

The Guardian

卫报

2022.01.24 - 2022.01.30

- [2022.01.30 - Opinion](#)
- [Headlines tuesday 25 january 2022](#)
- [2022.01.25 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.01.25 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2022.01.25 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.01.25 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines saturday 29 january 2022](#)
- [2022.01.29 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.01.29 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2022.01.29 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.01.29 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines monday 24 january 2022](#)
- [2022.01.24 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.01.24 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2022.01.24 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.01.24 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines friday 28 january 2022](#)
- [2022.01.28 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.01.28 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2022.01.28 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.01.28 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines thursday 27 january 2022](#)
- [2022.01.27 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.01.27 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2022.01.27 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.01.27 - Around the world](#)

2022.01.30 - Opinion

- [Robert Pattinson: at three hours, is Batman outstaying his welcome?](#)
- [The Observer view on Britain's energy crisis](#)
- [The Observer view on the EHRC decision on Scotland's gender recognition reforms](#)
- [Safe passage optional? Cruise industry heaps more misery on its passengers](#)
- [Boris Johnson: waiting for Sue Gray – cartoon](#)
- [Grilled by ‘girly swots’: what poetic justice for a man as misogynistic as Boris Johnson](#)
- [Letters: take to the streets to defy police and crime bill](#)
- [For the record](#)
- [How many more Charlie Todds must there be before our prisons are reformed?](#)

Names in the news[Robert Pattinson](#)

Robert Pattinson: at three hours, is Batman outstaying his welcome?

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



Films shouldn't be an endurance test yet that is what they are turning into



Robert Pattinson in *Batman*: time for the pruning shears? Photograph: Landmark Media/Alamy

Sat 29 Jan 2022 10.00 EST

I already love the new Batman film, *The Batman*. I haven't seen it, obviously, but its lofty self-importance keeps tickling me, from the definite article of the title to Robert Pattinson's cut-glass cheekbones to the director Matt Reeves's recent revelation that his Batman is inspired partly by Kurt Cobain. "Is this guy some kind of wayward, reckless drug addict? And the truth is that he is a kind of drug addict. His drug is his addiction to this drive for revenge. He's like a Batman Kurt Cobain," Reeves told *Esquire*, which I read written down, but I heard in an Alan Partridge voice. As I often think whenever I see socks with George Orwell's face on them, it's what he would have wanted.

It's unsurprising that the *Seven*-esque trailer makes *The Batman* look about as fun as Damon Albarn's DMs after the Swifties had set upon him. Batman is inherently po-faced these days; the era of tights and little silicone nipples and terrible puns is long gone. Last week, the *Hollywood Reporter* [revealed](#) that *The Batman* is almost three hours long. That's with credits, but you no longer get to shave off 10 minutes by leaving the cinema as soon as the director's name comes up, in case you miss a post-credits sequence or a

bloopers reel (in fairness, if there's a bloopers reel here, I will eat my bat-cape).

Is it finally time to agree that three hours is too long for a film? A running time should not require a lavatory break and/or a brief nap for sustenance. *Titanic* was too long. *The Irishman* is so long that I still haven't steeled myself to watch it. Three hours is an ordeal, not because of the debatable notion that our attention spans are declining, addled by dizzying TikToks and those pesky memes, but because I have never seen a film that is more than two-and-a half-hours long that wouldn't have benefited from a flattering trim.

The argument in favour of long films is that they give moviegoers more value for money. But there's something cynical about the idea that making a film longer will somehow improve its quality. It's double-spacing your homework, setting the font size to 14.

The Batman may well earn every one of its 175 minutes, but in 2015, YouGov found that 55% of Brits believe the ideal movie length is [under two hours](#). Using no scientific evidence whatsoever, I believe this: the ideal movie length is a neat, succinct, respectful and kind one hour and 39 minutes.

Emma Thompson: to bare or not to bare – that is the question



Emma Thompson: ‘It’s very challenging to be nude at 62.’ Photograph: Scott Garfitt/AP

In her new film *Good Luck To You, Leo Grande*, Emma Thompson plays a woman who hires a sex worker to help her have her first orgasm. Last week, she explained that she rehearsed for the part [in the nude](#), along with her director, Sophie Hyde, and co-star Daryl McCormack. “It’s very challenging to be nude at 62,” she said during a CinemaCafe discussion at the Sundance festival.

This is a transitional time for on-screen nudity. In recent weeks, full-frontal male nudity, usually doled out sparingly, has appeared on television with gusto. [And Just Like That...](#) famously showed Charlotte’s husband, Harry, whipping it out, with the show’s creator later confirming that it was a prosthetic. Meanwhile, teen tearaway show [Euphoria](#), rarely coy about anything, has embraced both female and male nudity with extra enthusiasm for its second season.

Yet Sydney Sweeney, who plays Cassie on *Euphoria*, pointed out that there remains a double standard when it comes to nudity. “When a guy has a sex scene or shows his body, he still wins awards and gets praise. But the moment a girl does it, it’s completely different,” she told the [Independent](#),

suggesting that she gets more acclaim for the roles in which she does not take her clothes off.

Thompson said she didn't think she could have done a nude scene before she was 62, though added that her age made it challenging, "because we aren't used to seeing untreated bodies on the screen". (The prosthetic, I suppose, would count as "treated".) But we are used to bodies, treated or not, and for women it remains as complicated a decision as ever.

Frank Ocean: good luck if you're trying to cover his songs



Frank Ocean: 'indescribable magic'. Photograph: John Shearer/WireImage

There are some artists who are uncoverable, either because their songs are so idiosyncratic or because they have such unique, indescribable magic that it's impossible to do them justice. For all of the times that people have tried, and basing this on my own experience of mangled karaoke, Abba are pretty uncoverable. Covers of Patti Smith seem tough to pull off, though conversely her covers are in a league of their own. I always thought of Frank Ocean as one of the uncoverable artists, for those same reasons. His songs are strangely structured, with their own language, and they are very much his alone.

Yet this is the season of Ocean covers, suggesting that people are at least willing to give it a good go. Last week, Machine Gun Kelly released his version of *Swim Good*, which did not undermine my theory. Cat [Power's new album, *Covers*](#), opens with a version of Bad Religion and she has remade and reshaped it in her own image, which did undermine my theory. I went digging, and found a whole stash of new versions of *Lost*, by corrJoy Crookes, Khalid and Jorja Smith, all finding a different spirit in it. Not uncoverable, then, but it depends who's doing the cover.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/29/robert-pattison-is-batman-outstaying-welcome-at-three-hours>

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

OpinionEnergy

The Observer view on Britain's energy crisis

[Observer editorial](#)

The government must act with the utmost urgency to ensure that the nation has clean and secure power



Electrical pylons from Dungeness nuclear power station in Kent, which is being decommissioned. Photograph: Jon Santa Cruz/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 30 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Energy is vital to our daily lives. We need reliable supplies to heat our homes, to cook, to keep our food fresh, to power our transport systems, to illuminate our cities and to stay in communication with each other. Ensuring there are no significant disruptions to that provision is one of the most important tasks that a government must perform on behalf of its citizens.

