a significant contributor to the climate crisis, responsible for [30% of the total](#) of greenhouse gas emissions. The industry must convert to an agroecological farming system where we feed ourselves [without destroying the land](#) for future generations, while, at the same time, protecting and improving the livelihoods of millions of food producers worldwide.

To be a part of the solution, I work for a union called the [Landworkers' Alliance](#) representing small and family farmers across the UK. We are a part of [La Via Campesina](#), a union representing 200 million farmers across the world. I lobby for policy to help our industry make the huge transition to nature-friendly farming that will restore biodiversity while mitigating the effects of climate change.

The UK government should reform the farm subsidy system so it pays farmers to restore our soils, plant trees, and provide sustainable employment, instead of simply paying them to intensify production. Alongside this, it needs to protect farmers from being undercut by cheap imports. Global trade has meant that supermarkets can source from anywhere, including, sadly, places with exploited workers or lower animal welfare and environmental regulations. This also goes directly against our climate commitment to reduce transport emissions.

Local councils, especially those declaring climate emergencies, should be encouraging local food webs to flourish. They should be developing food markets, delivery-box schemes, farm shops, community gardens, allotments and farms on the outskirts of cities (known as [peri-urban farming](#)). The plans should be strategic in considering how food can be produced using less transport, packaging, and processing.

We also need to think about less and better livestock. As a farmer I produce meat and cheese from cows and sheep that graze beneath the apple trees in my orchard on diverse, carbon-sequestering grasslands. Livestock plays an important role in traditional land management, but there is no doubt that we must produce less intensively and stop eating factory-farmed meat completely if we are to halt the destruction of Earth's ecosystems.

Lowering the intensity of agricultural production is also important to the welfare of workers. Mega-dairies, indoor pig units and huge chicken barns are not pleasant places to work. Neither are huge fields of fruit and vegetables sprayed in herbicides and pesticides. If we transition to smaller mixed farms, we can create green jobs that provide exercise, fresh air and creativity. My farm now provides employment for five people growing vegetables, and many more through food-processing businesses located on it.

In the food and farming sector we can go for “green growth”, creating both dignified livelihoods and amazing shopping experiences for consumers at abundant markets bursting with unique cheeses, preserves, fresh fruit and vegetables, artisan breads, restaurants, breweries and food kiosks.

Many new entrants to farming want to stand alongside traditional farmers and indigenous people to feed and heal the planet. But the false solutions, such as GM and global trade, that corporate agribusiness promote, stand in the way. Corporations dominate discussions about our food system at forums including the [UN food systems summit](#), and will certainly dominate discussions about agriculture at Cop26.

We must see through the claims of these large multinational food corporations, because their “solutions” have driven millions of small farmers from the land and put us into the precarious position we are in today.

Small farmers should be the heroes of any new green transition. We absolutely can feed the world, while restoring it – we just need to be given the power to get on with this momentous task and political space to share our message of regeneration and hope.

- Jyoti Fernandes is a farmer based in Dorset
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OpinionIreland

The harsh truths of partition in Ireland can't be avoided in the name of reconciliation

[Brian Hanley](#)



A republican poster in Derry, Northern Ireland, 2005. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Thu 21 Oct 2021 04.54 EDT

Today in Armagh a church service is marking the centenary since the partition of [Ireland](#). Though the event is hosted by the five main Christian churches on the island of Ireland, it has been shrouded in controversy since it emerged in September that the Irish president, Michael D Higgins, had declined an invitation to attend.

The [president objected](#) that the title and structure of the “Service of Reflection and Hope” to “mark the centenaries of the partition of Ireland and

the foundation of Northern Ireland” were political in nature; though he insisted it wasn’t a boycott. Minister for foreign affairs Simon Coveney is now representing the Irish government, [with Boris Johnson](#) also attending – the Queen’s attendance was [cancelled yesterday](#) on health grounds. Members of the DUP, and former taoiseach John Bruton, were quick to criticise Higgins’ decision, but it was an entirely logical move. Partition was imposed on Ireland a century ago, against the wishes of the majority of its people. The border was opposed not only by republicans, but also by the so-called “constitutional” nationalists of the Home Rule party, the labour movement and indeed many southern unionists. The birth of the border came as part of a violent process with what was to become the minority community in the new Northern Ireland effectively battered into submission.

To imagine that this could be an occasion of value-free reflection on history, as church organisers claimed it to be, was entirely ill-conceived. Just as leaders of the Democratic Unionist party refused (entirely logically) to attend events commemorating the Easter Rising in 2016, it was correct for Higgins to stay away from this event. He has attended numerous events north of the border but in this case has argued that the ceremony is not “neutral politically”.

While it cannot be said to have been the most important issue to face the public south of the border in the past month, [opinion polls](#) show a majority support the president’s decision. Does this reflect a hardening of the popular mood on issues such as the border? Partly, though that in turn has certainly been far more influenced by Brexit and its aftermath than by discussions about the past. What it may reflect however is a growing awareness of the limitations of the concept of a “shared history”.

For the past decade Ireland has been engaged in a commemorative process around the years that led to the birth not just of the Irish Free State and [Northern Ireland](#) but the modern United Kingdom. The dominant thinking at official level has been about how remembering events such as the first world war could lead to an appreciation of a shared history between unionists and nationalists on the island of Ireland and indeed between Ireland and Britain. This in turn, some believe, might even foster a sense of reconciliation between them.

The idea of “shared history” was always flawed, eliding as it did questions of imperialism, power, class and inequality and often attempting to avoid contentious issues. The real sense of fear among some commentators about commemorating the 1916 Easter Rising, for example, inspired vaguely ridiculous attempts at “branding” the centenary as a tourist marketing opportunity. The fearful approach also encouraged the bland, as the assumption seemed to be that too much politics would frighten people off.

This was partly the reason that much of the energy, enthusiasm and innovation during the centenaries came from “unofficial” local community groups and history societies rather than from government. Nevertheless there were very valuable interventions from the state, particularly making freely available (and accessible online) key documents relating to the revolutionary period, such as the [military service pension files](#).

But trying to avoid contentious political questions was always problematic, since central to the current idea of commemoration was the very politically driven view that it must reflect the existence of “two traditions” in Ireland as well as a “shared history” with Britain. This approach patronised the people who lived in Ireland 100 years ago, who were, after all, prepared to fight over their real and deeply held political beliefs. It was an idea embedded in the politics of commemorative trade-off, whereby nationalists got to celebrate Easter Week, Unionists to remember the Somme, and politicians, historians and civil servants congratulated each other on their maturity.

The issues that deeply divided Irish people a century ago were simplified or glossed over and the role of Britain virtually ignored. Ireland and Britain of course share history, but they did not share an *equal* history: only one was conquered by the other and only one became a global empire. Ultimately, and allowing for all the complexities and nuances that British rule in Ireland involved, in the last resort the Crown depended on force to hold Ireland. The imposition of the border and indeed David Lloyd George’s threat of “immediate and terrible war” if Irish delegates refused to accept the treaty in 1921 graphically illustrate this. Attempting to commemorate partition and avoiding mentioning these facts lest they give offence will ultimately satisfy nobody. This is why ill-conceived ideas such as the planned Irish state ceremony in January 2020 to remember the [pre-independence police forces](#),

the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Dublin Metropolitan Police, ultimately foundered in the face of a popular backlash.

In contrast to many commentators and historians, Higgins has notably reflected on the issues of imperialism and power at several key stages during the Decade of Centenaries. He has noted how many who critique the contradictions of Irish nationalism have tended to ignore the role of British imperialism in Irish history. By puncturing the consensus around shared history, he has actually performed a service to those of us seeking an honest debate about events a century ago. Perhaps this may eventually open up space for a more genuine reflection on how our current societies remain shaped by partition and the process by which it came about.

- Brian Hanley is a historian and author of *The Impact of the Troubles on the Republic of Ireland*
- This article was amended on Thursday 21 October 2021. Simon Coveney is Ireland's minister for foreign affairs, not the tanaiste.

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OpinionRestaurants

All you can eat? I take those words as a promise – and a challenge

[Adrian Chiles](#)



Buffet soldier. Photograph: MilanEXPO/Getty Images

Thu 21 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

There's a [Twitter account called Fake Showbiz News](#) that is occasionally kind/cruel enough to feature me as the subject of one its "exclusives". Even if there's an unpleasant undertone to the story, I'm at the stage in my "showbiz" career that, pitifully, I can't help being grateful for any sign that I've not been forgotten. This week's offering was so close to the truth that I didn't know whether to wince, laugh or cry: "[Adrian Chiles ordered to leave bottomless brunch following 'misunderstanding'](#)"

The ring of truth here has aggravated my tinnitus. I've never been to a bottomless brunch but, if I had, there would indeed have been the chance of a misunderstanding, as until now I didn't realise the "bottomless" refers to the booze not the food. Though I can put far too much alcohol away from time to time, unlimited food will always cause me more problems. Unlike many excessive drinkers, with booze I have a functioning off-switch; with food I have no off-switch at all.

This is something I've been aware of since an evening in Salt Lake City in 1987. A couple of friends and I were travelling by Greyhound bus across America. Being on a tight budget, we were delighted to come across something we had never seen before: an all-you-can-eat restaurant. We filled our boots. My friends were soon full, as was I, but that didn't stop me. I ate and ate and ate. The waiters were amused at first, then a little annoyed. As I troughed plate after plate, the annoyance turned to alarm and, finally, to admiration. Word reached the kitchen and soon the chefs appeared for a look at this gluttonous monster. I was applauded out of the place at the end of the evening. Who knows, I may even have been mentioned in the local press.

The three of us spent a long, sleepless night in an airless room in the cheapest of motels. We travelled south from there the following morning. It wasn't until we reached Austin, Texas – more than 1,000 miles away – that my digestive discomfort passed.

Adrian Chiles is a writer, broadcaster and Guardian columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/oct/21/all-you-can-eat-i-take-those-words-as-a-promise-and-a-challenge>

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

Yes, we have to live with Covid – but not with such irresponsible ministers

[**Philip Ball**](#)



‘Sajid Javid reassured us recently that the infection rate ‘feel[s] quite stable’.’ Photograph: Toby Melville/AP

Wed 20 Oct 2021 12.47 EDT

When the official inquiry into the Covid-19 crisis finally happens, the current phase of the pandemic will warrant as much scrutiny as any of the earlier ones. It’s surely the strangest and in some ways the most disturbing period of the pandemic so far, not least because there seems to be collective denial from the government and much of the public that we are still in a pandemic at all.

Some statistics might help to correct any such fantasies. Since mid-August, as many people in the UK have been dying from Covid every two weeks as [typically die](#) directly from flu in a year: that’s 1,400 or so. The UK has one of the highest [per capita infection rates](#) in the world: four times higher than Germany, nine times higher than France, and 25 times higher than Spain. Britain is a total outlier in western Europe.

By the start of October, 1 in 20 schoolchildren were [Covid-positive](#). Already, before winter sets in, the NHS is struggling to cope with hospitalisations – one in five intensive care beds [are occupied](#) by Covid patients – while still having a backlog of more than 5m [delayed treatments](#) to clear.

The chief executive of the NHS Confederation, Matthew Taylor, said today, “[We are right on the edge](#)”, and called for the government to implement its Plan B for Covid. This would entail compulsory masks in indoor spaces and secondary schools, vaccine passports and advice to work from home. None of these things would cause significant economic disruption: no one is calling for a lockdown. They could mostly be implemented tomorrow.

They [won’t be](#), as the business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, indicated today. Downing St says it is keeping a “close eye” on the situation – which makes you wonder what they would need to see before acting. This complacent attitude was exemplified by the health secretary, Sajid Javid, who reassured us recently that the infection rate “feel[s] quite stable”. As though the relatively massive absolute numbers – well over 40,000 new infections

recorded every single day, which he now admits could hit 100,000 this winter – don’t matter so long as they don’t change.

Remarkably, that attitude seems to be widely accepted: that, all evidence to the contrary, the pandemic is all but over, masks are no longer needed (except as virtue-signalling), and life must resume as before. Such complacency among the general public is understandable, given the message delivered not just by the government but by much of the media since mandatory restrictions were dropped on so-called Freedom Day back in July.

Of course, the reasons why this seeming indifference is even possible is the vaccines. Most of the deaths, adjusted for age, are among unvaccinated people, who run at least a tenfold higher risk. But in absolute numbers, by far the majority of deaths are still in older people, despite them being vaccinated. According to Prof Christina Pagel, an expert in healthcare policy at University College London, a double-vaccinated 80-year-old may have about the same risk of dying from Covid as an unvaccinated 50-year-old.

Besides, the prevalence and debilitating consequences of long Covid are now becoming clear: around two million Britons, and as many as one in seven children, are thought already to have long-lasting Covid symptoms, and many doubly vaccinated people will probably not be protected from that danger.

And the sheer numbers of infected people broaden the pool of virus in which new variants can arise. Already, a new variety of the Delta variant called AY.4.2 has appeared that might be marginally more transmissible. No one knows how much scope remains for new variants to become more contagious or virulent, but the best way to avoid that risk is to keep infections low.

We have been encouraged to regard Covid-19 as a kind of natural hazard about which we can do nothing more. But, as the rest of western Europe shows, there was never anything inevitable about our predicament. It was a political choice. As Jeremy Farrar, a member of Sage and director of the Wellcome Trust, has said, it is politics that stops Conservative MPs from wearing masks in parliament. The light-touch, low-cost measures of Plan B

are being resisted because they might signal a policy failure and would arouse indignation on the right.

Despite clear advice to the contrary, the government still appears to believe that vaccines, which gave them such a shot of popularity, were a get-out-of-jail-free card that requires them to do nothing else.

When Javid and Kwarteng say that we have to learn to live with the virus, they are right in one sense: the most probable trajectory is that Covid won't vanish but will establish itself as an endemic pathogen, like flu viruses. But they are deeply mistaken if they think, as it seems, that this means going about life as before the pandemic.

For the foreseeable future, "learning to live with Covid" should mean taking measures to prevent transmission – such as wearing masks in indoor public places and working from home where possible – and reintroducing further temporary restrictions should cases spike in certain parts of the country. Populist politicians don't feel comfortable with that; the question is whether the rest of us feel comfortable with the current, lethal alternative.

- Philip Ball is a science writer. His books include [The Water Kingdom: A Secret History of China](#)
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2021.10.21 - Around the world

- ['Aggressor' 'We cannot trust the Chinese' on Taiwan, says Biden's pick for Beijing ambassador](#)
- [Norway Country reveals plans for river trap system to protect wild salmon](#)
- ['National treasure' New Zealand Māori haka protected in trade deal with UK](#)
- [Trade UK strikes deal with New Zealand – but it may add nothing to GDP](#)

US foreign policy

Biden's pick for China ambassador says 'we cannot trust the Chinese' on Taiwan



Nicholas Burns speaks to the US Senate committee on foreign relations, which is due to confirm his appointment as ambassador to China: 'Our responsibility is to make Taiwan a tough nut to crack.' Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

*Helen Davidson in Taipei, and agencies
@heldavidson*

Thu 21 Oct 2021 08.34 EDT

US president Joe Biden's nominee to be ambassador to Beijing said on Wednesday that China was aggressive and untrustworthy, insisting that boosting Taiwan's defences against the threat of Chinese invasion should be a US priority.

Speaking to the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, which is due to confirm his appointment, Nicholas Burns denounced recent Chinese

warplane incursions into Taiwan's air defence zone, calling them "especially objectionable".

"We certainly cannot trust the Chinese" on the issue of Taiwan, Burns said. "Our responsibility is to make Taiwan a tough nut to crack."

The comments come amid increasing international pushback on Beijing's actions towards Taiwan. On Thursday, the European parliament adopted a report calling on the EU to ramp up relations with Taiwan.

Since 1979 the US has recognised the People's Republic of [China](#), but the US Congress simultaneously requires Washington to provide Taiwan with means of self-defence.

The island has had its own government since the communist takeover of mainland China in 1949, but Beijing considers Taiwan a part of its territory to be assimilated one day, by force if necessary.

However, the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, recently urged a "peaceful reunification".

Burns – a career diplomat who has worked in a number of US administrations, under Democrats and Republicans – did not mince his words on Wednesday.

He accused the Chinese government of being "an aggressor against India along their long Himalayan border, against Vietnam, the Philippines and others in the South China Sea, against Japan, in the East China Sea".

"Beijing has launched an intimidation campaign against Australia, and even more recently Lithuania," he said. "The PRC's genocide in Xinjiang, its abuses in Tibet, its smothering of Hong Kong's autonomy and freedoms and its bullying of Taiwan are unjust and must stop."

But Burns stressed that China's power should not be overestimated: "They have very few friends. They have no real allies."

“We ought not to exaggerate their strengths or underestimate the strengths of the United States,” he told the committee. “What we need is self confidence that the United States is a strong country.”

On Thursday, an overwhelming majority of the European parliament voted for a report supporting an increase in EU-Taiwan relations, guided by the EU’s one-China policy.

In a statement, the parliament hailed Taiwan as “a key EU partner and democratic ally in the Indo-Pacific,” and called for closer relations. It issued a warning over tensions in the Taiwan Strait, urged the scoping of a bilateral trade agreement, and expressed “deep concerns” over China’s military pressure against Taiwan.

The text was approved with 580 votes in favour, 26 against, and 66 abstentions.

“The European parliament’s first report on EU-Taiwan relations demonstrates that the EU is ready to upgrade its relationship with our key partner Taiwan,” said Charlie Weimers, the rapporteur on EU-Taiwan relations.

The adopted report also proposed changing the name of the EU’s de facto diplomatic presence in Taiwan from the “European Economic and Trade Office” to “European Union Office in Taiwan”.

Such a move is likely to prompt a rebuke from Beijing, which is hypersensitive to any move that suggests recognition of Taiwan’s sovereignty. In August, [plans by Lithuania and Taiwan to open mutual offices](#) with the name of Lithuania’s including “Taiwan” sparked a row in which China recalled its ambassador from Vilnius.

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Fish

Norway reveals plans for river trap system to protect wild salmon



While Norway strictly regulates the fishing of wild salmon, the species remains threatened by contact with farmed populations. Photograph: Ann and Steve Toon/Alamy

[Weronika Strzyżyska](#)

Thu 21 Oct 2021 05.56 EDT

Norway is to introduce new traps to protect wild salmon after experts warned they could become endangered as a result of contact with their farmed counterparts.

Farmed fish and non-native pink salmon carry various diseases and lice, and in recent years have spread from Russia across the Norwegian coastline, reaching [Britain and mainland Europe](#).

The Norwegian climate and environment ministry has pledged 15m Norwegian kroner (£1.3m) for install river traps in the country's northernmost region of Finnmark, as well as to enclosing all coastal fish farms by 2030.

The announcement coincides with the publication of a [new report](#) by the Scottish government that shows open-pen fish farms in the Highlands constitute a significant risk to the wild salmon population due to crossbreeding and an increase in parasites.

According to the North Atlantic Salmon [Conservation](#) Organization, the global population of Atlantic salmon fell by more than half since 1983 because of overfishing, habitat destruction by hydropower plants and the spread of salmon lice, among other factors.

It is estimated that only about 3 million wild salmon remain in the Atlantic, down from more than 8 million in the 1980s.

“The Norwegian populations of wild Atlantic salmon represent about one-third of all remaining populations of the species,” said Håvard Vedeler Nilsen, an adviser in Norway’s environment ministry. “The declining numbers of returning salmon is of great concern in Norway and has been for some time.”

While Norway strictly regulates the fishing of wild salmon, the species remains threatened by contact with farmed populations as the country is the biggest producer of farmed salmon in the world.

“Escaped farmed salmon can serve as a vector for diseases and parasites to wild salmonid populations and weaken the populations’ genetic integrity,” Vedeler Nilsen said. “Farmed salmon are bred with characteristics favourable in aquaculture such as fast growth and late maturation, however they lose other properties in the process. When an escaped salmon breeds with wild populations, the offspring might have a lower chance of survival due to its genotype.”

Additionally, the numerous fish farms contribute to the increase in salmon lice, parasites that feed on fish’s mucous layer and skin, making them more

susceptible to disease. “Salmon lice are a natural parasite in Norwegian coastal waters, but with the large number of hosts available from aquaculture, the number of lice has grown exponentially,” Vedeler Nilsen said.

“We’ve got exactly the same problems in the west Highlands,” said Andrew Graham-Stewart, the director of [Salmon and Trout Conservation](#), a charity campaigning for stricter fish farm regulation in the UK. He said a similar enclosure of Scottish farms was necessary for the preservation of wild salmon in Scottish waters. However, he said, regulation in the country had remained lax, with few steps taken to separate farmed fish from wild species.

“The future of wild salmon on the west Highlands and islands looks pretty grim, unless Scottish government starts to act to protect wild fish,” Graham-Stewart said. “The industry is not going to move into close containment because they’ve got little incentive to do so.”

While the Norwegian project focuses on the immediate need to separate salmon species, other long-term interventions are also planned, such as increasing the number of salmon gene banks that can be later used to re-establish populations.

“The plan has the potential to make a big difference for Atlantic salmon populations in Norway, and hopefully reverse the negative trend,” Vedeler Nilsen said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/oct/21/norway-reveals-plans-river-trap-system-to-protect-wild-salmon>

New Zealand

‘National treasure’: New Zealand Māori haka protected in trade deal with UK



The new UK-New Zealand free trade deal includes a commitment from the UK to protect the haka. Photograph: Hannah Peters/Getty Images

Tess McClure in Christchurch
[@tessairini](#)

Wed 20 Oct 2021 23.45 EDT

It may not be enough to prevent the dance being butchered [by dance troupes](#), [in TikToks](#) or at [pub crawls](#), but a historic [new UK-New Zealand free trade deal](#) includes commitments from the UK to protect New Zealand’s iconic haka, Ka Mate.

The deal is expected to boost New Zealand’s GDP by \$970m, and eventually lift tariffs on all its exports to the UK. But its provisions extend beyond the economic: unusually, it also notes “a commitment by the UK to cooperate with [New Zealand](#) to identify appropriate ways to advance recognition and

protection of the haka Ka Mate ... [and] acknowledge Ngāti Toa Rangatira's [the leaders of Ngāti Toa tribe's] guardianship of the haka".

The Ka Mate haka, a traditional Māori war dance that is performed internationally by some of New Zealand's top sports teams, has been subject to controversial appropriation in the UK. Last year, a group of UK nurses apologised after performing an altered haka in facepaint, which cultural adviser Karaitiana Taiuru [said at that time](#) was "blatant cultural abuse that is verging on being racist".

While a free trade deal is unlikely to prevent those incidents entirely, it may go some way to protect the haka from being used in commercial settings by those other than its traditional Indigenous guardians.

"Ka Mate is one of the most appropriated, commercially ripped off icons of New Zealand and Te Ao Māori [so] it's important and logical that it's in there," Taiuru said. "And at events in London we see drunk Kiwis down the street doing the haka, just disrespecting Ngāti Toa, Te Rauparaha, the whole haka ... I hope that this was a good step forward for recognition of Indigenous rights."

Māori party co-leader Rawiri Waititi welcomed the protections. "We must be looking at cultural appropriation – not misappropriation, treating it with a lot more respect and I'm glad that a lot more people are," he said, [according to the New Zealand Herald](#).

"You've got to understand the concept of haka, and what it's about," Waititi said.

"It's not a commodity to be used in that sort of space, it's a taonga [treasure] that's been gifted to the All Blacks by Ngati Toa and Aotearoa and we're really proud of it."

Ngāti Toa's guardianship of Ka Mate has been written into New Zealand law since 2014, and the haka has been formally recognised as a taonga, or treasure, belonging to the iwi, or tribe. Ngāti Toa iwi leader Kahu Ropata has [previously told Te Ao Māori](#), "It is recognised as a national treasure ...

“Our iwi signed the Ka Mate Ka Mate attribution bill through our settlement to recognise our rightful role as sole guardians of the haka. For whoever uses it should acknowledge its origins.”

Announcing the deal, British prime minister Boris Johnson said: “We already share deep ties of history, culture and values, and I look forward to the next chapter in our friendship.”

Competitive against China

The new free trade deal is one of only a handful that the UK has created from scratch in the post-Brexit era – and one Britain hopes will also chip away at New Zealand’s trade dependency on China.

The focus on the region is part of prime minister Boris Johnson’s 10-year plan to tilt the UK’s foreign policy focus towards the Indo-Pacific, strengthening the alliance and position of democratic countries in the region to make them more competitive against China.

More than 30% of New Zealand exports go to China, its largest trading partner. The country has come under fire in the past for adopting slightly gentler rhetoric on China than some of its allies – a stance critics claim is as a result of trade vulnerability.

New Zealand foreign minister Nanaia Mahuta [has previously urged exporters to diversify](#) and reduce their vulnerability to geopolitical shocks like the trade war Australia is experiencing.

Announcing the deal on Thursday, prime minister Jacinda Ardern said that Covid-19 had taught the country that “we must have as many options for our world-class products to ensure certainty for our primary producers, our economy and our people”.

Under the deal, the UK would eventually eliminate all tariffs on New Zealand exports. The most immediate winners will be New Zealand’s honey exporters – currently paying a 16% tariff – and its winemakers, which pay \$50 per 100 litres.

“It’s obviously good news,” said John Rawcliffe of the Unique Mānuka Factor Honey Association. “The removal of those tariffs which are somewhat of a barrier is very helpful for particularly the manuka [honey] industry in New Zealand.

“The signals and the recognition of culture and Indigenous rights also are quite significant for this industry … [it’s] starting to support the work around the protection of the term manuka honey, and the need to recognise those rights.”

Some duties and quotas will remain, however, on about 35% of exports – including tariff-free quotas for some beef, lamb and dairy exports in the next five-15 years. The New Zealand government estimated that tariff elimination would save local exporters about \$37.8m a year. Officials said expanded access to UK markets would result in a boost of almost \$1bn to New Zealand GDP – about 0.3% of New Zealand’s GDP. The impact on UK GDP is likely to be negligible – more in the realm of 0.01%, or possibly nothing.

Independently of the trade deal, prime minister Jacinda Ardern announced that the two countries were working on extending and improving the New Zealand-UK working holiday scheme.

“For many young New Zealanders an overseas experience has become a rite of passage, providing a pathway to develop their skills and work experience while travelling and living in the United Kingdom,” Ardern said.

Work on extending the program would begin immediately.

“It is fantastic that we will now work to build on what has been a long tradition between our two countries. We look forward to receiving those from the United Kingdom and providing them the same opportunities on our side of the world,” she said.

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International trade

UK strikes trade deal with New Zealand – but it may add nothing to GDP



New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern with Boris Johnson in September 2019. The UK leader wants to galvanise Indo-Pacific allies against China's influence. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

[Aubrey Allegretti](#), and [Tess McClure](#) in Christchurch

Wed 20 Oct 2021 18.02 EDT

Britain has struck a trade deal with [New Zealand](#), a key ally, as ministers hope to stem the country's reliance on China – but the agreement is expected to add no value to the UK's gross domestic product.

Despite the Department for International Trade heralding the deal as a “groundbreaking” achievement that was a “vital part” of Boris Johnson’s commitment to levelling up, the prime minister has been accused of selling out British farmers.

Tariffs as high as 10% are set to be removed on a range of UK goods, including clothes, buses, ships and bulldozers. The price of New Zealand-produced sauvignon blanc, manuka honey and kiwifruit should dip after 16 months of talks.

Trade between the UK and New Zealand is now worth £2.3bn a year, and the government said that would rise as the deal would make it easier for smaller businesses to break into the New Zealand market – as well as remove barriers for advanced tech and services companies.

It follows the recent [trade agreement struck with Japan](#) and the [deal struck in principle with Australia](#). The focus on the region is part of Johnson's 10-year plan to tilt the UK's foreign policy focus towards the Indo-Pacific, strengthening the alliance and position of democratic countries in the region to make them more competitive against China.

New Zealand is heavily reliant on China for trade, with more than 30% of its exports going to Chinese markets. The country has come under fire in the past for adopting slightly gentler rhetoric on China than some of its allies – a stance critics have claimed is as a result of trade dependency. Foreign minister Nanaia Mahuta has previously urged exporters to diversify and reduce their vulnerability to geopolitical shocks like the trade war Australia is experiencing.

New Zealand opposition leader Judith Collins told [the Guardian this month](#) that by not providing free trade agreements, the US and UK were “leaving the door open” to Chinese dominance in the indo-Pacific region.

Ardern said that Covid-19 had taught the country that “we must have as many options for our world-class products to ensure certainty for our primary producers, our economy and our people”.

The deal may boost New Zealand's GDP by \$970m or around 0.3%. However, last year's [analysis](#) by the UK government found that its effect on Britain's GDP would probably have “limited effect … in the long run” – being between a positive growth of 0.01% or negative growth of -0.01%.

Boris Johnson said: “This is great trade deal for the United Kingdom, cementing our long friendship with New Zealand and furthering our ties with the Indo-Pacific. It will benefit businesses and consumers across the country, cutting costs for exporters and opening up access for our workers.”

New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern said: “It’s one of our best deals ever and secured at a crucial time in our Covid recovery.”

“This deal will cut costs for exporters immediately, creates opportunities for New Zealand businesses to grow and diversify their trade, while boosting the economy as we recover from Covid-19.”

Minette Batters, the National Farmers Union president, said it would open the country’s doors to “significant extra volumes of imported food – whether or not produced to our own high standards – while securing almost nothing in return for UK farmers”.

She added: “We should all be worried that there could be a huge downside to these deals, especially for sectors such as dairy, red meat and horticulture. The government is now asking British farmers to go toe to toe with some of the most export-oriented farmers in the world, without the serious, long-term and properly funded investment in UK agriculture that can enable us to do so.

“It’s incredibly worrying that we’ve heard next to nothing from government about how it will work with farming to achieve this.”

Labour’s shadow international trade secretary, Emily Thornberry, echoed the criticism and said the deal would generate just £112m in additional exports for UK firms compared with pre-pandemic levels. Referring to the price tag of a new national flagship, she claimed the total value for businesses from the agreement would be “less than half the cost of Boris Johnson’s new yacht”.

Thornberry said: “It is a deal whose only major winners are the mega-corporations who run New Zealand’s meat and dairy farms, all at the expense of British farmers who are already struggling to compete. But for British jobs, growth and exports, this deal is yet another massive failure.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/oct/20/uk-strikes-trade-deal-with-new-zealand-but-it-may-add-nothing-to-gdp>

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Conservatives

Tory minister says face masks should not become a ‘sign of virtue’



Gillian Keegan was among Tory MPs wearing a mask in the Commons after Javid's calls to set an example. Photograph: Parliament TV

[Jamie Grierson](#)

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Fri 22 Oct 2021 05.06 EDT

Face masks should not become a “sign of virtue”, a government minister has said as she and her Conservative colleagues come under pressure to lead by example and wear them in the [House of Commons](#).

Gillian Keegan, the minister of state for care, told Sky News masks were “less relevant” than vaccines and boosters in the race to curb surging cases of coronavirus, which on Thursday surpassed 50,000 in a single day for the first time in three months.

A row has broken out within the Tory party over wearing masks after the health secretary, Sajid Javid, called on Wednesday for MPs [to set a good example](#) by masking up to help avoid further restrictions being introduced.

No 10 appeared surprised that Javid issued the call and declined to back his advice, instead pointing to the guidance on wearing them around less familiar faces.

The Commons Leader, Jacob Rees-Mogg, then raised eyebrows when he suggested on Thursday that Tories do not need to wear face coverings in parliament because of a “convivial, fraternal spirit”.

Asked for the downsides to wearing masks, Keegan said: “There’s a downside to many of these things; some people find mask-wearing difficult. It’s a personal choice.”

“Many people do wear masks,” she added. “It’s about personal choice, we’re not the sort of country that tells you what to wear.”

Keegan said the British public “know what to do” to keep safe and that it was not for the government to mandate, but there was that option as a backup, adding the right thing to do was come forward for a vaccine and booster.

Pressed on scenes in the packed House of Commons, which show only a small number of the hundreds of Conservative MPs wearing masks, she said: “We shouldn’t make it a sign of virtue or not.”

“More people will start to wear masks as we get into winter but it’s not very comfortable sitting there for hours in a mask,” she said. “I’m sure everybody [in the House of Commons] has been vaccinated and everyone will get their booster.”

She said it was a “social responsibility to get the vaccine, get the booster, then behave sensibly” but said any decision to cut the delay between the second dose of the Covid vaccine and the booster jab will depend on the advice of the experts on the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

Javid told MPs in September the government could bring in additional measures as a “plan B” if the focus on vaccination – plan A – was not doing enough to protect the NHS, including introducing mandatory Covid passports, making face coverings compulsory again and advising people to work from home.

The government has resisted a barrage of calls from medical experts to enact plan B immediately, insisting that the NHS is not yet under unsustainable pressure.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/oct/22/tory-minister-says-face-masks-should-not-become-a-sign-of-virtue>

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

[**Politics**](#)

UK Covid: Boris Johnson says ‘nothing to indicate’ winter lockdown likely as 49,298 cases reported – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2021/oct/22/uk-covid-live-booster-jabs-cases-data-jcvi-latest-updates>

NHS

Cancer patients face ‘perfect storm’ as Covid piles pressure on NHS



Macmillan said ‘patients are entering a system that was on its knees even before the pandemic’. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA Media

[Andrew Gregory](#) Health editor

Fri 22 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Progress in clearing the NHS cancer treatment backlog in England has gone into reverse amid [high Covid cases](#) and staff shortages, analysis suggests.

With rising coronavirus hospitalisations also now piling pressure on the health service, experts have warned patients should brace themselves for worse to come as a “perfect storm” looms in cancer care.

The NHS has been striving to catch up with the pandemic backlog of cancer care but the analysis by Macmillan [Cancer](#) Support of official data suggests

the drive has recently suffered a setback, with growing numbers of potential cancer diagnoses missed.

Four key cancer measures have fallen back, with two dropping to their worst ever recorded level.

Figures published by NHS [England](#), and analysed by Macmillan for the Guardian, show the number of patients starting treatment in August following a decision to treat fell to 25,800. The figure was above 27,000 in June and July. The proportion of patients who began treatment within one month of the decision to treat fell to 93.7% – the lowest percentage ever recorded.

Data published last week also shows that in August there was a record-high number of patients forced to wait for more than two months after an urgent referral from their GP before they started cancer treatment. According to Macmillan, 4,075 patients only began treatment two months after being referred, the highest figure recorded.

A fourth measure – urgent cancer referrals by GPs – also slipped in the most recent month for which figures are available. The data shows 210,931 urgent cancer referrals were made by GPs in England in August. This is higher than the equivalent figure for August 2019, a non-pandemic year, which was 200,317, but Macmillan said it was a setback because it was lower than in June and July.

Macmillan said it was concerned that rising Covid hospitalisations were making it “even harder for the system to cope”. Efforts to tackle the backlog are also being hit by a shortage of cancer nurses, the charity said.

Steven McIntosh, the executive director of advocacy at Macmillan, said: “We know that many patients are entering an overstretched system that was on its knees even before the pandemic. This risks a perfect storm, as the system experiences a considerable influx of patients alongside an overwhelmed workforce struggling to provide the care and support that people urgently need.”

Minesh Patel, the head of policy at Macmillan, said: “It is extremely concerning to see signs that progress with clearing the cancer treatment backlog may have already started to falter. If the fragile cancer recovery now starts going backwards, the backlog will only continue to grow and people’s chances of survival will once again potentially worsen.”

He added: “It is disappointing to see a setback in referrals and lack of further progress in treatment numbers compared to last month.”

A shortage of nurses is compounding the crisis. Macmillan estimates that, even before the chaos caused by Covid, the NHS was already short of 2,500 specialist cancer nurses in England. That figure is now probably closer to 3,000, it said.

One in four people (25%) diagnosed with cancer in the UK in the past two years lacked support from a specialist cancer nurse, Macmillan said, with almost half of this group (44%) experiencing at least one potentially serious medical implication as a result.

The charity is calling on ministers to create a ringfenced cancer nurse training fund of £124m to train the extra 3,371 specialist cancer nurses it says will be needed in England by 2030.

McIntosh added: “With worrying months to come in the NHS, the government must act to both protect cancer services now, and address the shocking shortfall in cancer nurses in the upcoming spending review.”

A report by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) thinktank and the CF health consultancy published this month suggested it could take more than a decade to clear the cancer treatment backlog in England. The pandemic led to a 37% drop in endoscopies, a 25% drop in MRI scans and a 10% drop in CT scans than expected, it said.

The research also showed that during the height of the pandemic – March 2020 to February 2021 – 369,000 fewer people than expected were referred to a specialist with suspected cancer. There were also 187,000 fewer chemotherapy treatments and 15,000 fewer radiotherapy treatments.

An NHS spokesperson said: “The NHS has experienced six months of record cancer referrals, with the number of patients starting treatment higher than in August 2019 or 2020.

“The NHS remains open and ready to care for you so it’s important that people experiencing cancer symptoms come forward and get checked.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/oct/22/cancer-patients-face-perfect-storm-as-covid-piles-pressure-on-nhs>

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[GPs](#)

GPs in England threaten industrial action over in-person appointments



The doctors' union said it had decided to hold a ballot on possible industrial action, which could see result in family doctors at the 6,600 practices in England reducing the work they undertake. Photograph: RayArt Graphics/Alamy

[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor

Thu 21 Oct 2021 14.44 EDT

GPs in England are threatening industrial action in protest at the government's attempt to force them to see any patient who wants a face-to-face appointment.

The British Medical Association's GPs committee voted unanimously to reject the plan by the health secretary, [Sajid Javid](#), which included "naming and shaming" surgeries that see too few patients in person.

The doctors' union has decided to hold a ballot on possible industrial action, which could result in family doctors at the 6,600 practices in England reducing the work they undertake.

"GPs have been left with no alternative but to take this action. All efforts to persuade the government to introduce a workable plan that will bring immediate and longer-term improvement for doctors and their patients have so far come to nought," said Dr Richard Vautrey, the chair of the BMA's GPs committee.

It is a dramatic escalation of GPs' increasingly bitter war of words with ministers and comes as [soaring Covid cases](#) put increasing strain on the health service.

It could herald the first major clash between the medical profession and ministers since the year-long junior doctors' dispute in England in 2015-16, which involved a series of walkouts by trainee medics.

GPs have been angered by Javid's instruction [last week](#) that they should see many more patients in person, and a plan to publish monthly data showing what proportion of each surgery's appointments occur in person or virtually. They are also frustrated by what they say is a lack of action to reduce their heavy workloads.

Family doctors are also furious at a separate plan to compel those who are paid at least £150,000 a year for NHS work to declare their earnings, [announced](#) in 2019 and starting next month. The BMA has said this could imperil family doctors' safety because "forcing GPs to publish their earnings provides no benefit to patient care, yet will potentially increase acts of aggression towards GPs and will damage morale amongst the profession and only worsen practices' ability to recruit and retain GPs."

It is unclear how much of an impact industrial action by GPs would have on the care patients receive. But if family doctors vote to forge ahead, it could lead to GPs:

- Declining to comply with Javid's insistence that they see patients in person who request it.
- Visiting care homes less often to check on residents' health.
- Undertaking fewer or less regular medication reviews of the drugs being taken by patients with a long-term health condition.
- Refusing to issue Covid medical exemption certificates, which will allow people who remain unvaccinated to continue working in environments such as care homes because they have a medical reason not to have been jabbed against the disease.

The BMA sought to reassure patients by pledging that any changes to usual working patterns would not affect GPs' involvement in the rollout of either winter flu jabs or Covid booster vaccines. However, the decision has prompted fears that patients could find it harder to see a GP at their surgery.

"This shows the government's deliberately provocative plans to name and shame GPs has backfired," said Daisy Cooper, the Liberal Democrats' health spokesperson. "Sajid Javid must now dial down the rhetoric and get round the table with doctors and patient groups to find a way forward. It would be unforgivable if, as we enter a winter crisis, people are unable to access their local GP."

The BMA and Royal College of GPs are deeply frustrated that Javid's plan contained few of their proposed steps to help to reduce GPs' "unsustainable" workloads.

They had asked him to suspend the Quality Outcomes Framework (QOF) under which surgeries are paid agreed sums for monitoring the health of people with conditions such as asthma and diabetes, saying it takes up too much time and that removing the QOF system in Scotland has not damaged patient care.

It is not certain that GPs will hold a ballot because the BMA's ruling council has to approve that course of action. But Dr Chaand Nagpaul and Dr David

Wrigley, the union's chair and deputy chair of council, are appalled at Javid's stance.

Nagpaul has insisted it is the lack of GPs in England – the number of full-time GPs has fallen by 1,800 since 2015 despite a rising population – that has limited rapid patient access, not family doctors' willingness to see all those seeking a consultation.

Vautry said: “The ultimate outcome should be to end the current crisis in general practice, to properly support practices to manage their workload pressure, including safely getting through the backlog of care caused by the pandemic, and deliver a safe service to patients, allowing time to create an agreed long-term plan to make general practice sustainable for the future.”

A Department of [Health](#) and Social Care spokesman said: “We want patients to be able to see their GP promptly and in the way they choose. Our plan will improve access and drive up face to face appointments, it includes providing a further £250m to GPs in order to boost capacity.”

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2021.10.22 - Spotlight

- Work How online meetings are levelling the office playing field
- Elton John ‘I can still explode at any moment. I just have terrible feelings about myself’
- Fearful but defiant Life goes on in Taiwan despite China’s threats
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Work & careers

How online meetings are levelling the office playing field



The permanent secretary for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Sarah Healey, recently told staff that she would keep online meetings, because they were more effective. Photograph: Drazen_ /Getty Images



Alexandra Topping

Fri 22 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

Before the pandemic Francesca used to miss a lot of meetings because she had to drop off her kids at school before commuting into the office. If she did make them, she rarely spoke up.

While many workers are suffering from [Zoom fatigue](#), for workers like Francesca online meetings have presented an opportunity – and one that she fears may soon be taken away.

“I’ve been able to get involved, have some extra opportunities and I’ve still managed to pick my son from school, so for me working from home has actually been brilliant,” she says. “I know a lot of people don’t like them, but I find I’m more confident online. I really worry about things changing.”

As a member of the civil service, that fear is not unfounded. Boris Johnson has missed no opportunity to urge workers back into the office; Rishi Sunak has warned that young people will miss out on opportunities if they work from home, while the former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith has wagged his finger at those snowflake work-from-homers, by pointing out that [even during the second world war](#) people went to the office.

But their exhortations may be falling on closed ears. While many companies are [using a hybrid model of working](#), many organisations are considering keeping large meetings online – arguing that it helps productivity, saves time and money, and boosts gender equality.

The permanent secretary for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Sarah Healey, recently told staff that she would keep online meetings, because they were more effective and also helped women participate.

She's right, says Ann Francke, the chief executive of the Chartered Management Institute, which has also decided to move all large meetings online, even when people are in the office. "They have been great levellers because everybody's in the same size box," she says. Functions like the chat box and raising hand button mean the person chairing the meeting can invite people to speak.

"In in-person meetings there can be a very dominant presence waving their arms around all the time – and that is eliminated," she says.

Women, historically and presently, suffer from a historical and intractable "authority gap", says Mary Ann Sieghart. Her book, *The Authority Gap: Why [Women](#) Are Still Taken Less Seriously Than Men, and What We Can Do About It*, suggests that even the most authoritative women do not escape belittlement – a 2017 US study found that, although women made up a third of US supreme court justices, they experienced two-thirds of all interruptions – 96% of the time by males.

"Being interrupted and talked over puts women off from speaking out in meetings – it silences them," she says. "On Zoom, interruptions are very messy, if people just try and shout over others everything sort of seizes up."

Amy Butterworth, the head of social enterprise Timewise's consultancy service, agrees that "run well, digital meetings can level the playing field". But chairs have to insist on the digital raising of hands, make sure those out of the office are contributing equally and nip any "mute-crashing" – where a participant unmutes and blurts out their point – firmly in the bud.

[Dr Heejung Chung](#), an expert in flexible working and reader in sociology at the University of Kent, argues that very simply, the fact that meetings are now physically accessible for many who could not have attended before in the office – potentially miles away – is a good start.

She also points to new research that shows people from an ethnically diverse background and LGBT+ workers may find that not having to be present in physical work environments that “other” them makes work more accessible.

Research from Slack’s thinktank Future Forum based on American workers found that [only 3% of black workers wanted to return to full-time in-person](#) work compared with 21% of white workers.

“In physical offices we have what sociologists call a [hegemonic masculine organisational culture](#), where white male characteristics are seen as virtues,” she says. “To think online spaces can completely remove that culture is a bit too naive but maybe some of those ingrained habits can change – if people are reflective.”

Some research suggests online meetings are not necessarily more democratic. [Deborah Tannen](#), professor of linguistics at Georgetown University, argues that imbalances found in “normal” meetings are amplified online, while a June survey found that almost half (45%) of US women business leaders said it was [difficult for women to speak up in virtual meetings](#) on platforms like Zoom, and [one in – five women felt they'd actually been ignored](#) on calls.

That’s not surprising, says Prof Jacqueline O'Reilly, co-director for the Digital Futures at Work Research Centre. If the leadership feels that younger workers or people from different ethnic backgrounds, or women should be heard, then they will be. If the leadership are oblivious to these issues, they won’t,” she says. “The tech itself is not what makes it inclusive, or exclusive and discriminating. It’s how people use it.”

Sieghart warns that while Zoom meetings might enable women, like Francesca, to participate more fully in work – they are likely to find other barriers remain. “Workers with caring responsibilities – who are thrilled to be able to work flexibly – might find that it’s the guys who are back in the

office, schmoozing their bosses, who are more likely to be promoted," she says.

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Elton John: 'I played Ernie Wise to Stevie Wonder's Eric Morecombe.'
Photograph: Gregg Kemp

Elton John: 'I can still explode at any moment. I just have terrible feelings about myself'

Elton John: 'I played Ernie Wise to Stevie Wonder's Eric Morecombe.'
Photograph: Gregg Kemp

by [Ben Beaumont-Thomas](#)

Fri 22 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

A good illustration of [Elton John](#) in 2021 is how, last week, he scored the eighth UK No 1 single of his career and also had his right hip replaced. The 74-year-old certainly has his frailties – “my left hip is the hip of a two-year-old, and my right hip is the hip of a 92-year-old” – but is youthful in other ways. His enormously enjoyable and varied new album, *The Lockdown Sessions*, may feature a range of boomer-pleasing names, such as Eddie

Vedder, Glen Campbell and two A-list Stevies (Wonder and Nicks), but there are also plenty of pop artists that could feasibly incite a TikTok dance craze: Dua Lipa, Lil Nas X, Rina Sawayama. One song pairs John with country singer Jimmie Allen over a drum'n'bass beat; another is interspersed with raps from Young Thug and Nicki Minaj.

“Watching Young Thug freestyle was just amazing!” he enthuses over a video call, self-isolating the day before his operation, dressed in collared, lapelled pyjamas over a rugby top. Oil paintings of 19th-century figures flank him in the background. “I hate it when people knock rap and hip-hop – when you actually go in the studio and watch Young Thug in front of a microphone, it’s an incredible thing.” He’d had dinner with Lipa, who duets with him on their No 1 single Cold Heart, a few nights before; he rings up [Olly Alexander of Years & Years](#), who covered Pet Shop Boys’ It’s a Sin with him, “a couple of times a fortnight. I feel an empathy with these people. I’ve got the enthusiasm of an 18-year-old, and enthusiasm keeps me going.”

Even through a laptop screen, John has a buoyancy and a nose for fun. Holed up in Los Angeles when the pandemic began, he says it was lovely to spend time with his sons and husband, but his feet were clearly itchy: soon enough he was four doors down the road at the home studio of pop star Charlie Puth, and the following day he was on Zoom, adding vocals and piano to a track by Texas group Surfaces. “I went in the studio and wrote something with the Weeknd when I was there,” he reveals. “Whether he’ll release it or not, I don’t know, but it was fascinating to see the way he works. I write songs from start to finish, I’m old-fashioned; these people take bits of melodies and make a collage. Songwriting doesn’t have to be the same old form of songwriting.”



On The Muppet Show in 1977. Photograph: David Dagleby/REX/Shutterstock

Even if he's clearly thrilled to be in the charts again, this isn't a cynical bid for relevance – he talks about new music with the zeal of a teenage stan trying to convince a doubtful parent. "Billie Eilish, at 15 she made a record, Lorde at 16 – I was still at school at 16. God knows how they do it. I'm in wonder, total awe, when I hear something different and new."

After returning to London, an album started to emerge as he picked up more recording gigs: a track with Gorillaz, a strident Metallica cover with Miley Cyrus, piano and vocal harmonies for Lil Nas X recorded at Abbey Road. "I was in Studio Two, at the same desk with the stuffing coming out of it, and I thought: 54 years ago I was here with the Hollies doing He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother. I've come full circle."

That circle began when he was a session musician starting out at "the end of an era of songwriters, and the beginning of the singer-songwriter". That's him in the background of [Daughter of Darkness by Tom Jones](#) ("the camaraderie in those sessions, we just couldn't sing for laughing"). At another Abbey Road session with comedy group the Barron Knights in 1968, also attended by Bernie Taupin, Paul McCartney walked in. That week, Hey Jude was at No 1. "This is the most famous person I've ever seen

close up at this point in my life. Bernie and I were kind of stuck to the wall going oh ... my ... God! He sat down at the piano and played Hey Jude, a moment I will never forget in my entire life.”

Within five years, John was generating Beatlemania-level fandom of his own, powered by his fantastical, observational and baldly romantic songs with Taupin: Your Song, Tiny Dancer, Crocodile Rock and Goodbye Yellow Brick Road. The dorky, virginal naif Reg Dwight became the flamboyantly dressed pop star Elton John, finally understanding his sexuality once he was in a relationship with his manager, John Reid. They moved in together but John remained closeted to the public. “After a while, Bernie made the lyrics apply to a man or a woman, because I couldn’t get away with saying: ‘Darling, I love you, my angel’, or whatever,” he says. “I was living with my manager, I was always going to gay clubs, it was an open secret.”



In Hampstead, 1968. Photograph: Val Wilmer/Redferns

He announced he was bisexual in a 1976 interview with Rolling Stone. “Some radio stations in America burned my records, but in general I got away with it. People appreciated honesty.” Did he confuse fans when he later married his female tape operator Renate Blauel, in 1984? He can’t say anything about the marriage – in 2019 she launched legal action against him after he discussed [their relationship in his memoir Me](#), later [settling with the](#)

[promise that he would no longer discuss it](#) – but he acknowledges that it did surprise some fans: “I got a lot of funny telegrams, put it like that.” In 1992, he said he was “quite comfortable about being gay”, and the following year met David Furnish. They had a civil partnership in 2005, on the day it became legal for same-sex couples, and then married in 2014, once that was legal too.

The half-closeted confusion of the 70s has evaporated in pop, and a number of the artists on The Lockdown Sessions, including Alexander, Sawayama and Brandi Carlile, are proudly LGBTQ; Lil Nas X recently danced naked in a prison shower for the operatically gay video to his single [Industry Baby](#). “Outrageous, right? God almighty!” John laughs. “That didn’t happen in the 70s. God, we have a lot of work to do as far as equality goes, but it’s encouraging to see people like Perfume Genius and Troye Sivan writing songs about being gay. Things have changed – though if you live in Chechnya, Poland, Hungary, Russia, the Middle East, they’re not in the fortunate position we are.”

Another guest is Stevie Wonder, playing harmonica and singing on gospel song Finish Line. “I kind of played Ernie Wise to his Eric Morecambe,” John says. “My vocal is pretty straight, but there he is singing like [he does on] Superstition. I haven’t heard him sing like that for a long, long time, and that was magical, to hear him stretch out.” I remind him of a story he tells in Me, where in 1973 he grumpily boards the Starship, a converted Boeing 720 flying him around the US complete with organ. “Of course there was an organ on the plane!” he laughs. Unbeknown to him, Wonder had been brought on board to sing Happy Birthday to him, but John, in a funk after an unsatisfactory gig, repeatedly told his publicist to “fuck off” before she burst into tears and revealed the surprise.

John’s caustic side worsened when he started abusing cocaine and alcohol. Recalled in his memoir, this excess leads to some undeniably funny moments, such as trashing a hotel room after Simon Le Bon introduces him to the concept of the vodka martini, mistaking Bob Dylan for a dishevelled gardener at a house party (to the disapproval of George Harrison), or jamming on stage with the Rolling Stones for way longer than the one song he was invited for. There are some starker moral failures, too, such as when

he brings one boyfriend out from Australia to live with him, gets bored and sends him back.

“I wasn’t unkind to anybody … I’m not horrible to people,” he protests. How does it feel to look back on moments like that Starship outburst? “I’m not proud of that stuff, no, it makes me shudder,” he says. “My behaviour was so erratic and so unpredictable. And it’s still in me, to explode at any moment. I’ve been trying to work on that for a long time and I’ve got a wonderful husband who knows how to get me out of that stuff. I think it’s an artistic thing – artists can be so self-destructive sometimes, for no reason. I can have a day when everything in my whole life is going so well, and I get up and I feel like the world is against me. Why, I do not know.”

When pressed, he says he does know. “The self-loathing, not having any self-esteem, that all comes from when I was a kid.” His memoir recalls his mother beating him with a wire brush during potty training; his father hit him for taking off his school blazer in a way he didn’t like. “That’s the way it was in the 50s – you got slapped round the face, you got a good hiding. ‘It was bloody good for you’ – it wasn’t good for me. It left me walking on eggshells.”

That feeling lasted into adulthood. “All my life, until I became sober, I was afraid of talking to anybody. They asked me when I went to treatment how I felt and I said: ‘I don’t know, I don’t feel anything.’ I came to defrost, as it were, and discovered I did have feelings, and they went back a long time. And I think it stays with you for the whole of your life … I just have terrible feelings about myself; I feel bad about myself sometimes.”



With Olly Alexander at the Brit awards at the O2 Arena. Photograph: JMInternational/JMInternational for BRIT Awards/Getty Images

Still, he can use his self-knowledge to help his young musical peers. “Olly [Alexander] was down in the dumps recently, and I just said: Go out, have fun! Sit there alone, and that ball comes down like in Raiders of the Lost Ark: an avalanche of bad feeling.” It also, of course, informs the way he parents his sons Zachary, 10 and Elijah, who is eight.

“We never hit them or lose our temper with them,” he says. “When they’re bad, they lose their pocket money, or their electronic stuff for a week – but they don’t get punished physically or mentally. We talk it through with them. And they’re very happy children. I was always afraid of my parents, and I didn’t want my children to ever be afraid of me. They’re going to feel embraced and loved every second of the day; they’re not going to be beaten and have those scars for the rest of their lives. I thought I was too late to have children but actually they came at the right time in my life, and it’s taught me so much,” he adds, getting visibly emotional. “God, I love my children so much. I have a purpose in life.”

I was always afraid of my parents, and I didn’t want my children to ever be afraid of me

[In 2022, he'll restart his final world tour](#), Farewell Yellow Brick Road, postponed by Covid and his hip issues. “I want to finish it in the right way, and go out on a high note, but I also want to finish because I don’t want to do it again. I’ve been doing this since I was 17 – I’ve had enough applause. I’ll be 76 when the tour finishes – who knows how much [time] I’ve got left? It will be spent with the kids, and with David, smelling the roses.”

The waspishness of old occasionally emerges from the floral perfume though, for instance when we talk about Rocket Hour, his radio show for Apple Music. “I play a lot of music on my show that really should be played on Radio 1, but things are so formalised with their playlists, you get the same thing time and time again.” So Radio 1, and their commercial rivals, are too conservative? “So conservative! They overplay tracks – there are new things that need to be heard, and it’s holding people back … There shouldn’t be any rules, or barriers. If music is good, play it. And if it’s a new single by some terrible girl band or boy band, just drop it, will you?”



‘I’ve had enough applause’ ... performing on stage c1974. Photograph: Michael Putland/Getty Images

The radio show will keep on going after he finishes touring, an outlet for that voracious love of pop. Each week he has a list of releases sent to him by the record shop Rough Trade, and he buys anything he likes the look of,

which sounds like nearly everything. Leeds [post-punk band Yard Act are a recent fave](#). “It’s a bit like Craig Finn from the Hold Steady, who Sam Fender loves – it’s talking, it’s music, it’s really interesting, like Fontaines DC ...” He’s also done a Christmas single with Ed Sheeran, whom John’s company Rocket managed early on his career.

“I’ve been able to give him advice and watch him grow, and he’s been so kind to me,” he says. “When [2011 Sheeran single] The A Team came out and a lot of US radio stations wouldn’t play it, I did a thing in the south of France, a private concert, free, for a certain radio chain to make sure they played it. When he was on at the Grammys, they weren’t going to put him on at the Grammys because they said he wasn’t going to be a star – I said to [show producer] Ken Ehrlich: ‘Suppose I played a duet with him, would that help?’ Yes – so I got him on the Grammys. He didn’t want to put [2014 single] Sing out, and I said: ‘You’ve got to put Sing out, you’ve put ballad after ballad out, and Sing will surprise everybody.’ And it did. He always thanks me for that.”

The stage musical of The Devil Wears Prada, which he wrote the music for, is coming in July 2022 after also being postponed by the pandemic, and there’s a cache of Taupin lyrics waiting for his music, “in a cupboard, or a safe, and when the time is right, I’ll get them out. I don’t know what’s going to come up – I didn’t know I was going to do The Lion King until Tim Rice phoned me up and it changed my life. If you let yourself be open to surprise, open your doors and say anything is possible, then you’ll have a wonderful life. And I have a wonderful life.”

The Lockdown Sessions is out now on EMI Universal

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Taiwan

Fearful but defiant: life goes on in Taiwan despite China's threats



People walking in the old streets of Tainan city in Taiwan. With the world's eyes on the island and China's threats to annex it, life continues largely as normal. Photograph: Helen Davidson/The Guardian



[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Fri 22 Oct 2021 04.58 EDT

In a small urban park on Yong Kang Jie, Taipei's famous eat street, an elderly woman leans across the frame of her friend's parked bicycle and shouts. "Taiwan is an independent country!"

It's a quiet autumn morning. Children play on a nearby slide, and a young mother enjoys a takeaway bento box.

But here, in a spontaneous speakers' corner, a hot topic is being debated. The diminutive septuagenarian's eyes flash above her medical mask as she continues, having just interrupted a friend, Lin, who had been urging that Taiwan – and its people – should not argue, lest it provoke [China](#) to up the ante of what she terms 70 years of bullying.

"Definitely ours, not China's country," the woman shouts, raising her fist, before walking off.

Lin, who declined to give her first name, insists the Taiwanese should not cause trouble.

“The best is to not oppose. Be gentle, do not fight,” she says. “We all should live peacefully together. China said as long as we don’t do independence, they won’t invade.”

The boisterous but good-natured debate in the park is emblematic of today’s Taiwan – tightknit but sometimes divided, fearful yet defiant, a vibrant democracy just a few decades free of authoritarianism but already having to contemplate the prospect of its return.

The world is now familiar with Beijing’s insistence that Taiwan is a breakaway province of China that must be retaken to fulfil a dream of national rejuvenation. While Beijing calls her a separatist, Taiwan’s president, Tsai Ing-wen, maintains Taiwan is already a sovereign nation with no need to claim independence.

With no common ground between the two positions, the world has watched in alarm as Beijing has ratcheted up its acts of military intimidation and bellicose rhetoric. Lin’s hope that peace can be maintained by Taiwan keeping quiet appears increasingly unlikely.

In the first four days of October alone, about 150 Chinese warplanes flew through Taiwan’s air defence zone, with Chinese officials saying it was targeting “Taiwan independence separatist activities”. The record sorties are part of years of military build up and expansion, increased drills and threats, mostly aimed at Taiwan.



Lin (right) discusses the day's news with a friend in Taipei. Photograph: Helen Davidson/The Guardian

It has prompted an extraordinary response from world governments who have sharply criticised China, offered support to Taiwan, formed new security pacts, and increased their military presence in the region. On Friday, the US president, Joe Biden, said the US was committed to defend Taiwan in the event of an attack. It echoed other somewhat woolly statements from the president which at a literal interpretation overturn decades of deliberate ambiguity, but at the very least indicate the US's increasing support for Taiwan, underpinned by billions of dollars in arms sales.

Front pages have warned of looming conflict, drawing in the world's powers and regional allies and affecting international security, trade, and economies. Former world leaders have warned "China is coming for Taiwan's freedom".

Yet Taiwan's people have lived under the threat of China's invasion for decades, and some believe that worrying about an attack is like worrying about an earthquake. Eyes rolled at an Economist front page earlier this year declaring Taiwan "the most dangerous place on earth". There is demonstrably more concern as China's aggression and resolve has grown under the leadership of Xi Jinping, but on the ground, life goes on.

‘Everything changes overnight’

In the capital, Taipei, pandemic restrictions have mostly lifted and people are filling restaurants and night markets, returning to beaches and taking long weekends to hike in the mountains. In the morning, the city parks fill with groups of elderly men and women practising tai chi and traditional dances under towering ficus and banyan trees while students cycle through to their campuses.

The evening and online news follows Covid vaccination rates, party leadership elections, political scandals and slanging matches, local disasters and celebrity gossip. The near-daily aerial incursions by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army air force are scattered among the headlines.

“I’m not that worried,” says Cho, an 18-year-old electronic engineering student at National Taiwan University. “They’ve been calling for invading Taiwan for dozens of years but I haven’t seen them really prepare.”

Cho and his fellow students Chen and Yeh, also 18, are speaking in the bustling campus food hall. Their focus is on graduating and getting good jobs. While they say they only marginally follow politics, they have a strong grasp of recent developments.

They welcome the international attention on Taiwan – Cho jokes that people overseas will stop confusing them with Thailand now – and the support of foreign governments against China’s threats.

“I think the possibility [of an attack] is quite small because these eyes are watching them,” says Yeh.

“Maybe it will happen, but it’s almost impossible because if China was to attack this would not just be between China and Taiwan,” says Chen. “Other countries can be affected. So more and more of them are paying attention.”

At the end of their degrees they will report for four months of mandatory basic training – the last vestige of Taiwan’s phase-out of a conscription-based armed force. It’s an oft-cited example when analysts point to issues with Taiwan’s defence forces.

The island has no chance of matching China's might, but its government has pledged to increase spending and focus on a "porcupine" defence strategy – making themselves hard to bite. Just 14 beaches on Taiwan's cliff-lined coast offer a viable landing point, and former military figures have previously told the Guardian they believe Taiwan can stop a full ground invasion, if not an aerial assault.

This month, Taiwan got a little louder about its fighting spirit. President Tsai and her senior ministers have trodden a careful path, emphasising Taiwan's contribution to the global community with its pandemic successes, and as an example of a friendly vibrant democracy. Taiwan is not "adventurist" and has no appetite for war, but, she has promised in recent speeches and editorials, it does have the will to defend itself.

Analysts say Tsai is a far more measured and cautious advocate for the status quo than others in the DPP who are more independence-minded, including those who may seek election after her final term ends in 2024.

A declaration of independence is a red line for Beijing. People point to Hong Kong, where a movement in support of democracy, with just fringe elements advocating for independence, was brutally crushed.

The events just a few hundred miles over the sea have not been lost on Taiwan residents. China has proposed a "one country, two systems" arrangement for Taiwan, the same that it promised Hong Kong would have until 2047, only to effectively throw it out after the 2019 mass protests.

Tsai Jya-en, 23, says she watched Beijing's crackdown on Hong Kong with alarm. "They used to be very free, just like Taiwan. But everything changes overnight. I think Taiwanese people should have more awareness of the crisis."

Back in the Yong Kang Jie park, Lin shares the same fear a Chinese invasion would see Taiwan become the next Hong Kong.

"In Taiwan we are free but in China the government controls everything. They have their own life there, we have our own life here."

Additional reporting by Chi Hui Lin

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Countdown to ecstasy: how music is being used in healing psychedelic trips



Trip advisers ... from left, Mendel Kaelen, Bryan Kasenic, Jon Hopkins and Amy Coleman Composite: Guardian Design: Nancy Kim; Steve Gullick; John Rohrer

Michelle Lhooq

Fri 22 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

Two hundred psychedelic enthusiasts have converged in Austin, Texas for a “ceremonial concert” on the autumn equinox. People sprawl on yoga mats around a circular stage as staffers pace the candlelit warehouse, jingling bells and spraying essential oils. While psychedelic drugs are prohibited, some attenders seem in an altered state, lying on their backs and breathing heavily as rumbles of bass from [Jon Hopkins](#)’ upcoming album, Music for Psychedelic Therapy, shakes the hushed space.

This is the first time Hopkins – known for acclaimed solo electronic albums as well as production for Coldplay and Brian Eno – has played his new record in public, and the crowd is visibly moved. As recordings of spiritual guru Ram Dass’s teachings fill the room on the final song, the woman next to me begins silently weeping.

With Music for Psychedelic Therapy, Hopkins is the latest arrival in a growing pool of artists, academics, and entrepreneurs shaping psychedelic research and therapy with music. Psychedelia sprang from the LSD-spiked waters of 1960s counterculture, as the Grateful Dead, the Doors and Pink Floyd drenched the charts in washed-out reverb, loopy lyrics and sinuous sitars. Today’s psychedelia has been digitally modernised for the streaming era – and, as with so much counterculture, increasingly commodified. A lucrative new market is emerging for music designed for [therapeutic trips using ketamine](#), psilocybin, MDMA and other psychotropic drugs. And from AI-driven apps to underground DJ mixes, the musical expression is as diverse and subjective as a psychedelic experience itself.

“We’re entering an era where this kind of therapy is going to be legal and widespread, and you need to have music for it,” says Hopkins, whose album was timed to last for exactly the length of a typical ketamine trip. “I’ve got to be really careful of sounding too grandiose, but it really feels to me like there is a frontier here – a new genre of music.”

Music has always played a critical role in psychedelic therapy. Indigenous healers believe it acts as a [sacred vehicle](#) to unconscious realms, and have

developed music specific to their plant medicines. South American ayahuasca shamans sing sacred songs called *icaros*, Mexican mushroom mystic Maria Sabina was renowned for her poetic chants, and the *ibogaine* rituals of the Bwiti religion of west-central Africa employ rapid tempos of up to 170 beats per minute. When scientists began studying psychedelics in the 1950s and 60s, music was quickly identified as having a profound impact on a trip, and recent research has found that it might even [play a greater role](#) in facilitating positive outcomes than the dosage of the drug itself.

“Music is an ideal tool for therapy because it provides a loose structure in which the patient can project the personal content of their subjective minds,” says Mendel Kaelen, founder of the psychedelic music app Wavepaths and former neuroscientist at Imperial College. According to Kaelen, music and psychedelics are [remarkably similar](#) in terms of the brain responses they evoke – bypassing the intellect and bringing emotional content to the forefront of consciousness. “One of the most important things music is doing is providing a climate in which the individual feels deeply acknowledged – of your experience to be OK as it is,” Kaelen adds.

Top psychedelic research institutions use playlists during clinical trials, and some are available to stream online: the Johns Hopkins Center for Psychedelic and Consciousness Research’s [Sacred Knowledge](#) playlist, which dates back to 1967, is stacked with classical composers such as Brahms and Vivaldi, while participants in Imperial College’s 2016 [psilocybin study](#) listened to ambient artists such as Brian Eno, Nils Frahm and Laraaji. The playlist [Music for MDMA-Assisted Psychotherapy](#) is the most New Age, mixing film composer Hans Zimmer with spiritual music and Sanskrit mantras. These playlists blend the personal tastes of researchers with a protocol developed in 1972 by music therapist Helen Bonny and psychiatrist Walter Pahnke (a student of LSD advocate Timothy Leary), which dictates that the music’s emotional arc should match the stages of a psychedelic experience: onset, ascent, peak, return to normal consciousness – a journey not unlike the pattern of many dance tracks and DJ sets.

In recent years, a wave of digital apps such as Wavepaths, Lucid, Spiritune and Mindcure have emerged, harnessing artificial intelligence to counter the one-size-fits-all approach of playlists. While the music on these apps might

not sound too different from typical psychedelia, the difference lies in their claims to elicit individualised and hyper-targeted emotional outcomes.

In a clinical environment, you want the music to help you explore your mind in a very specific way

Aaron Labbé

“Psychedelic music is usually just helping to set the setting, like, ‘I’m listening to the Grateful Dead on mushrooms, this feels great,’” says Lucid co-founder Aaron Labbé. “Whereas in a clinical or therapeutic environment, you really want the music to help you explore your mind in a very specific way.”

Many apps work with both human composers and algorithms. “AI is fairly primitive and not that pleasant in the auditory realm,” explains Spiritune founder and deep house DJ Jamie Pabst. “People like to consume what other humans create.” She hires musicians to compose tracks with specific rhythms, timbres and other characteristics that researchers have found to elicit specific emotional responses, then uses an algorithm to review these tracks, making sure that they meet the desired characteristics.

Wavepaths, which plays the music at [ketamine therapy clinic Field Trip](#), similarly aims to generate music tailored to an individual’s emotional needs and desired therapeutic outcomes; it is only available as a closed beta version for psychotherapists, while a [simpler version](#) available online plays prerecorded streams of simple, soothing tones. Field Trip also has its own app, Trip, which allows users to pick between ambient soundtracks composed by artists like East Forest, who debuted his album of classically-driven healing soundscapes, IN: A Soundtrack for the Psychedelic Practitioner Vol II, on the app.



East Forest and Jon Hopkins performing at the Equinox Immersion in Sound event in Austin, Texas last month Photograph: Publicity image

Mindcure and Lucid go further, using biodata feedback from headbands and wristbands that track patients' physiological states, in order to allow therapists to respond in real time with personalised music. "When someone is in a psychedelic state, there's no way for the therapist to know where the patient is without speaking," says Kelsey Ramsden, CEO of Mindcure, an app that uses Lucid's tech. "This lets the therapist be the DJ for one individual person by giving them a line of sight through biodata measurements like respiration and heart rate."

In addition to playlists and apps, some psychedelic therapists prefer a third approach: DJ mixes. "Patients said playlists felt choppy and patchwork, while generative music made by the apps sounded robotic," says Amy Coleman, a ketamine-assisted psychotherapist who has a private practice in New York City. Last year, Coleman began commissioning mixes from DJs she met in New York's underground rave scene, which she said had a greater impact on her clients. "These are sounds that people have never heard before, guaranteed, versus a Brian Eno or Enya song that they can recognise," Coleman says. "Music that is non-recognisable taps into the default mode network, and the mixing creates a coherent journey."

The three seconds in between songs can feel like the end of the world when you're in a K-hole

DJ Nick Bazzano

“The three seconds in between songs can feel like the end of the world when you’re in a K-hole,” jokes Nick Bazzano, a DJ who has worked with Coleman to create a custom mix for ketamine therapy. He cites music from LA’s Leaving Records label as being particularly well suited for creating a “safe container” for psychedelic therapy. “It feels organic, that sensation of being held by the Earth. It’s open and expansive and allows things to grow from it.”

Bryan Kasenic, founder of New York techno night and label The Bunker, has also been commissioning music by underground electronic artists that is specifically targeted for psychedelic trips. Last year he launched a sub-label called Going In, focusing on single tracks that run more than an hour long. Kasenic says the digital music format has made it easier to distribute extended pieces of music that don’t have to fit on a single plate of vinyl. “Therapists aren’t trained to change music for people tripping their brains out,” he adds. “DJs spend their whole lives perfecting that skill.”

Kasenic also notes that for him and the artists he works with, there was no better time for getting into stranger and more psychedelic music zones than during the pandemic. “I’ve been working with psychedelics for a long time, but only recently have I started doing them in ceremonies and treating them with the respect they deserve,” he said. “What’s changed is the intention. It’s not just the side chill-out room at a rave any more.”

Back in Austin, this paradigm shift is perceptible as Hopkins and East Forest’s ceremonial concert comes to a close, and a blissfully smiling crew of dancers sashay out of the venue. “There’s some amazing synergy between technology and these medicines that wasn’t possible until quite recently,” Hopkins tells me. “And it seems to be really powerful.”

- *Jon Hopkins’ album Music for Psychedelic Therapy is released 12 November on Domino Records. East Forest’s album IN: A Soundtrack*

for the Psychedelic Practitioner Vol II is out now on Aquilo Records/CashApp Studios

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Vaccines and immunisation

Covid booster jabs could be brought forward as UK daily cases hit 52,000



An advertising campaign is to urge people in England to get Covid booster and flu jabs if they are eligible. Photograph: Huw Fairclough/Getty Images

[Heather Stewart](#) and [Jessica Elgot](#)

Thu 21 Oct 2021 19.01 EDT

Millions of people could have their booster jab brought forward as ministers consider cutting the six-month gap between doses as part of a scramble to shore up the faltering vaccine programme and avoid imposing Covid restrictions.

As the number of new daily Covid cases hit 52,009 across the UK, the government is launching an advertising campaign urging people to get their booster and flu jabs.

The publicity blitz, under the slogan “get vaccinated, get boosted, get protected”, will run on TV and billboards amid mounting concern about the effectiveness of the jab rollout.

Boris Johnson declined to rule out reducing the wait for a third dose after the former health secretary Jeremy Hunt suggested moving to a five-month gap would increase the proportion of the public who are fully protected.

Downing Street sources later confirmed the government was examining the option, though it would need to be recommended by the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

Hunt told the House of Commons: “This decision that’s been made, that you can’t have your booster jab until six months after you had your second jab – how hard and fast should that rule be? Does it really matter, when it’s only nine weeks till the Christmas holidays, if someone has a booster jab after five months?”

He was among a string of Conservative MPs who peppered the new vaccines minister, Maggie Throup, with questions in the Commons, amid concerns that the vaccination drive has been allowed to drift. Throup’s predecessor was the more high profile Nadhim Zahawi, promoted to education secretary in September’s reshuffle.

Mark Harper, the chair of the Tory Covid Recovery Group, said that in the earlier stages of the vaccine rollout “there was a massive focus on it in government, from the prime minister downwards … we need that level of focus on boosters”.

Bernard Jenkin, the chair of the influential Commons liaison committee, said Johnson should take a more prominent role. “It is dead easy to get the public engaged on this subject: the prime minister holds a press conference with the chief medical officer and the chief scientific adviser and starts to explain in harsh terms what will happen if people do not carry on being vaccinated. That is the way to communicate, and we should do that,” he said.

A senior government health adviser said they believed the focus on an expedited booster campaign was a red herring, however, and that a change to five months would not make much of a difference as it was just a small part of a much bigger picture.

Some 2.68 million people aged 80 and over in [England](#) have received two doses of vaccine, of whom 1.34 million (50%) are now estimated to have had their booster dose.

Labour has called on the government to speed up the programme. In the Commons, the shadow health secretary, Jonathan Ashworth, said the [NHS](#) was coming under pressure because “the vaccination programme is now stalling” and called on the government to commit to 500,000 jabs a day. There were 75,445 administered on Wednesday.

“Ministers cannot blame the public when 2 million haven’t even been invited for a booster jab and on current trends we won’t complete the booster programme until March 2022,” he said.

NHS and doctors’ leaders and scientists have urged the government to trigger its “plan B” measures, which include reintroducing mandatory mask-wearing in public places and restoring working from home guidance.

Senior government sources confirmed there was still a firm view that Covid passports – controversial with Tory MPs – would also form part of any move to plan B, with one saying that businesses had had “plenty of time to prepare for that possibility”.

However, ministers still hope to avoid the need for fresh restrictions. They believe next week’s half-term holiday in schools in England could act as a firebreak, given the high prevalence of the disease among unvaccinated children.

There are also hopes in government that the public may moderate their behaviour and take more precautions after widespread media coverage of the surge in cases over recent days.

Javid was pictured wearing a mask at the funeral of the Conservative minister James Brokenshire on Thursday, after conceding that public figures should set an example. The leader of the House of Commons, Jacob Rees-Mogg, took a different stance, however, saying the reason he and some of his colleagues were not wearing masks was that they had “a more convivial, fraternal spirit”.

Speaking in Northern Ireland on Thursday, the prime minister underscored the fact that the government’s current approach is to press ahead with its plan A. He insisted the number of new Covid cases was still within expectations. “The numbers of infections are high but we are within the parameters of what the predictions were, what Spi-M [the advisory modelling group] and the others said we would be at this stage given the steps we are taking. We are sticking with our plan,” he said.

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Vaccines and immunisation

Who can get a Covid booster jab in England?



The booster doses are on the NHS for people most at risk from Covid, who have had a second dose of a vaccine at least six months ago. Photograph: Karwai Tang/Getty Images

[Alexandra Topping](#)

Thu 21 Oct 2021 06.12 EDT

The health secretary, [Sajid Javid](#), called on millions of eligible people to come forward and get booster doses of the coronavirus vaccine, during a press conference on Wednesday.

What is the booster jab?

The coronavirus booster vaccine dose is designed to improve the protection people have received from getting the first two doses of the vaccine, and

combat any waning efficiency.

Data from Public Health [England](#) (PHE) suggests that the protection provided by vaccines against severe illness gradually decreases over time.

The introduction of the third jab started on 20 September. On 15 October, the NHS said [more than 3 million people](#) had received it in the first four weeks.

But on 18 October, Jeremy Hunt, the former health secretary who now chairs the Commons health select committee, told the NHS England chief executive, Amanda Pritchard, that just 200,000 doses a day were being provided, half the 400,000 a day being given in the spring.

Who can get a Covid-19 booster vaccine?

Booster vaccine doses are on the NHS for people most at risk from Covid-19, who had a second dose of a vaccine at least six months ago.

A third jab has been offered to everyone over 50, as well as younger people with health conditions that put them at greater risk of getting very ill from Covid.

People should get the booster no earlier than six months after their second jab.

The following people are [eligible for a booster jab](#):

- People aged 50 and over
- People who live and work in care homes
- Frontline health and social care workers
- People aged 16 and over with a health condition that puts them at high risk of getting seriously ill from Covid-19

- People aged 16 and over who are a main carer for someone at high risk from Covid-19
- People aged 16 and over who live with someone who is more likely to get infections (such as someone who has HIV, has had a transplant or is having certain treatments for cancer, lupus or rheumatoid arthritis)

People who are pregnant and in one of the eligible groups can also get a booster dose.

When can I get a booster jab?

Previously people were told to wait until they were notified by text, letter or by their GP before booking.

But on 21 October, the health minister Edward Argar said people no longer needed to wait to be invited to get their booster coronavirus vaccine if the right amount of time had passed.

“If you get to the six months plus one week, [go on the national booking system](#) and book yourself in,” he told Sky News.

What about children?

On 19 October, the government announced that from half-term, 12- to 15-year-olds in England would be [able to get vaccinated at national hubs](#), rather than at school.

Children will also be allowed to go online and book an appointment in the same way as adults. Parents are being asked to wait for letters to arrive around the end of the week, asking for consent before signing up online.

It comes after criticism of the slow pace of the vaccine programme in teenagers: as of 19 October, 15% of 12- to 15-year-olds in England had been given one Pfizer jab, compared with 47% in Scotland.

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Coronavirus

PM resists calls to activate plan B as daily Covid cases top 50,000

00:24

'We're sticking with our plan': Boris Johnson on rising Covid-19 cases – video

[Harry Taylor](#)

[@harrytaylr](#)

Thu 21 Oct 2021 13.46 EDT

Daily Covid-19 cases have risen above 50,000 in the UK for the first time since July, as the prime minister resists calls for the government to activate its backup plan.

Official figures on Thursday put the number of positive tests at 52,009 as cases have continued to rise. The last time cases were at this level was 17 July. Daily data also showed 115 people died within 28 days of a positive test.

Boris Johnson told broadcasters during an interview in Northern Ireland on Thursday that he would not be switching to "plan B".

The PM said: "We are continuing with the plan we set out in July. We are watching the numbers very carefully every day.

"The numbers of infections are high but we are within the parameters of what the predictions were, what Spi-M [modelling group] and the others said we would be at this stage given the steps we are taking. We are sticking with our plan."

The Office for National Statistics, which has been doing research involving testing in the community, said that the number of people infected with the

virus is at its highest point since January, just after a lockdown had been introduced.

On Wednesday the British Medical Association [accused the government of being “wilfully negligent”](#) for not reintroducing rules including mandatory face masks. The health secretary, Sajid Javid, used a press conference to encourage the public to use face coverings in crowded places but said further restrictions would not be introduced “at this point”.

On Thursday, the Labour leader, Sir Keir Starmer, said the government’s current plans were failing, but said he did not want ministers to change course for “plan B”.

He urged the government to commit to a target of 500,000 jabs a day. “The government said that the vaccine would be the security wall against the virus. And now the government is letting that wall crumble,” he said.

“The booster programme has slowed down so much that at this rate, we’re not going to complete it until spring of next year. The government needs to change, it needs to get a grip.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/21/pm-resists-calls-to-activate-plan-b-as-new-covid-cases-top-50000>

Coronavirus

Covid may have killed up to 180,000 health workers globally, WHO says



The WHO says Covid's global death toll among health workers between the start of the pandemic and May this year may be 80,000 to 180,000.
Photograph: Themba Hadebe/AP

Agence France-Presse in Geneva
Thu 21 Oct 2021 19.59 EDT

The [World Health Organization](#) says 80,000 to 180,000 healthcare workers may have been killed by Covid-19 up to May this year, insisting they must be prioritised for vaccination.

A WHO paper on Thursday estimated that out of the world's 135 million health staff, "between 80,000 to 180,000 health and care workers could have died from Covid-19 in the period between January 2020 to May 2021".

The WHO chief, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said healthcare workers needed to be immunised against the disease first, as he slammed the global inequity in the vaccine rollout.

“Data from 119 countries suggest that on average, two in five health and care workers globally are fully vaccinated. But of course that average masks huge differences across regions and economic groupings.

“In Africa, less than in one in 10 health workers have been fully vaccinated. Meanwhile, in most high-income countries, more than 80% of health workers are fully vaccinated.”

He added: “We call on all countries to ensure that all health and care workers in every country are prioritised for Covid-19 vaccines, alongside other at-risk groups.”

Tedros said that more than 10 months on since the first vaccines were approved by the WHO, the fact that millions of health workers still had not been vaccinated was an “indictment” on the countries and companies controlling the global supply of doses.

Annette Kennedy, president of the International Council of Nurses, said the organisation grieved for all healthcare workers who had lost their lives – “many needlessly, many we could have saved”.

“It’s a shocking indictment of governments. It’s a shocking indictment of their lack of duty of care to protect healthcare workers who have paid the ultimate sacrifice with their lives.”

Kennedy added: “They are now burnt out, they are devastated, they are physically and mentally exhausted. And there is a prediction that 10% of them will leave within a very short time.”