In recent months, it has become clear that serious strains are now being placed on energy security in the United Kingdom, however. Spiralling gas

costs are causing considerable financial difficulties for thousands of households. At the same time, electricity supplies are now threatened because most of the UK's ageing nuclear reactors, which currently provide 20% of our electricity, face closure in the next few years with little prospect, at present, of new atomic power plants being ready to fill the gap in lost output.

On top of these issues, an urgent overhaul of our use of fossil fuels is required if the country is to have any chance of reaching its goal of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050, a promise made by the government as part of its commitment to tackle climate change and to help halt the dangerous warming of our planet.

At present, roughly half our electricity is generated by burning natural gas in power plants. About half of that comes to our shores from North Sea rigs whose [overall output is dwindling](#) as gas fields reach the end of their lives. The rest of our gas is imported from other nations; most of it is shipped from Qatar or the US or piped from Norway. Very little is imported from Russia, it should be noted.

In addition, gas plays a dominant role in heating our homes, a reliance that cannot last for much longer if we are to meet our climate change obligations. In short, we need, as a matter of priority, to replace gas with electricity generated in a safe, renewable, environmentally friendly manner.

The nation can achieve this goal in two ways: it can import more electricity from mainland Europe (around 6% of our power already comes via inter-connectors to France, the Netherlands and Ireland) or it can find alternative sources within the UK. The latter path is very much the preferable one, both in terms of establishing security for our energy supply while also ensuring this power is generated in a manner consistent with our carbon emission aspirations. Energy security and fighting climate change are inextricably linked, in other words.

This transformation needs to be done as a matter of urgency, however, a point that appears to have escaped ministers whose attempts to reshape power use in the UK have already started to unravel. Consider the government's [green homes grant scheme](#) for England. Hailed by Boris

Johnson as a key plank in his green industrial revolution by helping the public make their homes more energy-efficient and less reliant on fossil fuel heating, it targeted a total of 600,000 homes for improvement. In the end, however, only 47,500 were upgraded. As Dame Meg Hillier, chair of the public accounts committee, [put it last year](#): “This scheme was a slam dunk fail.”

Such setbacks are alarming and underline the urgent need for ministers to provide the nation with a cogent, detailed set of proposals for generating power securely and sustainably while minimising energy waste.

Several key issues need to be addressed to achieve these goals. The first is the creation of a system of smart grids. These local networks would distribute power generated from renewable energy sources to supplement mains supplies and reduce electricity bills. Establishing such a system should be seen as a priority for they offer the prospect of making maximum use of power generated within our shores at low cost.

[Properly insulating buildings](#) would have a similar effect. Despite Johnson’s green homes initiative failure, efforts to make homes and workplaces more energy-efficient should be redoubled. It will not be possible to fit every house in Britain with a heat pump or solar panels. Nevertheless, making more houses and offices greener today will have critical impacts in coming years.

Providing power when weather is gloomy and winds are non-existent is also key. At present, nuclear and gas-power plants provide that electricity. The disappearance of the latter over the coming decade will put more pressure on the UK to develop an efficient atomic power programme. Currently, our nuclear plans look piecemeal and unimpressive, despite last week’s announcement of a £100m investment to help develop the Sizewell C power station in Suffolk.

Further research is also needed to find new, efficient ways to store energy, so power from renewable sources can be stored for those gloomy, windless days. We also need to find ways to capture and store carbon dioxide from old power plants and so extend their lives.

Such developments will be crucial in providing the nation with a full range of options for generating its own power securely and cleanly. The alternative is to sit back and allow these issues to be resolved beyond our shores. In a world where energy will become ever more critical to national survival, that is not an option to be countenanced.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/30/observer-view-britains-energy-crisis>

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

OpinionTransgender

The Observer view on the EHRC decision on Scotland's gender recognition reforms

[Observer editorial](#)

The UK equalities watchdog has called for more consultation with all those affected by proposed changes



Transgender people and their supporters outside Downing Street call on the UK government to urgently reform the Gender Recognition Act, on 6 August 2021.

Photograph:

WIKTOR

Szymanowicz/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 30 Jan 2022 01.30 EST

It is not uncommon for people's fundamental rights to come into conflict. Democracies need legal frameworks and judicial systems that enable these conflicts to be resolved fairly and with civility. In the UK, the [Equality Act 2010](#) provides a robust legal framework that protects people against

discrimination and helps balance rights when they are in conflict. It protects people against discrimination based on nine “protected characteristics” – including sex and gender reassignment – and sets out important exceptions that allow for single-sex services, spaces and sports as a proportionate way of achieving a legitimate aim.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is the statutory regulator of the Equality Act. Last week, it told the Scottish government that its proposed reforms to the Gender Recognition Act 2004, which allows trans people to change the way their sex is recorded for legal purposes, should be paused because the consultation on these changes has not adequately taken into account their impact on [women's sex-based rights](#). The Scottish government is proposing to move to a system whereby people can change their sex for legal purposes through self-declaration, instead of needing a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria.

The EHRC is right that these reforms have implications for sex-based rights that have not been considered. There is not yet enough case law to fully understand how the Equality Act and the Gender Recognition Act intersect, but enabling people to change their legal sex through self-ID could in practice have significant consequences for the threshold at which it is lawful to exclude those who are biologically male from female-only spaces, on sex discrimination and equal pay cases, and on data collection.

Both trans rights and women's sex-based rights should be robustly defended. It should be a source of pride that the UK was one of the first countries to enshrine legal protection against discrimination for trans people in 1999; [no such federal protection exists in the US](#). Trans people can change their sex marker on many official documents, including their passport, without undergoing the legal process to change their sex. Trans people face unacceptable levels of societal prejudice as a result of their gender non-conformity, and waiting lists for trans health services are far too long: these very much need addressing.

But because reforming the Gender Recognition Act will affect another protected characteristic, sex, it is critically important that any proposals to reform it in the UK are informed by proper consultation with all those affected. That has not happened in Scotland. Instead, Nicola Sturgeon has

simply denied such a conflict exists. Women raising legitimate concerns that opinion polls show are widely shared have been tarnished as “transphobic” by Scottish politicians.

This is politicians fomenting rather than diffusing contested debates. It has created a culture where women of the view that biological sex cannot be wholly replaced by gender identity in law – a belief itself protected by equalities legislation – get harassed out of jobs and visited by the police as a result of expressing lawful and legitimate views. Everyone loses: in a world where some people are bullied out of the democratic process of debate and consultation, it is impossible to build social consensus around the balancing of rights of two groups facing significant discrimination.