The WHO wants each country to have vaccinated 40% of its population by the end of the year, but Tedros said 82 countries were now at risk of missing that target, chiefly through insufficient supply.

Covid-19 has killed at least 4.9 million people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP, while nearly 242 million cases have been registered.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/22/covid-may-have-killed-up-to-180000-health-workers-globally-who-says>

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2021.10.22 - Opinion

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- The climate crisis is global, but councils can offer local solutions
- I lost a TV role because I was pregnant – and I'm far from the only one
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OpinionCoronavirus

With Covid infections rising, the Tories are conducting a deadly social experiment

[Andy Beckett](#)



Illustration: Thomas Pullin/The Guardian

Fri 22 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

A pandemic is a political event. It exposes who is vulnerable and who can afford to escape, who is prioritised for treatment and who is neglected. The politics of a pandemic are both large-scale and intensely personal. How we behave towards each other, what balance is struck between safety and freedom, how blame is distributed, what a country considers an acceptable level of illness and death: questions that may once have been philosophical have become frighteningly real.

In Britain, the politics of Covid have been thought about and discussed almost entirely in party terms: the relative caution and competence of the SNP government in Scotland and its Labour counterpart in Wales; the recklessness and [lethal mistakes](#) of the Conservatives in England, and whether Labour can make the Tories pay for them. The pandemic has been seen as a potential turning point for all the main parties.

That it has not worked out like that – so far – has been a huge disappointment for the Conservatives’ enemies. But this focus on the parties has also been convenient for voters. Uncomfortable questions about whether our individual behaviour during the pandemic has matched our political values have not been asked.

These questions particularly matter now. Since Boris Johnson declared “freedom day” on 19 July, almost all the previous restrictions on everyday life in [England](#) under Covid have been removed. “Personal responsibility”, as Johnson and his ministers like to put it with a libertarian relish, has replaced emergency legislation as one of the main weapons against the virus. In effect, a giant experiment in individual ethics has been under way.

The results look increasingly alarming. In pubs, in shops, on public transport and in other enclosed spaces where the virus easily spreads, many people are acting as if the pandemic is over – or at least, over for them. Mask-wearing and social distancing have sometimes become so rare that to practise them feels embarrassing.

Meanwhile, England has become [one of the worst places](#) for infections in the world, despite a high degree of vaccination by global standards. Case numbers, hospitalisations and deaths are all rising, and are already much higher than in other western European countries that have kept measures such as indoor mask-wearing compulsory, and where compliance with such rules has remained strong. What does England’s failure to control the virus through “personal responsibility” say about our society?

It’s tempting to start by generalising about national character, and how the supposed individualism of the English has become selfishness after half a century of frequent rightwing government and fragmentation in our lives and culture. There may be some truth in that. But national character is not a very

solid concept, weakened by all the differences within countries and all the similarities that span continents. Thanks to globalisation, all European societies have been affected by the same atomising forces. England's lack of altruism during the pandemic can't just be blamed on neoliberalism.

Other elements of our recent history may also explain it. England likes to think of itself as a stable country, yet since the 2008 financial crisis it has endured a more protracted period of economic, social and political turmoil than most European countries. The desire to return to some kind of normality may be especially strong here; taking proper anti-Covid precautions would be an acknowledgement that we cannot do that.

These dozen years of crisis have also hardened us. Last week, researchers at the University of York [revealed that](#) between 2010 and 2015 alone, Conservative austerity policies in England led to more than 57,000 deaths. Yet, like the thousands of English Covid fatalities since "freedom day", the revelation did not receive much coverage. Ever since the Tories began to dismantle the protective state in 2010, with very obvious social consequences, much of the media and the public have got used to looking the other way. To face up to the enormous human cost of modern Conservatism would make supporting them, as the supposedly safe choice of government, much harder to justify.

There is also a more subtle side to England's Covid complacency. One of the reasons for Johnson's strong position as premier, which is rarely discussed, is the complicity that exists between him and many voters – even some who don't support him. His cynical optimism feeds an appetite for easy solutions, and the hope that crises such as the pandemic can be wished away, even though we know they can't be. At the Labour conference last month, as speaker after speaker rightly condemned the government's Covid insouciance, many in the packed sessions sat without their masks on. Such behaviour is contagious: after a few sessions, I also took mine off.

Mixed in with this wishful thinking is a degree of fatalism: the widespread belief in England that the Conservatives are so politically impregnable that there is nothing we can do about their approach to the virus except go along with it. Earlier in the pandemic, things were different: many people followed their own Covid rules, more cautious than the government's, for example by

cutting back on socialising when it was still officially permitted. There is less sign of such caution now. We seem to have learned to live with the Tories' deadly incompetence, as they have told us to live with the virus.

In England, there may also be a diminishing awareness about how other countries are dealing with the pandemic. At the start of it, following the different Covid strategies around the world was a way of coping with the crisis, of finding small sources of hope, and the media provided such material accordingly. But the pandemic is covered in a more insular way in England now, with little reference to comparable countries' stricter rules and lower death tolls. With travel to the rest of Europe still much less common than usual, many English people have no concrete sense of how the latest anti-Covid measures there, such as vaccine passports, are working out. Such measures are also being tried in Scotland and Wales, but much of the English press is profoundly incurious about how these countries are diverging from England. In public health, as in much else after Brexit, England is following its own risky path.

That could change. Over the last few days, as many more people have realised how bad England's Covid situation is, the government has said that it has no intention to alter its virus strategy "for now". Previously in the pandemic, such evasive language has been the prelude to a change of policy.

In the crowded part of London where I live, where the Covid toll has already been terrible, slightly more people are wearing masks and keeping their distance in the street this week. It's possible that England's pandemic ethics experiment may, finally, be about to produce more encouraging results – some signs that we want to protect each other as well as our own interests. But for Covid's victims since "freedom day", it will be too late.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist

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[A just transition](#)[Local government](#)

The climate crisis is global, but councils can offer local solutions

[Stephen Smellie](#)



Council houses in Newport, south Wales, fitted with solar panels
Photograph: TW Photo Images/Alamy

Fri 22 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

At Cop26 this year, we'll hear about diplomats and heads of state negotiating over targets, but when a river bank bursts or a storm hits, it's our local councils that are left to clear up the mess. When Storm Frank lashed the north-east of Scotland over the new year of 2016, it was council binmen, engineers, housing officers, social workers and home carers who [worked day and night](#) [mobilising](#) volunteers to evacuate homes and find temporary accommodation for some 300 households.

In the weeks and months afterwards, Aberdeenshire council had to deal with a mile stretch of destroyed road, three washed-away footbridges, and damage to several bridges. This is on top of the clean-up operation and returning families to their homes. Despite financial assistance from the Scottish government, the council was left with a bill of around £15m. This is the less glamorous, but very real work, that goes into responding to climate change.

As we look to the future, the task facing council workers like me is to think how we make our homes and neighbourhoods more sustainable and more resilient, and maybe even fairer along the way.

Starting with our homes, badly insulated housing is responsible for [14%](#) of the UK's total emissions. It's a real challenge to retrofit houses and other buildings so that energy is not leaking through roofs and walls. Leaving this to individual homeowners and landlords will result in a disparity between rich people, who can afford cavity wall and roof insulation, and poor people, who will freeze in poorly insulated homes when left unable to meet [rising heating bills](#).

Councils are ideally placed to coordinate social housing resources, while in turn benefiting other households. Local authorities who have retained in-house maintenance teams could retrofit their own buildings – but also, through the enormous efficiencies of scale that a cross-sector project would bring, reduce the cost of making homes fuel-efficient and warm for all other property owners. If you're going to put scaffolding up to retrofit one house, it's cheaper to do the house next door at the same time. At the same time, councils would be reskilling their own workforce, while creating industry-standard apprenticeship schemes. These would train young people in the skills needed to succeed in the green economy.

At the community level, councils themselves are enormous users of energy, from lighting the streets to heating buildings and running fleets of vehicles, so they face a challenge in reducing their own reliance on fossil fuels. However, councils can be a key agent in addressing this.

Local councils could become generators of renewable energy, using council land and buildings to generate wind and solar power for their own and the wider community's use. This could address issues of [fuel poverty](#) within their areas, at a time when the share of household budgets being spent on heating is on the rise. There are costs involved in setting up such schemes, but the benefits would be produced quickly.

Such municipal energy projects could act as a spur to public sector partners, linking community and commercial energy projects into councils' schemes through local renewable energy grids, avoiding the high cost of relaying energy long distance through the National Grid. With every roof fitted with solar panels, and wind turbines installed on appropriate council land, communities come closer to achieving energy self-sufficiency – an aim attainable within a couple of decades.

The benefit could be amplified if these schemes are connected to procurement policies that support nearby businesses. For example, the Community Wealth Building strategy, [launched last year](#) by North Ayrshire council, ensures that much more council spending is retained in the local area.

Of course, to initiate these schemes, councils require government investment. But many of these schemes will repay that investment over a period of 10 to 15 years, through savings on energy bills, the benefits of reducing fuel poverty and an improved local economy. Councils will need to identify the skills required to make this transition, while also recognising that some workers need to be retrained. There will be few jobs for diesel truck mechanics when council fleets switch to electrical or green hydrogen vehicles. As future social housing is built with electrical or pump storage heating, the gas fitters and maintenance teams will need to learn new skills. By working with their employees and trade unions, councils can ensure that these transitions are fair to the current workforce, tenants, service users and council taxpayers.

With the right national government support and planning, councils can use their economic power as major employers as well as owners of infrastructure, property and land, and procurers of goods and services, to be the agents of genuinely just transitions.

Stephen Smellie has worked for his local council for nearly 40 years in community development and training and is currently secretary of Unison's South Lanarkshire branch

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/oct/22/climate-crisis-global-councils-local-clean-energy-housing>

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Opinion**Discrimination at work**

I lost a TV role because I was pregnant – and I'm far from the only one

[Jade Anouka](#)



Jade Anouka at the Old Vic Bicentenary Ball, London, 2018. Photograph: David M Benett/Getty Images for The Old Vic Theatre

Fri 22 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

The entertainment industry likes to think it is a champion of diversity and inclusivity, jumping to call out those who are homophobic, racist, ableist and sexist. But as a queer black female actor I know all too well how far we still have to go. There is another prejudice infesting the industry, one that is kept in the shadows: pregnancy discrimination.

I was recently offered a TV role unlike any I'd been given the opportunity to play before and I was thrilled. I was pregnant when cast, but I knew this wouldn't pose any challenges for the production: the character spent most of the story sitting down, the setting meant clothing could cover my bump, or

the character could be pregnant, especially as all the action took place over a matter of days.

It was the perfect gig to get before the baby arrived. The fee would be a welcome boost, given that I'd be unable to work for a while and would have to take on all the extra costs a little one brings. My agent said we should inform them that I was pregnant, which I was nervous about, but we agreed that it would be the right thing to do. The next day we received an email from production with lines quoted from their insurers saying that the premium for a pregnant artist would be so high that the company would not cover it, and therefore they would be dropping me from the job.

I was upset and angry. The insurance company never took into consideration the lack of risk involved in the part or my good health. It felt as if I had been cast aside as a pregnant person as a general rule, rather than the specifics of my situation being taken into account. Society depends on pregnant people to bring the next generation into the world, yet I felt so quickly expendable.

I've been in this business for 14 years: I know how often actors are made to feel insignificant, replaceable, just one in a long production line. I've grown a thick skin because of it – you have to survive mentally. But being kicked out before having a chance to speak, fight, or reach a compromise hurt. I understand that the production company's hands were tied by rules set in place by the insurers, but a little kindness and understanding would have gone a long way. The impersonal letter made me feel as if I was treated as a pregnant problem, not as an individual.

I went to the actors' union, Equity, with the support of my amazing agent, to see where I stood on this. But the response was that the production company did everything right (legally) and so there was not a lot I could do. I'm not the only actor this has happened to: it was recently [reported](#) that at least five women in the past two to three years have claimed that they were hired to work on shows, only to be dropped after disclosing that they were pregnant. They're only the ones who came forward publicly; I know of many more.

For those of us who have experienced this discrimination, the solutions are few. The last thing you want to do is fight a legal case while looking after a newborn and make enemies of production companies while doing it. You

want to be able to work again but we all know how easy it is to be sidelined, especially if you are a woman and especially if you are black.

But I can't stay silent. The industry can and must change. Insurance companies are exerting too much control over the casting process and directors and producers seem unable to push back against these gatekeepers.

If those at the top won't even consider letting someone who is pregnant do their job, our industry will keep losing artists; talent bruised, battered and gone for ever.

- Jade Anouka is an actor who has appeared in His Dark Materials and on stage in the Donmar Shakespeare Trilogy
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[**Opinion**](#)[**Sexual harassment**](#)

Young women are sick of being told to stick together and watch their drinks

[**Gaby Hinsliff**](#)



After enduring months of cancelled music festivals and shuttered bars, this year's freshers deserve to be out having the time of their lives, but for some socialising is now edged with anxiety. Photograph: Liat Chen/PYMCA/REX/Shutterstock

Thu 21 Oct 2021 12.55 EDT

A young woman, out for a night's clubbing, suddenly feels the room begin to spin.

She blacks out and wakes up feeling terrible, with only vague memories of the night before and a mysterious throbbing pain in the back of her hand. And then, on closer inspection, she finds a pinprick in the skin. She thinks she remembers a sharp scratch, like an injection, before everything went blank.

It sounds like the stuff of urban myth, the kind of gap-year horror story that starts in a remote backstreet bar in South America and ends in the victim supposedly waking up missing a kidney. Yet reports of so-called "[spiking by needle](#)" – young women on a night out allegedly being injected by unseen strangers with something that knocks them out – are being taken seriously by police in cities including Nottingham, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Heartbreakingly, there have been reports of nervous women going out in thick, needle-proof jeans and leather jackets. However rare these incidents may turn out to be, they fit a pattern of behaviour that for many feels horribly familiar.

Once upon a time, the idea of spiking drinks – slipping drugs or extra shots of alcohol into a glass while the victim's back was turned, rendering them vulnerable to a would-be rapist or thief – seemed outlandish too. But a [BBC investigation](#) in 2019 uncovered 2,600 reports of drink-spiking to police in England and Wales over the previous four years, and now the return of nightlife post-lockdown seems to be bringing old fears out of the woodwork.

Nottinghamshire police have recorded [44 reported spiking incidents](#) since September, 12 of them involving "something sharp". Student unions nationwide are collecting accounts of suspected drink-tampering, with reported incidents in [Sheffield](#), [Norwich](#), and [Canterbury](#). After enduring

months of cancelled music festivals and shuttered bars, this year's freshers deserve to be out having the time of their lives. But for some, socialising is now edged with anxiety.

A stranger's hand unceremoniously shoved up your skirt on a night out has become almost routine for young women. Street harassment – not just catcalling but crude propositioning and being followed by men who may get aggressive if rejected – is normalised. Young women are sick of being told to stick together, or to watch their drinks, when the problem is male violence, not female vigilance. Why should they tie themselves in ever more anxious knots trying to stay safe, while the perpetrators carry on regardless? What depresses many older women, meanwhile, is that, if anything, this kind of everyday harassment seems to have got worse – creepier and more aggressive – over the years, even as the world opens up for younger women in so many ways.

Bad things have, of course, always happened in nightclubs or at parties. Some men have always taken advantage of women who are out of it. But Generation X didn't go out at night worrying that someone might poison us. Nobody had to offer us lids for our drinks, as they do our daughters. The misogyny we encountered was raw and open, but there's something so darkly insidious about the idea of furtively doping women into submission.

One of the more disturbing aspects of the spiking-by-needle allegations is that injecting a drug is likely to have a much more dramatic effect than getting someone to swallow it unwittingly, making it harder to smuggle a woman out past the bouncers by pretending she's merely drunk. Is this really about a desire to humiliate and frighten women, rather than to sexually assault them? Do some men get their kicks simply from making a woman pass out in front of them, as if they had been choked by an invisible hand? Young women are sometimes mocked for being anxious, fragile snowflakes. But given the pressures some of them are under, they seem positively warrior-like to me.

Students unions are already [organising a boycott](#) for Friday 29 October under the hashtag [#GirlsNightIn](#), urging young women to take a night off clubbing and go protesting instead. Since there's nothing anyone can do to stop some stranger with a needle, short of never actually leaving the house,

the spotlight is finally falling, as it should, on tackling the perpetrators. If the nightlife industry wants women's custom, without which they would quickly go bust, then it's time to prioritise their safety – even if that does mean inconveniencing men with more stringent searches or measures already common in student union bars, from better trained security to stocks of spike-proof stoppers that fit over a beer bottle. But while students are right to use their consumer clout, nightclubs won't solve this on their own.

Drink-spiking remains hard to prosecute while women remain reluctant to go to the police for fear that they won't be taken seriously, and that even when they do, evidence may be hard to find. Freshers who have overdone it on a night out are too common a sight on overstretched A&E wards to be routinely tested now for suspicious substances; and victims are likely to be confused, struggling to piece together what happened. But that is a cue for police and prosecutors to find ways round these obstacles, not park these cases as too difficult. Right now, spiking has become just another thing men do to women with relative impunity. Barring an overnight sexual revolution, that will change only with a realistic fear of getting caught.

Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

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2021.10.22 - Around the world

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- Poland More than 30,000 women sought illegal or foreign abortions since law change last year
- 'Free an oppressed people' Rightwing pundit Candace Owens suggests US invade Australia
- Germany Votes at 16 backed in coalition talks after success of Fridays for Future
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Evergrande

China Evergrande will make crucial bond payment to avert looming default – reports



China Evergrande's headquarters in Hong Kong where its shares rose on reports that it has made a crucial bond payment. Photograph: Jérôme Favre/EPA

[Martin Farrer](#) and agencies

Thu 21 Oct 2021 22.29 EDT

The troubled property company China [Evergrande](#) Group has come up with the money to pay a \$83.5m bond interest payment that it missed in September, according to reports.

The company, which has debts of around \$305bn, wired the \$83.5m payment and noteholders will receive it before Saturday, China's state-

backed newspaper Securities Times said on Friday, citing relevant channels, according to Bloomberg.

Reuters also reported that Evergrande had deposited funds to a trustee account on Thursday night before the expiration of a 30-day grace period for the payment, citing a source.

Evergrande, which is China's second-biggest property developer, sparked alarm on global financial markets when it announced in September that it might not be able to pay its many creditors ranging from homebuyers, building contractors, banks and offshore investors.

It missed the \$83.5m bond repayment [on 23 September](#) but had a 30-day grace period to come up with the money.

It then missed payments worth another \$193m on 29 September and 11 October. They also allowed for a 30-day grace period for payment.

An announcement this week that a deal to sell a 50.1% stake in its property services arm for \$2.6m [had fallen through](#) increased concern that it might go into default. It also failed to sell its Hong Kong headquarters for \$1.7bn.

A string of Chinese officials in recent days have sought to reassure investors, saying that creditors' interests would be protected. Market participants nevertheless expressed shock at news of the payment.

"This is a positive surprise," said James Wong, portfolio manager at GaoTeng Global Asset Management, adding many had expected a default.

The news would boost bondholders' confidence, he said, as "there are many coupon payments due ahead. If Evergrande pays this time, I don't see why it won't pay the next time".

Jeffrey Halley, senior market analyst at Oanda in Singapore, also said it was positive news but it was hard to predict what would happen with Evergrande given its enormous debts.

“It will still be a headwind for China markets because there’s just so many variables, so many ways this story could wash out,” he said. “I think this will be a short-term positive but I don’t think this will change the overarching fears about what the true state of the sector or the China economy is at the moment.”

Evergrande’s dollar bonds surged in value on Friday morning, with its April 2022 and 2023 notes jumping more than 10%, according to data provider Duration Finance.

Evergrande’s shares rose about 4%, a day after the resumption of trade after a more than two-week suspension pending the announcement of a scrapped stake sale in its property management unit.

The Hang Seng mainland properties index surged more than 5% in early trade, against a 0.13% rise in the broader Hang Seng index.

In an announcement about the failed asset sales on Wednesday, Evergrande did offer a clue about the bond repayment. It noted pointedly that the group “has a 30-day grace period to pay interest after the interest becomes due under its US dollar-denominated notes” and that the grace periods “have not expired”.

However, in the same statement it repeated an admission first made to the stock market in September that it was struggling under the weight of its huge debt burden, brought on by the loss of funding sources and a rapidly cooling housing market.

“In view of the difficulties, challenges and uncertainties in improving its liquidity, there is no guarantee that the group will be able to meet its financial obligations under the relevant financing documents and other contracts,” the statement said.

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Rights and freedomGlobal development

More than 30,000 Polish women sought illegal or foreign abortions since law change last year



Clothes hangers, a symbol of illegal abortions, are hung on the gate of the archbishop's palace during a protest against the tightening of abortion laws in Wroclaw, Poland, 24 October 2020. Photograph: Maciej Kulczyński/EPA

Rights and freedom is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Rosie Swash](#)

Fri 22 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

At least 34,000 women in Poland are known to have sought abortions illegally or abroad since the country introduced a [near total ban on terminations](#) a year ago.

According to [Abortion Without Borders](#) (AWB), an organisation that helps women access safe abortion services, more than 1,000 Polish women have sought second-trimester abortions in foreign clinics since the country passed draconian new laws.

AWB said its figures are likely to just be a snapshot of the true number of Polish women seeking illegal or foreign abortions in the past year. NGOs have estimated that [80 to 200,000 women a year](#) sought illegal abortions under Poland's old abortion laws, which still tightly restricted the conditions under which women could seek terminations.

On 22 October last year, [Poland's constitutional court ruled](#) that abortions in cases of foetal defects were unconstitutional and that terminations would be allowed only in cases of rape, incest, or if the mother's health was at risk,

which made up only about 2% of legal terminations at the time of the ruling. The law came into effect in January 2021.

In the past year, at least 460 Polish women seeking second-trimester abortions travelled to England, according to AWB, where terminations can be carried out up to 24 weeks, and beyond that in exceptional circumstances. The charity says it has helped women travel from [Poland](#) to Belgium, Germany, Spain and the Czech Republic to access legal abortions.

Of those who sought its services in the 12 months since the legislation was announced, AWB says at least 18,000 women were helped by its affiliate group [Women Help Women](#), an organisation that facilitates postal access to abortion pills.

The figures were released in the same week as a report by Human Rights Watch, including evidence from 14 other organisations, including Amnesty International and International Federation for Human Rights, said women and girls in Poland [are facing “incalculable harm”](#) due to the new abortion legislation.

“The constitutional tribunal ruling is causing incalculable harm – especially to those who are poor, live in rural areas, or are marginalised,” said Urszula Grycuk, international advocacy coordinator at the [Federation for Women and Family Planning](#) (Federa) in Poland, one of the groups that contributed to the report.

Mara Clarke, the founder of AWB, told the Guardian: “We’re seeing more women [access our services] with foetal abnormality since the law changed. We’re hearing from our service users that the severity of foetal abnormality is being downplayed by doctors and that in some cases doctors are wilfully delaying diagnosis [so that women find it more difficult to access an abortion].”

Abortion has always been tightly controlled in Poland, and was banned until 1932, when the law changed to allow legal abortion for medical reasons or in cases of rape or incest.

The October 2020 ruling resulted in [a wave of national protests](#), with thousands of women and girls across the country dressed in black taking to the streets in a national strike. An estimated 100,000 people demonstrated against the new legislation in Warsaw.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/oct/22/more-than-30000-polish-women-sought-or-foreign-abortions-since-law-change-last-year>

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Coronavirus

Rightwing pundit Candace Owens suggests US invade Australia to ‘free an oppressed people’



Candace Owens called on the US military to invade Australia after calling the country a “tyrannical police state” during an episode of her self-titled TV show. Photograph: Jason Davis/Getty Images

[Samantha Lock](#)

Thu 21 Oct 2021 23.50 EDT

Outspoken conservative political commentator Candace Owens has suggested the US military invade Australia in order to free its people “suffering under a totalitarian regime” while drawing comparisons to Hitler, Stalin and the Taliban.

Owens made the comments on her self-titled Daily Wire TV [show](#) earlier this week, declaring Covid-19 had propelled the planet into an “ideological

and psychological” global war.

“When do we deploy troops to Australia? When do we invade Australia and free an oppressed people who are suffering under a totalitarian regime? When do we spend trillions of dollars to spread democracy in Australia?” she asked.

While US rightwing commentators are keen to portray Australians suffering under tyranny, the public health measures adopted by federal, state and territory governments have been overwhelmingly supported by the population.

The measures have also been largely successful. While Australia has had about 1,500 deaths and 130,000 cases, the figures are far below the US death toll of 730,000 deaths and 45m cases, even on a per capita basis.

Yep life is real tough down under....

Thanks for your concern □ pic.twitter.com/HvDQtpd3Jg

— keith (@mrputin69) [October 21, 2021](#)

@RealCandaceO I live in Australia. Was at the pub on the weekend. I danced. The rules are not that strict. it is not a dicatatorship. I went to a football game (superbowl equivelant) with 40k other fans. We drank. We were merry. We are fine. Stop spreading lies and fear and anger

— Peter (@dpg213lbc) [October 21, 2021](#)

The high-profile host went on to describe Australia as a “tyrannical police state” where “its citizens are quite literally being imprisoned against their will”.

“When do we deploy? Of course, I ask that in jest because we all know the real answer. What is happening in Australia under the guise of a virus ... is federal overreach, tyranny, totalitarianism – the kind that gives birth to evil dictatorships and human atrocities,” Owens added.

“We are watching a replay of the early ambitions of Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Fidel Castro, Hugo Chávez.”

The ardent Trump supporter questioned whether the Australian government is “any better or any nobler than the Taliban” declaring that they both “believe that they have a right to oppress and a right to imprison people for their own good”.

Earlier this month [anti-vaccine protesters marched outside the Australian consulate](#) in New York while chanting “save Australia” before tearing down a free Covid-19 testing stand.

Last week US republican senator [Ted Cruz made a similar swipe at Australia’s Covid policies](#), lamenting the “Covid tyranny of their [Australia’s] current government,” which he said was “disgraceful and sad”.

“Individual liberty matters,” Cruz declared, adding he had considered Australia the “Texas of the Pacific”.

The Northern Territory chief minister, Michael Gunner, hit back by responding on Twitter with a statement sharing a “few facts about Covid down here” and tagging Cruz.

“You know nothing about us. And if you stand against a life-saving vaccine, then you sure as hell don’t stand with Australia,” Gunner said. “I love Texas (go Longhorns), but when it comes to Covid, I’m glad we are nothing like you.”

G’day from Down Under [@tedcruz](#). Thanks for your interest in the Territory. I’m the Chief Minister. Below are a few facts about COVID down here. <https://t.co/cGFwBP7Nqx> pic.twitter.com/mGNyOxlN41

— Michael Gunner (@fanniebay) [October 18, 2021](#)

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Germany

Votes at 16 backed in German coalition talks after success of Fridays for Future



A Fridays for Future demonstration in Munich last week. The movement is credited with contributing to a heightened political awareness among young people. Photograph: Alexander Pohl/Rex/Shutterstock

[Kate Connolly](#) in Berlin

Fri 22 Oct 2021 04.26 EDT

The three parties on track to form [Germany](#)'s next coalition government have been locked in tense negotiations over the future of Europe's powerhouse. But regarding one seemingly radical issue, they are united – lowering the voting age to 16.

The Social Democrats (SPD), Greens and pro-business Free Democrats (FDP) have signed up to reduce the age at which Germans can vote from 18 in acknowledgement that an increasingly politicised generation of young people must have a future say in the way the country is run.

If their plan goes ahead, Germany would join Austria, the Isle of Man and Guernsey as the only other places in western Europe with such a low voting age. Scotland and Wales also [allow 16-year-olds to vote](#), though not in UK parliamentary elections. In a handful of German states this has recently been allowed also, but only on a local and regional level.

Such a move nationally could also pave the way for other countries to follow the continent's largest economy.

A poll ahead of the [German elections last month](#) showed that young people were frustrated at not being able to vote in an election considered gamechanging and that was dominated by the over-50s, who made up the majority – 60% – of voters. Only 14% of voters were under 30, compared with 19% in 1961.

The Fridays for Future movement led by the Swedish activist [Greta Thunberg](#) is credited with contributing to a heightened political awareness among younger people that has had an impact on the mainstream parties of the left in particular. The coronavirus pandemic, with all its social, educational and economic consequences, is also seen to have contributed towards swaying the mood.

The Greens and FDP in particular, who secured the most votes among younger people, have stressed the importance of capturing their political enthusiasm.

In a widely quoted poll carried out by the environmental NGO Nabu, 59% of voters over 65 said before the 26 September vote they would not be considering younger voters' climate protection interests when they cast their ballots.

In a subsequent mock election of more than 200,000 young people across [Germany](#) held just over a week before the real election, 21% of participants voted for the Greens, which was interpreted as an indication the party might have received considerably more than the 15% it secured in the official election had the voting age been lower.

The last time an adjustment to Germany's voting age was made was 50 years ago when it was reduced from 21 to 18.

But even though the policy already appears in black and white on page 10 of the provisional agreement drawn up by the parties set to form the “traffic light” coalition – so-called due to the parties’ colours – in which it is described as “belonging to the realisation of a modern democracy”, it still faces a series of tough hurdles.

The voting age is established in article 38, paragraph 16 of the German constitution. Any attempt to change it requires a change in the constitution, for which a three-quarter majority in parliament is necessary. The prospective ruling coalition would have to secure support from other parliamentary factions for this to happen. While it can rely on votes from the leftwing Die Linke, this would not be sufficient. The far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) is completely opposed to the idea and the conservative CDU/CSU alliance is largely against it.

Even as recently as May, when the Greens and FDP proposed a law change on the issue, the SPD voted against it in what was seen as an effort to keep its increasingly fractious partnership with the conservatives intact.

Thorsten Frei, the deputy leader of the CDU parliamentary group, said this week he was “very sceptical” about lowering the age and did not think conservative parliamentarians could be won over. “Without a doubt, there are many young people with a strong political interest,” he told the newspaper Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung. “But rights and obligations have to be in alignment, and the question is whether it makes sense, on the one hand, to be able to partake in decision-making about the future of our country, but on the other, to not be able to sign a mobile phone contract or watch certain films at the cinema without parental consent? I have my doubts.”

However, amid dwindling support, the party may also be forced to change course.

In the 1960s, the last time the issue was strongly debated and given voice in student protest, military service played a big role in the debate. It was argued

that if young people were expected to defend their country, they could not be denied the right to vote, paving the way for a law change in the early 70s.

Even if the incoming government is not immediately successful in its plans, political analysts and observers are convinced it will be only a matter of time before public opinion leads to a change for which the Greens, SPD and FDP would look to take credit.

Michael Weigl, a political scientist at the University of Passau, recently told Bavarian Broadcasting: “Many young people don’t have the feeling that politics is decided with their interests in mind. And that in and of itself is of course already a sign that something has to change.”

“I believe we will have a voting age of 16 before long.”

This article was amended on 22 October 2021 to add Wales to the list of places that allow 16-year-olds to vote in some elections.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/21/germany-coalition-candidates-united-lowering-voting-age-16>

US midterm elections 2022

Black candidates for US Senate smash fundraising records for 2022 midterms



Val Demings raised \$8.5m in three months for her race against Senator Marco Rubio. There are currently no Black women in the Senate.
Photograph: Bill Clark/CQ-Roll Call, Inc/Getty Images

[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Fri 22 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

African American candidates running for the [US Senate](#) smashed campaign fundraising records over the past three months, raising hopes of transforming a body that remains overwhelmingly white.

There have [only been 11 Black senators](#) since the chamber first convened in 1789 and only two were women. Senator Kamala Harris's ascent to the vice-presidency means there are currently no female members who are Black.

But in the most recent Federal Election Commission reporting period, African Americans [posted huge sums from donors](#), especially in the south, suggesting the potential to build a pipeline of Black politicians who can excite the grassroots and reshape the government.

Democrat Raphael Warnock, a pastor who [won a crucial runoff](#) in January to become Georgia's first Black senator, took in a staggering \$9.5m over three months for his re-election bid. Val Demings, a congresswoman and former police chief challenging the Republican senator Marco Rubio in Florida, was close behind with \$8.5m.

Notably, both Warnock and Demings raised more money than any other Senate candidate of any racial demographic.

Another Democrat, [Charles Booker](#), running for Senate in Kentucky against the Republican Rand Paul, raised \$1.7m in the third quarter, which ran from July to the end of September. Cheri Beasley, a judge running for Senate in North Carolina as a Democrat, netted \$1.5m.

And in the vital battleground state of Wisconsin Mandela Barnes, the lieutenant governor, took in \$1.1m from donors, eclipsing two white Democratic primary opponents who each made personal loans to top the million dollar threshold.

Republicans have also capitalised on the trend. Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina took a haul of \$8.4m, [fuelling speculation](#) that he could mount a bid for the White House. Herschel Walker, a former football player taking on Warnock in Georgia, raised \$3.8m in the first five weeks of his Donald Trump-endorsed campaign.

The historic tallies – more than a year before the midterm elections – signal a potential turning point after decades in which Black candidates, especially women, struggled to raise funds to rival their white counterparts, feeding a vicious circle in which they were seen as unelectable by party establishments.

So why the third-quarter report is so powerful is that it's a proof of concept that Black women are electable and viable

Glynda Carr

“When we allow the narrative that Black women and Black candidates are not electable and viable to seep into an election cycle early, that is why money slows down,” said [Glynda Carr](#), co-founder and president of Higher Heights, an organisation that supports Black women running for elected office.

“So why the third-quarter report is so powerful is that it’s a proof of concept that Black women are electable and viable. Frankly, many of the Black women that are currently boldly serving across this country in Congress and in statehouses ran races with no early institutional support, party support or money and still ran winning campaigns.

“You now add in early money, it is just going to position more Black women to run in competitive seats and be seeing what we already know are viable candidates that were given the additional resources early will succeed on election day.”



Senator Raphael Warnock led the way in third-quarter fundraising with \$9.5m for his re-election race in Georgia. Photograph: Bonnie Cash/UPI/Rex/Shutterstock

The internet has enabled Black candidates to bypass the old networks by reaping small donations online. Elections such as Warnock's in Georgia also proved the centrality of Black voters in the Democratic coalition. And last summer's Black Lives Matter protests following the [police murder of George Floyd](#) could have a lasting political legacy.

[Antjuan Seawright](#), a senior adviser to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, said: "The net worth of African American voters has proven over time its value. Therefore, the Black candidates are reaping the benefits not just at the ballot box, but also when it comes to fundraising and other key ingredients it takes to be successful in this business. That is part of the reason you can see this explosion happening."

Seawright, based in Columbia, South Carolina, added: "The African American network has demonstrated over time that without us you cannot win up and down the ballot and so I think all that matters in terms of the conversation and the benefits.

"And then you add that to the fact that the country's changing. There's not a race in this country that you can be successful at the ballot box without having a strong, deep and wide support amongst what I believe to be the most loyal and consistent voting bloc in the country."

Not all Black candidates swept the board. In Pennsylvania [Malcolm Kenyatta](#), a state representative, was outraised by both the lieutenant governor, John Fetterman, and congressman Conor Lamb.

What it does show is that donors and voters can be enthusiastic about a candidate that is Black

Drexel Heard

And deep pockets alone cannot buy success. Jaime Harrison, an African American man who is the current chair of the Democratic National Committee, raised more than \$100m last year [but could not unseat](#) the Republican Trump ally Lindsey Graham in South Carolina.

Drexel Heard, a Democratic strategist based in Los Angeles, California, said: “Raising money does not always translate well to a candidate’s viability when it comes to voters. What it does show is that donors and voters can be enthusiastic about a candidate that is Black. I think that’s the difference.”

But Heard noted: “The party has always known that Black voters are the most loyal voters to the Democratic party, and that’s been indisputable. The party also recognises that we have to build a bench that is reflective of the voting base and I think you’re seeing that in those candidates that are popping up.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/oct/22/black-candidates-us-senate-fundraising-records-2022-midterms>

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Health policy

English local health chiefs urge extra Covid measures in break from guidance



A Covid test centre in London. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

[Jamie Grierson](#)

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Sat 23 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

Local public health chiefs in England are breaking from the government's official guidance and recommending so-called plan B protective measures to combat a surge in coronavirus cases.

At least a dozen directors of public health (DPHs) have called on residents in their areas to readopt protective measures such as mask-wearing and working from home.

The government is likely to face questions over why local authority public health experts feel it necessary to break from the official national guidance.

Alice Wiseman, the DPH for Gateshead who is among the health leaders to call for changes, said: “Given the concerning rise in case numbers and the considerable pressures that we’re already seeing on NHS services, now is the time for us all to do whatever we can to avoid reaching crisis point. Taking basic precautions now like wearing face masks, working from home where possible and keeping indoor spaces well ventilated could help us to avoid returning to more disruptive restrictions.

“So although mandatory measures are not yet being introduced, I’d urge all of our communities to pull together and take these simple but effective steps now. They’re actions which cause minimal inconvenience for individuals but collectively will make a big difference in reducing the spread of Covid, flu and other seasonal illnesses – which, together, could stretch our NHS beyond its limit.”

Wiseman has written to headteachers in the local authority area recommending they take additional measures at their schools when pupils return from the half-term break, including all adults and pupils wearing face coverings in secondary schools. She also recommends reintroducing class bubbles in primary schools and year group bubbles in secondary schools.

Dominic Harrison, the DPH for Blackburn and Darwen, has called for plan B measures to be introduced nationally by mid-November at the latest but the “sooner the better”, although he is not currently recommending tailored additional measures for his area.

Helen Lowey, the Bolton DPH, is backing other protective measures. She wrote on Twitter: “We can’t rely only on vaccines. It’s test when have no symptoms, wear face covering more often than not, give people space, work from home when can, vaccines, isolate when symptoms, ventilate etc.”

Other DPHs recommending additional measures in schools such as mask wearing include those covering Walsall, Calderdale, Trafford, Suffolk and Swindon. The Guardian understands that the DPH for Southend is considering recommending additional measures for schools after half-term.

Lancashire’s DPH is not recommending a blanket approach for schools but is recommending additional measures at specific schools that have shown

signs of outbreaks. The DPH in Hertfordshire, Jim McManus, has recently [encouraged residents](#) of his county to work from home.

In North Somerset, the deputy council leader has expressed frustration that further mitigation measures are not being introduced and highlighted the particular struggles faced in the south-west after the [Immensa testing fiasco](#), in which the results of 43,000 Covid tests were incorrectly returned as negative.

Mike Bell, North Somerset's deputy leader and lead member for health, said: "I am also really frustrated to hear the government confirm that they have no plans to tighten restrictions in England. This situation must not be allowed to escalate. Lives must not be put at risk.

"We will soon enter the winter period which is always a challenging time for the most vulnerable members of our community and for our health and care workers. I would much rather action is taken now to protect people before case rates spiral and people become ill, and to ease the winter pressures on our hard-working care and health services."

On Wednesday the health secretary, [Sajid Javid](#), predicted new infections could hit a record 100,000 a day and urged millions of eligible people to come forward for booster jabs. Javid urged people to wear masks in crowded places and test themselves before going to Christmas parties.

The British Medical Council chair, Dr Chaand Nagpaul, has accused ministers of being "[wilfully negligent](#)" after Javid ruled out immediately implementing the government's [coronavirus plan B](#).

The NHS Confederation, the membership body for organisations that commission and provide NHS services, and the doctors' trade union, the British Medical Association, have called on the government to enact plan B.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/oct/23/english-local-health-chiefs-urge-extra-covid-measures-in-break-from-guidance>

[Coronavirus](#)

Covid testing failures at UK lab ‘should have been flagged within days’



A laptop displays Covid test results from a PCR testing machine. Critics say the government has ‘created a market opportunity’ for private firms to do potentially unreliable testing. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

[Ian Sample](#) Science editor

[@iansample](#)

Sat 23 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

Health officials should have known about major failings at a private Covid testing lab within days of the problem arising, rather than taking weeks to shut down operations at the site, senior scientists say.

About 43,000 people, mostly in south-west England, are believed to have [wrongly been told they did not have the virus](#) by Immensa Health Clinic’s laboratory in Wolverhampton in a debacle described as one of the worst scandals in the UK’s Covid crisis.

The affected swabs were processed from 2 September, but neither Immensa's own quality control processes nor oversight from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) raised the alarm before concerned members of the public complained, triggering a formal investigation.

"In the long list of Covid disasters and scandals, this is pretty near the top," said Alan McNally, a professor in microbial evolutionary genomics at the University of Birmingham, who helped set up the Lighthouse Covid testing lab at Milton Keynes.

"You shouldn't be relying on anecdotal reports to spot a problem of this size. That's the unforgivable thing about this," he added. "I don't think it's going too far to say that an absolute failure of quality in that lab is going to lead to very serious illnesses, maybe hospitalisations, and maybe worse."

The UKHSA suspended work at the Immensa lab on 12 October, at least three weeks after academics and others raised concerns about discrepancies in regional Covid test data.

The failure has prompted calls for the government to publish its contract with Immensa, transfer as much testing as possible to NHS and university labs, and establish more stringent oversight of the hundreds of private companies that have rushed into the Covid testing business, often without any track record of delivering critical clinical tests.

One UK researcher who is familiar with Covid testing, but not authorised to speak on the issue, said the problems at Immensa were almost inevitable given the way in which private companies were brought in to build testing capacity.