The EHRC’s own 2018 response to the Conservative government’s proposals to introduce self-ID in England and Wales – now dropped – also underplayed their impacts on the Equality Act. In doing so, it failed its statutory duty to protect everyone at risk from discrimination and foster good relations between groups. Now under new leadership, the EHRC’s reassertion of its role as a fair and impartial regulator of the rights of both trans people and women is overdue but welcome.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/30/observer-view-ehrc-decision-scotland-gender-recognition-reforms>

[NotebookCruises](#)

Safe passage optional? Cruise industry heaps more misery on its passengers

[Rowan Moore](#)



Cold comfort likely in the small print for those aboard Crystal Symphony liner rerouted to avoid arrest over unpaid fuel bills



Cruise liner Crystal Symphony was diverted from Florida to the Bahamas with hundreds of passengers on board. Photograph: Bruce Smith/AP

Sat 29 Jan 2022 12.00 EST

Cruise ships, called “floating petri dishes” early in the pandemic for their role in propagating infection, are back in the news. One company, in what would be an ugly alliance of capitalist and communist exploitation, is accused of colluding with the government of Cuba to force Cuban crew members to work under “[slave labour](#)” conditions. Another, Crystal Cruises, chose not to return its ship Crystal Symphony to Florida, for fear that it would be arrested for \$4.6m (£3.4m) in unpaid fuel bills. It was [diverted to Bimini in the Bahamas](#) and its passengers were obliged to end their two-week dream cruise with a vomit-inducing ferry trip through what was called “inclement weather”.

According to a legal expert quoted by the *Washington Post*, their claims for compensation are likely to be limited by the terms and conditions that cruise companies tend to impose on their customers. No one familiar with the [dark arts of this multibillion-dollar business](#) will be surprised after the [notorious “poop cruise”](#) of 2013, in which raw sewage backed up into passenger areas. Lawyers for its owner, Carnival Cruise Line, argued that the “ticket contract

makes absolutely no guarantee for safe passage, a seaworthy vessel, adequate and wholesome food and sanitary and safe living conditions”.

Inflating the problem



A House of Lords report found the government’s Help to Buy scheme inflated house prices. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

When George Osborne launched his help-to-buy scheme in 2013, which was supposed to support homebuyers with government-supported loans, its likely flaws should have been obvious to anyone with the most basic grasp of economics. By increasing demand it would push prices up, which would defeat the purpose of the exercise. The main beneficiaries would be those selling the product in question, the volume housebuilders who went on to make large profits and award handsome bonuses to their executives. Now, a recent [House of Lords report](#) finds that the scheme, “which will have cost around £29bn in cash terms by 2023, inflates prices by more than its subsidy value in areas where it is needed the most”. It is usually left-leaning administrations that are accused of squandering public money on ideologically driven projects, but here a Tory government has done just that.

Such money would have been better spent on actually building humane and beautiful affordable housing. Peter Barber is an architect who for years has

been creating just that, within the exacting demands of the business of constructing homes. Last week, the Royal Academy of Arts made him a Royal Academician, an honour that puts him in the same ranks of celebrated artists such as Tracey Emin and Anish Kapoor. It's heartening to see such recognition for the application of creativity to the places where people lead their everyday lives.

Pundits in paradise



Entrance to El Paraíso Verde, a ‘utopia’ in Paraguay for libertarians and maybe rightwing British media figures? Photograph: William Costa

In the Caazapá region of Paraguay, there's an attempt to [build a utopia](#) for those who want to escape “the socialist trends of current economic and political situations worldwide”.

It welcomes vaccine sceptics, doubters of the US 2020 presidential election and those who fear 5G, fluoridated water, healthcare mandates and Muslims. It is a place for people, whom the project's founder, Erwin Annau, calls “enlightened Christians”, who “are concerned about our daughters”. [El Paraíso Verde](#), as it is called, says that it seeks “innovative thinkers, engineers, hairdressers, restaurateurs, shopkeepers, alternative healing practitioners”.

I don't wish any more trouble on Paraguay than it already has, but I hope that this community will also welcome the know-nothing loudmouths in the rightwing British media, who for nearly two years have been opposing every sane step, from mask-wearing to working from home, without which this country's death toll would be even higher than it is.

Rowan Moore is the Observer's architecture correspondent

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/29/safe-passage-optional-cruise-industry-heaps-more-misery-on-passengers>

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

Observer comment cartoon

Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson: waiting for Sue Gray – cartoon

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/picture/2022/jan/29/boris-johnson-waiting-for-sue-gray-cartoon>

Opinion[Boris Johnson](#)

Grilled by ‘girly swots’: what poetic justice for a man as misogynistic as Boris Johnson

[Catherine Bennett](#)



Being held to account by mere women must be agonising for our frat-house styled PM



Boris Johnson – ‘a man who publicly identifies as the Incredible Hulk’.
Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Sun 30 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

“Just pat her on the bottom and send her on her way.” When, as rarely happens, [Boris Johnson](#) is forced to cooperate with women in authority, it may help that, as he’s occasionally mentioned, he possesses a fair few insights into female behaviour and woman-management, some of them perhaps gleaned from his father.

Though it must be painful, given his attitude to women in the workforce, to be forced to deal with them at all. He once depicted female employment as “an ever-growing proportion of British women [who] have been ‘incentivised’ or socially gestapoed into the workplace”. When can he stop acting as if Sue Gray is his equal?

Isn’t it humiliation enough that Johnson, Big Dog, a man who publicly identifies as the Incredible Hulk, should already have been [thwarted by Lady Hale](#), then denied revenge on another female adversary, [Kathryn Stone](#), the parliamentary commissioner for standards? Just last week Stone was again acting as if Hulk could be defeated by a woman, saying it is “bonkers” she can’t investigate the funding of his dodgy refurb.

“The madder Hulk gets, the stronger Hulk gets,” Johnson once warned fellow leaders. But the Hulk never had to deal with a police investigation, albeit heavily compromised, by three female officers. True, one is Cressida Dick, but add deputy assistant commissioner Jane Connors and commander Catherine Roper and that’s still an entire troika of nightmare “[girly swots](#)” (as Johnson describes conscientious people of either sex). DAC Connors, who [expressed sadness](#) about people “flagrantly” ignoring Covid rules, is certainly a contender for Johnson’s signature insult. Not long after declaring his proroguing of parliament illegal, Lady Hale [pointedly applied it to herself](#).

Which is the kind of thing that happens when the professions fail to learn from Johnson’s example that the correct approach to hiring women, allowing for occasional lapses, is not to do it in the first place.

Even the young, blond, cheatworthy ones will end up old, like the “sweaty old peeresses”, “old bag” and “kind of woman who owns fifteen cats” referred to in Johnson’s novel *Seventy Two Virgins*, a fast-moving catalogue of sexist and racist slurs, set in Westminster.

Like David Cameron, Johnson likes to boast about the female prime ministers who outwitted men like himself, while ensuring his own administration is modelled, thus ruling out further such anomalies, on admission arrangements at his old school. Any Tory female visibility in the Commons and cabinet should not, as became clear in reports about No 10’s lockdown lifestyle, be interpreted as evidence of progress. The most arresting aspect of the covertly photographed drinks/meeting at No 10 is, for example, less the refreshments than the quaint sex ratio, apparently 16 to three. Two of the women being the girlfriends of Matt Hancock and Boris Johnson.