"This commercial capacity mushroomed in a very short time and that's because it was allowed to and encouraged to, and there was very little oversight," they said. "The technology is so routine now almost anyone with lab experience can do this."

"The fact that you have companies being set up and doing potentially unreliable testing is not surprising because you've created the market

opportunity for that to happen.”

Tests that would have been sent to Immensa’s Wolverhampton lab are being diverted to other companies, and individuals who received potential false negative results have been advised to test again.

The sensitive PCR tests used to analyse Covid swabs have built-in controls that should flag failed tests to the operator immediately. The results from PCR machines are typically interpreted by computer software, so good laboratories tend to check the data manually for unusual patterns such as prolonged periods with no positives.

“If it wasn’t picked up internally the only conclusion I can come to, having overseen a million and a half of these tests, is that no one was looking at the data coming off the PCR machine,” said McNally.

Deenan Pillay, a professor of virology at University College London and a member of the Independent Sage group, said the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) must publish its contract with Immensa so that quality control measures written into the document can be scrutinised.

He said as much of the private testing as possible should be transferred to NHS and university labs where quality control is built-in, and lab heads take responsibility for test reliability.

“What is really surprising to me is that a problem like this was not picked up in the lab almost on the day,” he said. “If anything looks strange, even if the number of positive tests goes down, then that is a clear red flag.

“Errors always happen in labs. That is why you have a whole series of systems in place to rapidly identify any problems.”

This week, a DHSC spokesperson claimed the Immensa lab was “fully accredited by the UK’s independent accreditation service (Ukas) before being appointed,” but Ukas quickly made clear [it had never accredited Immensa nor its sister company, Dante Labs.](#)

On Friday, the UKHSA said it had previously been incorrect to say the problem started on 8 September, and that it had actually arisen six days

earlier.

“The consequences of a false negative result are very alarming. You become a hazard to those around you, to the people you love,” the researcher familiar with Covid testing said. “I’m sure there would have been obstacles to expanding NHS capacity, but I do think that was the way to go, and it would have greatly avoided what we have had, which is a total free-for-all and an apparent knock-on effect on quality.

“What’s the point of doing clinical tests if they are not robust, if they are not properly controlled? If this doesn’t create a suitable stink, what are we saying? That it’s OK to run a whole load of tests that give results that aren’t worth having?”

With UK cases running high, McNally said it may make sense to drop PCR testing in favour of lateral flow tests. “Why continue to use this huge amount of taxpayers’ money to provide PCR tests for an infection that the government is doing nothing to control? It makes zero sense,” he said. “We can use the enormous testing budget for something that might make a difference, such as supporting people who need to isolate.”

Dr Will Welfare, the incident director for Covid-19 at the UKHSA, said the investigation into Immensa was ongoing. “There is no evidence of any faults with lateral flow devices or PCR test kits themselves and the public should remain confident in using them and in other laboratory services currently provided.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/23/covid-testing-failures-at-uk-lab-should-have-been-flagged-within-days>

Coronavirus

Unions warn of ‘winter of chaos’ without urgent action to curb Covid



A man puts on his mask as he enters Oxford Street underground in London
Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

[Heather Stewart](#) Political editor

Fri 22 Oct 2021 14.00 EDT

Trade union leaders representing 3 million frontline workers have warned that the government risks “another winter of chaos” if urgent action is not taken to curb the spread of Covid, including mandatory mask-wearing in shops and on public transport.

In a joint statement, unions including Usdaw, Unison, Unite, the GMB and Aslef attacked the government’s “laissez-faire approach to managing the pandemic” after the prime minister insisted it was [not yet time to impose fresh restrictions](#).

“We all want to beat Covid once for all and to avoid further lockdowns. But without decisive action now, we risk sleepwalking into another winter of chaos,” the union leaders said, in a joint statement also signed by the TUC general secretary, Frances O’Grady.

The intervention from the unions came as:

- Sage said moving early to tackle rising Covid infections could help avoid harsher measures later on.
- Regional health chiefs broke with government policy to ask the public to wear masks and work from home.
- Official figures showed that one in 55 people in England had Covid-19 in the week ending 16 October, a level last seen in mid-January.

The unions’ members work in retail, transport, healthcare and other sectors where working from home is all but impossible.

“With hundreds of Covid outbreaks at workplaces being reported to health authorities each week, events feel ominously reminiscent of last winter,” they said. “The government must act now to reduce the spread of Covid. Failure to do so will risk public health, frontline services and the economy.”

Their plea chimed with warnings in documents released by the Sage committee of experts, published on Friday, that early intervention is more effective than delayed action, as cases rise – though they stopped short of calling for immediate action.

“In the event of increasing case rates, earlier intervention would reduce the need for more stringent, disruptive and longer-lasting measures,” minutes of a Sage meeting held on 14 October record.

That echoed previous comments from the government’s chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, that it should “go hard and go early” in curtailing the spread of the virus.

Ministers said in September they would implement a “plan B”, including the return of mandatory mask-wearing in public places and the reintroduction of working from home guidance, if the NHS risked coming under unsustainable pressure.

New recorded infections dipped slightly to 49,298 on Friday. Over the past seven days, 947 people have died within 28 days of a positive Covid test, up 16% on a week earlier.

Boris Johnson, visiting a vaccine centre in London, said: “The numbers that we’re seeing at the moment are fully in line with what we expected in the autumn and winter plan.” He added that there was “[absolutely nothing to indicate](#)” that another lockdown might be necessary.

01:00

As Covid cases rise, Boris Johnson claims 'nothing to indicate' winter lockdown is likely – video

The Sage documents suggested that working from home guidance could be the most effective element of the plan.

According to a document from the Sage subgroups Spi-M, Spi-B and the EMG, “reintroduction of working from home guidance, for those who can, may have the largest impact on transmission out of the potential plan B measures”.

While the government is insistent that the pressures faced by the NHS are sustainable, at local level, a growing number of directors of public health (DPH) have begun urging local people to take steps including wearing masks and working from home.

The Guardian has learned of at least a dozen areas where this is the case. Alice Wiseman, the DPH for Gateshead, said: “Given the concerning rise in case numbers and the considerable pressures that we’re already seeing on NHS services, now is the time for us all to do whatever we can to avoid reaching crisis point. Taking basic precautions now, like wearing face masks, working from home where possible and keeping indoor spaces well ventilated, could help us to avoid returning to more disruptive restrictions.

“So although mandatory measures are not yet being introduced, I’d urge all of our communities to pull together and take these simple but effective steps now.”

The health secretary, Sajid Javid, reminded the public earlier this week of guidance [recommending mask-wearing in crowded indoor spaces](#), but ministers have continued to insist that it remains a matter of personal choice, and Conservative MPs at Westminster [rarely wear them](#).

As well as mandatory mask-wearing, the union leaders’ statement called for employers to be reminded of their duty to carry out workplace risk assessments to show how they are avoiding the spread of Covid; and for enhanced statutory sick pay to prevent people being forced back to work because they cannot afford to self-isolate.

Their plea comes after the NHS Confederation and British Medical Association (BMA) [sounded the alarm](#) on behalf of NHS leaders and doctors earlier this week about the challenges facing the health service.

Both bodies urged the government to implement “plan B” immediately. As well as mask-wearing and working from home, plan B includes introducing vaccine passports for venues such as nightclubs – a policy that would require a vote in parliament, and is deeply unpopular with Tory MPs.

Labour has not yet called for plan B to be triggered – though it was against the ending of mandatory mask-wearing in the summer. Instead, the shadow health secretary, Jon Ashworth, has highlighted the shaky rollout of vaccine boosters and jabs for 12-15-year-olds – part of the government’s plan A.

While they are not ruling out fresh restrictions, ministers are hoping next week’s half-term will act as a natural firebreak for the virus, given how prevalent it is among school-age children. The latest ONS infection survey showed that 8% of 11-16-year-olds had Covid in the week ending 16 October – far higher than any other age group.

The government has also kicked off a marketing campaign, with adverts to be shown in prime TV slots, to nudge the public to get their Covid boosters and flu jabs as winter approaches.

Ministers are considering asking the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation to shorten the gap between the second and booster doses of vaccine – though some government advisers believe that would make little difference.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/22/unions-warn-of-winter-of-chaos-without-urgent-action-to-curb-covid>

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NHS

Five charts that show how the NHS is under acute pressure



The number of patients waiting for treatment had risen to 5.7 million in August. Photograph: Rui Vieira/PA

[Ashley Kirk](#) [Niamh McIntyre](#) [Pamela Duncan](#) [Cath Levett](#)

Fri 22 Oct 2021 12.03 EDT

The [NHS](#) is caring for a rising number of Covid patients at the same time as it deals with a backlog of more than 5.7 million patients in England alone.

The head of the NHS Confederation [warned the government this week](#) that it must implement “plan B” winter measures – such as mask wearing and vaccine passports – to help deal with this accumulation of demand.

The warning came amid [sharply rising Covid infections](#) in recent weeks, with the UK recording the highest number of daily Covid deaths in seven months.

Here are five charts from the latest NHS data that show how demand on the health service is growing as we approach winter.

NHS bed occupancy is at the highest level in a year

Hospitals are more full than at any time since November 2020, according to Guardian analysis. This is the point at which NHS England started publishing [full daily bed occupancy data](#) in relation to Covid.

In the seven days to 19 October, 92.9% of beds were occupied across all trusts in England – but close to half of 126 acute trusts across England averaged 95% capacity or more in the same week (85% occupancy is the accepted international standard and 95% is seen by medics as dangerously high).

Just 5.6% of beds were occupied by Covid patients in the same week (this figure reached 33% in late January). However, overall bed occupancy is as high as it has been in almost a year with average bed occupancy increasing almost interrupted for more than two weeks now.

[Area chart showing how NHS bed occupancy is at highest level in a year](#)

Covid hospital patients are creeping up

One cause of the pressure on the NHS is the fact that the [number of Covid patients in hospital](#) is slowly creeping up.

The number of Covid patients in UK hospitals has remained above 5,000 since the end of July. This extended period of time in which the NHS has had to deal with a large number of Covid patients means that the NHS has not been granted a reprieve for four months now – and many are worried about what lies ahead with winter approaching.

Only three in five A&E patients are seen within four hours

The proportion of people seen within four hours is slipping. NHS England data shows that just 64% of patients in major A&Es were seen within four hours in September – a record low since the NHS started publishing this data in November 2010.

The equivalent figure for September last year was 81.7%, while it stood at 77% in September 2019, before the pandemic.

[Line chart showing how just two in three A&E patients are seen within four hours](#)

Record number of people waiting for treatment

The monthly NHS England figures show yet another climb in the [number of patients waiting for treatment](#), which stood at 5,715,698 in August. Before the pandemic, in January 2020, it stood at 4,417,420 – marking a 29.4% increase.

The median wait has also grown slightly to 11.5 weeks in August (from 10.9 last month), as has the proportion seen within 18 weeks (67.6%) compared with 68.3% in July. The number waiting over a year has gone down marginally from 293,102 in July to 292,138 in August.

[Line chart showing how 5.7 million people are waiting for treatment](#)

GPs have seen more people in 2021 compared with the last two years

GPs have seen 196.8 million people to date this year. That's up from 175.4 million in the first eight months of 2020 and 175.5 million in the first eight months of 2019.

This marks a 12.1% increase compared with 2019.

[Chart showing how GPs have seen more people in 2021 compared to the last two years](#)

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/oct/22/the-charts-that-show-how-the-nhs-is-under-pressure>

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‘Before we knew it we were riffing off each other like good musicians’: Bruce Springsteen and Barack Obama. Photograph: Rob DeMartin

Springsteen and Obama on friendship and fathers: ‘You have to turn your ghosts into ancestors’

‘Before we knew it we were riffing off each other like good musicians’: Bruce Springsteen and Barack Obama. Photograph: Rob DeMartin

Sat 23 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

President Barack Obama

Good conversations don’t follow a script. Like a good song, they’re full of surprises, improvisations, detours. They may be grounded in a specific time and place, reflecting your state of mind and the current state of the world. But the best conversations also have a timeless quality, taking you back into the realm of memory, propelling you forward toward your hopes and

dreams. Sharing stories reminds you that you're not alone – and maybe helps you understand yourself a little bit better.

When Bruce and I first sat down in the summer of 2020 to record [Renegades: Born in the USA](#), we didn't know how our conversations would turn out. What I did know was that Bruce was a great storyteller, a bard of the American experience – and that we both had a lot on our minds, including some fundamental questions about the troubling turn our country had taken. A historic pandemic showed no signs of abating. Americans everywhere were out of work. Millions had just taken to the streets to protest the murder of [George Floyd](#), and the then occupant of the White House seemed intent not on bringing people together but on tearing down some of the basic values and institutional foundations of our democracy.

Almost a year later, the world looks a shade brighter. But for all the change we've experienced as a nation and in our own lives since Bruce and I first sat down together, the underlying conditions that animated our conversation haven't gone away. And in fact, since the podcast was released, both of us have heard from folks from every state and every walk of life who've reached out to say that something in what they heard resonated with them, whether it was the imprint our fathers left on us; the awkwardness, sadness, anger and occasional moments of grace that have arisen as we navigate America's racial divide; or the joy and redemption that our respective families have given us. People told us that listening to us talk made them think about their own childhoods. Their own dads. Their own home towns.



Bruce Springsteen and Barack Obama record their podcast. Photograph: Rob DeMartin

Bruce Springsteen

When President Obama suggested we do a podcast together, my first thought was: “OK, I’m a high school graduate from Freehold, New Jersey, who plays the guitar … What’s wrong with this picture?” My wife Patti said: “Are you insane?! Do it! People would love to hear your conversations!”

The president and I had spent some time together since we met on the campaign trail in 08. That time included some long, telling conversations. These were the kind of talks where you speak from the heart and walk away with a real understanding of the way your friend thinks and feels. You have a picture of the way he sees himself and his world.

So I took Patti’s advice and followed the president’s generous lead, and before we knew it we were sitting in my New Jersey studio, riffing off each other like good musicians.

There were serious conversations about the fate of the country, the fortunes of its citizens, and the destructive, ugly, corrupt forces at play that would like to take it all down. This is a time of vigilance when who we are is being seriously tested.

We found a lot in common. The president is funny and an easy guy to be around. He'll go out of his way to make you feel comfortable, as he did for me so that I might have the confidence to sit across the table from him. At the end of the day we recognised our similarities in the moral shape of our lives. It was the presence of a promise, a code we strive to live by. Honesty, fidelity, a forthrightness about who we are and what our goals and ideas are, a dedication to the American idea and an abiding love for the country that made us.

We are both creatures stamped Born in the USA. Guided by our families, our deep friendships and the moral compass inherent in our nation's history, we press forward, guarding the best of us while retaining a compassionate eye for the struggles of our still young nation.

My father's house

Bruce Springsteen and Barack Obama talk about the impression their fathers made on their lives and their concept of manhood

Springsteen From when I was a young man, I lived with a man who suffered a loss of status and I saw it every single day. It was all tied to lack of work, and I just watched the low self-esteem. That was a part of my daily life living with my father. It taught me one thing: work is essential. That's why if we can't get people working in this country, we're going to have an awful hard time.

Obama It is. It is central to how people define themselves in the sense of self-worth. For all the changes that have happened in America, when it comes to "What does it mean to be a man?", I still see that same confusion, and the same limited measures of manliness today, as I had back then. And that's true, whether you're talking about African American boys or white boys. They don't have rituals, road maps and initiation rites into a clear sense of a male strength and energy that is positive as opposed to just dominating.

I talk to my daughters' friends about boys growing up, and so much of popular culture tells them that the only clear, defining thing about being a

man, about being masculine, is excelling in sports and sexual conquest ...

Springsteen And violence.

Obama And violence. Those are the three things. Violence, if it's healthy at least, is subsumed into sports. Later, you add to that definition: making money. How much money can you make? And there are some qualities of the traditional American male that are absolutely worthy of praise and worthy of emulating. That sense of responsibility, meaning you're willing to do hard things and make some sacrifices for your family or for future generations. But there is a bunch of stuff in there that we did not reckon with, which now you're seeing with [#MeToo](#), with women still seeking equal pay, with what we're still dealing with in terms of domestic abuse and violence. There was never a full reckoning of who our dads were, what they had in them, how we have to understand that and talk about that. What lessons we should learn from it. All that kind of got buried.



Bruce Springsteen's parents on their wedding day. Photograph: Springsteen Family Archives

Springsteen Yeah, but we sort of ended up being just 60s versions of our dads, carrying all the same sexism.

Obama You don't show emotion, you don't talk too much about how you're feeling: your fears, your doubts, your disappointments. You project a general "I've got this".

Springsteen Now, I had that tempered by having a father who was pretty seriously mentally ill, and so in high school I began to become very aware of his weaknesses even though, outwardly, he presented as kind of a bullish guy who totally conformed to that standard archetype. Things went pretty wrong in the last years of high school and in the last years that I lived with him at our house. There was something in his illness or in who he was that involved a tremendous denying of his family ties. I always remember him complaining that if he hadn't had a family he would've been able to take a certain job and go on the road. It was a missed opportunity. And he sat there over that six-pack of beers night after night after night after night and that was his answer to it all, you know? So we felt guilt. And that was my entire picture of masculinity until I was way into my 30s, when I began to sort it out myself because I couldn't establish and hold a relationship; I was embarrassed simply having a woman at my side. I just couldn't find a life with the information that he'd left me, and I was trying to over and over again.

You think: if I can't get to him and I can't have him, I'll be him. I'm on stage. I'm in workmen's clothes. I've never worked a job in my life

Bruce Springsteen

All the early years I was with Patti, if we were in public I was very, very anxious. I could never sort that through, and I realised: "Well, yeah, these are the signals I got when I was very young: that a family doesn't strengthen you, it weakens you. It takes away your opportunity. It takes away your manhood." And this is what I carried with me for a long, long time. I lived in fear of that neutering, and so that meant I lived without the love, without the companionship, without a home. And you have your little bag of clothes and you get on that road and you just go from one place to the next.

And you don't notice it when you're in your 20s. But, right around 30, something didn't feel quite right. Did you have to deal with that at all?

Obama So there's some stuff that's in common and then there's stuff that tracks a little differently. So my father leaves when I'm two. And I don't see him until I'm 10, when he comes to visit for a month in Hawaii.

Springsteen What brought him to visit you eight years after he left?



Barack Obama with his father Barack Sr around 1971. Photograph: Obama-Robinson Family Archives

Obama So the story is that my father grows up in a small village in the north-western corner of Kenya. And he goes from herding goats to getting on a jet plane and flying to Hawaii and travelling to Harvard, and suddenly he's an economist. And in that leap from living in a really rural, agricultural society to suddenly trying to pretend he's this sophisticated man about town, something was lost. Something slipped. Although he was extraordinarily confident and charismatic and, by all accounts, could sort of run circles around people intellectually, emotionally, he was scarred and damaged in all kinds of ways that I can only retrace from the stories that I heard later, because I didn't really know him. Anyway, when he's a student in Hawaii, he meets my mother. I am conceived. I think the marriage comes after the conception.

But then he gets a scholarship to go to Harvard and he decides: “Well, that’s where I need to go.” He’s willing to have my mother and me go with him, but I think there are cost issues involved and they separate. But they stay in touch. He goes back to Kenya, gets a government job, and he has another marriage and another set of kids.

Springsteen When he comes back to visit you, he has another family ...

Obama He’s got another family, and I think he and his wife are in a bad spot. And I think he was probably trying to court my mother and to convince her to grab me and move all of us to Kenya, and my mother, who still loved him, was wise enough to realise that was probably a bad idea. But I do see him for a month. And ... I don’t know what to make of him. Because he’s very foreign, right? He’s got a British accent and he’s got this booming voice and he takes up a lot of space. And everybody kind of defers to him because he’s just a big personality. And he’s trying to sort of tell me what to do.

He’s like, “Anna” – that’s what he’d call my mother; her name was Ann – “Anna, I think that boy ... he’s watching too much television. He should be doing his studies.” So I wasn’t that happy that he had showed up. And I was kind of eager for him to go. Because I had no way to connect to the guy. He’s a stranger who’s suddenly in our house.

In some cases, people whose fathers aren’t there – and whose mothers are really bitter about it – what they absorb is how terrible that guy was

Barack Obama

So he leaves. I never see him again. But we write. When I’m in college I decide: “If I’m going to understand myself better, I need to know him better.” So I write to him and I say: “Listen, I’m going to come to Kenya. I’d like to spend some time with you.” He says: “Ah, yes. I think that’s a very wise decision, you come here.” And then I get a phone call, probably about six months before I was planning to go, and he’s been killed in a car accident.

But two things that I discovered, or understood, later. The first was just how much influence that one month that he was there had on me, in ways that I

didn't realise.

He actually gave me my first basketball. So I'm suddenly obsessed with basketball. How'd that happen, right? But I remember that the other thing we did together was, he decided to take me to a [Dave Brubeck](#) concert. Now, this is an example of why I didn't have much use for the guy, because, you know, you're a 10-year-old American kid and some guy wants to take you to a jazz concert.

Springsteen Take Five, you're not going to love ...

Obama Take Five! So I'm sitting there and ... I kind of don't know what I'm doing there. It's not until later that I look back and say: "Huh." I become one of the few kids in my school who's interested in jazz. And when I got older my mother would look at how I crossed my legs or gestures and she'd say: "It's kind of spooky."

The second thing that I learned was, in watching his other male children – who I met and got to know later when I travelled to Kenya – I realised that, in some ways, it was probably good that I had not lived in his home. Because, much in the same way that your dad was struggling with a bunch of stuff, my dad was struggling, too. It created chaos and destruction and anger and hurt and long-standing wounds that I just did not have to deal with.



Springsteen the garage rocker in 1968. Photograph: Springsteen Family Archives

Springsteen The thing that happens is: when we can't get the love we want from the parent we want it from, how do you create the intimacy you need? I can't get to him and I can't have him. I'll be him. That's what I'll do. I'll be him ... I'm way into my 30s before I even have any idea that that's my method of operation. I'm on stage. I'm in workmen's clothes. I've never worked a job in my life.

My dad was a beefy, bulky guy. I've played freaking guitar my whole life, but I've got 20 or 30 extra pounds on me from hitting the gym. Where'd that come from? Why do I spend hours lifting up and putting down heavy things for no particular reason? My entire body of work, everything that I've cared about, everything that I've written about, draws from his life story.

Here is where I was lucky. At 32, I go into hardcore analysis. I don't have my children until I'm 40, so I'm eight years into looking into a lot of these things, because what I found out about that archetype was it was fucking destructive in my life. It drove away people I cared about. It kept me from knowing my true self. And I realised: "Well, if you wanna follow this road, go ahead. But you're going to end up on your own, my friend. And if you want to invite some people into your life, you better learn how to do that."

And there's only one way you do that: you've got to open the doors. And that archetype doesn't leave a lot of room for those doors to be open because that archetype is a closed man. Your inner self is forever secretive and unknown: stoic, silent, not revealing of your feelings.



Bruce Springsteen, his wife Patti Scialfa and the kids go sledding.
Photograph: Springsteen Family Archives

Well, you've got to get rid of all of that stuff if you want a partnership. If you want a full family, and to be able to give them the kind of sustenance and nurture and room to grow they need in order to be themselves and find their own full lives, you better be ready to let a lot of that go, my friend.

My dad never really spoke to me through [to] the day he died. He didn't know how. He truly did not. He just didn't have the skills at all. And once I understood how ill he was, it makes up for a lot of it. But when you're a six-year-old or an eight-year-old or a nine-year-old boy, you're not going to have an understanding of what your father is suffering with, and ...

Obama You end up wrestling with ghosts.

Springsteen I guess that's what we all do.



Barack Obama with his children Malia and Sasha. Photograph: Obama-Robinson Family Archives

Obama And ghosts are tricky because you are measuring yourself against someone who is not there. And, in some cases, I think people whose fathers aren't there – and whose mothers are feeling really bitter about their fathers' not being there – what they absorb is how terrible that guy was and you don't want to be like that guy.

In my mother's case, she took a different tack, which was that she only presented his best qualities and not his worst. And in some ways that was beneficial, because I never felt as if I had some flawed inheritance; something in me that would lead me to become an alcoholic or an abusive husband or any of that. Instead, what happened was I kept on thinking: "Man, I got to live up to this." Every man is trying to live up to his father's expectations or live up to his mistakes.

You know, Michelle wonders sometimes: "Why is it that you just feel so compelled to just do all this hard stuff ? I mean, what's this hole in you that just makes you feel so driven?" And I think part of it was kind of early on feeling as if: "Man, I got to live up to this. I got to prove this. Maybe the reason he left is because he didn't think it was worth staying for me, and no,

I will show him that he made a mistake not hanging around, because I was worth investing in.”

Springsteen You’re always trying to prove your worth. You’re on a lifetime journey of trying to prove your worth to ...

Obama Somebody that’s not there.

Springsteen The trick is you have to turn your ghosts into ancestors. Ghosts haunt you. Ancestors walk alongside you and provide you with comfort and a vision of life that’s going to be your own. My father walks alongside me as my ancestor now. It took a long time for that to happen.

This is a condensed and edited extract from [Renegades: Born in the USA](#) by Barack Obama and Bruce Springsteen. It is published on Tuesday (Viking, £35).

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Consumer affairs

Air source heat pumps: how the costs and savings stack up



An air source heat pump is installed at a home. Photograph: Andrew Aitchison/In Pictures/Getty Images



[Miles Brignall](#)

Sat 23 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

Householders are being encouraged to ditch their old gas and oil-fired boilers and replace them with new clean, green heat pumps.

In the run-up to the Cop26 climate summit, the UK government has set out plans to offer grants to help households install air source heat pumps and other low-carbon heating systems over the next three years.

Central and hot water heating accounts for about 20% of the UK's carbon emissions. An air source heat pump running on renewable electricity will heat a home much more sustainably, which is why ministers are encouraging consumers to make the switch.

Q&A

What are heat pumps and why is the UK government pushing them?

Show



In simple terms, an electric heat pump works like a reverse fridge, extracting warmth from the outside air, the ground or a nearby water source before concentrating the heat and transferring it indoors. They can usually be found outside a home, and they look like a standard air-conditioning unit.

About 85% of UK homes use gas boilers for heating, making it one of the most polluting sectors of the economy. The fossil fuels used in our homes for heating, hot water and cooking make up more than a fifth of the UK's carbon emissions, meaning low-carbon alternatives are critical if the UK government hopes to meet its climate targets.

Jillian Ambrose

Photograph: KBImages/<https://www.alamy.com>

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

What are they and how do they work?

In simple terms, an air source heat pump works like a reverse fridge, extracting warmth from the outside air before concentrating it and transferring it indoors to provide central heating and hot water. The pumps

look like a standard air-conditioning unit and need to be situated outside the home. They will work at temperatures of minus 15c and lower, although the colder the outside temperature, the more electricity they need to consume to heat your home. Ground source heat pumps work in a similar way but collect the heat from pipes running underground. These are more efficient but are harder to retrofit to existing homes unless you are prepared to dig up your garden.



An air source heat pump extracts warmth from the outside air before concentrating it and transferring it indoors to provide hot water and central heating. Photograph: Jenny Detrick/Getty Images

What does it cost to install one?

Don't believe some of the quoted prices that have appeared in recent days, someone with a family-size three-bed house and larger can expect to pay £8,000-£15,000 in total to install a complete air source system, while fitting out a bigger home will cost more. Alongside the pump, that price will include a new hot water tank and labour. The final bill will depend on whether your existing radiators are large enough or need to be replaced. You are also advised to upgrade your home's insulation at the same time, which could add considerably to the final bill, depending on your home's

construction. Fitting a ground source pump will cost much more – typically upwards of £15,000.

What financial help is there?

This week the government announced it will be giving households grants of £5,000 to help them install ASHPs, with the total money allocated enough to cover 90,000 homes. There will be grants of up to £6,000 available for ground source heat pumps.

What has been less publicised is the fact that you can already apply for funding via the Renewable Heat Incentive

The grants will be available from April 2022, and details of how consumers will apply are yet to be published. The scheme will operate for three years. It is highly likely that it will be oversubscribed, meaning those who can fulfil the criteria quickest will receive the grants.

What has been less publicised is the fact that you can already apply for funding via the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI). Buyers have to pay for the work upfront and then reclaim the RHI payments, which are paid quarterly for the first seven years of ownership. The total paid to a household under the RHI depends on the measure installed, the home energy performance and the type and age of the boiler being replaced. Those replacing an old oil-fired boiler receive the most – typically £9,000. If you replace an old gas boiler in a family-size house you can expect to receive a total £7,000. There is a calculator on the [Gov website](#).

To gain the RHI money you must use an MCS-accredited installer and there is a somewhat torturous application process. The RHI will close to new applications on 31 March 2022.

What do air source heat pumps cost to run?

People ripping out an inefficient old oil-burning boiler should reduce their annual energy bill by going for an ASHP – but not by a huge amount. Those taking out a gas boiler are highly unlikely to see any savings and could well

end up paying more each year. Octopus [Energy](#) says in a poorly insulated home it will cost as much as 40% more to run a heat pump rather than a traditional boiler. This is because the cost of electricity includes carbon taxes and subsidies to support low-carbon energy projects. Green groups have called on the government to move these levies on to gas bills instead to encourage households to turn their backs on oil and gas.

Do they work as well as a conventional boiler?

A properly installed ASHP system, which is the right size for the property, should keep house warm on the coldest winter days. They typically operate at 55C rather than the 60-80C that gas boilers will often work at, which is why they can require bigger radiators. They work particularly well with underfloor heating and are designed to keep indoor spaces at a steady temperature with gentle top-ups through the day.

What are the downsides?



Air source heat pumps will work at temperatures of minus 15c and lower, although the colder the outside temperature, the more electricity they need to consume to heat your home. Photograph: KBImages/Alamy

The biggest problem is that a great many UK homes are not suitable for an ASHP. Flat owners have struggled to get permission, and that's assuming the installer has found a way to make a system work inside a confined space. Retrofitting a system with an existing boiler is not for the faint of heart on the basis that much of the plumbing will need to be replaced. You will also need a place to store a water tank.

There have been concerns over the reliability and longevity of some systems. Mitsubishi pumps appear to be well regarded, as do those coming out of Scandinavia, and, more recently, the Northern Irish supplier, Red. Some installed in coastal towns have suffered premature wear because of the high salt content in the air.

Is it worth it?

If you are gutting and restoring a house and putting in a whole new heating system along with a major insulation upgrade, installing an ASHP – or, even better, a ground source pump – along with underfloor heating is a no-brainer. Equally, if you are currently running an old boiler that needs replacing anyway.

Whether you will want to rip out a perfectly good, modern gas boiler will largely depend on how keen you are to move to zero carbon heating, the level of your home's insulation and, if your insulation is poor, whether you are prepared to see your bills rise.

Is it worth waiting for an alternative technology to emerge?

Possibly. A great deal of investment is being put into community ground source heat systems, where whole roads, estates and tower blocks are plumbed into a central ground source that runs under the road. Simon Lomax, who runs Kensa Heat Pumps in Cornwall believes these offer a much better long-term solution as they are more efficient and durable, and don't have many of the downsides of ASHPs. Hydrogen is the other great hope. Trials and schemes are testing whether the highly flammable element can be used safely.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2021/oct/23/air-source-heat-pumps-how-the-costs-and-savings-stack-up>

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Money

‘It’s been brilliant’: air source heat pump will recoup cost for owner



Steve and Wendy Knight paid just over £14,000 for the heating and hot water system and will recoup £9,000 of the cost through the Renewable Heat Incentive. Photograph: Wendy Knight



Miles Brignall

Sat 23 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

Wendy and Steve Knight installed an air source heat pump (ASHP) heating system in their Grade II-listed, 18th century home in Hunton, North Yorkshire, and say they could not be happier with it.

Prior to its installation in the summer of 2020, they were relying on an oil-fired boiler and spending about £1,000 a year on two oil tanker deliveries. On top of that they were spending about £900 a year on electricity.

“We really wanted to get rid of the oil system on environmental grounds, and so when the 25-year-old boiler needed replacing we started looking at ASHPs instead as a way to reduce our carbon footprint,” says Wendy.

Q&A

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Jillian Ambrose

Photograph: KBImages/<https://www.alamy.com>

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

The couple paid Yorkshire [Energy](#) Systems from Harrogate just over £14,000 for the heating and hot water system. It was connected to the existing underfloor heating in their kitchen. A specially made hot water tank was installed under the stairs and 10 radiators were installed – significantly

larger than the ones that were in the property previously. In some cases they have been hung vertically to make the best use of the space.

“We were lucky in that we had already spent a lot of time and money insulating the house. It can get very cold here, -8C is not uncommon in the winter, and the house is always warm. It’s so warm now that we rarely need to put the radiators on in the bedroom. We have never run out of hot water, even with baths. You have to leave the heating running all the time in the winter, and turn the thermostat up and down as required. The house is so much warmer and drier than it was,” she says.

The couple will recoup £9,000 of the cost through the Renewable Heat Incentive paid over seven years. They now pay £160 a month (£1,920 a year) to their 100% renewable electricity supplier – meaning their running costs are around the same as before, and their annual bill now includes the recharging of an electric car for 6,000 miles a year.

“I would definitely encourage others to install one, but I would advise people to do their research on their chosen installer. Ours were absolutely brilliant, even helping us with the RHI application, but I have heard some horror stories. It’s quieter than the older boiler, and there’s no kerosene smell in the garden, and zero carbon emissions. It has been brilliant,” she says.

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A pioneering pilot, a vast wilderness, a drunken afternoon... Booker shortlisted authors reveal their inspirations



Top from left: Anuk Arudpragasam, Patricia Lockwood, Nadifa Mohamed; bottom from left: Maggie Shipstead, Damon Galgut and Richard Powers

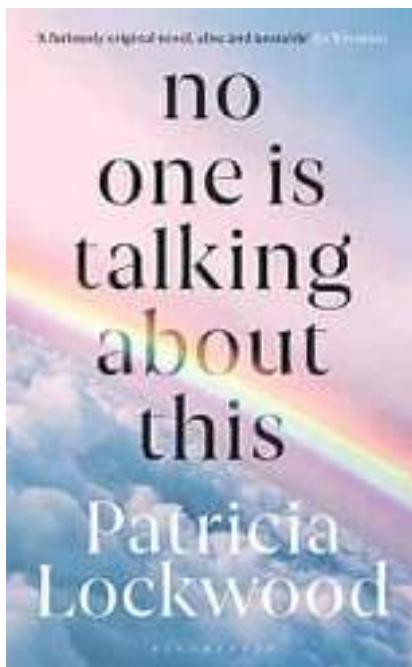
Patricia Lockwood, Anuk Arudpragasam, Maggie Shipstead, Richard Powers, Nadifa Mohamed and Damon Galgut

Sat 23 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

Patricia Lockwood

'I did not see a character, but rather a horizon'

The idea often comes on a heightened day, when you've had too much of something or too little of something else, or when everything is about to be completely different. On the day I started [No One Is Talking About This](#) we were moving apartments, and I was hiding from my husband in the bedroom so I didn't have to help – or, as he more charitably put it, so I didn't walk directly into the movers just as they were lifting my Glass Menagerie out the door.



I sat on the floor and began to read *Mrs Caliban*, the 1982 masterpiece by Rachel Ingalls. This was before it was rereleased, and I had long ago lent out my cherished copy with the abstract, beloved frogman on the cover. I barely remembered the lurking background sadness of the book, that the protagonist had lost a child. I did not yet know that I would have a niece,

and we would call her Little Froggy. I just felt the heightened moment, and for some inexplicable reason took a picture with my phone of the shadows that the vines were making on the wall, in my now empty bedroom, where I sat alone, not helping. I probably looked at the picture and considered whether I should post it.

The initial voice of Mrs Caliban asks: Are you living one day perpetually? I thought, I am living one day perpetually. I closed my eyes and saw forward movement. I did not see a character at all, but rather a horizon that she walked towards and could not reach, wide as a line of text. I thought: “What would happen if I wrote about my real day, as I really lived it,” and I wrote the first line. The horizon came no closer. I thought, I could write this book for ever, until something really happens.

When the news of the shortlist came I sat at the desk in the hotel room and tried to steady myself. I saw a roomful of people in ... gowns? Tuxedoes? Then I thought of the human face that I see so constantly: curling hair, damp forehead, large eyes. When they asked me how I felt, I said all I could say: that it was too much, it was immense, that I was grateful.

No One Is Talking About This by Patricia Lockwood is published by Bloomsbury.

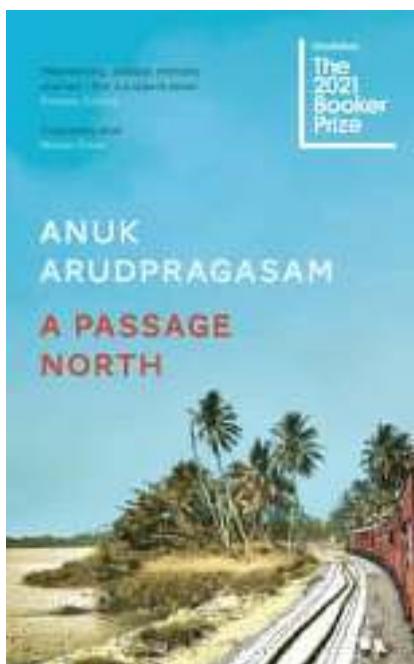


A military funeral in Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2000. Photograph: Gemunu Amarasinghe/AP

Anuk Arudpragasam

'The Sri Lankan civil war shaped my writing more than any firsthand experience'

There are certain events that seem to exist outside time, that seem to remain fixed in the mind, vivid and primordial, suspended in a kind of endless present. They stay with us as we wake, as we eat, and as we work, through all the little tribulations of everyday life.



For myself and members of my community, the destruction of Tamil society in northern Sri Lanka during the final two years of the civil war was such an event, and despite the fact that I was absent while it happened, precisely because I was absent, perhaps, it has shaped my writing more than anything I have felt or experienced firsthand. My first novel, *The Story of a Brief Marriage*, was an attempt to project myself into the midst of that great violence, a small, private penance born out of shame at my unscarred body and my easy life. It was a hard book to write, and when I finished I wanted to move on to less painful topics, to write about situations that were closer to

the world I actually inhabited. I began writing about the relationship between a young man and his grandmother in Colombo, a novel about desire, ageing and the passage of time. As the pages accumulated, though, I started noticing my earlier subject surfacing in oblique and unexpected ways, like little Freudian slips that betrayed my conscious plans. Disturbed by their appearance, my first impulse was to excise these moments of violence from the text, and it was only over the course of months and years that I came to accept what now seems obvious: that I was still unable to move on.

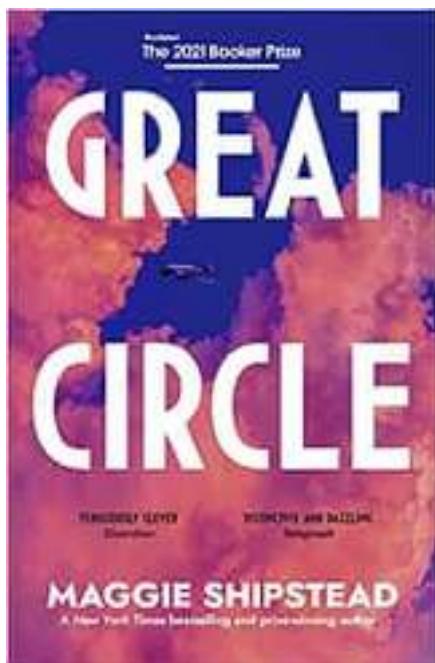
I decided I would write not about the violence, exactly, but about what it means to witness such violence from afar, to be unable to act or intervene, and then unable to forget. When violence of such magnitude becomes ingrained in one's consciousness even the most innocent habits begin to feel inappropriate, to seem frivolous or absurd or disrespectful. Everyday life becomes subject to constant scrutiny, to a relentless interrogation of what is consonant and dissonant with the awareness of genocide. A Passage North is about other things too – desire and longing, the possibilities of liberation – but above all it is about the daily life of such a consciousness, about how, even as time passes, certain events never let us go.

A Passage North by Anuk Arudpragasam is published by Granta.

Maggie Shipstead

‘A statue of the pilot Jean Batten caught my eye’

In October 2012, a statue outside the international terminal of Auckland airport caught my eye: a woman in an overcoat balanced on the balls of her feet as though striding forward, one hand cradling a bouquet of flowers and the other aloft, waving. This was the pilot Jean Batten, who, in 1936, had been the first person to fly solo from England to her home country of New Zealand. A quotation of hers, inscribed on the pedestal, began: “I was destined to be a wanderer.”



I was heading home to California after a solo trip around the South Island. At the time I had started what I'd thought would be my third novel, but the project had died on me 100 pages in, leaving me lost and mopey. Uncertainty about what to write next always feels like it's about to crystallise into never writing anything ever again. But Batten's triumphant bronze likeness and her confidence in her own destiny triggered a simple, decisive thought: I should write about an aviator.

Two years passed before I started work on *Great Circle*, and three more before I finished a mammoth 980-page first draft. Since I'm constitutionally unable to plan books before I start writing them, I was (forgive me) flying blind through the construction of a narrative involving two intertwined plotlines, multiple eras and voices, about a million distinct settings, an ever-expanding cast of characters, and occasional forays into natural and human history that reached as far back as the ice age. The research was constant and relentless, the scale of the process overwhelming. Partly in service of the book, I became a travel journalist during those years, and Marian's peripatetic life blurred into my reality.

When a novel is still in progress, it is alive in your private, inner world, roaming and shape-shifting. To finish it, for it to become a book, you must, in some ways, kill it. You freeze it in place, render it as immovable as a

fossil, extinguish its what-ifs, give up hope of taming its imperfections. But that is all necessary for it to live again in the minds of readers. The Booker shortlisting is an unexpected and indelible inflection point in the life of this book and my own, a joyful thing I'm grateful to be experiencing.

Great Circle by Maggie Shipstead is published by Doubleday.

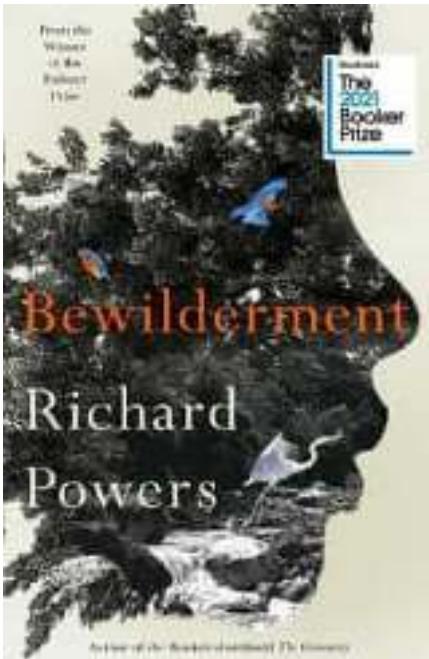


'A hard place to begin to write a novel' ... Great Smoky Mountains national park, Tennessee. Photograph: SeanPavonePhoto/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Richard Powers

'I was locked down in half a million acres of wilderness'

When the pandemic hit, I went into quarantine in the Great Smoky Mountains. It was a lucky place to be locked down, with half a million acres of wilderness in my backyard. But it proved to be a hard place to begin writing a new novel. I couldn't travel to explore the places where a new story might unfold. I couldn't interview people in person or gather print materials in a library, the way I usually do when setting out on a new project. But I pressed ahead in isolation, trying to fashion a story out of old bits of material that I had squirreled away for years.



Bewilderment Written by Richard Powers Photograph: PR

A month or two in, I hit the wall. My characters weren't coming alive, and I knew that something was wrong with my plot. When I can't write, it's usually a sign that I shouldn't be writing. And the best remedy I know for that impasse is to get out and walk.

I walked almost every day for a few weeks. One overcast afternoon, four miles down a remote trail that tracked a steep mountain stream, I felt a small boy walking alongside me, taking in the nearby heron that was fishing in the cascades, looking up at the tunnels of rhododendron and down at the carpets of hepatica and rue anemone. He seemed to say: "Are you for real?" It was the same phrase that a friend's beloved son, who had special needs, had always liked to ask me when he couldn't tell if I was being serious or just teasing. I thought that this visitor was asking if the world really was as rich and wild and lucky as the trail we were on. Then it seemed he was asking if we were really letting it all disappear.

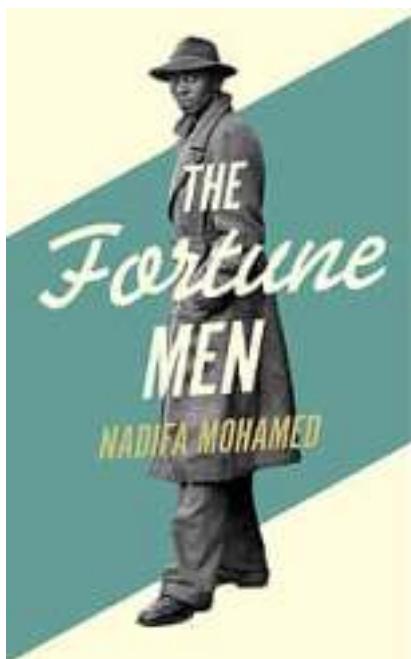
The vague impression passed quickly, but by the time I turned back and retraced the four miles to the trailhead, I could see my story's central character in detail.

Bewilderment by Richard Powers is published by Hutchinson Heinemann.

Nadifa Mohamed

'I was struck by a mugshot of a Somali sailor imprisoned in Cardiff in the 1950s'

Inspiration is a strange word; it sounds so clear and defined while the reality is much stranger. The desire to write *The Fortune Men* crept up on me over many years, a desire that would ebb and flow but never let me go. I first read about Mahmood Mattan in my early 20s when I had just finished a history and politics degree from Oxford with little knowledge of my own history. I was struck by a mugshot of a Somali sailor imprisoned in Cardiff in the 1950s in a tabloid newspaper: I remember discussing him with my friends and then my father, who told me he had known him when they both lived in Hull. I wanted to know what had brought Mahmood here and what had led to his lonely and early death in Cardiff prison.



Other books got in the way but there was a sense of unfinished business and in 2015 I started researching Mahmood's story in earnest. The National Archives allowed me a luxury I had never enjoyed before – transcripts, photos, receipts, all the hoarded documents of the British state – and as I read through them I saw the tragedy play out in real time. He had thought he understood how things worked in this country but those papers in their

bureaucratese showed how much he misunderstood the danger he was in. The relationship between writer and subject began to shift as his own defiant words rang in my mind; he could speak well enough for himself, it wasn't for me to create this character but to listen to and empathise with him.

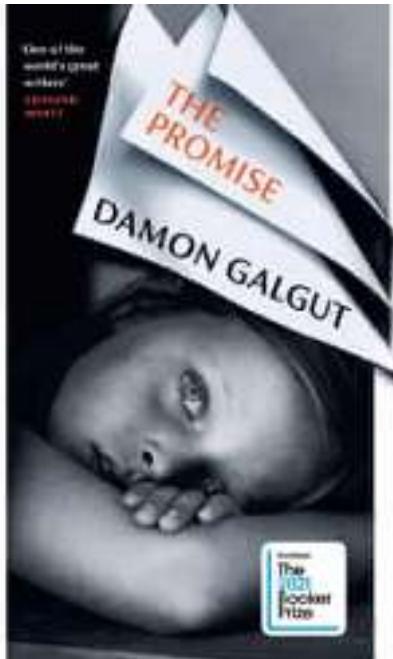
It was also easy to fall in love with the world that the novel was set in: I wish I had heard a young [Shirley Bassey](#) busking with her cap, that I had seen Tiger Bay alive as one of the most important docklands in the world. I felt I had found my kind of place and my kind of people. Mahmood was the spirit who had led me there and who still haunted it but the Britain that they had helped create – cosmopolitan, creative – was the one I wanted to declare loyalty to.

[The Fortune Men](#) by Nadifa Mohamed is published by Viking.

Damon Galgut

'The idea came to me one semi-drunk afternoon'

What goes into the writing of a book? Sometimes even the writer doesn't know. The origins of this novel probably lie in my childhood and the experience of growing up in Pretoria in the 1960s and 70s. My unhappy family life from back then is in there too, with all its fractures and foibles; to say nothing of the country at large, with its conflicting chorus of voices.



On a more conscious level, the idea for the book came to me one semi-drunken afternoon, listening to a friend describe the funerals of his parents, brother and sister. Unlikely though it sounds, he turned tragedy into comedy, by focusing on the antics of the living. At least one of his anecdotes – about a hysterical relative forcing the undertaker to open the coffin, to check the right corpse was inside – found its way into the novel. Dark stuff, to be sure; but not without its funny, human fringe.

The dramatist in me saw the potential in staging a family history in four acts, each one centred on a burial. And if each act took place in a different decade, with a different president in power, I saw a way to show the nation behind the family, and give a taste of the time.

Every narrative has its own voice, and it can take a while to find it. When I started writing, I floundered amongst all the death and decay. That wasn't my subject, but how to break free? Key in this case was setting the novel aside to do a film script. Not a fulfilling experience in itself, but revolutionary for the book when I came back to it. Here was the voice I was looking for: like the camera in a [Fellini](#) movie, a character in its own right, observing, commenting, mocking, wondering. The antidote to Death is Life, of course, and now I heard what it sounded like.

From that point, the writing took on a freedom I hadn't felt before. I could jump between multiple points of view, sometimes in a single sentence. I could even break the fourth wall, as theatre and film have been doing for decades, and address the reader directly. But why stop there? I saw other walls to knock down, and I'd found my hammer. No other writing experience has given me this kind of deep pleasure. Who knew that vandalism could be so much fun?

The Promise by Damon Galgut is published by Chatto.

The winner of the [Booker prize](#) will be announced on November 3 in an award ceremony held in partnership with the BBC and broadcast live from 7.15pm.

The winner will discuss their work and answer some of your questions at a special Guardian Live online event on Tuesday 9 November. Book tickets [here](#).

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2021.10.23 - Coronavirus

- [Covid news UK expert fears lockdown Christmas; vaccines alone not enough to curb variants – WHO](#)
- [Emily Lawson Former vaccine chief to return to NHS role amid concern over booster rollout](#)
- [UK Government accused of promoting travel tests at misleading prices](#)
- [Children English schools struggle to cope as virus wreaks havoc](#)

[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Saturday's coronavirus news: Russia defends Sputnik V vaccine; Britain's weekly cases at highest since July

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NHS

Former vaccine chief will return to NHS role amid concern over booster jabs rollout



Emily Lawson is to return to the NHS to lead the Covid vaccination programme. Photograph: Ian Davidson/Alamy

[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor

Fri 22 Oct 2021 17.21 EDT

The senior official credited with the early success of the Covid vaccine rollout in England is returning to the NHS to resume her role overseeing the programme, months after leaving to become the [head of Boris Johnson's Downing Street delivery unit](#).

Emily Lawson is ending her secondment at No 10 to return to NHS England amid concern that [the rollout of booster jabs in England is flagging](#).

Earlier this week Jeremy Hunt, the former health secretary, told Amanda Pritchard, the chief executive of NHS England, that the rollout needed to be “turbocharged” because [numbers were too low](#), especially with Covid infections rising sharply again.

In a statement first reported by the Health Service Journal, Pritchard said: “It is great news that Emily has agreed to return to lead the [NHS](#) Covid-19 vaccination programme as our response to the pandemic enters another crucial phase.”

Lawson had joined No 10 to head up the delivery unit set up by the prime minister to try to ensure that government policy commitments in key areas were being turned into action.

On Friday, she said: “The next phase of the vaccination programme is extremely important. We know that the vaccine is helping us to save lives and so we must focus all of our efforts on rolling out the booster campaign to everyone eligible, as well as ensuring that everyone who has not yet had their first jab, including young people, gets the chance to come forward.”

Briefings in newspapers attributed to government sources have criticised the NHS for not getting more jabs delivered fast enough. NHS England said this week that more than 4 million people have had a booster jab in just over a month.

Johnson again urged people to come forward for their boosters. In a video posted on Twitter on Friday, he said: “I wanted to just emphasise how important it is to come forward and get your booster jab against Covid, if and when you get the call.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/oct/22/former-vaccine-chief-will-return-to-nhs-role-amid-concern-over-booster-jabs-rollout>

Coronavirus

Government accused of promoting Covid travel tests at misleading prices



From Sunday, travellers entering England from many countries can take a lateral flow test rather than a PCR test. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

[Tom Ambrose](#)

Fri 22 Oct 2021 14.42 EDT

The government has been accused of promoting companies offering Covid lateral flow tests for holidaymakers at misleading prices.

From Sunday, fully vaccinated people arriving in [England](#) from countries not on the government's "red list" can take a lateral flow test instead of the more expensive PCR version.

But concerns were raised when the government published a list of firms providing tests on Friday as companies were accused of advertising

“clickbait” prices but then charging more and “gaming” the website to appear first.

Test providers are listed alphabetically, with many using symbols, numbers, or a combination of both, to appear higher up the list.

The Which? travel editor, Rory Boland, said: “The PCR testing system for travel has been operating for months now and yet there are still major issues with providers gaming the system to appear at the top of the government list and advertising prices lower than the true cost.

“Unfortunately this means that yet again you can’t trust the information on the government website. The government’s list should be your starting point, but you will need to do your own homework and research into the providers.”

Analysis by PA Media found many of the companies with the lowest prices either did not actually allow customers to book tests, or the prices were much higher than initially advertised.

Some tests were offered from as little as £14.94, but clicking through to websites gave much higher prices. Frustrated travellers on Twitter accused firms of “fake advertising” and “clickbait”.

Boland said: “Problems that consumers have faced with the PCR testing market have been well documented so it’s inexcusable these issues have been repeated for the lateral flow testing system.”

Paul Charles, the chief executive of travel consultancy the PC Agency, said: “Why does the government fail to learn? Yet again it is quoting prices for day-two tests which are not reflected by the actual test providers on their own websites.

“Its poor oversight and lack of regulation of this multibillion-pound industry continues to beggar belief.”

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said: “These reports are inaccurate and misleading - the average price is between £20 and £30 for

lateral flow tests and there is no provider listed on gov.uk offering lateral flow tests at £150.

“The UK Health Security Agency has put in place extensive checks to ensure pricing is fair and affordable for travellers. It is unacceptable for any private testing company to take advantage of holidaymakers and any private providers showing misleading pricing on gov.uk are being removed.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/22/travellers-call-out-fake-advertising-on-official-covid-test-provider-list>

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Coronavirus

English schools struggle to cope as Covid wreaks havoc



Pupils queue before taking Covid-19 tests as they return to school at Copley academy in Stalybridge, England. Photograph: Anthony Devlin/Getty Images

[Sally Weale](#) and [Nicola Davis](#)

Fri 22 Oct 2021 12.33 EDT

Schools in [England](#) hit by high numbers of Covid-19 cases among staff and pupils have been forced to reinstate mask wearing, send whole year groups home to study online and in some cases close early for half-term as the pandemic continues to wreak havoc in education.

Despite the government narrative of a return to normality in classrooms, schools in areas with high coronavirus rates say they have struggled to function, with many staff off sick and problems securing supply teachers because of high demand.

This week, for example, one Devon school was missing a third of its workforce, a school in Wiltshire was forced to send two year groups home early for half-term and a Buckinghamshire junior school closed and moved to online learning. In Northamptonshire, meanwhile, the Guardian has learned that one primary school had almost 50% of pupils off with Covid during a period of about a week between the end of September and 5 October.

The school has since introduced key stage bubbles and restrictions to social contacts and external visitors, but according to unions there have been delays in many areas across the country in introducing mitigating measures because of a lack of clear advice.

Julie McCulloch, director of policy at the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), said local public health officials had the option within the government's guidance to introduce enhanced measures in schools to tackle infection rates. She said: "Some have already done this, but many schools and colleges are struggling to get clear advice when they have an outbreak and feel they are, yet again, being left to manage a public health crisis with insufficient support."

In a recent ASCL survey more than 90% of headteachers said teaching and learning had been impacted by pupil and staff absence this term and almost a third said the impact had been severe, while four out of five had been targeted by anti-vaccination campaigners. In one case a pupil was pushed into the road by a protester after refusing to take a leaflet. "The anti-vax movement is more prolific and louder than scientific or NHS argument," said one headteacher with a 35% consent rate.



Ben Davis: ‘Schools have been thrown into this with no measures or restrictions and we’ve been told to deal with it.’ Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

“People are on their knees,” said Ben Davis, headteacher at St Ambrose Barlow RC high school in Wardley, Greater Manchester. “There’s never been such a hard half-term as this, during the whole pandemic. [Schools](#) have been thrown into this with no measures or restrictions and we’ve been told to deal with it.”

Covid rates have been higher in his school than before, with 80 positive cases and up to 14 staff off at a time. “We’ve reinstated masks in corridors and classrooms on the advice of public health. Achieving cooperation with that is much, much harder than it was as there’s nowhere else in their lives that children are having to wear masks.”

In Cornwall it has been similarly challenging. “We have had school closures and several year group closures across primary and secondary, with a couple having to close early for half-term due to staffing pressures,” said David Barton, executive officer of the Cornwall Association of Secondary School Headteachers. “Our Covid rates have remained high since the summer and are increasing – currently 555 per 100,000 – and half of all cases are in school-aged children.”

The government's vaccination rollout for 12- to 15-year-olds is fraught with problems. Take-up among Cornish pupils is higher than the national average, said Barton, "but capacity to roll out the immunisation at pace simply isn't there so less than half our schools have so far had any immunisations."

Elsewhere local authorities have been accused by unions of failing to support schools to take steps to mitigate high case numbers. While Cambridgeshire has taken action in schools to bring back masks in communal spaces, social distancing for staff and online meetings where possible, the situation has played out very differently in other parts of the country, including Northamptonshire – an area where case rates are among the highest in England at just over 642 cases per 100,000 people in the most recent seven days for which data is available.

Rachelle Wilkins, the regional officer for the GMB union in Northamptonshire, said: "I've been visiting schools in the last four or five weeks. And it's been basically a free-for-all. I've been into a school this morning and worn a face mask in a meeting – nobody else had a face mask on."

On 11 October a letter from six trade unions, including the GMB, was sent to local authority chief executives and directors of public health across England, asking for urgent steps to be taken to help keep pupils safe in schools. Wilkins said the North Northamptonshire unitary council had moved to reintroduce face masks in schools, though headteachers will be able to use their discretion.

Lucy Wightman, joint director of public health at North and West Northamptonshire councils, said schools had been following DfE guidance since the start of the new school year and are being supported by the council's team.

"Directors of public health do not have the authority to override the DfE guidance in place," she said. "We are only able to offer advice to schools. Headteachers have to take the final decision themselves."

Wightman said a letter was sent on Friday to parents via schools. “This provides advice for during half-term and on return to school. The letter includes the ask that pupils adhere to any requests made by headteachers for the use of face coverings where infection risks are identified and/or outbreaks occur, and that parents support this,” she said.

A Guardian callout to readers prompted dozens of responses from anxious teachers and parents. “All the hand sanitising dispensers are empty and everyone is acting as if there is no pandemic at all,” said one secondary teacher. “Our school has seen more upheaval than when we were closing for bubbles,” said another. “One class had 30% positive cases this week. Parents are demanding online learning for their sick children but we are on our knees just trying to keep classes running.”

“It’s genuinely very varied across contexts and locations,” said Robin Bevan, headteacher of Southend high school for boys. “Case numbers are rising, which is noticeable in pupil absence levels, and challenging for sustaining remote and on-site learning, but not yet at a level that disrupts significantly.

“There is a lurking background fear that it will get worse and that there isn’t really a plan. We do seem to have been left to get on with it. The reservoirs of resilience are running dry.”

Jules White, headteacher of Tanbridge House school in Horsham, West Sussex, said there had been about 200 student infections to date in his school. “The pressures of supporting students who continue to have their learning disrupted are significant especially when colleagues are also having periods of isolation that last 10 days.”

Confidence in the government is wearing thin. “In the middle of the pandemic the government said all children’s schooling was their ‘first priority’,” said White. “I will believe that if we see substantial investment in education after the upcoming comprehensive spending review.”

A Department for Education spokesperson responded: “The protective measures in place in schools strike a balance between managing

transmission risk – with enhanced ventilation, regular Covid testing and vaccinations of older students and staff – and reducing disruption to education by removing the need for close contacts in bubbles to self-isolate and for face coverings to be worn in most cases.

“If there are particularly high Covid case rates in schools or colleges in their local area, local directors of public health may advise they reintroduce temporary additional measures such as increased testing, but face-to-face education should be prioritised.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/22/english-schools-struggling-to-cope-as-covid-wreaks-havoc>

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2021.10.23 - Opinion

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- The Saudis may own Newcastle United, but it will always be an odd relationship
- Finally, Facebook can say it's not the most toxic social network
- China, India and Brazil must set out their plans to cut emissions

[Opinion](#)[Energy industry](#)

Britain's oil and gas workers want a green transition – but the industry doesn't

[Erik Dalhuijsen](#)



Workers on a North Sea oil platform off Aberdeen, 2019. Photograph: Andy Buchanan/AFP/Getty Images

Sat 23 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

Moving to a green energy system and a zero-emissions society without leaving people behind is an enormous challenge. Many oil and gas workers are actually ready for the change, but the oil and gas industry itself is slowing the process, holding back real progress.

Having worked in the oil industry in Aberdeen and abroad for decades, what I have seen feels like the industry applying all of its power to self-

preservation, in the face of the immutable truths that fossil fuels will one day run out and that we must keep what of them remains in the ground.

Oil and gas workers need alternatives and fast. I have seen what happens in communities where oil and gas jobs dry up with no plan B in place. When the price of oil [crashed in 2014](#), thousands of people in the region lost their job. I know former colleagues who used to work on multimillion-pound projects and are now unemployed or working in shops on the minimum wage.

I know that moving from oil and gas to renewables is possible. My skills helped me understand and troubleshoot the emissions models that underpin sustainable development plans. My skills allowed me to evaluate and optimise integrated renewable supply systems, and also decarbonise sewage treatment processes. Many people in the oil industry – including those who work offshore – have even more skills that can be transferred into the renewable energy sector, such as working on offshore wind farms.

But it still feels like the industry is refusing to adapt, all the while pretending to be leaders in “energy transition”. In the hope of selling more gas, the industry is pushing dirty (blue) hydrogen based on the yet-untested promise that carbon capture and storage will be able to remove any emissions at scale.

Cop26 in Glasgow is a chance to remind ourselves that the leaders of the oil and gas industry may not be on our side. They sell and make a profit from fossil fuels and need to be removed from the conversation as their interests are in conflict with lowering emissions.

The government must put an immediate stop to further oil exploitation licences [such as Cambo](#), and set accelerated decommissioning timelines for those currently in existence. We needn’t worry about the financial collapse of oil companies: in addition to continued oil production as the fields decline, half of their £50bn costs of decommissioning and clean-up work in the North Sea will be [paid by the taxpayer](#).

At the same time, efforts can be made to grow the green economy. Once truly running, there will be jobs aplenty, as shown in many in-depth studies. To get there, the government needs to lead strongly by setting specific and urgent decarbonisation goals, upon which the industry can build long-term plans.

Finally, cooperation between government, industry, unions and recruiters is needed to match workers' skills, attitudes and aptitudes to new job openings. This will require facilitation with some retraining opportunities, as the green sector still seems reluctant to consider oil industry CVs.

We need to move away from fossil fuel production – and making the best use of the experienced and capable people in the fossil fuel industry will both accelerate the transition and ensure nobody gets left behind.

- Erik Dalhuijsen is a consultant petroleum and sustainability engineer and a climate change activist living in Aberdeen
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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/oct/23/britain-oil-gas-workers-industry>.

OpinionNewcastle

The Saudis may own Newcastle United, but it will always be an odd relationship

[Ian Jack](#)



Illustration by Nathalie Lees

Sat 23 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Newcastle had been mining coal for at least six centuries when, in March 1938, the American geologist Max Steineke [struck oil in eastern Saudi Arabia](#). His find had momentous consequences: what turned out to be the world's largest exploitable oil reserves made Saudi Arabia crucial to the global economy and the politics of the Middle East, and a kingdom that other countries found it useful to befriend.

The effects have been unfurling for the past 80 years, and in Newcastle you might say with contrasting results: harsh and kind. First: by vastly swelling and cheapening the oil supply, Saudi Arabia helped finish off the original source of Newcastle's prosperity and significance (together with most of Europe's deep-mine coal industry). Second: with [this month's purchase of Newcastle United](#) FC, Saudi Arabia has revived the civic spirit and brightened the city's future.

The latter statement requires you to believe that the city and the football club have identical interests; that supporters and citizens share the same fealty; that the roof of the stadium at St James' Park, distinctive in the city-centre skyline, is a substitute for the shipyard cranes and the colliery winding gear whose silhouettes have disappeared.

There is, after all, only one football team in Newcastle: unlike the rival clubs of London and the pairings in the bigger English cities (to say nothing of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee), it carries the undivided burden of a city's adoration and despair. The fans like to think of themselves as "the geordie nation" and there may be something to that fancy – nationhood often being underpinned by what Sigmund Freud called "the narcissism of the small difference" as well as the notion of a golden past.

Newcastle United can supply both. No other club in England has an anthem as old as the Blaydon Races – it was first performed in a Newcastle music hall in 1862 – or as purposefully local in its references and its language, a word which the geordie dialect, infused with so much non-standard English, sometimes stretches to. And which English region has produced as many

renowned players – Jackie Milburn, the Charlton brothers, Paul Gascoigne, Alan Shearer – as Newcastle and its hinterland?

As for a golden past, there [it lies glittering in the dust](#): four times winners of the old First Division; six times winners of the FA Cup and seven times runners-up, the last significant Wembley triumph in 1955. According to attendance statistics, Newcastle were the best supported football club in England in the first half of the last century. In 1932, not just trains but steamships took thousands of flat-capped men south to that year's cup final.

The Saudi-backed consortium has acquired the stewardship of this tradition, as well as [ownership of the club, for £300m](#) – a bargain price. A club's history contributes to the passion of the stadium crowd, which adds to the excitement of the global television audience, which helps grow that audience, which increases advertising and viewer revenues, which adds to the profits of the TV channel and the Premier League ... and so on.

In this chain of value, the spectators in the stadium come second only to the players. (The wonder is that they pay to get in – they deserve fees as film extras.) Add to this structure the thorough globalisation of Premier League ownership, often foreign and sometimes remote, and you have the answer to the conundrum of why a supporter can speak of “our” club when it belongs to an oligarch, a sultan or [a baseball business](#).

Newcastle is now funded, however indirectly, by a regime that oppresses women and eliminates its [critics by murder and dismemberment](#); but what most supporters seem to feel is gratitude. In any case, BAE Systems has sold Saudi Arabia at least £6.9bn-worth of arms (an official figure – other estimates are far higher) since a Saudi-led coalition began bombing Yemen in March 2015. These are sales made under a government-to-government agreement and therefore “in our name”. A fan might ask, what's a football club in this scheme of things? And when will they hire a new manager, having terminated Steve Bruce (though he'll be OK with his few million quid payoff and his house in Darras Hall)?

Last Sunday afternoon I saw these avid, friendly people from the window of a Metro to Whitley Bay. Little family groups and big men wearing black-

and-white Newcastle shirts, all of them looking cheerful while they waited at Wallsend, Percy Main and North Shields for trains going the other way – into town, to see United v Spurs, the first game under the club's new ownership.

A few had tied tea-towels on their heads as make-do *kafiyas*. Another marched along the platform waving the Saudi flag – recognisable by its Qur'anic inscription in Arabic. Perhaps they did this as a welcome, perhaps as a thank you, perhaps as a piece of fun: all three, probably, but it embarrassed the new management, who on [Wednesday issued a statement](#) “kindly asking supporters to refrain from wearing traditional Arabic clothing or Middle East-inspired head coverings at matches if they would not ordinarily wear such attire”. The club stressed that nobody in the new ownership had been in any way offended, “but there remains the possibility that dressing this way is culturally inappropriate and risks causing offence to others”.

I like Newcastle. The handsome stone terraces, the steep slope down to the Tyne, the seven bridges across the river, the graceful curves of the railway arches, the arcades, the museums: who could have expected such filthy industries as coal, shipbuilding and alkali-making to have left such a beautiful residue?

Still, a town that likes to be known as “party city” makes an odd fit for the moral austerity of its football club's new funders. On a Friday and Saturday night, shoals of men and women sway down its handsome streets, keen to lose inhibition and find excess. Most cities in Britain now understand the meaning of “the evening economy”, but Newcastle remains its apogee: in its central drinking quarter, almost every shop has become a restaurant or a bar. It isn't Jeddah.

I first came here in 1956. Lying in my Newcastle hotel bed last Saturday, secure from the crowds on the Quayside, I remembered what I could of that visit. In the long gap between a change of trains – we were on our way from Scotland – my father had taken me down to the swing bridge, which opened on cue to let a yellow-funnelled steam tug sail downstream. The air itself seemed grey with smoke – from the trains on the bridges as well as the tug – and the buildings on the opposite shore were a jumble of black. The age of

the first fossil fuel was ending in Britain, though I didn't know that. It had made us and may ruin us, though that too wasn't known.

- Ian Jack is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionSocial media

Finally, Facebook can say it's not the most toxic social network

[Marina Hyde](#)



Donald Trump in the state dining room of the White House, Washington DC, June 2020. Photograph: Alex Brandon/AP

Fri 22 Oct 2021 08.10 EDT

By rights, these should really be what we might euphemise as Donald Trump's "hidden years". Though he might not have been expected to descend immediately to full [late-era Howard Hughes](#) – four-inch fingernails and tissue boxes on his feet – the aesthetics of this third act in Trump's American life felt promisingly tragicomic.

The 45th president would live out an excruciatingly undignified post-office twilight down at Mar-a-Lago, railing like some 19th-hole Lear about his lost kingdom, shuffling his sad buffet tray of trans fats along the line in the communal restaurants of his home/tacky-members'-club hybrid, and grabbing the mic at weddings held on the premises to assure bemused guests that he was days, maybe even hours, away from securing gamechanging recounts in this or that state.

The somewhat confounding thing is that Trump HAS been doing all this, yet remains the clear favourite to win the 2024 Republican nomination. The saving grace up to this point has been that you had to be fairly committed to seek out his thoughts. Attempts by Trump to make up for his various social media bans have thus far tended toward the lo-fi. There is an email list people can sign up to, and for less than a month there was a blog-style outlet called "[From the Desk of Donald J Trump](#)", which came across very much as a fax machine operating from the floor next to his toilet.

But now – or at least soon – he is [launching his own network](#), TRUTH Social, a name which feels par for the course from arguably Earth's most committed liar. [As he put it](#) this week: "We live in a world where the Taliban has a huge presence on Twitter, yet your favorite American President has been silenced ... This is unacceptable. I am excited to send out my first TRUTH on TRUTH Social very soon... Everyone asks me why doesn't someone stand up to Big Tech? Well, we will be soon!"

Anyway, there we are. Really the only entity for whom this is long-term good news is Facebook, which – against all odds – now has at least the promise of a more toxic social network than its own. Most timely for Mark

Zuckerberg, who currently resembles the middle photo of a magazine cover in which the goofy chef from Ratatouille is morphing into Voldemort. In recent days, it's been feeling like Mark will need more than metaverse plans and a [mooted corporate name-change](#) to distract from the various shits he's taken in his own in-tray.

So then to the latest impending Facebook exposé, also scheduled for landfall next week – an exposé people are currently only aware of thanks to the tip-off from Facebook. The news was [posted by Facebook](#) itself to its Twitter account, making it a non-scientific 30% more believable than something posted to a Facebook account. But still not what you'd call “believable”.

A sniffy thread of tweets saw [Facebook](#) trail an investigation based on leaked documents from within the firm, which is being worked on by what it says is 30 or more journalists from multiple media outlets. Facebook seemed particularly exercised that the release of the investigation was happening under an embargo – which feels the equivalent of reading your charge sheet and whining about the font it's in. It also seems to be very upset about the “curation” of the documents, which certainly suggests that the architects of News Feed have paused the rollout of their self-reflection feature.

Still, is there a more exciting player in the prebuttal space than Facebook, whose attempts to get out in front of the fortnightly exposés of its behaviour are fast becoming a totally non-ominous part of the early 21st-century powerscape? Of course, many of us have long accepted that when the firm finally causes the apocalypse, the event will be succeeded by a video of Facebook VP Nick Clegg going: “We will do better.” I am now beginning to think the event may even be preceded by a Clegg video announcing: “We will learn from this. Find out from WHAT when the darkness falls next week.”

For now, Facebook is only convincingly troubled by “disinformation” if it's about itself. We don't know what will emerge next week, but we can be almost sure how the firm will react to it. The usual MO of Facebook's chiefs has been to deny they even did the thing they're being accused of, until the position becomes untenable. At that point, they concede they did whatever it was on a very limited scale, until that position becomes untenable. Next up is accepting the scale was more widespread than initially indicated, but with

the caveat that the practice has now come to an end, until that position is the latest to become untenable.

Clear evidence that the practice never came to an end and, in fact, only became more widespread will come with aggressive reminders that it is not and never has been technically illegal. If and when whatever-it-is has been proved to be technically illegal after all, Facebook will accept the [drop-in-their-ocean fine](#), with blanket immunity for all senior officers, and move back to step one in the cycle. We get rinsed; they repeat.

So we'll have to see how plucky minnow startup TRUTH Social will fare in the landscape Facebook created. But it's already strange to think that Zuckerberg himself toyed with the idea of a presidential run relatively recently, spending part of 2017 on a "listening tour" that took in swing-state truck stops and so on. The Facebook overlord since seems to have shelved that plan, presumably realising at some point that it would be a demotion. After all, presidents these days are effectively junior personnel.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist
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[The Secret Negotiator](#)[Cop26](#)

China, India and Brazil must set out their plans to cut emissions

[The Secret Negotiator](#)



Chimneys at a coal-fired power plant in Shanghai. China produces about a quarter of global emissions. Photograph: Aly Song/Reuters

Sat 23 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

As we get closer to the beginning of [Cop26](#), I worry that the main goal – keeping temperature rises [within 1.5C above pre-industrial levels](#) – is slipping away.

The Covid-19 pandemic offered the opportunity for a global reset. We could rebuild in a way that was green and with lower greenhouse gas emissions.

We have not seen that occur and have [squandered that opportunity](#). Going back to the beginning of 2019, we have had two years to reflect on the reset that we needed, but countries have not done so.

We are seeing some bad signs. China looking at burning more coal because of high energy prices is terrible.

China and many countries talk about historic responsibility for emissions. Developed countries, such as the US, the UK and other European countries, were burning fossil fuels at high levels for a long time, so most of the carbon that was in the atmosphere in 1992, when the UN framework convention on climate change was signed, came from them.

But today China produces about a quarter of global emissions, so it has a historic responsibility.

The interests of small developing countries and large developing countries are very different: development versus existence. For the larger developing economies, development is more important than the climate. But for us this is about survival. At 1.5C, it will be difficult but we can adapt. Above 1.5C, we cannot and the impacts will be terrible.

Our emissions are very small in global terms. Even if all of we small countries went to zero emissions immediately, that would not have any impact on 1.5C. Even if the big developed countries cut their emissions faster, that would still not take us to 1.5C.

Every country is supposed to come to Cop26 with nationally determined contributions (NDCs). But what we have seen from countries is not enough. The present NDCs are not targeting 1.5C. It's very important that every decision at Glasgow is aligned with 1.5C.

Some G20 parties have made the necessary adjustments and they are in line with 1.5C. The G20 is responsible for about 80% of global emissions, but the majority of large developing countries that are members of the G20 have not submitted NDCs that are aligned with 1.5C and many have not submitted NDCs at all.

We need the big developing countries that are members of the G20 to come forward now. We have just one week to Cop26, and the G20 leaders are preparing to meet next weekend. China, India and Brazil need to step up to the plate urgently.

- *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.*
-

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[Facebook](#)

Facebook crisis grows as new whistleblower and leaked documents emerge



An anonymous whistleblower told the Washington Post they had submitted a complaint to the SEC. Photograph: Jeff Chiu/AP

Kari Paul in San Francisco and Dani Anguiano in Los Angeles
Fri 22 Oct 2021 22.25 EDT

Facebook faced mounting pressure on Friday after a new whistleblower accused it of knowingly hosting hate speech and illegal activity, even as leaked documents shed further light on how the company failed to heed internal concerns over election misinformation.

Allegations by the new whistleblower, who spoke to the [Washington Post](#), were reportedly contained in a complaint to the Securities and Exchange Commission, the US agency that handles regulation to protect investors in publicly traded companies.

In the complaint, the former employee detailed how Facebook officials frequently declined to enforce safety rules for fear of angering Donald Trump and his allies or offsetting the company's huge growth. In one alleged incident, Tucker Bounds, a Facebook communications official, dismissed concerns about the platform's role in 2016 election manipulation.

"It will be a flash in the pan," Bounds said, according to the affidavit, as reported by the Post. "Some legislators will get pissy. And then in a few weeks they will move on to something else. Meanwhile, we are printing money in the basement, and we are fine."

The claims echo those of the whistleblower [Frances Haugen](#), a former Facebook product manager who has said the company repeatedly prioritizes profit over public safety. Haugen's recent damning testimony before the US Congress, and forthcoming testimony before the UK parliament, has prompted a major PR crisis for the social network, which is said to be [readying plans for a rebrand](#).

The whistleblower claims came on the same day that news outlets, including [the New York Times](#), the [Washington Post](#) and [NBC](#), published reports based on internal documents shared by Haugen. The documents offer a deeper look into the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories on the platform, particularly related to the 2020 US presidential election.

The documents show that Facebook employees repeatedly flagged concerns before and after the election, when Donald Trump tried to falsely overturn Joe Biden's victory. According to the [New York Times](#), a company data scientist told coworkers a week after the election that 10% of all US views of political content were of posts that falsely claimed the vote was fraudulent. But as workers flagged these issues and urged the company to act, the company failed or struggled to address the problems, the Times reported.

The internal documents also show Facebook researchers have found the platform's recommendation tools repeatedly pushed users to extremist groups, prompting internal warnings that some managers and executives ignored, [NBC News reported](#).

In one striking internal study, a Facebook researcher created a fake profile for “[Carol Smith](#)”, conservative female user whose interests included Fox News and Donald Trump. The experiment showed that within two days, Facebook’s algorithm was recommending “Carol” join groups [dedicated to QAnon](#), a baseless internet conspiracy theory.

The reports come as Facebook faces pressure from lawmakers on various fronts – including pending [legislation](#) from Congress, a [lawsuit filed](#) by US attorneys general, and a [Federal Trade Commission lawsuit](#) filed by the agency’s new chairwoman, Lina Khan.



Frances Haugen, a former Facebook employee turned whistleblower, testifies before US lawmakers. Photograph: Lenin Nolly/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Facebook watchdogs say the latest whistleblower accounts of wrongdoing underscore the need to regulate the platform.

“It’s time for Congress and the Biden administration to investigate a Facebook business model that profits from spreading the most extreme hate and disinformation,” said Jessica J González, co-CEO of the civil rights organization Free Press Action. “It’s time for immediate action to hold the company accountable for the many harms it’s inflicted on our democracy.”

Responding to the Post about the whistleblower's claims, Bounds said: "Being asked about a purported one-on-one conversation four years ago with a faceless person, with no other sourcing than the empty accusation itself, is a first for me."

Erin McPike, a Facebook spokeswoman, also criticized the Post's reporting, saying in a statement to the news organization that it set "a dangerous precedent to hang an entire story on a single source making a wide range of claims without any apparent corroboration".

"This is beneath the Washington Post, which during the last five years would only report stories after deep reporting with corroborating sources," she told the Guardian in a statement.

But the reports align with what others have shared about the company. Haugen in her testimony stated that Facebook at one point tweaked its algorithm to improve safety and decrease inflammatory content but abandoned the changes after the election, a decision that Haugen tied directly to the [6 January riot at the Capitol](#). Facebook also disbanded the civic integrity team after the election.

"As soon as the election was over, they turned them back off or they changed the settings back to what they were before, to prioritize growth over safety. And that really feels like a betrayal of democracy to me," she said in her testimony on 5 October.

Referring to the algorithm change, Haugen added: "Facebook has realized that if they change the algorithm to be safer, people will spend less time on the site, they'll click on less ads, and [Facebook] will make less money."

Haugen's own SEC filings [alleged that](#) Facebook leadership avoided reporting such issues in SEC filings available to investors. The SEC is tasked with scrutinizing whether public firms should disclose such information to investors.

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US supreme court

Supreme court refuses to block Texas abortion ban but will hear challenges



A sign reads ‘Abortion is healthcare’ at the Women’s March Rally for Abortion Justice in Washington DC. Photograph: Allison Bailey/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Jessica Glenza](#) and agencies

[@JessicaGlenza](#)

Fri 22 Oct 2021 14.08 EDT

The [US supreme court](#) allowed a Texas law that bans the vast majority of abortions to temporarily remain in effect, but will hear arguments on 1 November. The law, known as Senate Bill 8, bans the procedure after roughly six weeks gestation or before most women know they are pregnant.

The justices said they will decide whether the federal government has the right to sue over the law. The court’s action leaves in place, for the time

being, a law [Texas](#) clinics say has led to an 80% reduction in abortions in the nation's second-largest state.

The refusal by the court's conservative majority to block the law while oral arguments are prepared was excoriated by the liberal justice Sonia Sotomayor, who called the decision "cold comfort" to Texas's 6 million women of reproductive age.

"The court is right to calendar this application for argument ... in recognition of the public importance of the issues these cases raise," wrote Sotomayor. "The promise of future adjudication offers cold comfort, however, for Texas women seeking abortion care."

In Texas, SB8 has been in effect since September, aside from a district court-ordered pause that lasted 48 hours. It bans abortions once cardiac activity is detected, usually about six weeks.

While courts have blocked other state laws effectively banning abortion before a fetus can survive outside the womb, the Texas law has so far avoided a similar fate because it leaves enforcement up to private citizens, a move that many critics have said effectively creates anti-abortion bounty hunters.

The law allows anyone, anywhere to bring a suit against anyone who helps a woman obtain an abortion, and provides a \$10,000 penalty against defendants found to violate the law. Defendants cannot recoup anything if they prevail in court.

The Biden administration, in its final pitch to block Texas's ban on most abortions, warned the supreme court that none of its decisions would be safe if it allows the Texas law to remain in force.

If the law stays in effect, "no decision of this court is safe. States need not comply with, or even challenge, precedents with which they disagree. They may simply outlaw the exercise of whatever rights they disfavor," the administration wrote in a brief filed on Friday.

Other state-enforced bans on abortion before the point at which a fetus can survive outside the womb have been blocked by courts because they conflict with supreme court precedents.