While Johnson was either snogging female colleagues or declaring them unpromotable, other professional women prevailed

The latter’s insistence that these garden drinks were “people at work” conveys his confidence that an appearance of institutionalised sex discrimination will always be less shameful than booze-related rule-

breaking. Written accounts of the No 10 work/booze timetable also depict a sex monoculture you'd probably blame on the prep school culture that created Johnson if that hadn't, in comparison, been thrillingly diverse.

The narrator of *King Solomon's Mines*, published in 1885, at least acknowledges to his schoolboy readers that "there is not a petticoat in the whole history". That is, except for a female fiend and "she was a hundred at least, and therefore not marriageable, so I don't count her". It's still one more petticoat than you get in a Johnsonian "quad".

Questioned about the non-existent female membership of his inner cabals, with their [idiot nicknames](#) and boxing-glove accessories, Johnson has protested, like Cameron before him, that he is doing his best, helpless to correct the shortage of female candidates as accomplished as Gavin Williamson, as trustworthy as Hancock, as authoritative as Dominic Raab. After elected women were sidelined in the national Covid response, including almost entirely from public briefings, a sniggering Johnson told the parliamentary liaison committee: "It's certainly true that I would have liked to have had more female representation in the press conferences so far." Though not enough to do anything about it. "And, erm, you know, er, what can I say?"

Keen Johnson students would have heard the echoes, here, of the *Spectator* column where, along with the bum-patting tip, he offered this to future editors: "You will receive threatening letters from female journalists, urging you to have more female bylines, starting with their own, and I would not dream of advising you there." For Johnson, the persistence of women who are neither flattering nor shaggable has never stopped being hilarious.

But his long-diagnosed "[woman problem](#)", as this common-or-garden prejudice is usually euphemised, has recently taken on, thanks to difficulties entirely of Johnson's own making, a delightful new meaning. If it's too much, judging by last week's evasions, to hope for poetic justice, in the shape of his subjugation by the sex he has patronised for half a century, the mortification alone is joy. While Johnson was either snogging female colleagues or declaring them unpromotable, other professional women prevailed.

Now the Hulk has to answer their questions. Probably his misogyny runs too deep to allow Johnson some reflection on the possible benefits if he hadn't presided over a frat house from which unwanted women could be summarily ejected. But if so, it will have made any impertinence on the part of middle-aged women (who may even own cats) all the more personally agonising.

How agonising? Hard to say, but he once compared the horror of being overtaken by a female driver to "being treated as though you were an old woman by a young woman".

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/30/grilled-by-girly-swots-poetic-justice-for-man-as-misogynistic-as-boris-johnson>

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

Observer lettersPolice

Letters: take to the streets to defy police and crime bill

The government would find it hard to ignore hundreds of thousands of protesters from a coalition of environmental groups



An Extinction Rebellion protest in London. 'Even this government can't arrest and imprison us all.' Photograph: Dominika Zarzycka/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 30 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Reading Will Hutton's piece on the threat posed by the police and crime bill to our democratic right to peaceful protest got me thinking about how we should challenge it if it is eventually passed ("[Attempting to ban protest is usually the mark of a repressive state. That's not us, is it?](#)", Comment). I am dismayed at the lack of coverage being given to the dangers of climate change; it is as if Cop26 never happened. Government, big business, the media and the public are rejoicing at the prospect of resuming foreign holidays, cruises, driving to work again and consuming. What happened to

“building back greener”? I would like to see a grand coalition of environmental groups joining forces and getting out on to the streets. A few thousand Extinction Rebellion protesters blocking roads may be dismissed as “crusties”. Hundreds of thousands of “middle England” members of the RSPB, National Trust, Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust et al could not be so easily ignored. Even this government can’t arrest and imprison us all.

Geoff Jones

Lincoln

What happened to loyalty?

The treatment of Kate Clanchy by her publisher, in dropping her from its list and dropping a book of poems by her pupils, makes one wonder what has happened to the tradition that publishers stick by their authors (“[The hounding of author Kate Clanchy has been a witch-hunt without mercy](#)”, Comment). It also makes one feel helpless: how to show solidarity with this exceptionally humane woman in the face of treatment such as this? One solution might be for Pan Macmillan’s authors to sever their links with this disgraceful publishing house. One thing publishers can’t do without is authors. I have published several books with Macmillan, but that was years ago and they’re now out of print. If I was still publishing with them, I’d break my contract and publicise the reason why as widely as possible. Behaviour like this brings the entire industry into disrepute.

Ruth Brandon

London NW3

Slavery on the curriculum

Eric Williams’s *Capitalism and Slavery* was certainly recognised as an important book in the 1960s (“[Hidden history of why the British abolished slavery back on the shelves](#)”, News). I still have a copy of the 1964 André Deutsch edition. It was recommended to me as a sixth former in the late 60s and my history teacher, Patrick Richardson, who was an expert on 18th-century history, also used it in his published work which included work for school students. He also taught us to balance sources and historians, so Williams was one voice among many. It was also among the works on my reading lists at university.

It is often asserted (by Sathnam Sanghera, among others) that slavery was not taught in schools until recently. This is certainly not true. I taught it as part of the curriculum in comprehensive schools in the 1970s and the well-known Jackdaw series for schools had a whole pack on the African slave trade, with graphic images. Later, when I was visiting a range of schools for a publisher in the 1980s, slavery/the slave trade was in the curriculum, placing it of course in its full historical context. To assert that modern academic historians don't recognise the context of abolition is not sustainable.

Peter Langworth

London NW1

Poverty and inflation

Poor people become poorer because wage negotiations and benefit rises are based on inappropriate inflation indices (“[Poor people face a perfect storm. Let no one tell you it's their fault](#)”, Comment). The CPI and RPI underestimate inflation for poorer people by including items such as new cars and consumer durables that generally have a lower inflation rate than food, energy and rent. We need an additional index based on, say, the spending of the poorest 20% of households.

Richard Mountford

Hildenborough, Kent

Fire guidance not ignored

Kenan Malik is wrong in claiming that the Labour government “ignored” the recommendations of the 1999 select committee report following the Garnock Court fire (“[Grenfell delivers yet more horrors. But the guilty still fail to take responsibility](#)”, Comment).

As minister responsible for the building regulations from 1997-2001, I gave evidence to the select committee and responded to all its recommendations. In the government response, I agreed to introduce the new full-scale test methodology as recommended by the committee and confirmed that I had begun the process to secure its adoption as a British Standard. I made it clear that when this was achieved the government would amend the guidance

(Approved Document B) to reflect its status as a British Standard and review whether the reference in the guidance should be strengthened. On the committee's tragically prescient concern about the possibility of a serious fire resulting in many people being killed, I strongly endorsed the committee's view, explained the mandatory requirements of the building regulations – in this case “to resist the spread of fire over the external wall surfaces” – and the role of the guidance document and added: “The department considers that if this guidance is followed, then the risk to life safety as a result of fire spread via the external cladding system will be minimal.”

Sadly, the shocking evidence that has been emerging from the Grenfell public inquiry has illustrated serious subsequent failures to adhere to the requirements of the regulations and the advice in the guidance in Approved Document B.