“Texas should not obtain a different result simply by pairing its unconstitutional law with an unprecedented enforcement scheme designed to evade the traditional mechanisms for judicial review,” the administration wrote.

A day earlier, the state urged the court to leave the law in place, saying the federal government lacked the authority to file its lawsuit challenging the Texas ban.

The justice department filed suit over the law after the supreme court rejected an earlier effort by abortion providers to put the measure on hold temporarily.

In early October, US district judge Robert Pitman ruled for the administration, putting the law on hold and allowing abortions to resume. Two days later, a three-judge panel of the fifth US circuit court of appeals put the law back into effect.

Texas said it opposed the early review by the supreme court, but that if the justices agree to the Biden administration’s request, they also should use this case to directly overrule the Roe and Casey decisions.

The supreme court is already slated to hear arguably the most consequential abortion rights case in decades, a case called Dobbs v Jackson Women’s Health Organization, which challenges Mississippi’s 15-week abortion ban and will be heard on 1 December.

The Dobbs case is seen as a direct challenge to Roe v Wade, the landmark 1973 case that legalized abortion nationally to the point a fetus can survive outside the womb, generally regarded at 24 weeks gestation. The decision has protected the right to terminate a pregnancy for nearly five decades, including in hostile states which have worked zealously to, once more, make the procedure illegal within their borders.

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[Afghanistan](#)

Taliban ‘forcibly evicting’ Hazaras and opponents in Afghanistan



Wheat harvesting in Balkh province, where land has been seized and farming families have been forced to leave, Human Rights Watch has reported. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

[Emma Graham-Harrison](#)

Sat 23 Oct 2021 00.00 EDT

Thousands of people have been forced from their homes and land by Taliban officials in the north and south of [Afghanistan](#), in what amounted to collective punishment, illegal under international law, Human Rights Watch has warned.

Many of the evictions targeted members of the Shia Hazara community, while others were of people connected to the former Afghan government. Land and homes seized this way have often been redistributed to [Taliban](#) supporters, HRW said.

Forced evictions [logged by Human Rights Watch](#) took place across five provinces, including Kandahar, Helmand and Uruzgan in the south, Daikundi in the centre, and the northern province of Balkh.

Many of the people were ordered to leave homes and farms with just a few days' notice, and without any opportunity to prove their legal ownership. Some were reportedly told that if they did not comply with orders to leave, they "had no right to complain about the consequences", the report said.

"The Taliban are forcibly evicting Hazaras and others on the basis of ethnicity or political opinion to reward Taliban supporters," said [Patricia Gossman](#), associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "These evictions, carried out with threats of force and without any legal process, are serious abuses that amount to collective punishment."

The Taliban promised an inclusive government, but chose an all-male cabinet dominated largely by Sunni clerics from the Pashtun ethnic group, from which the group has historically drawn its core support.

Since taking power in mid-August, the Taliban have been linked to a string of human rights abuses including reprisal killings and attacks on journalists. They have also stripped many women of the right to work, and barred girls from study at secondary level.

The evictions come just before winter, which in much of [Afghanistan](#) brings extreme cold, and in the middle of the harvest, which rural families rely on to pay off a year of debts and stock up on food for the year ahead.

Those forced out of their homes join a huge number of people who have already been made refugees inside their own country because of war, drought or economic collapse. This year alone over 665,000 Afghans have been displaced, bringing the total nationwide to about 4 million.

"It's particularly cruel to displace families during harvest and just before winter sets in," Gossman said. "The Taliban should cease forcible evicting of Hazaras and others and adjudicate land disputes according to the law and a fair process."

After four decades of civil war, property disputes have become a major source of tension in Afghanistan. Competing groups have repeatedly handed out overlapping claims to land when they seized it, leaving a muddle of competing documentation.

Now those who lost out in earlier disputes are petitioning the Taliban to support their ownership. In northern Balkh, local people said they had owned the land being handed out to Taliban fighters since the 1970s, while the new government said the evictions were based on a court order.

In Kandahar the evictions targeted members of a government-owned apartment block, where homes had been distributed to civil servants, HRW said. In Helmand, at least 400 families were driven out of Naw Mish district in the middle of harvesting season.

The largest displacements recorded are in Daikundi and Uruzgan provinces, where at least 2,800 Hazara residents were driven from their homes in September. Checkpoints on the road prevented those leaving from taking their harvest with them, according to one of those who fled.

Eviction orders for some Daikundi villages were rescinded by officials in Kabul, the report said, but by late October no residents had returned.

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Myanmar

UN fears new atrocity in Myanmar as troops gather in restive northern states



A military parade in Myanmar, where troops are gathering in states which have witnessed human rights abuses in recent years. Photograph: Reuters

Agence France-Presse

Fri 22 Oct 2021 21.15 EDT

The United nations fears another human rights catastrophe in [Myanmar](#) amid reports of thousands of troops massing in the north of the south-east Asian country, which has been in chaos since a February coup.

“We should all be prepared, as the people in this part of Myanmar are prepared, for even more mass atrocity crimes. I desperately hope that I am wrong,” said UN special rapporteur on Myanmar, Tom Andrews.

More than 1,100 civilians have been killed in the country’s bloody crackdown on dissent and more than 8,000 arrested since the coup,

according to a local monitoring group.

Andrews, who was presenting the findings of an annual human rights report on Myanmar to the UN general assembly in New York, said that he had received information that tens of thousands of troops and heavy weapons were being moved into restive regions in the north and north-west.

The findings, he said, also indicated that the junta had engaged in probable crimes against humanity and war crimes.

“These tactics are ominously reminiscent of those employed by the military before its genocidal attacks against the Rohingya in Rakhine state in 2016 and 2017,” Andrews said.

About 740,000 Rohingya fled Myanmar’s Rakhine state in 2017 after security forces launched a clampdown that the UN has said may amount to genocide.

Andrews urged countries to deny Myanmar’s military junta the money, weapons and legitimacy it desired, citing a prisoner release earlier in the week as evidence that pressure was working.

On Monday, Myanmar’s junta chief, Min Aung Hlaing, announced the release of more than 5,000 people jailed for protesting against the coup.

The move came just days after the Association of Southeast Asian Nations delivered a major snub to the military regime, exclude the junta head from an upcoming summit of the 10-country bloc.

“Asean’s announcement that the junta will not be welcome at its upcoming summit strikes at the heart,” Andrews said.

Andrews said that junta-controlled forces had displaced a quarter million people. Many of those who had been detained were tortured, he said, including dozens who had died as a result.

Andrews added that he had received credible reports that children had also been tortured.

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‘We need him to deliver’: Biden faces wrath of disappointed supporters



Joe Biden’s approval rating has sunk to 42% after colliding with some harsh political and economic realities. Photograph: Evan Vucci/AP



David Smith in Washington

@smithinamerica

Sat 23 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

When Joe Biden huddled with a group of historians in March, the conversation revolved around thinking big like one of his predecessors, Franklin Roosevelt, architect of the New Deal. Biden, it seemed, wanted to join him in the first rank of transformational US presidents.

Six months later, a very different gathering took place this week outside the White House gates. Five young climate activists, holding signs and sitting on folding chairs, began an indefinite hunger strike. It was a visceral expression of disgust at what they see as Biden's willingness to think small and break his promises.

“Young people turned out in record numbers to elect him on his climate commitments,” said Nikayla Jefferson, 24, an activist helping the quietly determined hunger strikers on the edge of Lafayette Park. “But over this past month he’s almost given up. He’s not being a leader in this moment in the way that we need him to deliver.”

A growing sense of betrayal is shared by campaigners for everything from gun rights to immigration reform, from racial justice to [voting rights](#), who saw Democrats' governing majority as a once-in-a-generation opportunity. Instead [party infighting](#) has put Biden's agenda in jeopardy and could result in voter disillusionment in next year's midterm elections.

The 46th president came into office promising to attack four crises – coronavirus, climate, economy and racial justice – but has seen his [approval rating sink to 42%](#) after colliding with some harsh political and economic realities.

These include tepid jobs growth, [labour strikes](#), rising inflation and petrol prices, logjams in the global supply chain, a record number of arrests at the US-Mexico border and a botched withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan that raised unexpected questions about his competence.

Even routine business, such as appointing an ambassador to Japan, appears to have become jinxed: Biden's choice for Tokyo, Rahm Emanuel, [provoked a backlash](#) from liberals because of his record on racial justice as mayor of Chicago.

Worries that Biden has lost his way have been intensified by his failure to hold an open-to-all press conference since taking office in January. In that time he has done [only 10 one-on-one interviews](#) – far fewer than Barack Obama or Donald Trump at the same stage.

But the biggest sense of a stalled presidency derives from seemingly interminable wrangling among congressional [Democrats](#) over Biden's \$1tn physical infrastructure bill and a \$3.5 trillion social and environmental package.



Environmental activists march to the US Capitol earlier this month.
Photograph: Bryan Olin Dozier/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Two senators in particular, Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, have demanded cuts to the reconciliation package, [prompting public acrimony](#) with Senator Bernie Sanders and other progressives that has come to dominate Washington and crowd out other urgent causes.

Biden's proud march into the history books appears to have descended into internal party mudslinging.

Jeff Merkley, a Democratic senator for Oregon, [told the Meet the Press Daily](#) programme on the MSNBC network: "It's completely taking the air out of the balloon for the Biden presidency. It's hurting Biden. It's hurting the Democrats. It's undermining the vision of all the accomplishments we will have as being highly significant."

With his legislative agenda in limbo if not peril, Biden was this week forced to step in, host both factions at the White House and take a more aggressive role. This gave some Democrats fresh hope of a breakthrough but indicated that he will pare down the \$3.5tn package in favor of a more modest

proposal, threatening a clean electricity programme that was the centerpiece of his climate strategy.

It also underlined concerns that Biden is yielding to corporate interests on fossil fuels, prescription drug prices and tax increases. Critics say he has become so consumed with the grind of policy sausage-making that he has lost sight of big picture issues dear to his supporters.

Among them is the fate of democracy itself.

Do I think that he supports voting rights? Absolutely. Do I believe that he is willing to use the full power of his office? That's yet to be seen.

LaTosha Brown

Last week Senate Republicans deployed a procedural rule [known as the filibuster to block](#), for the second time, debate on sweeping reforms that would protect the right to vote. Activists who knocked on doors and raised funds for Biden warn that his failure to prioritize the issue above all others could prove his biggest regret.

[LaTosha Brown](#), co-founder of Black Voters Matter, said: “Do I believe that he’s against voter suppression? Absolutely. Do I think that he supports voting rights? Absolutely. Do I believe that he is willing to use the full power of his office and his administration to ensure that voters that voted for him are not punished for voting for him? That’s yet to be seen.”

In a CNN town hall on Thursday night, Biden signaled support for filibuster reform. But he should have pushed the cause earlier and more forcefully, Brown argues.



Voting rights activists hold a brief rally before a civil disobedience action at the White House this week. Photograph: Allison Bailey/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

“When you fight for those that fight for you, you go in the midterms with an advantage. I think they squandered that with choosing the wrong strategy. They miscalculated. Black folks may not have another real, viable party option but we always have options,” she said.

Derrick Johnson, president of the NAACP, a leading civil organization, described the White House’s passivity about safeguarding democracy as “appalling”. [He told the Washington Post](#): “I have heard from many of my colleagues and members that the lack of priority around voting rights will be the undoing of the legacy for this presidency.”

Disenchantment was evident again last weekend when dozens of advocates for immigration reform [staged a virtual walkout](#) on administration officials during a video meeting. They are critical of Biden’s continuation of Trump-era border policies such as forcing migrants to wait in Mexico pending asylum hearings and deploying a public health order known as Title 42 to expel migrants at the border over concerns about Covid-19.

Where is Joe Biden? Where is Kamala Harris? It leaves a lot of people wondering what actually are they doing?

Ariana Saludares, migration campaigners

[Ariana Saludares](#), an advocate from the New Mexico-based community organization Colores United, who took part in the walkout, said: “Title 42 is a sham. Politicians, including the current administration, use it to explain that those coming across the borders have higher rates of infection. We have the numbers from our shelters along the borders to show that that is absolutely false.”

Speaking by phone from Puerto Palomas, a small border town in Mexico suffering water shortages, Saludares asked: “Where is Joe Biden? Where is Kamala Harris? Where are all of these things they said that they would be able to provide us with after such a ‘horrible period’. And now what? It leaves a lot of people wondering what actually are they doing?”

The disappointment of grassroots activists spells trouble for Democrats ahead of midterm elections for the House of Representatives and Senate that historically tend to favour the party that does not hold the White House. Ominously seven House Democrats have announced they will retire rather than run for re-election, with another five seeking other elected office.

Democrats fear a replay of 2010, when the tortuous but ultimately successful passage of Obama’s Affordable Care Act did not prevent a crushing defeat in the midterms. And looming in the distance is Trump, who seems [likely to run for president again](#) in 2024, a prospect that fills many observers with dread for the future of American democracy.



Joe Biden delivers remarks at the 10th anniversary celebration of the dedication of the Martin Luther King Memorial in Washington DC.
Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

[Bill Galston](#), a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution thinktank in Washington and former policy adviser to President Bill Clinton, said: “This is obviously a delicate moment in the Biden presidency. Right now the Biden agenda is the equivalent of airplanes in a kind of a crush, circling above an airport that doesn’t have enough runways to accommodate all of them simultaneously.

“Things will look different once some of the planes begin to land and I do expect that the infrastructure bill and a pared-down reconciliation bill will in fact be enacted into law well before the end of the year. That will change the mood to some extent. The situation is not quite as bad as it looks – but it’s bad enough.”

But not everyone is doom and gloom. [Antjuan Seawright](#), a Democratic strategist based in Columbia, South Carolina, was more upbeat. “I feel cautiously optimistic,” he said. “Joe Biden has demonstrated over time his ability to take a licking and keep on ticking. He’s also demonstrated that when people count him out, he always teaches them that they do not know how to count.

“When the ink dries about the story of this piece of history, you’re going to see that as the continued theme when it comes to Joe Biden. I believe we’re right where we need to be. Mike Tyson has a quote, ‘The key to being successful is peaking at the right time,’ and I think Joe Biden will in the end do just that.”

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[Energy](#)

Minister hints at gas boilers ban but says market should drive change



Condensation from boilers at homes in London. Ministers have been under pressure to set a date to ban the installation of new gas boilers in existing homes. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Jessica Elgot Chief political correspondent
[@jessicaelgot](https://twitter.com/jessicaelgot)

Tue 19 Oct 2021 04.38 EDT

Gas boilers could be banned in future but the government believes the market should drive changes to home heating systems, the cabinet minister [Anne-Marie Trevelyan](#) has said, amid criticism of the limited grants system for heat pumps.

Ministers had been under pressure to set a date to ban the installation of new gas boilers in existing homes, but on Tuesday announced the installation of

low-carbon heat pumps would be encouraged with a [grant system of £5,000](#) for up to 90,000 homes in England and Wales.

The grant would make the installation a similar cost to a new gas boiler, but green campaigners have said the move would expand the greener system to a minuscule proportion of homes and does not set a date for a full ban.

Speaking on Tuesday as the government launched its heat and buildings strategy, one of a number of announcements made ahead of the [Cop26 summit](#) in Glasgow, Trevelyan hinted the installation of new gas boilers would be banned in the future.

“In the short term, yes, of course this is a voluntary scheme … There will be a point at which that changes but, yes, for now that’s the case,” she told Sky News.

The international trade secretary said she believed the market would eventually change to make the greener switch more affordable. “At the moment we’re encouraging the market to drive those changes,” she told the BBC.

“What we’re seeing already is energy companies already moving into, not only providing us with energy, but encouraging their customers to shift to heat pumps and looking to find ways to help do that – your energy provider will be part of that solution.

“In 10 years’ time, we want to look back and think we’ve actually made a difference as individuals, because that’s as important as the big chunky things like offshore wind turbines and nuclear power stations.”

Q&A

What are heat pumps and why is the UK government pushing them?

Show



In simple terms, an electric heat pump works like a reverse fridge, extracting warmth from the outside air, the ground or a nearby water source before concentrating the heat and transferring it indoors. They can usually be found outside a home, and they look like a standard air-conditioning unit.

About 85% of UK homes use gas boilers for heating, making it one of the most polluting sectors of the economy. The fossil fuels used in our homes for heating, hot water and cooking make up more than a fifth of the UK's carbon emissions, meaning low-carbon alternatives are critical if the UK government hopes to meet its climate targets.

Jillian Ambrose

Photograph: KBImages/<https://www.alamy.com>

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The full strategy is expected to be published on Tuesday and will include measures totalling £3.9bn to decarbonise buildings and how they are heated, with a confirmed 2035 target for all new heating systems in UK homes to be energy efficient.

Caroline Jones of Greenpeace UK said efforts to decarbonise housing were being hampered by unambitious policies and inadequate funding. She said: “More money must be provided to rapidly increase the number of homeowners switching to heat pumps over the next few years, with full costs covered for families on low incomes.

“A clearer signal would have been a phase-out of new boilers before 2035. And all of this must be delivered with a fully funded, nationwide programme to insulate our homes at a scale and speed that the government hasn’t fully grasped.”

Under the plans, which the minister said would support up to 240,000 jobs by 2035, the £5,000 grants will be available from April next year, and should eliminate any price differential for heat pumps or similar systems. The plan suggests as the market expands, the price for such systems should drop by between a quarter and a half by 2025.

The wider £3.9bn of funding for greening homes will be targeted through a series of existing schemes, with others aimed at public buildings.

Ed Miliband, the shadow business secretary, said it was a “meagre, unambitious and wholly inadequate response”.

He added: “Families up and down the country desperately needed Labour’s 10-year plan investing £6bn a year for home insulation and zero carbon heating to cut bills by £400 per year, improve our energy security, create jobs and reduce carbon emissions.”

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Drax

Drax dropped from index of green energy firms amid biomass doubts



A person holds biomass pellets at Drax power station in North Yorkshire. Drax claims that burning biomass to generate electricity is ‘carbon neutral’. Photograph: Anna Gowthorpe/PA

[Jillian Ambrose](#) Energy correspondent

Tue 19 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Drax has been booted from an investment index of clean energy companies as doubts over the sustainability of its wood-burning power plant begin to mount within the financial sector.

The FTSE 100 energy giant, which has received billions in renewable energy subsidies for its biomass electricity, was axed from the index of the world’s greenest energy companies after S&P Global Dow Jones changed its methodology.

The exit from the S&P Global Clean Energy Index is a blow to Drax, which has vowed to become [the world's first "carbon-negative"](#) energy company by the end of the decade.

It comes amid growing scepticism about its green credentials after the financial services firm Jefferies told its clients this week that bioenergy was “unlikely to make a positive contribution” towards tackling the climate crisis.

Drax was once [one of the largest coal power generators](#) in Europe before it converted four of the generating units at its North Yorkshire site to burn biomass instead. It received more than £800m in government subsidies and tax breaks to support the conversion last year, and could expect billions more in the future.

The company claims that burning biomass to generate electricity is “carbon neutral” because the emissions from incinerating wood pellets are offset by the carbon dioxide absorbed when the trees they are made from grow.

By using new technology to capture the carbon emissions from the biomass power plant, the company could effectively create “negative carbon emissions”, according to [Drax](#).

However, the Jefferies equity analyst Luke Sussams said bioenergy was unlikely to make a positive contribution to climate action because of “uncertainties and poor practices” in some parts of the timber industry regarding the sources of wood, forest management practices, supply chain emissions and high combustion emissions.

“We argue that bioenergy production is not carbon neutral, in almost all instances. This casts doubt on whether bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS) is a net-negative emissions technology. The widespread deployment of BECCS looks challenging,” he said.

The interventions by S&P Global Dow Jones and Jefferies are some of the first blows struck by a financial sector against the bioenergy sector, which has long been criticised by green groups. The S&P Global Clean [Energy](#)

Index also dropped a French biomass generator, Albioma, which, like Drax, has used wood chips to replace coal in its power plants.

Despite the growing concerns, Susamms expects the UK government to continue allowing Drax to rake in billions in subsidies to support its plans. [Drax's share price](#) has climbed by more than 4.5% to 540p a share this week.

Its BECCS plans could cost British energy bill payers £31.7bn over 25 years and would “not deliver negative emissions” after accounting for the full carbon footprint of biomass in the power sector, according to the climate thinktank Ember.

Phil MacDonald, Ember’s chief operating officer, said: “Scientists are increasingly raising concerns that it cannot be relied upon to reduce emissions – and financial institutions are starting to signal that they don’t think it’s clean or green either.”

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Drax sources about two-thirds of its biomass from the south-eastern states of the US via ocean tankers, which are major emitters, and recently struck a £420m deal to triple its biomass capacity by acquiring the Canadian wood pellet manufacturer Pinnacle Renewable Energy.

“It’s time for the UK government position on biomass to catch up with the evidence – so that investors are encouraged to instead invest in technologies which have been scientifically proven to reduce carbon emissions,” MacDonald said.

A government spokesperson declined to comment.

A Drax spokesperson said its biomass “meets the highest sustainability standards” and that the “science underpinning carbon accounting for bioenergy” was “crystal clear”.

The spokesperson added: “The world’s leading authority on climate science, the UN’s IPCC, is absolutely clear that sustainable biomass is crucial to

achieving global climate targets, both as a provider of renewable power and through its potential to deliver negative emissions with BECCS.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/oct/19/drax-dropped-from-index-of-green-energy-firms-amid-biomass-doubts>

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Energy

£5,000 grants unveiled to support home heat pump installation



Labour condemned the plans as ‘more of Boris Johnson’s hot air’.
Photograph: Joe Giddens/PA

Peter Walker Political correspondent
[@peterwalker99](https://twitter.com/peterwalker99)

Mon 18 Oct 2021 17.00 EDT

Ministers have unveiled plans for £5,000 grants to allow people to install home [heat pumps](#) and other low-carbon boiler replacements as part of a wider heat and buildings strategy that some campaigners warned lacked sufficient ambition and funding.

Labour also condemned the plans as “more of [Boris Johnson](#)’s hot air”, without sufficient substance.

Details for the scheme, to be formally set out on Tuesday alongside the government's net-zero strategy, include £450m committed towards grants to replace boilers, with a pledge that the fund will mean heat pumps should cost no more than boilers to install or run.

More widely, the heat and buildings strategy contains a commitment to funding totalling £3.9bn to decarbonise buildings and how they are heated, with a confirmed 2035 target for all new heating systems in UK homes to be energy-efficient.

With the crucial Cop26 climate summit in Glasgow starting in a fortnight, the business and energy secretary, [Kwasi Kwarteng](#), said recent gas price rises "have highlighted the need to double down on our efforts to reduce Britain's reliance on fossil fuels and move away from gas boilers over the coming decade".

He said: "As the technology improves and costs plummet over the next decade, we expect low-carbon heating systems will become the obvious, affordable choice for consumers."

However, some environmental groups said more urgent action was needed. Caroline Jones, of Greenpeace UK, said efforts to decarbonise housing were being hampered by "unambitious policies and inadequate funding". She said: "More money must be provided to rapidly increase the number of homeowners switching to heat pumps over the next few years, with full costs covered for families on low incomes.

"A clearer signal would have been a phase-out of new boilers before 2035. And all of this must be delivered with a fully funded, nationwide programme to insulate our homes at a scale and speed that the government hasn't fully grasped."

Jan Rosenow, European programme director for the Regulatory Assistance Project, a clean-energy NGO, said there were "many positive elements" in the strategy, with the ban on new fossil heating systems being a world first and a useful signal ahead of Cop26.

But he added: “Providing grants for installing heat pumps is essential as they are more expensive than gas boilers. But the level of funding is too low. Under the plans, only 30,000 homes would be able to benefit from the government grant, just enough to support current installation levels. Given that the target is to install 600,000 heat pumps per year, this is clearly not enough.”

The shadow business and energy secretary, Ed Miliband, said: “As millions of families face an energy and cost of living crisis, this is a meagre, unambitious and wholly inadequate response. People can’t warm their homes with yet more of Boris Johnson’s hot air, but that is all that is on offer.”

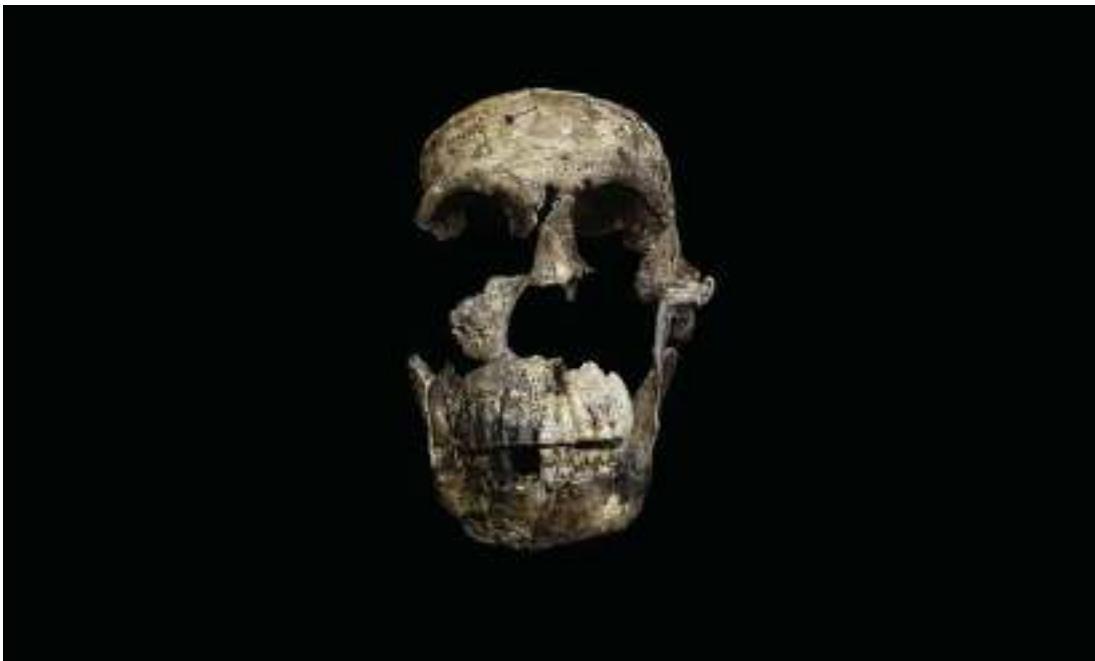
Under the plans, which the minister says will support up to 240,000 jobs by 2035, the £5,000 grants will be available from April next year, and should eliminate any price differential for heat pumps or similar systems. The plan suggests that, as the market expands, the price for such systems should drop by between a quarter and a half by 2025.

The wider £3.9bn of funding for greening homes will be targeted through a series of existing schemes, with others aimed at public buildings.

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2021.10.19 - Spotlight

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- [Meditation, vodka and vinegar Can the morning routines of the rich and famous make me a better person?](#)
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The skull of Homo naledi, as discovered in the Rising Star cave system in South Africa. Photograph: Xinhua/Alamy

[The long read](#)

Unfreezing the ice age: the truth about humanity's deep past

The skull of Homo naledi, as discovered in the Rising Star cave system in South Africa. Photograph: Xinhua/Alamy

by [David Graeber](#) and [David Wengrow](#)

Tue 19 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

In some ways, accounts of “human origins” play a similar role for us today as myth did for ancient Greeks or Polynesians. This is not to cast aspersions on the scientific rigour or value of these accounts. It is simply to observe that the two fulfil somewhat similar functions. If we think on a scale of, say, the last 3m years, there actually was a time when someone, after all, did have to light a fire, cook a meal or perform a marriage ceremony for the first

time. We know these things happened. Still, we really don't know how. It is very difficult to resist the temptation to make up stories about what might have happened: stories which necessarily reflect our own fears, desires, obsessions and concerns. As a result, such distant times can become a vast canvas for the working out of our collective fantasies.

Let's take just one example. Back in the 1980s, there was a great deal of buzz about a "mitochondrial Eve", the putative common ancestor of our entire species. Granted, no one was claiming to have actually found the physical remains of such an ancestor, but DNA sequencing demonstrated that such an Eve must have existed, perhaps as recently as 120,000 years ago. And while no one imagined we'd ever find Eve herself, the discovery of a variety of other fossil skulls rescued from the Great Rift Valley in east Africa seemed to provide a suggestion as to what Eve might have looked like and where she might have lived. While scientists continued debating the ins and outs, popular magazines were soon carrying stories about a modern counterpart to the Garden of Eden, the original incubator of humanity, the savanna-womb that gave life to us all.

Many of us probably still have something resembling this picture of human origins in our mind. More recent research, though, has shown it couldn't possibly be accurate. In fact, biological anthropologists and geneticists are now converging on an entirely different picture. For most of our evolutionary history, we did indeed live in Africa – but not just the eastern savannas, as previously thought. Instead, our biological ancestors were distributed everywhere from Morocco to the Cape of Good Hope. Some of those populations remained isolated from one another for tens or even hundreds of thousands of years, cut off from their nearest relatives by deserts and rainforests. Strong regional traits developed, so that early human populations appear to have been far more physically diverse than modern humans. If we could travel back in time, this remote past would probably strike us as something more akin to a world inhabited by hobbits, giants and elves than anything we have direct experience of today, or in the more recent past.

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Ancestral humans were not only quite different from one another; they also coexisted with smaller-brained, more ape-like species such as *Homo naledi*. What were these ancestral societies like? At this point, at least, we should be honest and admit that, for the most part, we don't have the slightest idea. There's only so much you can reconstruct from cranial remains and the occasional piece of knapped flint – which is basically all we have.

What we do know is that we are composite products of this original mosaic of human populations, which interacted with one another, interbred, drifted apart and came together mostly in ways we can only still guess at. It seems reasonable to assume that behaviours like mating and child-rearing practices, the presence or absence of dominance hierarchies or forms of language and proto-language must have varied at least as much as physical types, and probably far more.

Perhaps the only thing we can say with real certainty is that modern humans first appeared in Africa. When they began expanding out of Africa into Eurasia, they encountered other populations such as Neanderthals and Denisovans – less different, but still different – and these various groups interbred. Only after those other populations became extinct can we really begin talking about a single, human “us” inhabiting the planet. What all this brings home is just how radically different the social and physical world of our remote ancestors would have seemed to us – and this would have been true at least down to about 40,000BC. In other words, there is no “original” form of human society. Searching for one can only be a matter of myth-making.

Over recent decades, archeological evidence has emerged that seems to completely defy our image of what scholars call the Upper Palaeolithic period (roughly 50,000–15,000BC). For a long time, it had been assumed that this was a world made up of tiny egalitarian forager bands. But the discovery of evidence of “princely” burials and grand communal buildings has undermined that image.

Rich hunter-gatherer burials have been found across much of western Eurasia, from the Dordogne to the Don. They include discoveries in rock shelters and open-air settlements. Some of the earliest come from sites like

Sunghir in northern Russia and Dolní Věstonice in the Moravian basin, and date from between 34,000 and 26,000 years ago.

What we find here are not cemeteries but isolated burials of individuals or small groups, their bodies often placed in striking postures and decorated – in some cases, almost saturated – with ornaments. In the case of Sunghir that meant many thousands of beads, laboriously worked from mammoth ivory and fox teeth. Some of the most lavish costumes are from the conjoined burials of two boys, flanked by great lances made from straightened mammoth tusks.

Of similar antiquity is a group of cave burials unearthed on the coast of Liguria, near the border between Italy and France. Complete bodies of young or adult men, including one especially lavish interment known to archaeologists as *Il Principe* (“the Prince”), were laid out in striking poses and suffused with jewellery. Il Principe bears that name because he’s also buried with what looks to the modern eye like regalia: a flint sceptre, elk antler batons and an ornate headdress lovingly fashioned from perforated shells and deer teeth.

Another unexpected result of recent archaeological research, causing many to revise their view of prehistoric hunter-gatherers, is the appearance of monumental architecture. In Eurasia, the most famous examples are the stone temples of the Germus mountains, overlooking the Harran plain in south-east Turkey. In the 1990s, German archaeologists, working on the plain’s northern frontier, began uncovering extremely ancient remains at a place known locally as Göbekli Tepe. What they found has since come to be regarded as an evolutionary conundrum. The main source of puzzlement is a group of 20 megalithic enclosures, initially raised there around 9000BC, and then repeatedly modified over many centuries.



A megalithic enclosure at Göbekli Tepe in south-east Turkey. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

The enclosures at Göbekli Tepe are massive. They comprise great T-shaped pillars, some over 5 metres high and weighing up to 8 tonnes, which were hewn from the site's limestone bedrock or nearby quarries. The pillars, at least 200 in total, were raised into sockets and linked by walls of rough stone. Each is a unique work of sculpture, carved with images from the world of dangerous carnivores and poisonous reptiles, as well as game species, waterfowl and small scavengers. Animal forms project from the rock in varying depths of relief: some hover coyly on the surface, others emerge boldly into three dimensions. These often nightmarish creatures follow divergent orientations, some marching to the horizon, others working their way down into the earth. In places, the pillar itself becomes a sort of standing body, with human-like limbs and clothing.

The creation of these remarkable buildings implies strictly coordinated activity on a really large scale. Who made them? While groups of humans not too far away had already begun cultivating crops at the time, to the best of our knowledge those who built Göbekli Tepe had not. Yes, they harvested and processed wild cereals and other plants in season, but there is no compelling reason to see them as “proto-farmers”, or to suggest they had any interest in orienting their livelihoods around the domestication of crops.

Indeed, there was no particular reason why they should, given the availability of fruits, berries, nuts and edible wild fauna in their vicinity.

And while Göbekli Tepe has often been presented as an anomaly, there is in fact a great deal of evidence for monumental construction of different sorts among hunter-gatherers in earlier periods, extending back into the ice age.

In Europe, between 25,000 and 12,000 years ago, public works were already a feature of human habitation across an area reaching from Kraków to Kyiv. Research at the Russian site of Yudinovo suggests that “mammoth houses”, as they are often called, were not in fact dwellings at all, but monuments in the strict sense: carefully planned and constructed to commemorate the completion of a great mammoth hunt, using whatever durable parts remained once carcasses had been processed for their meat and hides. We are talking here about really staggering quantities of meat: for each structure (there were five at Yudinovo), there was enough mammoth to feed hundreds of people for around three months. Open-air settlements like Yudinovo, Mezhirich and Kostenki, where such mammoth monuments were erected, often became central places whose inhabitants exchanged amber, marine shells and animal pelts over impressive distances.

So what are we to make of all this evidence for princely burials, stone temples, mammoth monuments and bustling centres of trade and craft production, stretching back far into the ice age? What are they doing there, in a Palaeolithic world where – at least on some accounts – nothing much is ever supposed to have happened, and human societies can best be understood by analogy with troops of chimps or bonobos? Unsurprisingly, perhaps, some have responded by completely abandoning the idea of an egalitarian golden age, concluding instead that this must have been a society dominated by powerful leaders, even dynasties – and, therefore, that self-aggrandisement and coercive power have always been the enduring forces behind human social evolution. But this doesn’t really work either.

Evidence of institutional inequality in ice age societies, whether grand burials or monumental buildings, is sporadic. Richly costumed burials appear centuries, and often hundreds of miles, apart. Even if we put this down to the patchiness of the evidence, we still have to ask why the evidence is so patchy in the first place. After all, if any of these ice age

“princes” had behaved like, say, bronze age (let alone Renaissance Italian) princes, we’d also be finding all the usual trappings of centralised power: fortifications, storehouses, palaces. Instead, over tens of thousands of years, we see monuments and magnificent burials, but little else to indicate the growth of ranked societies, let alone anything remotely resembling “states”.

To understand why the early record of human social life is patterned in this strange, staccato fashion we first have to do away with some lingering preconceptions about “primitive” mentalities.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many in Europe and North America believed that “primitive” folk were not only incapable of political self-consciousness, they were not even capable of fully conscious thought on the individual level – or at least conscious thought worthy of the name. They argued that anyone classified as a “primitive” or “savage” operated with a “pre-logical mentality”, or lived in a mythological dreamworld. At best, they were mindless conformists, bound in the shackles of tradition; at worst, they were incapable of fully conscious, critical thought of any kind.

Nowadays, no reputable scholar would make such claims: everyone at least pays lip service to the psychic unity of mankind. But in practice, little has changed. Scholars still write as if those living in earlier stages of economic development, and especially those who are classified as “egalitarian”, can be treated as if they were literally all the same, living in some collective group-think: if human differences show up in any form – different “bands” being different from one another – it is only in the same way that bands of great apes might differ. Political self-consciousness among such people is seen as impossible.

And if certain hunter-gatherers turn out not to have been living perpetually in “bands” at all, but instead congregating to create grand landscape monuments, storing large quantities of preserved food and treating particular individuals like royalty, contemporary scholars are at best likely to place them in a new stage of development: they have moved up the scale from “simple” to “complex” hunter-gatherers, a step closer to agriculture and urban civilisation. But they are still caught in the same evolutionary straitjacket, their place in history defined by their mode of subsistence, and

their role blindly to enact some abstract law of development which we understand but they do not. Certainly, it rarely occurs to anyone to ask what sort of worlds they *thought* they were trying to create.

Now, admittedly, this isn't true of all scholars. Anthropologists who spend years talking to indigenous people in their own languages, and watching them argue with one another, tend to be well aware that even those who make their living hunting elephants or gathering lotus buds are just as sceptical, imaginative, thoughtful and capable of critical analysis as those who make their living by operating tractors, managing restaurants or chairing university departments.



French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in the Brazilian Amazon, c1936.
Photograph: Apic/Getty Images

One of the few mid-20th-century anthropologists to take seriously the idea that early humans were our intellectual equals was Claude Lévi-Strauss, who argued that mythological thought, rather than representing some sort of pre-logical haze, is better conceived as a kind of “neolithic science” as sophisticated as our own, just built on different principles. Less well known – but more relevant to the problems we are grappling with here – are some of his early writings on politics.

In 1944, Lévi-Strauss [published an essay](#) about politics among the Nambikwara, a small population of part-time farmers, part-time foragers inhabiting a notoriously inhospitable stretch of savanna in north-west Mato Grosso, Brazil. The Nambikwara then had a reputation as extremely simple folk, given their very rudimentary material culture. For this reason, many treated them almost as a direct window on to the Palaeolithic. This, Lévi-Strauss pointed out, was a mistake. People like the Nambikwara live in the shadow of the modern state, trading with farmers and city people and sometimes hiring themselves out as labourers. Some might even be descendants of runaways from cities or plantations.

For Lévi-Strauss, what was especially instructive about the Nambikwara was that, for all that they were averse to competition, they did appoint chiefs to lead them. The very simplicity of the resulting arrangement, he felt, might expose “some basic functions” of political life that “remain hidden in more complex and elaborate systems of government”. Not only was the role of the chief socially and psychologically quite similar to that of a national politician or statesman in European society, he noted, it also attracted similar personality types: people who “unlike most of their companions, enjoy prestige for its own sake, feel a strong appeal to responsibility, and to whom the burden of public affairs brings its own reward”.

Modern politicians play the role of wheelers and dealers, brokering alliances or negotiating compromises between different constituencies or interest groups. In Nambikwara society this didn’t happen much, because there weren’t really many differences in wealth or status. However, chiefs did play an analogous role, brokering between two entirely different social and ethical systems, which existed at different times of year. During the rainy season, the Nambikwara occupied hilltop villages of several hundred people and practised horticulture; during the rest of the year they dispersed into small foraging bands. Chiefs made or lost their reputations by acting as heroic leaders during the “nomadic adventures” of the dry season, during which times they typically gave orders, resolved crises and behaved in what would at any other time be considered an unacceptably authoritarian manner. Then, in the rainy season, a time of much greater ease and abundance, they relied on those reputations to attract followers to settle around them in villages, where they employed only gentle persuasion and led by example to guide their followers in the construction of houses and tending of gardens.

They cared for the sick and needy, mediated disputes and never imposed anything on anyone.

How should we think about these chiefs? They were not patriarchs, Lévi-Strauss concluded; neither were they petty tyrants; and there was no sense in which they were invested with mystical powers. More than anything, they resembled modern politicians operating tiny embryonic welfare states, pooling resources and doling them out to those in need. What impressed Lévi-Strauss above all was their political maturity. It was the chiefs' skill in directing small bands of dry-season foragers, of making snap decisions in crises (crossing a river, directing a hunt) that later qualified them to play the role of mediators and diplomats in the village plaza. And in doing so they were effectively moving back and forth, each year, between what evolutionary anthropologists insist on thinking of as totally different stages of social development: from hunters-gatherers to farmers and back again.

Nambikwara chiefs were in every sense self-conscious political actors, shifting between two different social systems with calm sophistication, all the while balancing a sense of personal ambition with the common good. What's more, their flexibility and adaptability enabled them to take a distanced perspective on whichever system obtained at any given time.

Let's return to those rich Upper Palaeolithic burials, so often interpreted as evidence for the emergence of "inequality", or even hereditary nobility of some sort. For some odd reason, those who make such arguments never seem to notice that a quite remarkable number of these skeletons bear evidence of striking physical anomalies that could only have marked them out, clearly and dramatically, from their social surroundings. The adolescent boys in Sunghir and Dolní Věstonice had pronounced congenital disfigurements; other ancient burial sites have contained bodies that were unusually short or extremely tall.

It would be extremely surprising if this were a coincidence. In fact, it makes one wonder whether even those bodies, which appear from their skeletal remains to be anatomically typical, might have been equally striking in some other way; after all, an albino, for example, or an epileptic prophet would not be identifiable as such from the archaeological record. We can't know

much about the day-to-day lives of Palaeolithic individuals buried with rich grave goods, other than that they seem to have been as well fed and cared for as anybody else; but we can at least suggest they were seen as the ultimate individuals, about as different from their peers as it was possible to be.



A reconstruction of an Upper Paleolithic mammoth hunter settlement at Dolní Věstonice in the Czech Republic. Photograph: Album/Alamy

This suggests we might have to shelve any premature talk of the emergence of hereditary elites. It seems very unlikely that Palaeolithic Europe produced a stratified elite that just happened to consist largely of hunchbacks, giants and dwarves. Second, we don't know how much the treatment of such individuals after death had to do with their treatment in life. Another important point here is that we are not dealing with a case of some people being buried with rich grave goods and others being buried with none. The very practice of burying bodies intact, and clothed, appears to have been exceptional in the Upper Palaeolithic. Most corpses were treated in completely different ways: de-fleshed, broken up, curated, or even processed into jewellery and artefacts. (In general, Palaeolithic people were clearly much more at home with human body parts than we are.)

The corpse in its complete and articulated form – and the clothed corpse even more so – was clearly something unusual and, one would presume,

inherently strange. In many such cases, an effort was made to contain the bodies of the Upper Palaeolithic dead by covering them with heavy objects: mammoth scapulae, wooden planks, stones or tight bindings. Perhaps saturating them with such objects was an extension of these concerns about strangeness, celebrating but also containing something dangerous. This too makes sense. The ethnographic record abounds with examples of anomalous beings – human or otherwise – treated as exalted and dangerous; or one way in life, another in death.

Much here is speculation. There are any number of other interpretations that could be placed on the evidence – though the idea that these tombs mark the emergence of some sort of hereditary aristocracy seems the least likely of all. Those interred were extraordinary, “extreme” individuals. The way their corpses were decorated, displayed and buried marked them out as equally extraordinary in death. Anomalous in almost every respect, such burials can hardly be interpreted as proxies for social structure among the living. On the other hand, they clearly have something to do with all the contemporary evidence for music, sculpture, painting and complex architecture. What is one to make of them?

This is where seasonality comes into the picture. Almost all the ice age sites with extraordinary burials and monumental architecture were created by societies that lived a little like Lévi-Strauss’s Nambikwara, dispersing into foraging bands at one time of year, gathering together in concentrated settlements at another. True, they didn’t gather to plant crops. Rather, the large Upper Palaeolithic sites are linked to migrations and seasonal hunting of game herds – woolly mammoth, steppe bison or reindeer – as well as cyclical fish-runs and nut harvests. This seems to be the explanation for those hubs of activity found in eastern Europe at places like Dolní Věstonice, where people took advantage of an abundance of wild resources to feast, engage in complex rituals and ambitious artistic projects, and trade minerals, marine shells and furs. In western Europe, equivalents would be the great rock shelters of the French Périgord and the Cantabrian coast, with their deep records of human activity, which similarly formed part of an annual round of seasonal congregation and dispersal.

Archaeology also shows that patterns of seasonal variation lie behind the monuments of Göbekli Tepe. Activities around the stone temples correspond with periods of annual superabundance, between midsummer and autumn, when large herds of gazelle descended on to the Harran plain. At such times, people also gathered at the site to process massive quantities of nuts and wild cereal grasses, making these into festive foods, which presumably fuelled the work of construction. There is some evidence to suggest that each of these great structures had a relatively short lifespan, culminating in an enormous feast, after which its walls were rapidly filled in with leftovers and other refuse: hierarchies raised to the sky, only to be swiftly torn down again. Ongoing research is likely to complicate this picture, but the overall pattern of seasonal congregation for festive labour seems well established.

Such oscillating patterns of life endured long after the invention of agriculture. They may be key to understanding the famous Neolithic monuments of Salisbury Plain in England, and not just because the arrangements of standing stones themselves seem to function (among other things) as giant calendars. Stonehenge, framing the midsummer sunrise and the midwinter sunset, is the most famous of these monuments. It turns out to have been the last in a long sequence of ceremonial structures, erected over the course of centuries in timber as well as stone, as people converged on the plain from remote corners of the British Isles at significant times of year. Careful excavation shows that many of these structures were dismantled just a few generations after their construction.



Children of the Nambikwara Sarare tribe in Mato Grosso state, Brazil.
Photograph: André Penner/AP

Still more striking, the people who built Stonehenge were not farmers, or not in the usual sense. They had once been; but the practice of erecting and dismantling grand monuments coincides with a period when the peoples of Britain, having adopted the Neolithic farming economy from continental Europe, appear to have turned their backs on at least one crucial aspect of it: they abandoned the cultivation of cereals and returned, from around 3300BC, to the collection of hazelnuts as their staple source of plant food. On the other hand, they kept hold of their domestic pigs and herds of cattle, feasting on them seasonally at nearby [Durrington Walls](#), a prosperous town of some thousands of people – with its own Woodhenge – in winter, but largely empty and abandoned in summer.

All this is crucial because it's hard to imagine how giving up agriculture could have been anything but a self-conscious decision. There is no evidence that one population displaced another, or that farmers were somehow overwhelmed by powerful foragers who forced them to abandon their crops. The Neolithic inhabitants of England appear to have taken the measure of cereal-farming and collectively decided that they preferred to live another way. We'll never know how such a decision was made, but Stonehenge itself provides something of a hint since it is built of extremely large stones, some

of which (the “bluestones”) were transported from as far away as Wales, while many of the cattle and pigs consumed at Durrington Walls were laboriously herded there from other distant locations.

In other words, and remarkable as it may seem, even in the third millennium BC coordination of some sort was clearly possible across large parts of the British Isles. If Stonehenge was a shrine to exalted founders of a ruling clan – as some archaeologists now argue – it seems likely that members of their lineage claimed significant, even cosmic roles by virtue of their involvement in such events. On the other hand, patterns of seasonal aggregation and dispersal raise another question: if there were kings and queens at Stonehenge, exactly what sort could they have been? After all, these would have been kings whose courts and kingdoms existed for only a few months of the year, and otherwise dispersed into small communities of nut gatherers and stock herders. If they possessed the means to marshal labour, pile up food resources and provender armies of year-round retainers, what sort of royalty would consciously elect not to do so?

Recall that for Lévi-Strauss, there was a clear link between seasonal variations of social structure and a certain kind of political freedom. The fact that one structure applied in the rainy season and another in the dry allowed Nambikwara chiefs to view their own social arrangements at one remove: to see them as not simply “given”, in the natural order of things, but as something at least partially open to human intervention. The case of the British Neolithic – with its alternating phases of dispersal and monumental construction – indicates just how far such intervention could sometimes go.

The political implications of this are important, as Lévi-Strauss noted. What the existence of similar seasonal patterns in the Palaeolithic suggests is that from the very beginning, or at least as far back as we can trace such things, human beings were self-consciously experimenting with different social possibilities.

It’s easy to see why scholars in the 1950s and 60s arguing for the existence of discrete stages of political organisation – successively: bands, tribes, chiefdoms, states – did not know what to do with Lévi-Strauss’s observations. They held that the stages of political development mapped, at

least very roughly, on to similar stages of economic development: hunter-gatherers, gardeners, farmers, industrial civilisation. It was confusing enough that people like the Nambikwara seemed to jump back and forth, over the course of the year, between economic categories. Other groups would appear to jump regularly from one end of the political spectrum to the other. In other words, they threw everything askew.

Seasonal dualism also throws into chaos more recent efforts at classifying hunter-gatherers into either “simple” or “complex” types of social organisation, since what have been identified as the features of “complexity” – territoriality, social ranks, material wealth or competitive display – appear during certain seasons of the year, only to be brushed aside in others by the exact same population. Admittedly, most professional anthropologists nowadays have come to recognise that these categories are hopelessly inadequate, but the main effect of this acknowledgment has just been to cause them to change the subject, or suggest that perhaps we shouldn’t really be thinking about the broad sweep of human history at all any more. Nobody has yet proposed an alternative.

Meanwhile, as we’ve seen, archaeological evidence is piling up to suggest that in the highly seasonal environments of the last ice age, our remote ancestors were behaving much like Nambikwara. They shifted back and forth between alternative social arrangements, building monuments and then closing them down again, allowing the rise of authoritarian structures during certain times of year then dismantling them. The same individual could experience life in what looks to us sometimes like a band, sometimes a tribe, and sometimes like something with at least some of the characteristics we now identify with states.

With such institutional flexibility comes the capacity to step outside the boundaries of any given structure and reflect; to make and unmake the political worlds we live in. If nothing else, this explains the “princes” and “princesses” of the last ice age, who appear to show up, in such magnificent isolation, like characters in some kind of fairytale or costume drama. If they reigned at all, then perhaps it was, like the ruling clans of Stonehenge, just for a season.

If human beings, through most of our history, have moved back and forth fluidly between different social arrangements, assembling and dismantling hierarchies on a regular basis, perhaps the question we should ask is: how did we get stuck? How did we lose that political self-consciousness, once so typical of our species? How did we come to treat eminence and subservience not as temporary expedients, or even the pomp and circumstance of some kind of grand seasonal theatre, but as inescapable elements of the human condition?

In truth, this flexibility, and potential for political self-consciousness, was never entirely lost. Seasonality is still with us – even if it is a pale shadow of its former self. In the Christian world, for instance, there is still the midwinter “holiday season” in which values and forms of organisation do, to a limited degree, reverse themselves: the same media and advertisers who for most of the year peddle rabid consumerist individualism suddenly start announcing that social relations are what’s really important, and that to give is better than to receive.

Among societies like the Inuit or the [Kwakiutl](#) of Canada’s Northwest Coast, times of seasonal congregation were also ritual seasons, almost entirely given over to dances, rites and dramas. Sometimes, these could involve creating temporary kings or even ritual police with real coercive powers. In other cases, they involved dissolving norms of hierarchy and propriety. In the European middle ages, saints’ days alternated between solemn pageants where all the elaborate ranks and hierarchies of feudal life were made manifest, and crazy carnivals in which everyone played at “turning the world upside down”. In carnival, women might rule over men and children be put in charge of government. Servants could demand work from their masters, ancestors could return from the dead, “carnival kings” could be crowned and then dethroned, giant monuments like wicker dragons built and set on fire, or all formal ranks might even disintegrate into one or other form of bacchanalian chaos.

What’s important about such festivals is that they kept the old spark of political self-consciousness alive. They allowed people to imagine that other arrangements are feasible, even for society as a whole, since it was always possible to fantasise about carnival bursting its seams and becoming the new

reality. May Day came to be chosen as the date for the international workers' holiday largely because so many British peasant revolts had historically begun on that riotous festival. Villagers who played at "turning the world upside down" would periodically decide they actually preferred the world upside down, and took measures to keep it that way.

Medieval peasants often found it much easier than medieval intellectuals to imagine a society of equals. Now, perhaps, we begin to understand why. Seasonal festivals may be a pale echo of older patterns of seasonal variation – but, for the last few thousand years of human history at least, they appear to have played much the same role in fostering political self-consciousness, and as laboratories of social possibility.

Adapted from The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity by David Graeber and David Wengrow, published by Allen Lane. To order a copy, go to [Guardian Bookshop](#)

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Meditation, vodka and vinegar: can the morning routines of the rich and famous make me a better person?



‘My minds churns like a cement mixer’ ... Emma Beddington tries early-morning meditation in her garden. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer



[Emma Beddington](#)

Tue 19 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Are morning people better than night owls? I was delighted to discover that they are not. The “morning morality effect” – the notion that our capacity to resist lying and cheating dwindles through the day – applies only to larks, research shows; nighthawks behave better in the evenings.

Morning people do, however, have a reputation for getting stuff done. Early rising is associated with energy, optimisation and efficiency; it is a foundational principle of all manner of self-help and self-actualisation programmes. “If you look at many of the most productive people in the world, they’ll have one thing in common: they were early risers,” says one wide-eyed zealot in the trailer for the motivational guru Hal Elrod’s film about his “miracle morning”, as Oprah Winfrey, Mahatma Gandhi and Albert Einstein flash past. Elrod’s Savers routine – silence, affirmations, visualisation, exercise, reading, scribing – is a classic of the genre, but he is only one of many urging us to seize the day super-early.

The entrepreneur and trainer Adrienne Herbert has created a successful podcast (and now a book) around her concept of a “power hour” in the morning. “First, it’s because solitude is so hard to find at any other time. It’s

also about starting the day as you mean to go on,” she says. “That is going to set you up for the day, for better or worse. Without that, you just kind of roll the dice.” It is also a way of putting yourself first, she says: “It’s quite empowering. I’m completely in control of my time before I’m on call for anyone else.”

My own routine is a 7.15am alarm, followed by bleary horizontal doomscrolling until [my elderly dog's complaints](#) become overwhelming, then a slow trudge to pick up his poo, followed by a pint of tea at my desk. I am not empowered, effective or optimised. “What if you could change anything about your life just by changing the way you start your day?” asks Elrod’s film. Time to find out.

Wake at dawn

The idea

There is a simple, earnest romance to rising with the dawn, like a Thomas Hardy character before the harvest fails and tragedy looms. The writer and Observer Food Monthly editor [Allan Jenkins](#) is a horrifyingly early riser, sometimes up at 3am or 4am. In his book [Morning: A Manifesto](#), he writes about the dawn light like a lover, observing its shifts and moods, the colours it wears. “I’m a light-driven person,” he says. “Being somewhere on your own with light coming up – it’s slightly magical.”



Is sleeping with the curtains open going to help? Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

It is good for you, too: research has demonstrated that exposure to early morning light increases alertness, improves sleep and [decreases stress levels](#). I want all those things, obviously, so I leave my curtains open and switch off the alarm.

The verdict

I don't know where the people who suggest this live – the Outer Hebrides, maybe, or the 18th century – but where I live, leaving the curtains open means a massive assault of artificial light, from street lamps to neighbours' security lights going on and off every time a cat walks past. Light is good for you, but so is dark. I can't sleep with the curtains open without wearing an eye mask, but I can't witness the dawn if my eyes are covered. You see the problem.

Get physical

The idea

Fitting exercise into my day is, hmm, I will say “tricky”, but “vanishingly unlikely” also works. Getting it done first thing is the best way to maximise your chances. Herbert is an eloquent advocate for early-morning movement:

she started her power hour in 2017, with only 14 weeks to train for a marathon. “The almost meditative beat of my feet striking the ground brings a feeling of invincibility,” she says. “My worries don’t seem so big any more. I can think clearly. I have more energy and anything seems possible.” It doesn’t hurt that Herbert is a glowing, inspirational picture of health and vitality. Count me in.

The verdict

Imagine a cinematic montage of me falling out of bed, fighting with a sports bra and dozing off as I lace my trainers. My Monday run is bearable. Obviously, I hate getting up, but, after a barrage of online advice, I set my kit out the night before, giving myself one less excuse. The misty dawn is beautiful, as is my smug glow.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, I do early online classes, one called [Your Mum's VHS](#), the other [Boyband Barre](#). The former involves high-energy bouncing à la Jane Fonda (although the 90s music suggests the mum in question is me, which stings). The latter, meanwhile, is a brutally painful way to start the day – even the instructor appears to be suffering – and no amount of Take That can drown out the screaming from my glutes. On Thursday, I try the app [Zombies, Run!](#), a post-apocalyptic audio tale that provides running prompts. I enjoy running in darkness through a desolate wasteland populated by the undead, desperately searching for food and fuel: it is perfect preparation for Christmas 2021.



Early-morning yoga is a classic of the genre. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

By my 7am pilates class on Friday, I am broken and exhausted. This is a big problem, according to Herbert; the most important part of power hour preparation is getting enough sleep. “No one wants to get up in the morning early if they’re tired. If you want it to feel good and not to be a punishment, get to bed early and get the sleep you need.” But this is where life intrudes: I am a poor sleeper, my sons’ adolescent body clocks mean they talk to me only after 10pm and the dog needs his walk before I can exercise. By the weekend, I am rebranding the 10-minute dog walk as “exercise”.

If mornings are painful, afternoons are worse: I experience slumps so intense they feel like out-of-body experiences. It feels as if I am wading through syrup. I ask Herbert for advice. “I definitely get a slump; for me, it’s concentration and focus. The way I combat that – and people don’t want to hear this – is movement. Get up from your desk, get moving, walk around outside, stretch, get a bit of oxygen.” She is right: I don’t want to hear this. I try Jenkins, hoping for sympathy. “Life isn’t perfect, so why shouldn’t you be tired sometimes?” he says. “That’s what tea is for, that’s what sugar is for.”

Speaking of sugar, I eat constantly and indiscriminately this week, with the panicky greed of a rat trapped in a Greggs wheelie bin. Very much #fitnessgoals.

Meditation

The idea

The benefits of meditation don't need restating: its [impact on a wide range of conditions](#), including depression, anxiety and fibromyalgia, is well documented. Many spiritual traditions that incorporate meditation consider it an early-morning practice, too: "Creating a sacred connection to your higher self when the world and your mind are at their quietest," as the alternative medicine enthusiast Deepak Chopra puts it. I have hated every previous attempt at meditating – my mind churns like a cement mixer – but perhaps dawn will work its magic.

The verdict

I try the [Calm app](#) twice but, as usual, my brain trots straight to my greatest failings, festering grievances and the expired soup in the fridge. I have the rest of the day for that stuff; I don't need an extra hour of it in the morning. Instead, inspired by Jenkins' beautiful and persuasive writing about early mornings in nature – the blackbirds and foxes that inhabit his street and his allotment, the light-streaked sky at "the quiet moments when the day inhales and the night fails" – I try sitting outside, quietly. I watch the wind move the leaves and the sparrows bustle in the bushes as the dark recedes over 15 minutes. I don't think it is meditation – my eyes are open, I am not focusing on my breath – but it does have that stilling quality I find so elusive.

Creativity

The idea

[The Artist's Way](#), a 1992 book by the creativity whiz Julia Cameron, introduced the concept of "morning pages": freeform first-thing writing to get the juices flowing (yuck). Its more recent equivalent, journalling, is a staple of self-help and personal development morning routines.

The bestselling author [Jojo Moyes](#) dabbles in early writing shifts: “When my children were young, I started at 6am (or, if I could face it, 5am). It was the only time of the day that my brain wasn’t fogged with domestic detritus,” she says. “The first half hour was always a struggle, but there is a weird filterless quality to what comes out straight after dreams. It’s a good time for the imagination.”



‘There is a weird filterless quality to what comes out straight after dreams.’
Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

Early-morning writing works for Jenkins, too: “The stuff I do early just comes, because there’s nothing else around. You can kind of hear it; the tone is there.” The writer Oliver Burkeman tested Cameron’s idea and found it “[powerful ... at calming anxieties, producing insights and resolving dilemmas](#)”. I need that.

The verdict

Cameron’s instructions are rigid, yet terrifyingly vague: three full longhand sides of “US letter paper” on anything; a complete stream of consciousness. I fall out of bed at 6am, shuffle to the spare room, open a notebook and start to write. I hate how it feels – and, as for the output ... well. Morning pages are supposed to be private, but let me share some snippets: “Wow this is

terrible I hate this”; “Jeopardy, no USP chicken estuary”; “This was terrible”. Powerful stuff.

On the third day, I abandon the bootcamp because I have work to do on a tight deadline. I start at 5.30am. Moyes and Jenkins are right: the emptiness, the absence of noise, creates a space where I am not constantly distracted. I finish efficiently, without scrolling through Twitter once.

Celebrities

The idea

We are fixated on dissecting the minutiae of celebrity routines, keen to draw any lessons we can from their habits. How did they become so successful, glossy and charismatic? Is it anything to do with their breakfast? This means I have plenty to choose from as I try to capture a bit of morning-routine stardust.

The verdict

I start with Winfrey, the queen of self-actualisation. In one of the many conflicting versions of her routine I read, she wakes at 6.02am, without an alarm clock. I have no expectation this will work, but I swear that when I check my phone on waking in the morning, it is precisely 6.02. She follows up with dog walking, coffee and meditation in her 3,000-tree garden or “breakfast chair”.

I manage dog and coffee, then I sit in the shed for 10 minutes (it is raining) and check out the Winfrey-endorsed The Bowl of Saki (daily snippets of Sufi mysticism) on my phone, taking in absolutely nothing. Winfrey does assisted stretches (“two, sometimes three, people … come to my house to help me”), so I ask my husband for help. He pulls my arms, briefly and perfunctorily. Winfrey also runs “a giant loop around my home”. I do this, too. It takes 35 seconds.



Trying apple cider vinegar a la Victoria Beckham. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

After Winfrey, things degenerate. I can't manage Jennifer Aniston's 4.30am start, or her regime of "[keeping your body confused](#)" by exercise, including the ominous-sounding "spin-yoga". My body is sufficiently confused by getting up at 6am, so I ride my bike round the block (this is so fun I do it twice) then sleepwalk through a 10-minute yoga video. Aniston's breakfast smoothie is an unholy sludge with cacao (I use cocoa), protein powder, spinach and other horrors: it sits on my desk for hours before I can stomach it. I do adopt, and genuinely appreciate, her "[no phone for the first hour](#)" discipline, however.

Victoria Beckham drinks two tablespoons of [apple cider vinegar](#) first thing, then does two separate workouts. No wonder she often looks thunderous. I do a 6am run, then drink the vinegar, an experience so unpleasant I decide it counts as my second workout. Beckham is another smoothie devotee – what is it with celebs' reluctance to chew? – but my blender can't countenance broccoli, so I eat a few florets instead.

Orlando Bloom's [nonsensical and much-derided regime](#) also defeats me. "I chant for 20 minutes every day," he says, but I settle for muttering: "I hate this," a few times. Bloom's first breakfast of "green powders that I mix with

brain octane oil” becomes a cod liver oil capsule and a cystitis sachet (I don’t have cystitis, but it is the only vaguely therapeutic powder in the house). He does “eye-gazing” with his infant daughter, but I daren’t look my 17-year-old in the eye before midday, so I just glance at him as he eats breakfast, stony-faced.

I had hoped to close the month with [Princess Margaret’s fabled morning routine](#), as revealed in Craig Brown’s [Ma’am, Darling](#): breakfast in bed, two hours of reading the papers and smoking, bath, hair and makeup, then vodka. Sadly, none of that is possible when you have to hold down a job.

After a month of self-actualised, optimised mornings, I am bone-tired and biscuit-dependent; the dog’s body clock has fatally readjusted to require walking at 6am. Even so, I find myself reluctant to give up. I have started setting the alarm earlier and, when I wake before it, something compels me to get up and go outside. It is certainly not because I am more effective, but the peace, the birdsong and the light feel like an initiates’ secret, a gift to myself. “If you can make it work, there’s goodness in it,” says Jenkins. Perhaps I can.

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Interview

Ashley Banjo on Black Lives Matter, backlash and reality TV: ‘I’m a sceptic of cancel culture’

[Alex Mistlin](#)



Ashley Banjo, dancer, choreographer, actor and now activist. Photograph: Mark Waugh/Alamy

Tue 19 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

By the time he was 30, Ashley Banjo had spent nearly a decade in the public eye. Having pipped Susan Boyle to the Britain's Got Talent (BGT) title with his dance group Diversity in 2009, he completed seven UK arena tours before transitioning back to television, with a slew of judging gigs on television dance shows, including Dancing on Ice, Got to [Dance](#) and Dance Dance Dance.

Nothing, however, could have prepared him for the backlash that followed Diversity's appearance on BGT last September. The performance [featured backing dancers in riot gear and the image of a white man standing on Banjo's neck](#), a reference to the murder in Minneapolis of [George Floyd](#), and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests that followed.

To date, it has racked up more than 30,000 complaints to the media regulator Ofcom, earning a spot as one of [the top five most complained about moments in UK TV history](#).

"People were very quick to label it the Black Lives Matter performance but I wasn't trying to make a political statement," says Banjo, 33. "I wasn't trying to cause reform or change policy, I was just bringing the conversation to a place that is natural for me: a stage." Without the BLM element, he says, "it wouldn't have been too political or too sad, or not right for light entertainment. What was 'wrong' is that I brought in Black Lives Matter."

In doing so, he pushed his troupe into unfamiliar, politically charged terrain, and unleashed a torrent of online threats and abuse. As the face of the operation, Banjo became a particular target. On social media, he says, racial slurs were just "sitting there untamed" in stark contrast to the platforms' crackdown on Covid-19 misinformation or women who "even hint at showing a nipple".

Banjo holds less resentment against people who expressed disapproval respectfully, including those who complained to Ofcom. "Listen, there's a

lot of ignorance but I don't think the 30,000 people are racist," he says. "That's such a sweeping generalisation. Probably a lot of those people are racist. But there's a lot of people who felt uncomfortable, or who didn't even see it and complained because their mate in the pub was complaining. I've had personal conversations with people who have apologised when they realised where they might have gone wrong."



Banjo, centre, and Diversity in the 2020 Britain's Got Talent performance that led to 30,000 complaints. Photograph: Dymond/Thames/Syco/Shutterstock

He also received encouragement from a few people he "wouldn't normally hear from" following the BGT performance: Elton John contacted him, as did the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. "They called when everything was going on, just to check in and offer their support. [Meghan and Harry] understood racism in Britain and what it felt like to have a certain level of backlash ... In the sea of negativity, it was a huge help."

I was born to be a boxer but dad wasn't having it – he said I could put my face to better use

I meet Banjo on a boat, moored outside an east London studio, where he is being photographed. Weary after a day of trying on outfits, he is now

wearing the biggest item of clothing I have ever seen: a fluffy, grey fleece that drowns his heavyweight boxer physique. His dad actually was a heavyweight boxer: “It’s much harder to dance when you’re big,” says Banjo, who is 6ft 6in. “I was naturally born to be a boxer but dad wasn’t having it – he said I could put my face to better use.”

Banjo was born in Leytonstone, east London, but grew up in Essex. His Nigerian father, [Funso](#), originally moved to Scotland to attend boarding school before settling in Forest Gate, while his mother, Dani, a dance teacher, was born and raised in Ilford. “I was in a buggy in the corner of the studio from when I was born,” he says. “I was a little kid seeing my mum at the front, putting everyone through stretches, being the sergeant major. She has always been that figure in my life,” he says of the woman who not only trained him as a dancer, but is still his manager.

At 14, Banjo started teaching dance himself. “We were an old-school circus family,” he beams. He met his wife, Francesca Abbott, two years later, teaching at his family’s Rainham studio. She also now works for Diversity Dance, the management company behind the troupe. “As a 20-year-old, knowing that if your ideas aren’t good enough, your brother, your mum, your wife don’t eat, that’s a life-shaping responsibility,” he says. It was also a responsibility he felt most intensely during the pandemic. Unable to tour, and with a one-year-old and a newborn baby to look after, he says he [fell into a “dark hole”](#). “You can’t see any of your family, your businesses and jobs are crumbling around you. It was tough.”

As a child, he attended private school in Billericay, Essex, where he was academically successful and also head boy. But, he says, he “grew up straddling two worlds: being the only Black kid [at school]” before spending his evenings at the dance school where “everybody’s making ends meet … you mix that with being mixed-race”, he says. “My mum’s white, my nan’s white, my wife’s white, one of my kids has blue eyes, blond hair. You don’t like to think about it because they are my family, but we are not the same.”

At school, he experienced his fair share of bullying (“I was a young, mixed-race boy who danced and didn’t play football”) but because he was so much bigger than everyone else, the intimidation was never physical. He remembers an incident where a white pupil approached him “bragging about

beating up Black and Asian people at the weekend, like as a hobby". If he ever wanted to react violently, his boxer father's warnings would ring loud in his ears: "People might think he was like, 'Give him the right hook' – but my dad was the opposite. He always taught us to turn the other cheek."

Banjo says he formed Diversity by accident. In the mid-2000s, the only boy dancing on screen was [Billy Elliot](#) and so, feeling embarrassed, he and the other boys at his Rainham dance school would retreat into a backroom to practise their own "cool" routines. Two years later, they won BGT. "It was all organic; I've never held an audition," he says.

But in 2009, inexperience wasn't the only thing between them and the BGT title: "[Susan Boyle had already been in The Simpsons](#)," he explains. "She was world-famous at that point, which took the pressure off." Diversity, however, won the public vote, leaving a young Banjo to face the disappointed media scrum waiting to greet Boyle. "There was press there from around the world: America, Asia ... it was her crowning moment. From the beginning, the first question was: 'Why you?' But I remember sitting there, thinking: 'This is going to change my life completely.'" Banjo took time off from his degree (in physics and biology) to compete on BGT and, 12 years later, has yet to return to it. "In a way, I hope I don't – but I would also love the chance to finish my degree," he says.



Diversity in May 2009, two days before winning Britain's Got Talent.
Photograph: Stuart Atkins/Shutterstock

Last summer, Banjo returned to BGT as a judge when Simon Cowell broke his back after falling off [an electric bike](#). The competition is sometimes viewed as one of the “softer” reality shows, with only three performances demanded of participants in total, but Banjo acknowledges that many of the issues around the [exploitation of vulnerable contestants](#) and [the lack of psychological support](#) available, both on set and after filming, remain. “You’re still exposing ordinary people to the public … Diversity have been blessed. It’s very rare that big groups win those things; normally, you’re on your own. It sounds so dramatic, but it can honestly destroy you. That’s the only way to describe it.”

Did he feel any trepidation about working for Cowell, given the recent [allegations of bullying and racism on the set](#) of America’s Got Talent, which NBC has denied? “Personally, no,” he says. “I’m a sceptic of woke culture to the point where it’s cancel culture – and the speed of allegation is 100 times quicker than the speed of investigation. It’s very dangerous to be able to point a finger and change someone’s life.”

His latest project is an hour-long ITV documentary, Ashley Banjo: Britain in Black and White. “There will be a lot of assumptions, but I didn’t want to poke the hornet’s nest,” he says. Indeed, the show is not quite the journey into the dark heart of British prejudices that you might expect. Rather, he was driven to make the programme after “people saying to me, ‘I’ve never really thought about racism before’ or ‘I didn’t really know it existed’.” “I’m learning too, but I have a platform – which means that I can do it with people watching,” he says.

His commitment to promoting Black history is also something of a personal crusade: “I want to get to a point when it is no longer [considered] ‘Black’ history,” he says. “I want this to be stuff that people just learn.” In the documentary, “this”, specifically, is [the New Cross fire](#) in 1981, in which 13 young people died in a house fire at a 16th birthday party. No one has ever been charged in connection with the fire, but the slogan “13 dead, nothing said” became a rallying cry for political action – in part due to the work of activists such as the writer and editor [Leila Hassan Howe](#). “Meeting Leila

“was one of the most educational, eye-opening experiences of my life,” says Banjo. “The sheer hate was so overt back in the day, to the point where people were being murdered in fires. We’re only talking about a generation ago; it can’t just evaporate.”



Ashley, right, and his brother Jordan Banjo at the 2021 Bafta awards – Diversity’s BGT performance was voted 2020’s must-see moment by the public. Photograph: Scott Garfitt/REX/Shutterstock for BAFTA

It’s Banjo’s name in the title, but the documentary is almost a two-hander with the historian [David Olusoga](#), whose production company, Uplands TV, was involved in making it. “I wanted to educate and inspire,” says Banjo. “But I wanted to come from a place of knowledge and historical context, not finger-pointing and assumption,” which is why he was keen to share the screen with the academic.

“We wanted to do something about now, and about how the past and the present have combined in this moment we’re living through,” says Olusoga. “This is Ashley’s story but it was also a moment that millions of people followed and were affected by ... Ashley understands the unique place he occupies in British culture. I think a lot of people are going to see a different side to him in this film.”

It clearly irks Banjo that his contentious appearance on BGT has become known as “the BLM performance”. “We’ve never given it a title, but I would call it The Great Realisation because that’s what happened to me personally.” If he had known how much backlash the piece would provoke, would he have tempered his approach? “I still would have done it,” he says. “But I would have been scared.”

“I didn’t intend to be an activist, but somehow here I am,” he says. “I’ve learned to believe in my own choices.”

Ashley Banjo: Britain in Black and White, 19 October at 9pm on ITV and ITVHub.

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[Colin Powell](#)

Colin Powell: the man who might have been America's first Black president



Colin Powell in October 1995, a month before he decided against running for president. Photograph: David Sillitoe/The Guardian



[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Tue 19 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

Colin Powell wrote a speech in November 1995 announcing a run for US president. He wrote another speech announcing a decision not to run.

When he faced reporters in a hotel in Alexandria, Virginia, [Powell delivered the second speech.](#)

Political life “requires a calling that I do not yet hear”, he said, explaining why he would not take on the White House incumbent, Bill Clinton.

So Powell was not to be America’s first Black president. Instead he was, “perhaps, one of the finest Americans never to be president”, John Major, the former British prime minister, reflected on Monday after [Powell’s death at the age of 84](#) due to complications from Covid-19.

America’s loss was arguably also the Republican party’s tragedy. In his remarks, Powell said he would help the party in “broadening its appeal”, suggesting that he could “help the party of Lincoln move once again close to the spirit of Lincoln” and find ways to “heal racial divides” in society.

But by the end of his life, Powell, who previously voted Republican in seven presidential elections in a row, had endorsed Democrats in the last four. He finally quit the party that surrendered to Donald Trump and his mendacious, racially divisive brand of populism.

“Like many Republicans, he felt that the party was leaving him, that the party was taking a rightward turn and he felt increasingly unwelcome,” said [Joe Cirincione](#), who as president of the Ploughshares Fund, a foundation focused on nuclear non-proliferation and conflict resolution, worked closely with Powell.

“He never joined the Democratic party. He preferred the moderate policies of the [Republicans](#), even as he watched the party go, but it was Trump and Trumpism that pushed him out of the party.”

Powell was the son of a seamstress and a shipping-room foreman in Manhattan’s garment district, both immigrants from Jamaica. He wrote in his 1995 autobiography [My American Journey](#): “Mine is the story of a black kid of no early promise from an immigrant family of limited means who was raised in the South Bronx.”



As chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, Powell inspects a guard of honour in London. Photograph: Times Newspapers/Rex/Shutterstock

A veteran of the Vietnam war, Powell spent 35 years in the army and rose to the rank of four-star general. He served as national security adviser to Ronald Reagan and was chairman of the joint chiefs of staff under another Republican president, George HW Bush, during the 1991 Gulf war.

He had been a political independent during his military career but, after retirement in 1993 and a bestselling memoir, was wooed by both Democrats and Republicans as potential presidential material. He sided with the latter, explaining that he aligned with Republicans on fiscal responsibility, small government and low taxes, even though he disagreed with some illiberal positions.

Cirincione, now a fellow at the [Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft](#) thinktank in Washington, recalled: “If he had decided, I think he would have been the Republican candidate. At that time he was one of the most widely respected people in the country. He would have been the candidate to beat if he had decided to go for it.”

But after much agonising, Powell ruled out a White House bid. He publicly acknowledged the potential impact on his family as a factor. His wife, Alma, reportedly feared that he would be assassinated because of his skin colour. Journalist Bob Woodward’s book *Bush at War* [quoted her as saying](#): “If you run, I’m gone. You will have to do it alone.”

Cirincione added: “He would often say things like, ‘It was the campaigns.’ He wouldn’t mind being president but it was the campaigns that would have killed him. He was comfortable being in leadership roles, including as chairman of the joint chiefs in charge of millions of our troops.

“It was very personal for him because of the health of his wife and he just didn’t want to engage in the kind of gruelling, time-consuming effort it takes to become president at the sacrifice of what he thought would be his family. He wasn’t willing to do it.”

Powell did return to public service when he was named secretary of state to President George W Bush, becoming the first African American to serve as the country’s top diplomat. He publicly [presented mistaken intelligence](#) about weapons of mass destruction to justify the March 2003 invasion of

Iraq, which he later called it a “a blot” that will “always be a part of my record”.



Powell meets President Barack Obama at the White House in 2010. During the 2008 election Powell hailed Obama as a ‘transformational figure’.
Photograph: Martin H Simon/UPI/Rex/Shutterstock

Powell also came to personify a certain section of the moderate Republican old guard increasingly horrified by the direction of the party. Although he donated to the campaign of the party’s nominee, John McCain, in 2008, he did not support his running mate, Sarah Palin, a smashmouth neophyte whose stoking of white rage [represented the opening of a Pandora’s box](#).

In a major blow to McCain’s campaign, Powell endorsed Barack Obama, a Democrat whom he hailed as a “transformational figure”. He told the NBC politics show [Meet the Press](#): “I’m also troubled by, not what Senator McCain says, but what members of the party say. And it is permitted to be said such things as, ‘Well, you know that Mr Obama is a Muslim.’

“Well, the correct answer is, he is not a Muslim, he’s a Christian. He’s always been a Christian. But the really right answer is, what if he is? Is there something wrong with being a Muslim in this country? The answer’s no,

that's not America. Is there something wrong with some seven-year-old Muslim American kid believing that he or she could be president?"

Underlining his misgivings about the Republican party's populist-nativist drift, Powell endorsed Obama again in 2012, then Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election and Joe Biden last year. He described Trump as a liar who presented a fundamental danger to the US.



Donald Trump and Powell shake hands at an event in 2019. 'He thought Trump was insane,' said someone who worked closely with Powell.
Photograph: Sarah Silbiger/UPI/Rex/Shutterstock

Cirincione noted: "He thought Trump was insane. He thought the risk of the president of the United States using nuclear weapons was greater under Trump than any time in his career. It was that global security risk, plus the threat to democracy, that alienated him from the Republican party."

The deadly insurrection by a pro-Trump mob at the US Capitol on 6 January was the final straw: Powell declared that he no longer considered himself a Republican. The party that he had grown up with, which espoused the American dream and promoted him to senior roles in government, no longer existed.

Larry Jacobs, director of the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota, said: “Colin Powell came from a working-class background and he never forgot that. The party moved away from the blue-collar Reagan Democrats, which is probably closer to where Colin Powell was, and it became much more of a corporate party, a party that would win elections by stoking racial resentment.

“It became much less inclusive on social issues that Powell was more moderate on. I think the reason he didn’t run for president is he looked at the Republican party and he didn’t see a place for himself. From a practical point of view, he made the assessment he probably couldn’t win the nomination without a lot of conflict and perhaps his reputation being tarnished.”

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Coronavirus

UK Covid cases near 50,000 in one day as No 10 warns of ‘challenging’ winter



As cases rise in the UK, experts point out that the Covid statistics from Europe demonstrate it didn't have to be this way in Britain. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

[Ian Sample](#) Science editor

[@iansample](#)

Mon 18 Oct 2021 15.23 EDT

Downing Street has warned of “challenging” months ahead as UK coronavirus cases reached their highest level since mid-July.

The reported number of Covid cases in the UK increased steadily through October and reached 49,156 on Monday, the highest reported since 17 July and a 16% rise in new cases over the past week.

The figure is only 19,000 cases short of the peak number of cases ever recorded in the UK. On 8 January 2021, 68,053 new cases were reported at the height of the most devastating wave of the pandemic last winter.

The prime minister's official spokesperson said a rise in coronavirus cases was expected over the winter and that the government would keep a "close watch" on the statistics.

Hospitalisations and deaths are also increasing according to Monday's data, with 5,561 people admitted to hospital over the past week, up 6.9% on the week before, and the number dying within 28 days of testing positive reaching 869 over the past seven days, up 11.4% on the week before.

"We always knew the coming months would be challenging," Boris Johnson's official spokesperson said. "What we are seeing is case rates, hospitalisations and deaths still broadly in line with the modelling as set out a few months back now. The vaccination programme will continue to be our first line of defence, along with new treatments, testing and public health advice. But we will obviously keep a close watch on cases."

The rise in UK cases is largely driven by infections among secondary school children, though some older age groups, including those who have children in school, are also experiencing rises. Hospitalisations and deaths are mostly driven by infections in older and more vulnerable groups, including those whose immunity has started to wane.

Dr Kit Yates, a mathematical biologist at the University of Bath and a member of the Independent Sage group of experts, said that with Britain nearing 50,000 cases on Monday, there had been only 16 days throughout the whole pandemic when cases were higher in the UK.

"The narrative has become that case numbers aren't important, but they still are," he said. "They don't mean the same as they did before vaccination, but the link between cases and deaths has not been broken. We are seeing over 120 deaths a day on average, which for me is unacceptable. Just glancing at the numbers from our neighbours in Europe demonstrates that it didn't have to be this way."

Prof Andrew Hayward, who advises the government on the Covid crisis, told BBC Radio 4's World At One that it was concerning the UK had very high rates of infection and higher rates of hospitalisation and death than many European countries, adding that waning immunity was probably one reason for infections being so high.

"We shouldn't be complacent because there is still huge potential for the NHS to come under a lot of pressure and for there to be a lot of unnecessary deaths," he said. "So we need to get the vaccination rates up and we need to be prepared potentially to think about other measures if things do get out of control."

Earlier this month, Prof Neil Ferguson, head of the influential modelling team at Imperial College London, called for teenage vaccines and boosters to be accelerated to reduce the risk of a substantial wave this winter.

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New Zealand

New Zealand reports record Covid cases as experts sound warning over health system



Auckland is currently in level 3 lockdown amid a covid outbreak
Photograph: Fiona Goodall/Reuters

Tess McClure in Christchurch

@tessairini

Tue 19 Oct 2021 00.11 EDT

New Zealand has hit its highest daily case number since the pandemic began. 94 new Covid-19 infections announced on Tuesday, as experts warned that cases would probably keep rising, and sustained high numbers could quickly push the health system to capacity.