In the amended online version of the article, Kenan Malik maintained that the retention of approval for Class 0 materials was a “loophole”, which undermined the government’s response. However, the government’s technical advisers (the Building Regulations Advisory Committee), which had recently conducted a review of Part B of the building regulations, made no recommendation to withdraw approval from Class 0. The select committee emphasised that the main focus of concern was the adequacy of the previous small-scale arrangements for testing the performance of materials, which is why the government supported the introduction of the large-scale test. Like all other materials, Class 0 should have been subject to the new, more rigorous testing regime designed to demonstrate the performance of cladding materials in a “live” fire situation after the test methodology was adopted as a British Standard.

A reading of the government response to the select committee report illustrates the degree to which the government at that time was seriously committed to enhance fire safety and, far from ignoring the committee’s report, engaged fully and constructively with the committee, and many others, to this purpose.

Nick Raynsford
London SE10

Give trees a chance

Farmers don't need to plant trees as they have already been planted – in their hedges ("[Farmers' dilemma: if we plant trees, will we take a cash hit?](#)", News).

The trees already in our hedges have a good rootstock, are healthy, indigenous and can start absorbing carbon immediately – if hedges are just "faced" but not "topped" with the tractor flail every year. If farmers were paid for the trees already growing on their land, rather than wished for, we could make a major and immediate impact on carbon absorption, rather than waiting 20 years for newly planted trees.

Bob Harvey

Blackawton, Totnes, Devon

Dishonourable mention

William Keegan's comparison of Boris Johnson to Falstaff is extremely apt. I'm reminded of Falstaff's catechism on honour: "What is honour? A word. What is that word 'honour'?... Air... Therefore I'll none of it."

Roger Cottrell

Kenninghall, Norwich

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/commentisfree/2022/jan/30/letters-take-to-the-streets-to-defy-police-and-crime-bill>

For the record

For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 30 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

An article about a reader who was wrongly pursued for an energy bill said the debt collection company, BW Legal, confirmed it had sent further payment demands after the customer disputed the bill. In fact, the company had said it did not contact the customer about the balance after that time, other than to request evidence of non-liability. We regret the error, which was made during editing ([BW Legal is chasing a debt I don't owe](#), 23 January, p63).

In early editions last week, an article said that Eric Williams's seminal book, *Capitalism and Slavery*, first published in the US in 1944, "continued to be spurned by British publishers until 1966, when a small university press gave it a very limited print run". In fact, the UK publishing house was André Deutsch, which published the work in 1964, with a number of reprints over the next 20 years ([Shunned critique of Britain's slavery role finally hits bookshops](#), p31). In correcting this for later editions, we misspelled the surnames of two more authors published by André Deutsch, Margaret Atwood and VS Naipaul.

A travel piece about sculpture trails ([Time to get in shape](#), 23 January, Magazine, p43), which featured the New Art Centre at Roche Court in Wiltshire, referred to the Lord Nelson pub "in nearby Middleton". That is the hostelry's street address but the village is Winterslow.

The psychologist whose work is shown in BBC Two's *Couples Therapy* is Dr Orna Guralnik, not "Orla" ([I've seen everything as a couples therapist. It's not a job for the faint-hearted](#), 23 January, p46).

Other recently amended articles include:

Rudy Giuliani and Michael Flynn to see honorary university degrees revoked

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

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2022/jan/30/for-the-record>

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

OpinionPrisons and probation

How many more Charlie Todds must there be before our prisons are reformed?

[Nick Cohen](#)



The suicide of a young inmate points up how indifferent we are now to conditions in jail



Durham Prison, where 18-year-old Charlie Todd was found dead in 2019.
Photograph: Rex Features

Sat 29 Jan 2022 14.03 EST

I am sitting at my desk in a Covid-secured *Observer* newsroom trying to achieve a feat that may be beyond my journalistic skill: to make you care about the vile state of our prisons.

A generation ago, liberal newspapers and the BBC competed to break stories about the degradation inflicted in the public's name. Now the web has given editors too much information. In the 20th century, they could kid themselves that readers cared. But the click-counters don't lie and the 21st century has shown that, although readers say they care, as a matter of observable fact they don't. Prison reform has all but vanished from public debate.

How to break the indifference? Let's try a statistic. A punch to the gut with a killer fact. Last week, the Ministry of Justice [revealed](#) the number of jail suicides was up by 28%. When Covid hit, it ordered most of its 80,000 inmates to stay in their cells for 23 hours a day. Near perpetual confinement slowed the spread of the virus and cut assaults on prisoners and prison officers, which is why ministers are thinking of keeping lockdown going after Covid has gone. But it has been a mental health disaster.

The authorities don't keep decent records because they know that the public doesn't care. The Commons justice committee said the best guess it could make was that 70% of inmates have two or more [mental health conditions](#). Locking them in cells for 23 hours a day, week after week, month after month, has pushed many to the edge and over it.

The stats not doing it for you? How about a bit of human life or, rather, a needless death? My editors always told me to grab the readers with a case study and save the boring stuff for later. Prison officers found [Charlie Todd](#) hanging in a segregation unit at Durham Prison. Once they might have been saved his life. But as well as defunding the police, the Conservatives have defunded the prison service. Four staff were meant to have been on duty at the unit, but weren't. Officers said budget cuts meant "on a day to day basis, no one [was] in charge".

Charlie was awaiting trial for burglary and a more serious wounding charge. Prosecutors later dropped the wounding allegation against his associates, so the odds were they wouldn't have charged him and he would not even have received a custodial sentence.

His mother, Emma, described "a handsome, loving boy who loved to tell a story and would put a smile on the face of anyone who met him. He was a cheeky chappie, happy go lucky and loyal." Her son was just 18.

The prisons are stuffed with inmates like him on remand or serving pointless and dangerous [short sentences](#). There's no time to offer them treatment or rehabilitation. The state holds on to them just long enough to lose them their jobs or the partner who might have persuaded them to go straight.

If the stats don't make you care about the vile state of our prisons, how about a bit of human life or needless death?

Unsurprisingly, they go out and reoffend. Predictably, Boris Johnson is making a bad situation worse. As part of his despairing efforts to save his worthless backside, the prime minister is inventing policies that might deter Tory MPs from chucking him into history's dustbin. To prove he's a tough guy, he announced he would increase the power of magistrates to jail

defendants without any of that old-fashioned nonsense about the right to [trial by jury](#). Soon, there will be yet more people sent to prison for short terms. In they will go, out they will come, and back in they will go again.

Still not with me? We are talking about criminals, after all. I accept it's one thing to lament that we send the most vulnerable to the places we care about least. But prisoners are not the same as autistic kids abused in mental health wards or innocent refugees imprisoned in detention centres. For all that, even when you've acknowledged there are inmates who should never be let out, you are still left with tens of thousands of ill and addicted people with trivial criminal records.

Rory Stewart told me that nothing he had seen in Afghanistan or Iraq was “so screwed” as the system he encountered when he became prisons minister in 2018. “Violence had tripled to 30,000 assaults a year, every institution was overcrowded, filthy and rat and drug-infested.” In the poor world, prisons were relatively open. Inmates could leave cells. Their families could bring food. Here, he found only neglect.