Prime minister Jacinda Ardern said the rise in Covid cases was “incredibly hard,” and urged people to get vaccinated and to continue following the

rules.

“We’re not powerless, we do have the ability to help keep cases as low as we can,” she said.

Case numbers in New Zealand are expected to continue to rise in the coming weeks. “We always know that a single day is just a point on a graph on a trend curve,” said epidemiologist prof Michael Baker. “But taken with the other points [we’ve seen], we’re going to be in three digits soon - if not tomorrow then this week, probably.”

Health officials have so far been unable to link more than half of the cases announced on Tuesday to existing infections. The concerning rise in unlinked cases could indicate further, undetected spread in the community. Ardern said the outbreak had spread across the city, and there were now cases in 124 Auckland suburbs.

“There’s not much margin for error at the moment, in terms of the race between our vaccination program and the outbreak,” said Shaun Hendy, an epidemiologist and modeler for Te Pūnaha Matatini, on whom the government has previously relied for outbreak modeling. “It could go either way at this stage. If we don’t see numbers starting to stabilize or pull down in a couple of weeks, it’s likely that we’re looking at a much longer outbreak.”

As the outbreak grew, public health interventions like testing, tracing and isolating cases would start to falter, Hendy said. New Zealand’s contact tracing capacity was already approaching its limits. “We’re seeing more and more unlinked cases, which is telling us that the virus is well ahead of our contact tracers at the moment,” he said.

“One of the big concerns is that our track, trace and isolate [strategy] will stop making an impact, and we’ll see that virus really strip ahead of our vaccination program.”

“Your response actually gets worse as case numbers grow. You’re giving the virus an extra edge, once the outbreak gets large. In that case, the risk of it

basically beating our vaccine rollout is quite high.”

The outbreak is increasingly hitting young people, with 12 people in hospital under the age of 39. The highest number of new cases on Tuesday came from the youngest age groups – those aged under 39 – which also have the lowest vaccination rates.

Ardern said vaccination efforts would increasingly have to focus on young people who “don’t think it is real, or that it affects them yet.” Because New Zealand opted to roll out population-wide vaccination by age band, most of those young people have had far less time to get vaccinated. Those aged 12 and up only became eligible to get a vaccine on 1 September.

Since the Delta strain arrived in New Zealand, it has been [ripping through Māori and Pacific communities](#). Despite making up just 16.5% of the overall population, Māori have made up almost half, or 46% of cases over the last 2 weeks. Of Tuesday’s cases, 39% are Māori and 14% are Pasifika. Toward the beginning of the outbreak it was concentrated in Pacific communities, who made up 60-70% of cases.

Māori affairs minister Peeni Henare urged Māori to get vaccinated. “I say to the Māori people, Covid-19 is on the doorstep of your houses. Do not let it enter,” Henare said. “The best course of protection still remains for us to vaccinate our people.”

The country is racing to increase vaccination numbers as the outbreak grows. As of Tuesday, 83% of the eligible (those aged 12 and up) population have had at least one dose, or 70% of the full population. 65% of the eligible population have been fully vaccinated with both doses, or 55% of the full population.

Vaccination rates among Māori and Pacific communities, particularly young people, were still lagging behind the broader population.

As case numbers rise, so too were the number of people hospitalised with the illness: 38 people were in hospital with Covid-19, and five people were in intensive care.

Hendy said that if cases rose slightly and then sustained triple digits, modelling showed the health system would quickly come under pressure.

New Zealand's outbreak so far had had an unusually high hospitalisation rate, of around 10%. If that endured, emergency and ICU capacity could start to buckle. "It really wouldn't take an awful lot more. A sustained rise in cases, a couple of weeks of triple digits with this first kind of hospitalization rate... [and] we'll be under considerable strain in the healthcare system," he said.

Baker said that the government's pathway forward needed to be based not just on vaccine targets, but on giving a more precise idea of when the health system would reach saturation, and what measures would be required to prevent that.

Of Tuesday's cases, 87 were in Auckland and seven were in Waikato. Both regions remain in a level 3 lockdown. The government has signaled it will release plans for those cities' pathway forward on Friday, including a new pandemic management plan as cases rise.

The Ministry of Health said in a release: "Public health staff are continuing to urge anyone in Auckland to, please, get a test if they have symptoms of Covid-19, regardless of which suburb they live in. There are increased cases across the region, so everyone needs to remain vigilant."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/19/new-zealand-covid-cases-rise-to-new-record-as-young-people-bear-brunt-of-infections>

Social care

‘Where’s the logic?’: how England’s ‘no jab, no job’ policy will hit a care worker



Carol Thomas with her carer Debbie Vickers, who said: ‘I am losing my job and my career. I feel as if it’s an ultimatum, not a choice.’ Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian



[Robert Booth](#) Social affairs correspondent

Mon 18 Oct 2021 06.55 EDT

Carol Thomas, a retired health academic who lives with multiple sclerosis, is about to lose not just a carer but a companion because of the government's "no jab, no job" policy.

Unless the policy is changed, which looks unlikely after the health secretary, Sajid Javid, this month told unjabbed care workers to "get out and get another job", the 62-year-old's days of being cared for by Debbie Vickers are numbered.

Vickers, who has more than a dozen years' experience in social care and the NHS, has become a friend as well as someone who hoists Thomas in and out of bed and undertakes the most personal of care for the [former professor](#) at Lancaster University's faculty of health and medicine.

But she is among tens of thousands of care home staff in England declining the vaccine who now face redundancy. Guardian analysis of the latest NHS data reveals the decision to make full Covid-19 vaccination a "condition of deployment" from 11 November is on course to force up to 38,000 staff out of care homes for older people, deepening a staffing crisis which is already causing care home closures and discharge backlogs in hospitals.

As of 10 October 12% of staff in older adult care homes were still not fully vaccinated, rising to more than one in five in areas including Birmingham, Manchester, Stoke and Hackney in London. A small number of these may be able to apply for [medical exemptions](#).

Vickers said she was “no anti-vaxxer”. Her decision comes because of an earlier adverse reaction to a flu jab. She may get a few weeks’ grace, but she still faces redundancy from what Thomas believes is an ethically wrong and practically illogical “insulting, discriminatory blanket ban”.

Many see the value in care workers being vaccinated, given Covid was involved in the deaths of 42,732 care home residents in England and Wales to the start of October. But with 105,000 care staff vacancies in England exacerbated by a slump in foreign workers arriving to fill the low-wage roles, operators are calling for a pause on the strict policy, which not does not apply to NHS staff.



Vickers said she was ‘no anti-vaxxer’. Her decision comes because of an earlier adverse reaction to a flu jab. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

A snapshot survey of 34 independent care operators this month seen by the Guardian found more than half believed they would lose six or more staff as

result. The National Care Association also found that close to one in five operators believe staff shortages will affect their ability to operate at full capacity. Two care homes in Cumbria closed last week for that reason. Advinia, which runs Barrock Court in Low Hesket, confirmed vaccine hesitancy was a contributory factor.

Thomas said she was set to lose four people who care for her at her Sheffield care home. One, who feels she has a medical condition and should be excused, is being supported by her GP but cannot “tick the box” for a medical exemption because her condition has not been confirmed by a consultant, Thomas said. Another, from Hungary, said her feeling was that “if the state requires you to do something, you don’t”.

“I really object to a lot of the anti-vax propaganda on social media but the carers involved are not objecting for those reasons,” Thomas said. “I don’t think it is right that parliament should decide that people have to be vaccinated. Individuals have a right not to be instructed by the state to take vaccines if they feel it is dangerous or for whatever reason.”

She said she was capable of deciding the type of care she wants. She would be comfortable with her carers taking other steps to counter infection risk, “but the government has given care homes no choice but to terminate their employment”.

“I won’t be able to work with Carol, but I can visit her in her room, take her out to the pub,” said Vickers. “The residents have a choice not to be vaccinated and visitors don’t have to be vaccinated. It is discrimination and also quite stupid. Where is the logic? Does the virus recognise me as a visitor and not a carer?”

“We are losing really good staff and nursing homes are going to buckle,” she added. “I am losing my job and my career. I feel as if it’s an ultimatum, not a choice. We have been working all the way through this [pandemic] and it is a kick in the guts. I love the people I care for. I become friends with a lot of them and their families.”

The Department of Health and Social Care has been asked for comment.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/oct/18/where-is-the-logic-how-no-jab-no-job-policy-will-hit-one-care-worker>

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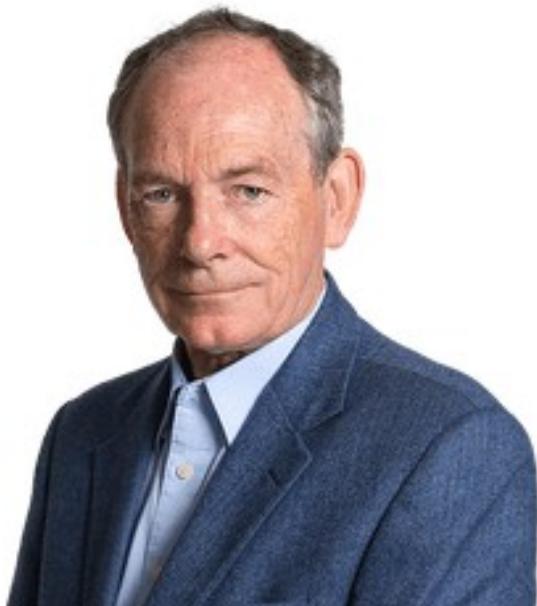
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[**Opinion**](#)[**Politics**](#)

Dedicated and tireless, David Amess was a paragon of a good constituency MP

[Simon Jenkins](#)





‘David Amess would drop everything to help his constituents.’ Tributes to Amess outside Belfairs Methodist church in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, 18 October. Photograph: Martin Dalton/REX/Shutterstock

Tue 19 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

British politics rightly commemorates its own. David Amess, killed in his home constituency last week, was eulogised on Monday [in the Commons](#) and St Margaret’s church, Westminster, as what the prime minister called “one of the kindest, nicest, most gentle people in politics”. He was not a star of the parliamentary firmament, but rather that paragon: a “good constituency MP”. The solemn minute’s silence held in the House of Commons and the tributes to Amess from MPs testified to a profession under collective threat. It is one that lies at the heart of representational democracy: that of intermediary between the rulers and the ruled.

Amess’s death comes at what many see as a critical juncture in democracy’s theatre of public debate. MPs are exposed to criticism and attack as never before, thanks in large part to the glaringly inadequate regulation of social media. Male and female MPs, particularly female ones, are being subjected to appalling anonymous trolling. An Amnesty survey in the run-up to the 2017 general election found the MP Diane Abbott was in receipt of an

average of [51 abusive tweets a day](#). Her colleague [Jess Phillips](#) has to keep in constant touch with the police. The atmosphere in which an MP must work is thus increasingly poisonous, with no effective action taken by either Facebook or Twitter.

One of the chief legacies of Amess's death must surely be action by the government and MPs alike to regulate the titans of the social media industry, whose creations are now haunting politics on both sides of the Atlantic. The evil they do both to individuals and to democracy as a whole far outweighs the benefits of non-regulation. The way democracy orchestrates public debate needs constant refreshment.

In Britain that is not happening. Parliament's combative debating chamber and absurd "upper house" of lords desperately need reform to accommodate the digital age and wholly new patterns of political activity. Yet rather than instigate such reforms, the two houses are planning to spend huge amounts of taxpayers' money on moving their chambers and voting lobbies into Victorian facsimiles while they repair, rather than update, their old ones. The Commons is never remotely full except on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. The rest of the time MPs are in their constituencies, where most are nowadays fully occupied.

The praise heaped on Amess was precisely for this commitment to his constituency, Southend West. He sought no ministerial office. He made no attempts at headline-grabbing within his party or in government. The [tributes paid to him](#) have all shown his work in a remarkably domestic light. One constituent could not get a school bus; another's council tax was wrong; another could not find her mother a care visitor; one needed help with a homeless charity. Amess would drop everything to help people like this – and to support the local church choir, the fire brigade, a cancer charity. His final campaign was to have his beloved Southend [declared a city](#) – an ambition realised on Tuesday, when Boris Johnson [confirmed the move](#) in honour of Amess.

Other modern democracies would find it odd that tasks such as these should fall to a member of the nation's central assembly. In the 1950s, the MP Duncan Sandys was criticised for never appearing in his Streatham constituency. [He blandly replied](#) that he was elected to represent "Streatham

at Westminster, not Westminster at Streatham". It was a repeat of Edmund Burke's similar retort to his Bristol electors. Parliament was where the nation's affairs were discussed, not Streatham high street.

Amess presented an image of an MP who was more similar to a local parish priest or GP. Yet his tasks were essential. The reason why they had to be performed, and why they would seem strange to other democracies, is that the services found lacking in his constituency are in Britain centrally ordained, while elsewhere they are a local democratic responsibility.

A British MP is thus thrust into the role of sole identifiable buffer between a citizen and the state, the last resort, the human port of call in time of distress. In France, Germany or Scandinavia, that buffer takes many forms: a mayor, a councillor, a local service ombudsman. I recall a survey from some years ago that found almost all Germans could name their mayor, while virtually no Britons could name their council leader. Local elections across most of Europe often enjoy huge turnouts, while Britain's are rarely much above 40%.

An MP is thus the nearest Britons get to a proper mayor. David Cameron's elected mayors were nothing of the sort, instead mere regional lobbyists for groups of towns with no responsibility for services. MPs on the other hand are seen as having seniority and authority. Amess's peculiar genius was to know which door to knock on and, if necessary, break down. To an official, appeasing a popular MP was a wise act of one-off discretion, preferable to possibly having to upheave a defective policy. To an MP it is a path to local popularity and re-election.

In grand bureaucracies such as the NHS or social care, the citizen confronts what can seem like an overwhelming power. Each edifice is barricaded behind zombie phone lines of recorded voices and websites awash in codes and passwords. All are designed to deter any but the most determined assault. The modern state is an electronic fortress. The only humans who seem trusted by the public to lay siege to it are MPs.

This should not be so. On coming to office, every government pledges to decentralise, localise and diversify accountability. No government delivers on that pledge. This gives MPs a prominence that, to many of their

constituents, wrongly leaves them as recognisable embodiments of the state. To many people in Southend, Amess must have seemed the local face of the British government, albeit in a friendly guise. He was a point of live contact. As such he could have seemed a natural focus of antagonism and hatred.

British MPs must fill a vacuum in local accountability that detracts from their job of debating and scrutinising the executive in parliament. Such scrutiny has never been more needed than at present. It stands to the credit of Amess and the many MPs like him that they have such a rapport with their constituencies. They are democracy's finest champions. But their most important and primary job remains at Westminster. Until a government is elected ready to divest power and accountability to other tiers of democracy, MPs will find themselves having to serve two masters. Amess, too, faced that dilemma.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist

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[A just transitionCoal](#)

How I switched from a career in coal to working in renewables

Paul Clarke



‘Everyone in high-carbon industries needs to be engaged in discussions about change.’ Cottam power station in 2015. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Tue 19 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

In the past, industrial change was poorly managed, leading to skilled staff being made redundant, withdrawing from work or drifting into less skilled employment. Anyone who remembers the dole queues after the closure of our [country's coalmines](#) in the 1980s may be rightly wary of promises of a “just transition” for fossil fuel workers as we move into a net-zero future. But, it doesn’t have to be this way, and I’d like to share my story as a testament to what is possible when we come together to properly prepare for the future.

Three years ago, I worked at Cottam, an EDF coal-fired power station in Nottinghamshire, as a professional engineer. I was proud of my job. My skills kept the country's lights on and kettles boiling. It was more than a career for me, it gave me a sense of purpose.

Then, they announced the [closure of the station](#), I knew I needed to fight to keep working in the energy industry. At the same time as our roles at Cottam were disappearing, there was great uncertainty in the electricity sector with acute skills shortages already evident. So, I joined a group of union representatives to work constructively with EDF to secure the best future for our members and to make sure that our skills, which would be essential to reaching net zero, were not lost.

We worked through the options for everyone. We assessed the options for redeployment to other jobs in EDF, other jobs in the energy sector and other jobs in different parts of the economy. From securing job trials with other employers to running joint union-employer workshops on the skills needed for a career in renewables, we tried every route to secure the best future for staff displaced by change. I secured a role in EDF Renewables' UK business and discovered that the knowledge gained from a career in a traditional coal station was equally as valuable in a green business.

I have been lucky; my union and employer worked closely together to offer me opportunities. It required hard work and commitment but I have the satisfaction of ensuring that customers have access to reliable, affordable, low-carbon electricity. To secure a just transition for other energy professionals, my personal view is that the government must work with unions and employers to achieve three main goals.

First, everyone in high-carbon industries needs to be engaged in discussions about change and able to positively influence their future. At Cottam we discussed the options fully, leading to the discovery of innovative ways to redeploy individuals. By doing this we fully understood the talents of my colleagues and how they could best use those skills to develop the county's low-carbon economy. This shows the true value of unions in the modern economy.

Second, we need a better planning process for change so that we can maintain affordable and secure electricity supplies and create incentives for companies and people to move around the energy business. With more certainty about change, individuals can be better prepared to develop their skills and continue to contribute to providing essential electricity supplies.

Third, as we provide market support to encourage the development of renewable energy technology, we should direct some of that support into effective training and development. Skilled people are an essential asset of the UK energy system and we should focus on improving these talents as they are key to delivering a sustainable future.

At Cottam, we learned from the failures of the past and used our knowledge and relationships across industry to protect the future of staff. I hope we're the first of many.

Paul Clarke is a former engineer in a coal-fired power station

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/oct/19/switched-career-coal-working-renewables>

OpinionVegetarianism

Flexitarians, pescatarians and a big meat conundrum

[Zoe Williams](#)



No thanks – unless it is hand-reared. Photograph: KatarzynaBialasiewicz/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Tue 19 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

Last century, we used to have a lot of conversations about what qualified as a “drink problem” – the range was huge. I interviewed one American public health official and he said: “Anyone who goes out for an evening and has no idea how many drinks he’ll have had by the end of it has a drink problem.” Given that the working definition of an alcoholic in my workplace at the time was “anyone who needs to use their tie as a pulley for their first drink because their hand is shaking too much for the famously unstable shape of a martini glass”, we thought that was hilarious. After more field work, someone came back with “anyone who needs rules around alcohol has a problem with it” – no spirits at home, no drinking on a Sunday night, a rigidly observed yardarm with weekend variations. All that had to go, and then you could be satisfied that you had no problem. These questions were outpaced by the passage of time – now it would be widely agreed that everyone, back then, had a problem.

In place of that, we have a question over what counts as a vegetarian. Fish have always been a grey area, not least because they are grey, but now there’s a space-time component – you can be a vegetarian except on a Friday, or unless you’re at somebody else’s house. You can eschew all meat unless it’s hand-reared, which ultimately means you are veggie everywhere except your own house, the worst of all possible worlds from a manners point of view, but maybe the best from the perspective of animal welfare. You can go white-meat only, which amounts to a vendetta against the chicken, but works for sustainability – or you toggle between real and fake meat, and make quite a detailed account of why the fake meat doesn’t taste the same. All this without anyone calling you ridiculous. I wonder if the trajectory is the same, and the future will just agree that we all had a meat problem.

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The politics sketchUK news

Old muckers try to hold back the tears for the late Sir David Amess

[John Crace](#)



Mark Francois in the House of Commons as MPs paid tribute to Sir David Amess, who died on Friday after he was stabbed several times during a constituency surgery in Leigh-on-Sea in Essex. Photograph: House of Commons/PA

Mon 18 Oct 2021 15.56 EDT

There was an empty space on the packed Conservative benches where Sir David Amess used to sit. Which was as it should have been, because he was there in spirit if not in person. Parliamentary sessions where MPs remember colleagues who have died can sometimes feel somewhat formulaic – dutiful, even, with the sense that MPs are rather going through the motions, with their speeches saying as much about themselves as the departed. The farewell to Amess was very different. It was as close to a wake as the House of Commons is likely to see, with every MP doing their best to rise to the occasion. To find the right words that summed up a life and career well lived. And much loved.

Amess was one of those politicians who these days often slip beneath the media radar. Someone who throughout his 38 years in Westminster never once looked on becoming an MP as a stepping stone to higher office. If he dreamed of a ministerial career, he kept it extremely well hidden, preferring instead to become the model backbench MP, devoted both to the interests of his constituents and cross-party causes in which he believed. And it was these often undervalued qualities to which his friends and colleagues tried to give voice.

The opening speeches from Boris Johnson and Keir Starmer were heartfelt and well judged; tributes on behalf of their parties to a man they and most others did not know well, but whose public service and close family ties they instinctively recognised.

Johnson highlighted causes Amess had backed – animal welfare, fuel poverty and women with endometriosis – before announcing that Southend was to be made a city in his honour. In nearly eight years of sketching, I can't remember a single contribution from David in which he had failed to shoehorn in an appeal for his constituency to be awarded city status. The

tragedy is that he had to pay such a high price for his dream to reach fruition.

The Labour leader said it was an attack on our country and our way of life; that the tragedy inevitably brought back memories of Jo Cox, who had been killed five years earlier, and highlighted the need for a renewed focus on MPs' safety. "We lean across and reach out to the opposite benches," he said. What the parties had in common mattered far more than what divided them.

But it was when Amess's close friends began to speak that proceedings began to feel more real, more intimate. Old muckers remembering him with gags and anecdotes. Anything to keep his memory alive. This was possibly Mark Francois's finest hour. The Tory MP hasn't always endeared himself to either Labour or many in his own party with his outspoken, combative brand of politics, but now we got to see a different side to him, both funny and touching.

Francois began by talking about how Amess had sponsored him to be an MP – clearly David had seen qualities in him that many others were to miss – back in the days when Basildon council was so rowdy that it was the councillors who heckled the public gallery. He ended by talking about Amess's timekeeping. "He was notorious for always being late for everything," he said. His voice then broke as he tried to hold back the tears. "Now he is the late Sir David Amess." Nadhim Zahawi and Suella Braverman also dabbed their eyes.

The jokes and stories came thick and fast from other friends, such as James Duddridge, Jackie Doyle-Price and Iain Duncan Smith. How Amess, a devout Catholic, had once accidentally got a boiled sweet blessed by the Pope. How David had never gone out of his way to disabuse voters who were under the impression he was a Labour MP. How he had once led a conga round Basildon town hall.

How he had ridden across Southend on a horse after being knighted. How he would cheerfully go along to every "opening of an envelope" – probably because he had written the invitation that had been inside it. How Amess had introduced IDS as the man who had slid down the greasy pole at a function

shortly after he had been sacked as leader of the Tory party. Being leader of the opposition isn't all it's cracked up to be, he confided to Starmer. Keir had the grace to smile.

But all the laughs could not hold back the sadness. The sheer pointlessness of a good and decent man being allegedly killed by a man with a knife in what police suspect could have been a terror attack, while doing his job at a constituency surgery. That was brought home by the contributions of both Stephen Timms, who had been wounded in an attack in 2010, and Kim Leadbeater, Jo Cox's sister, who now represents her old seat.

From time to time, some MPs would try to make some kind of sense of Amess's death. They would not live in fear. Democracy wouldn't be defeated. Politics must be conducted in a kinder way. Love must prevail. All of which were true. But the lasting feeling was still one of senselessness. Of a family robbed of a loving, gentle husband and father. Of a Commons numb at having lost one of its own in such horrific circumstances. Of an MP who had been in parliament for nearly 40 years and was still – to those who knew him – very much in his prime.

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Global health

Afghanistan to restart polio vaccination programme with Taliban support



Afghan health workers administer polio vaccinations to children in Kandahar, Afghanistan, last year. Photograph: Muhammad Sadiq/EPA

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Haroon Janjua in Islamabad

[@JanjuaHaroon](#)

Tue 19 Oct 2021 01.01 EDT

Afghanistan will restart nationwide polio vaccinations after more than three years, as the new Taliban government agreed to assist the campaign and to allow women to participate as frontline workers, the UN said on Monday.

The World [Health](#) Organization and Unicef said the vaccination drive would begin on 8 November with Taliban support.

“WHO and Unicef welcome the decision by the Taliban leadership supporting the resumption of house-to-house polio vaccination across Afghanistan,” the UN statement read.

“The Taliban leadership has expressed their commitment for the inclusion of female frontline workers.”

The announcement is a turnaround from the Islamists’ stance during the two decades of insurgency against the previous US-backed government. Past vaccination [campaigns have been hampered](#) in areas controlled by Islamic

State or the Taliban, with frontline workers being killed. The pandemic also caused [jabs to be paused](#).

“After consultation with the UN the government will start the polio vaccination campaign with both female and male workers and we will provide security to the entire polio vaccination team workers across the country,” Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid told the Guardian.

In the past three years there has been a significant rise in polio cases, and the effort to eradicate the disease in Afghanistan is an escalating challenge.

Attempts have also been made by clerics and tribal elders to [debunk myths around polio vaccines](#) prevalent among the Taliban and IS.

In the past, polio vaccination campaigns have been viewed with suspicion, accused by some of being used by foreigners to spy on insurgents or to undermine Islamic traditions. Some tribal leaders spread the idea that the vaccine caused infertility and polio workers have been targets of violence in Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan.

Afghanistan and Pakistan are the last two countries in the world to have cases of the polio virus in children, which can lead to paralysis or even death. [According to Unicef, 56 new cases](#) of polio virus were reported in Afghanistan last year, the highest number since 2011.

“This decision will allow us to make a giant stride in the efforts to eradicate polio,” said Hervé Ludovic De Lys, Unicef representative in Afghanistan.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/oct/19/afghanistan-to-restart-polio-vaccination-programme-with-taliban-support>

Indonesia

‘We are worried’: Indonesia and Malaysia express concern over Australia’s nuclear submarine plan



Royal Australian Navy submarine HMAS Rankin is seen during a maritime exercise in 2021. Under the Aukus pact, Australia will update its current fleet to add nuclear-powered submarines. Photograph: Australian Defence Force/Getty Images

Reuters

Tue 19 Oct 2021 01.14 EDT

Malaysia and [Indonesia](#) share strong reservations over Australia’s decision to acquire nuclear-powered submarines, even though nuclear weapons were not part of the plan, Malaysia’s foreign minister said.

Referring to [Aukus](#), a trilateral security pact agreed last month between Australia, the United States and Britain, Saifuddin Abdullah said the two

Southeast Asian nations were similarly concerned about its ramifications.

“We agree on the latest issue in the region regarding a country near our territory that is purchasing new nuclear-powered submarines,” Saifuddin told a joint news conference on Monday after meeting counterpart Retno Marsudi.

“Even though that country doesn’t have the capacity for nuclear weapons, we are worried and concerned.”

Indonesia last month said it was concerned Aukus could lead to a regional arms race.

The deal comes amid increasing tensions in the East and South China Seas, conduits for trillions of dollars of shipments amounting to about a third of global trade.

The Philippines, a US defence treaty ally, has backed it, saying it offers a necessary counterbalance to an increasingly assertive China.

Malaysia previously said it would seek views on the issue with China and the Association of South-east Asian nations (Asean). The Indonesian and Malaysian ministers also expressed disappointment with the Myanmar junta’s lack of progress in implementing an agreed peace plan with Asean.

Asean on Friday decided to exclude junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, who led a 1 February coup, from an upcoming regional meeting, in an unprecedented snub by the bloc.

Asean will continue to offer humanitarian assistance to Myanmar, said Indonesia’s Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi.

The foreign ministers also said they were in discussion about starting a travel corridor between Indonesia and Malaysia, and had agreed to finalise maritime sea borders in southern Malacca and the Sulawesi Sea.

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World news

Pandemic has spurred engagement in online extremism, say experts



‘What we’ve seen is evidence of spikes of online activity in a wide range of extremist issues during lockdown,’ says the ISD’s Jacob Davey. Photograph: Alamy

[Dan Sabbagh](#) Defence and security editor

Tue 19 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Eighteen months of global lockdowns have led to growing engagement in a toxic online cocktail of extremist material ranging from terrorist content to conspiracy theories and disinformation, experts warn.

Jacob Davey from the Institute of Strategic Dialogue (ISD) said studies had already shown “there has been a proliferation of harmful and troubling activity online” during the pandemic, with an impact that is impossible to predict.

“What we’ve seen is evidence of spikes of online activity in a wide range of extremist issues during lockdown. It is not just terrorist material but a broad cocktail of online harms, as people spent more time indoors,” Davey said.

Last year the UK’s Counter-Terrorism Internet Referral Unit (CTIRU) said over 7% more pieces of suspected terrorism content had been reported to them during 2020 compared with the year before, reflecting global trends.

A [study](#) by the ISD, which studies extremism worldwide, showed that content on rightwing extremist pages and groups in Canada increased by 33.7% on Facebook last year, while postings on the 4Chan bulletin board were up by 66.5%.

Terror content was just one of “a cocktail of harms” that people were engaged with, Davey said, arguing postings to rightwing extremist forums, for example, took in a wide range of harmful content. “It includes conspiracy theories, hate speech and disinformation, not just discussions about violent activity.”

The nature of the terror threat was already changing prior to the pandemic, said Paul Gill, a professor of security and crime science at University College London, since Islamic State (IS) lost the last of its territory in Syria in 2019. “That has meant there were already fewer directed plots and a rise in self-initiation.”

Lockdowns in countries such as the UK had made it harder for people to associate in person or to plan attacks in a more traditional style, Gill said, but it also amounted to “a perfect storm of other risk factors for radicalisation” because so many people were isolated at home.

The killing of David Amess has prompted a conversation about ending online anonymity. While police are investigating whether there are any links to Islamist extremism and have not connected the killing to the targeting of MPs online, allies of the MP said he had voiced growing concern about threats and toxicity within public discourse as they demanded a crackdown.

There is also growing evidence that lockdown contributed to wider mental health pressures in countries such as Britain, including an increase in cases

of psychosis – “all of which has decreased people’s resilience”, Gill said. That could make a small minority of people more susceptible to extremist content, he added.

“If you have any grievance you can go online and find people who will validate your grievance, and make you feel like you are part of something,” Gill said, arguing an increasing number of terror – or closely related – cases were “hard to define”.

He cited the example of Jake Davison, who in August killed his mother and four others with a shotgun before turning the weapon on himself in Plymouth. “Ideology is so mixed up with personal grievance that it can be difficult in such cases to know what are the driving motives,” said Gill.

Some people called for Davison’s case to be designated as terrorism after he posted messages online describing himself as an involuntary celibate or “incel”, but senior officers said last month they did not believe incel ideology was itself terrorist and that the series of murders did not amount to terrorism.

Islamist extremism remains, according to MI5, the largest terror threat facing the UK, followed by rightwing extremism. But experts point also to a new, fast-growing category called mixed, unclear or uncertain (MUU), where it is easier to pin down the violence than the thinking that prompted it.

Of all referrals to the government’s Prevent counter-radicalisation programme in 2019-20, the latest period for which figures are available, 51% were in the MUU category, with the rest nearly split between Islamist (24%) and rightwing (22%) extremism.

In a speech in July, Jonathan Hall QC, the government’s independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, highlighted the case of Tobias Rathjen who killed nine in Hanau, Germany, last year as an example.

“He was openly racist but obsessed with conspiracy theories involving ritual child abuse. He called himself an incel. He was a loner, not connected to any group. It is impossible to say that he had a single programme,” Hall said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/19/covid-pandemic-spurred-engagement-online-extremism>

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[India](#)

Indian couple float to their wedding in a cooking pot along flooded streets

00:37

Indian couple float to wedding in cooking pot after floods in Kerala – video

[Samantha Lock and agencies](#)

Mon 18 Oct 2021 22.39 EDT

An Indian couple have arrived for their wedding in unusual style after sailing through the flooded streets of their town in a cooking pot after heavy rains wrecked havoc in the southern state of Kerala.

Footage shared across social media showed the newlyweds squeezed inside the aluminium vessel while two men and a photographer paddled the pair down a submerged street.

The couple reportedly borrowed the pot from a local temple, adding that it was “the only option” available at short notice, local news agency PTI reported.

Undeterred by the flooding and landslides caused by heavy rains which killed at least 27 people across the state, the pair were unwilling to postpone their big day.

So this couple from Alappuzha district in Kerala used a large cooking vessel to wade through the flood water to get to their wedding venue. Even the wedding venue was flooded, but fortunately they managed to get married without missing the muhurtham time :)
pic.twitter.com/mqldzgKIkd

— Shilpa (@Shilpa1308) [October 18, 2021](#)

Footage later showed the bride and groom arriving safe and dry at a small partially flooded temple in Thalavady where they exchanged floral garlands, a tradition in many Hindu wedding ceremonies.

“It has turned into a wedding which we never imagined,” the bride told local news channel [Asianet](#).

The pair were determined to go through with the ceremony despite the extreme weather.

“Should have booked a boat instead of a car ...,” a man can be heard saying in the background of one video, Agence France-Presse reported.

According to local media reports, husband and wife Akash and Aishwarya are both healthcare workers at a hospital in Chengannur.

Heavy rainfall has caused serious flooding and deadly landslides across the state over the past four days. Rivers have overflowed and bridges and roads have been swept away - in some cases entire towns and villages have been cut off.

Images from the region showed cars and buses submerged by the flood waters as several homes were washed away in mud and debris.

Rescuers searched for survivors on Monday as the army, navy and air force assisted with relief and rescue operations.

05:22

The climate science behind flooding: why is it getting worse? – video explainer

Sheeba George, the senior official in Idukki district, told local media that dozens of families had been evacuated from their homes ahead of the dam openings.

The state government said it had evacuated thousands of people and set up over 100 relief camps.

Widespread rain, including isolated heavy downpours was expected to batter the region for the next two to three days from 20 October, the state government said on Monday. In 2018, flooding killed nearly 500 people in the worst floods to hit the state in almost a century.

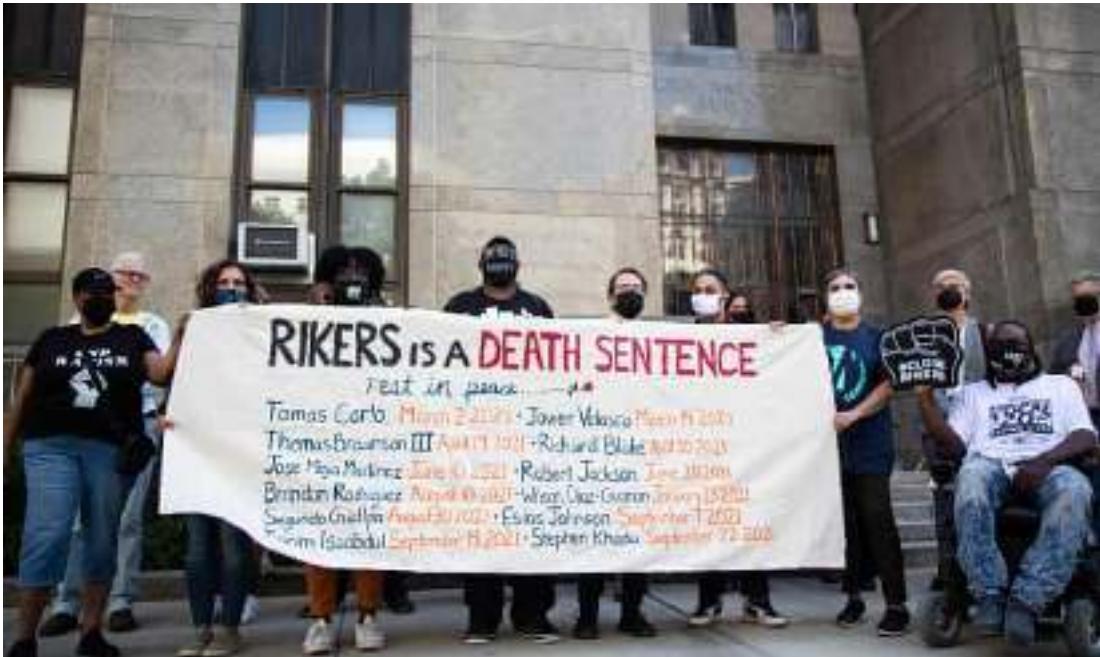
With Agence France-Presse and Reuters

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US news

‘Abject neglect’: critics report chaotic and deadly conditions on Rikers Island



Activists gathered at the Manhattan Courthouse on 27 September to denounce the conditions at Rikers Island. Photograph: Karla Ann Cote/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Erum Salam](#) in New York

Tue 19 Oct 2021 08.52 EDT

New York’s Rikers Island, one of the largest and most notorious jails in the world, is reaching a breaking point after more than a dozen incarcerated people died this year alone, in what elected officials and advocates are calling a humanitarian crisis.

The jail, located on an island in between the Bronx and Queens, has descended into dangerous chaos. Those with access to visit reported seeing inmates walking around with infected self-harm wounds, an inmate

hijacking a bus full of prisoners and crashing it into a wall, and a lack of access to basic hygiene products.

Most of the 5,700 people held in jail in New York City are held in Rikers, with the majority awaiting trial because they cannot afford the high bail set by the judges presiding over their case. Last week [it was announced](#) that women and transgender people would be moved out of the jail to other facilities.

Some state and local elected officials who toured the complex recently have been left traumatized, such as the former public defender and Democratic candidate for city council Tiffany Cabán.

“People were relieving themselves into bags. They were sleeping on floors,” Cabán said. “These were the kinds of things you think about if they were happening in another country, you would believe without any hesitation that these were human rights violations. Nobody should ever be treated or kept in these conditions.”

The New York city council has already voted to permanently close Rikers in 2026, but the recent worsening of conditions has spurred doubts about the sustainability of the huge jail complex even for the next five years. With about 500 inoperable cell doors, a lack of toilets that has forced inmates to defecate in bags, and a jail guard force hit by high absenteeism, justice advocates say it’s unclear how long Rikers can stay open.

Of the 11 people who officially died in custody at Rikers in 2021 so far, five were suicides and the remaining cases are under investigation, according to the city’s office of the chief medical examiner. The deaths of two additional incarcerated men, Tomas Carlo Camacho and [Victor Mercado](#), are not counted as “in-custody” since they were granted compassionate release before dying in hospital.

In addition to the unusually high death count, reports of chaos inside the jails from elected officials who visited the island last month rang alarms about the worsening conditions on the island. The conditions prompted New York’s mayor, Bill de Blasio, to finally visit Rikers, but he did not tour

inmate housing facilities, a decision which was criticised by correction officers and state legislators.

A spokesperson for the department of corrections (DOC) union, the Correction Officers' Benevolent Association (COBA), blamed the crisis at Rikers on De Blasio and his refusal to hire more staff, though New York City employs more correctional officers per incarcerated person than the [national average](#). There are five correctional officers for every three incarcerated people in New York; on average, the US employs five correctional officers for every 21 incarcerated people.

The corrections union spokesperson described staff in Rikers who have struggled under the poor conditions of the jail and been hit especially hard by the strains of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We had 1,800 correctional officers [in 2021] that got Covid – officers out with long-term Covid," the COBA spokesperson said. "We have officers physically and mentally exhausted from working these 25-hour or more shifts. They're going to work on Monday, not knowing they're going home on a Wednesday."

On 7 September, the city announced it would hire an additional 600 correctional officers, but recruitment is proving challenging. Only 64 new recruits attended the last training session.

The correction officers' critics include leftist state elected officials who advocate the complete and immediate shutdown of Rikers. Assemblywoman Emily Gallagher, who represents north Brooklyn, does not believe there is a staffing problem at Rikers, but rather a misuse of the staff already available.

"DOCs and COBA [the union] both claimed they need to hire more officers, but repeatedly failed to identify where in the system this new staff would be allocated," Gallagher wrote in a tweet after a public hearing. "The [independent] federal monitor says DOCs have more than enough staff and the problem is poor management. I believe that."

In the public hearing held by a panel of state assembly members, Gallagher questioned the DOC's union president, Benny Boscio Jr, on his position

regarding vaccines. Boscio said that only about 45% of correction officers were “probably” vaccinated – a troubling statistic as many officers were missing shifts due to Covid exposure. Boscio later admitted to the press that he was not vaccinated himself.

But as the debate rages over why Rikers has descended into chaos, 13 inmates are now dead over the past year. Leo Glickman is the attorney representing the estate of Isa Abdul Karim, the 11th inmate to die at Rikers in 2021. He said he learned Karim had died on social media.

“I found out via a tweet of a state senator, Jessica Salazar,” Glickman said.

He said his reaction to Karim’s death was “shock and dismay” and said he believed the conditions at Rikers were due to “abject neglect”.

According to Glickman, Karim was kept for at least seven days in what should have been a temporary holding pen with other incarcerated people, after technically violating his parole terms. Glickman began representing Karim in 2017, when Karim wanted to file suit against the department of corrections at Rikers Island for another incident in 2016.

Glickman is now representing Karim’s family and estate. His law office is awaiting the release of Karim’s medical records, jail information, and autopsy paperwork to assess how to bring justice to his former client.

In response to the crisis at the jail, the New York governor, Kathy Hochul, signed the Less is More Act on 17 September, which would prevent those with non-criminal technical parole violations from returning to jail. Less is More will not go into effect until March 2022, but after the act was signed, 191 people were immediately released.

Karim was one day short of qualifying for the 30-day minimum stay requirement to be released under Less is More when he died.

“When you look at the people who are on Rikers, these are people who should just be released into their communities with support,” Cabán said. “We know they are overwhelmingly there because they cannot afford their bail.”

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