Stewart and his then boss, David Gauke, tried to limit the abuse. Johnson has a reverse Midas touch, however: everything he touches turns to dirt. He drove them out of parliament for opposing his extreme version of EU withdrawal and prison reform became just another opportunity to build a better country Brexit destroyed.

The prison service remains Whitehall’s equivalent of a posting to Siberia – an assignment the ambitious and talented run from. When the job of chief executive came up, officials tried to change that. They approached Nils Öberg from the Swedish ministry of justice, which had [cut prison numbers and reduced crime](#). They asked what he would do if ministers and the courts sent him an extra 10,000 prisoners. He replied that he would refuse to cram them into overcrowded jails. The negotiations stopped and you can see why. It’s all very well for Scandinavia to insist on civilised standards but the Brits would never accept them. Can you imagine the rage in the media if the jails closed their doors just because they were full?

They gave the job to one [Jo Farrar](#). Instead of having experience of working in the criminal justice system, she had run Bath and North East Somerset

council. She's presided over a humanitarian scandal, but at least she hasn't provoked angry headlines in the tabloids.

If you still don't care, reflect that bad government kills and maims the law-abiding as well as the convicted. Everyone knows that to reduce crime and the suffering it brings to the innocent, you must boost mental health and drug and alcohol treatment services, tackle homelessness and give teenagers after-school sport clubs and summer jobs to absorb their energy. This government hasn't done it and will never do it and if you are unlucky perhaps one day you will pay the price for its carelessness.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/29/how-many-more-charlie-todds-must-there-be-before-prisons-reformed>

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

Headlines tuesday 25 january 2022

- [Boris Johnson Cake and singing on PM's birthday was not a party, says Grant Shapps](#)
- [Live Shapps tells media he won't try to defend No 10 holding social event](#)
- [Boris Johnson PM faces fresh outrage over lockdown birthday party](#)
- ['You can't have your birthday cake and eat it' What the papers say about the PM's party](#)

Boris Johnson

Cake and singing on PM's birthday was not a party, says Grant Shapps

Transport secretary says Sue Gray will be using incident in her report, and 'we'll wait to see what she says'

- [**A full list of alleged parties**](#)
- [**What were the rules in June 2020?**](#)
- [**Coronavirus – latest global updates**](#)

01:11

Grant Shapps 'stands by' having no sympathy for people throwing parties – video

[Jessica Elgot](#) and [Jamie Grierson](#)

Tue 25 Jan 2022 04.04 EST

Boris Johnson's gathering with birthday cake in the cabinet room was not a party, the transport secretary, Grant Shapps, has said, denying the prime minister had organised the event.

"The prime minister clearly didn't organise to be given a cake," Shapps told Sky News after the [latest revelations about lockdown breaches](#) in Downing Street. "Some people came forward and thought it would be appropriate for on his birthday."

But he suggested it was "unwise" for the prime minister have been given a cake at the gathering of staff. He told BBC Radio 4 Today that he shares "the sense of unease about all of this".

Asked if, at the time, he would have advised someone at a Downing Street press conference that the gathering as described would be allowed, Shapps

said: “I think it’s clearly unwise to do those things.... This is in a workplace with a bunch of people who were working together all of the time, who decide to give the prime minister a birthday cake on his birthday. Unwise, I’m sure, given the circumstances as we know them.”

Shapps confirmed that the event on 19 June 2020 would be considered by the official inquiry into the breaches by Sue Gray, saying she was “already aware of this particular incident, so she will be using that in her report and we’ll wait to see what she says”.

He said the gathering revealed by ITV News, which was attended by the prime minister’s wife, Carrie, and interior designer, Lulu Lytle, was with staff the prime minister had been “working with all day long, and will have been many a time in the same room with them working on the response to coronavirus ... They come in, give him a cake, I understand I think it lasted for 10 minutes and that was it.”

It came as the former prime minister Gordon Brown said Johnson’s apparent lockdown breaches were a “moral issue”, which resonated because people had not been able to spend time or say goodbye to people they love.

“I could not go to the funeral of a very close relative last year at the same time,” he told Good Morning Britain. “I couldn’t visit a dying friend in hospital, and there are thousands and thousands of families who were in that position.

“Therefore, this is not a political issue. This is a moral issue about whether the standards you ask people to follow are standards you are prepared to follow yourself.”

Shapps said he still had confidence in Johnson, who is facing renewed anger from Tory colleagues and a possible vote of no confidence. He said the prime minister had “achieved remarkable things” but added “no one is perfect”.

The culture secretary, Nadine Dorries, tweeted in support of Johnson on Monday night, saying: “So, when people in an office buy a cake in the

middle of the afternoon for someone else they are working in the office with and stop for 10 minutes to sing happy birthday and then go back to their desks, this is now called a party?"

The shadow foreign secretary, David Lammy, said the behaviour of staff in Downing Street stood in contrast to how others had spent their birthdays. "Why should the Queen forgo her birthday party?" Lammy told the Today programme.

The human rights lawyer Adam Wagner, an expert on Covid regulations, said on Twitter he "can't see how it could have been lawful" if the reporting was accurate.

"It's obviously not within the rules and nobody from the government at the time would have said for a moment it was," he said.

If the facts of this are accurate then I can't see how it could have been lawful

19 June 2020 - indoor gatherings of 2 or more were banned unless it fell within a list of exceptions. Birthday parties (or any social gatherings) were not an exception
<https://t.co/Qq2S9DLmhM>
<https://t.co/6i7Xc9PB2U> pic.twitter.com/o56QjqRlOJ

— Adam Wagner (@AdamWagner1) [January 24, 2022](#)

Wagner told Sky News: "There are two questions you should ask, two thought experiments, first one is if the police had come across a gathering like this, with cake and food on the tables, and obviously social and arranged before in a particular room in a workplace but no one doing any work – what would they have done? I think the answer is they would have given everyone fixed-penalty notices.

"And the other question to ask is if you had asked the PM or Matt Hancock or any of the officials that stood up at those regular briefings, we want to have a birthday gathering, a party, really, let's call it what it is, in a work room, we're going to pre-arrange it, we're going to have cake and food,

we're going to stay there for half an hour, there will be 30 peopleindoors, at the time they would have said 'absolutely not, that's not within the rules'. And they would have been right".

[Contact Guardian Politics. Create a ProtonMail account and email us at guardian.politics.desk@protonmail.com; or Use Signal Messenger or WhatsApp to message +44 7824 537227.](#)

Mark Drakeford, the first minister of Wales, told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that the PM had no "moral authority" to lead the UK.

Asked about the latest party allegations, he said: "I have reacted with a combination of despair and disgust really."

Drakeford said the singing had particularly resonated with him. "Amongst the hardest letters I had to read in the whole pandemic were from people telling me they had to attend a funeral where only eight people were able to be there, where it didn't last 10 minutes, where you weren't able to sing," he said.

"In Wales, a funeral without being able to sing is a really difficult experience. And yet those people stuck to the rules. It was hard but they did it."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/25/cake-and-singing-boris-johnson-birthday-not-a-party-say-grant-shapps>

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

[**Politics**](#)

Downing Street parties: Sue Gray report could come this week as police signal no objection – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2022/jan/25/boris-johnson-birthday-party-live-news-partygate-covid-coronavirus-omicron-politics>

Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson faces fresh outrage over lockdown birthday party

Furious response from MPs and bereaved after revelation of celebration held indoors in contravention of Covid restrictions

- [A full list of alleged parties](#)
- [What were the rules in June 2020?](#)
- [Coronavirus – latest global updates](#)



No 10 said Boris Johnson attended the party for 10 minutes. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

[Jessica Elgot](#) and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)

Mon 24 Jan 2022 15.53 EST

Boris Johnson was facing renewed anger from MPs and bereaved families on Monday after the disclosure that his fiancee threw him a surprise lockdown birthday party, as sources said an official inquiry had uncovered “appalling evidence of mismanagement” at the heart of Downing Street.

Sue Gray, the senior civil servant leading the inquiry into Downing Street parties, is expected to make deeply critical recommendations on overhauling No 10’s operation after hearing of repeated failures of leadership, according to a Whitehall source who spoke to the inquiry.

In the latest alleged breach of rules, No 10 admitted that Carrie Johnson held a party for the prime minister and up to 30 staff on 19 June 2020 despite Covid rules banning indoor social gatherings. Outdoor gatherings were limited to groups of six.

ITV reported that the prime minister attended the party in the cabinet room at No 10 at 2pm on his 56th birthday, and that the interior designer Lulu Lytle – who was not a member of No 10 staff – was there.

The room was said to have been laid out with Marks & Spencer party food and a birthday cake, with staff singing “Happy Birthday” and staying for 20-30 minutes.

No 10 said the PM attended for 10 minutes and denied reports from ITV that he held a party later on 19 June in his Downing Street residence. Gray is understood to have already been told about the allegations, meaning the latest exposé is unlikely to delay publication of her report, expected late this week.



Boris Johnson holding a birthday cake as he visited a school in Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire on 19 June 2020. Photograph: Andrew Parsons/10 Downing St/EPA

A spokesperson for Lytle said she was working on the [controversial refurbishment](#) of Johnson's flat that day, adding: "Lulu was not invited to any birthday celebrations for the prime minister as a guest. Lulu entered the cabinet room briefly as requested, while waiting to speak with the prime minister."

It comes as whips have been warned that Johnson is facing the possibility of losing a vote of no confidence amid growing anger about the multiplying revelations.

One senior MP estimated up to a third of the ministerial payroll – ranging from ministers to parliamentary private secretaries and Tory vice-chairs – could vote against the prime minister, leaving Johnson reliant on support from at least half of his backbench MPs.

On Monday night angry MPs said they were fuming at the latest "drip-drip" of lockdown breach stories. "And presumably there is more being stored up for release after the Gray report just in case that hadn't dealt the killer blow," one said.

Another Tory MP who has not yet submitted a no confidence letter said the birthday gathering was “clearly social” and “changes things – a lot”.

The Guardian understands that Labour is poised to attempt to force the publication of the full Gray report at its opposition day debate next week, should No 10 attempt to hold back the full details and only publish summary findings.

A frontbencher said those who had been running the numbers of would-be rebels for the prime minister over the weekend were becoming increasingly concerned that Johnson could lose a no confidence vote despite multiple charm offensive calls to wavering MPs.

“People have been telling them over the weekend that they are behind the PM, but of course, that could be people lying,” the source said.

“Ultimately there’s a third of the payroll I could see voting against the PM – if that happens he needs at least half of all backbenchers to back him. That seems pretty unlikely. You can see things get dangerous quickly.”

Contact

Most MPs are still determined to wait for the outcome of Gray’s inquiry, expected late this week.

Johnson is alleged to have also hosted family and friends later that afternoon in his home but No 10 denied this, claiming he hosted a small number of relatives outside only.

Regarding the 2pm gathering, a No 10 spokesperson said: “A group of staff working in No 10 that day gathered briefly in the cabinet room, after a meeting, to wish the prime minister a happy birthday. He was there for less than 10 minutes.”

Addressing the later alleged party in the flat, a spokesperson said: “This is totally untrue. In line with the rules at the time, the prime minister hosted a small number of family members outside that evening.”

On Monday, Dominic Cummings, the prime minister's former chief adviser, [said](#) he had handed written evidence to the Gray inquiry – but warned that some staff were concerned about handing over evidence, fearing retribution from the prime minister.

Gray has reassured some staff they would be given a degree of protection, the Guardian understands. However, one source who has given evidence to the inquiry said fears of retribution persisted. “Junior staff have been concerned if they are seen to corroborate what’s in the press,” one Whitehall source said.

“People have been burnt as well by the Priti Patel investigation, where the advice was suppressed and the conclusion wasn’t followed. It’s one thing to be asked and not lie and quite another to offer the evidence proactively.”

Labour demanded in a letter to Johnson that he stand by his assurance in parliament on 8 December to place a copy of the report – then being compiled by cabinet secretary Simon Case – in the Commons library for all MPs to see.

03:57

'I apologise for the impression': how Boris Johnson has responded to lockdown party claims – video

Deputy leader Angela Rayner said the government “cannot allow any further cover-up” and urged Johnson to give MPs an embargoed copy of the report to let them read the detail before quizzing him in parliament.

Tory MPs said that there would be outrage among backbenchers should there be any attempt to censor the findings. Another said: “The only reason you would hold it back is because you’ve calculated that whatever’s in there is worth taking the flak for trying to hide it.” A third said: “The more that’s withheld, the less likely it is to be accepted.”

Labour could also table a “humble address” motion to force the government to publish the report in full, or parts of the evidence to ensure any testimony of criminality has been passed to the police.

However, if the government pulls Labour's next opposition day debate, other options being considered are using a select committee to request documents.

Scotland Yard reiterated its previous statement, saying if Gray's inquiry finds evidence of a potential criminal offence then officers will make a "further consideration" on whether to investigate.

Reacting to the birthday party revelations on Monday, Jo Goodman, cofounder of Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice, said: "Like thousands of others, I remember 19 June vividly. It was the day before what would have been my dad's 73rd birthday, shortly after he had passed away from Covid-19.

"It's completely sickening that the prime minister spent [time] sharing cake with 30 friends indoors ... every day and every fresh scandal pours salt on the wounds of the hundreds of thousands who have lost loved ones. If he had any decency he would do what we and the country is calling for him to do and go."

This article was amended on 25 January 2022. A sentence about Conservatives who might vote against the prime minister meant to include some parliamentary private secretaries, not "principal private secretaries", who are civil servants.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/24/boris-johnsons-lockdown-birthday-party-pm-faces-anger-from-mps-and-bereaved>

Boris Johnson

‘You can’t have your birthday cake and eat it’: what the papers say about Johnson’s party

News of a party held on Boris Johnson’s birthday during England’s first Covid lockdown features heavily on front pages



UK newspaper front pages on Tuesday 25 January Composite: Various

[Helen Livingstone](#)

Mon 24 Jan 2022 22.36 EST

The disclosure that Boris Johnson’s fiancee threw him a surprise party during lockdown, prompting a new wave of outrage, dominate the front pages.

In the latest alleged breach of rules, No 10 admitted that Carrie Johnson held a party for the prime minister and up to 30 staff on 19 June 2020 despite Covid rules at the time banning indoor social gatherings.

The **Guardian**'s front page leads with "[Johnson faces fresh outrage over birthday party in No 10.](#)" It says sources said an official inquiry had uncovered "appalling evidence of mismanagement" at the heart of Downing Street. No 10 said the PM attended for 10 minutes and denied reports from ITV that he held a party later on 19 June in his Downing Street residence.

Guardian front page, Tuesday 25 January 2022: Johnson faces fresh outrage over birthday party in No 10 [pic.twitter.com/cnm33HjhIn](#)

— The Guardian (@guardian) [January 24, 2022](#)

The **Times** has "Johnson held lockdown birthday party at No 10". It reports that Carrie Johnson and interior designer Lulu Lytle, who was working on the couple's Downing Street flat at the time, "are said to have presented the prime minister, who had turned 56, with a union jack cake while his wife led staff in a chorus of Happy Birthday".

TIMES: [@Johnson](#) held lockdown birthday party at No10
[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) [pic.twitter.com/psNtL8p2XM](#)

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) [January 24, 2022](#)

The **Sun**'s take on the story is a play on Johnson's [own subversion of a famous proverb](#): "You can't have your birthday cake ... and eat it Boris". "Amid fury at the latest Covid partygate revelation, Downing Street insisted the PM was only there for ten minutes," it reports.

Tomorrow's front page: Boris Johnson held indoor birthday bash at height of first lockdown in fresh partygate storm<https://t.co/wQPZHUEC4> [pic.twitter.com/caWe0ZZXSo](#)

— The Sun (@TheSun) [January 24, 2022](#)

The **Mirror** headlines with “PM’s No10 birthday bash in lockdown” and reports that “Just days earlier, the PM had urged us all to obey laws banning indoor gatherings.” It also quotes a “furious” Jo Goodman, whose father had died of Covid just weeks earlier. “It’s sickening,” she told the paper. “The PM should resign.”

Tomorrow's front page: PM's No10 birthday bash in lockdown
[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) <https://t.co/rc8pIWUulj>
pic.twitter.com/St3oC7E7nB

— The Mirror (@DailyMirror) [January 24, 2022](#)

The **Daily Mail** goes its own way with “PM’s Mr Brexit: Kill Off Tax Hike”, reporting that “April’s National Insurance hike must be scrapped to help the economic recovery, Lord Frost declared last night”. The paper gives a more sceptical treatment to the birthday party reports, picturing a grinning Boris Johnson holding a cake and headlining it “New storm over Boris’s 10-minute birthday ‘party’ at No 10” while relegating the story to pages six and seven.

Tuesday's [@DailyMailUK](#) [#MailFrontPages](#)
pic.twitter.com/HX8QxMDNdi

— Daily Mail U.K. (@DailyMailUK) [January 24, 2022](#)

The **Telegraph** references Johnson’s party in its banner, “Now PM accused of No 10 lockdown birthday party”, while also leaving the story for the inside pages. Instead it leads on Ukraine, with “Biden prepares troops to face Putin threat”.

[]The front page of tomorrow's Daily Telegraph:

'Biden prepares troops to face Putin threat'[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)

Sign up for the Front Page newsletter<https://t.co/x8AV4Oomry>
pic.twitter.com/wulscuhyl2K

— The Telegraph (@Telegraph) [January 24, 2022](#)

The **i**'s take is “Johnson's problems grow with birthday party leak” and reports that the “drip-drip effect of revelations is damaging staff morale in No 10” and that “further allegations expected as Tory former minister tells i: ‘Cummings has gone feral’.”

Tuesday's front page: Johnson's problems grow with birthday party leak [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)

Latest from @HugoGye: <https://t.co/GXYGwjZeTu>
pic.twitter.com/43kY637dSa

— i newspaper (@theipaper) [January 24, 2022](#)

The **Independent** splashes a picture of Johnson across its front page with the headline “‘Birthday party for PM’ in first lockdown” but chooses to lead with “Islamophobia review ignored by ministers”.

INDEPENDENT DIGITAL: Islamophobia review ignored by ministers
[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) pic.twitter.com/S5Q7mveuxh

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) [January 24, 2022](#)

The **Metro** opts to lead on Ukraine, headlining its front page “Nato Jets Ready To Scramble” but pictures Boris and Carrie Johnson in its banner with the headline, “How Boris had his cake and ate it ... at No 10 lockdown birthday bash”.

Tomorrow's Paper Tonight □

NATO JETS READY TO SCRAMBLE

- West shores up forces in Eastern Europe amid growing Russian threat
- PM warns Putin is planning 'lightning strike' into

Ukraine#TomorrowsPapersToday
pic.twitter.com/K3bU7n3w61

<https://t.co/UZvEKbt8QU>

— Metro (@MetroUK) [January 24, 2022](#)

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/25/you-cant-have-your-birthday-cake-and-eat-it-what-the-papers-say-about-johnsons-party>.

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

2022.01.25 - Spotlight

- ['It's a job I love - but some days I hate it' One frontline GP on anti-vax protests, angry patients and Omicron](#)
- ['Princess Anne is a rock star' Erin Doherty on stealing scenes in The Crown and creepy new drama Chloe](#)
- [Behind the label How the US stitched up the Honduras garment industry](#)
- [Apple AirPods 3 review Solid revamp with better fit and longer battery](#)



Laura Mount: ‘When people are making you out to be a villain, that’s my lowest point.’ Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

[A worker in winter](#)

The hidden life of a GP: angry patients, anti-vaxxers, extreme goodwill and exhaustion

Laura Mount: ‘When people are making you out to be a villain, that’s my lowest point.’ Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

In the first of a new series on the under-pressure workers holding the UK together in this difficult winter, doctor Laura Mount reveals how staff sickness, spiralling waiting lists and political pressure have left GPs on the brink

by [Sirin Kale](#)

Tue 25 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Laura Mount became a doctor – she visibly winces at repeating such a cliche – to help people. Also, she was good at school. Her dad was a chemist, which is where she got her love of science; her mum, who was a hairdresser, gave Mount her drive. “If you didn’t do well and get on with it, you knew,” says Mount. “She felt she missed out on all that. So she was quite strict. She wanted us to do well.”

Mount, 44, has been a GP for 15 years. She is a partner at the Folly Lane medical centre in Warrington, Cheshire, which is also where she grew up and has lived her entire life, apart from her training in Sheffield. In addition to being a GP, Mount is the clinical director of a primary care network, coordinating six GP surgeries across Warrington. On top of this, she runs a vaccine clinic from a community centre in Orford. “It’s all a bit mad,” she says.

Mount has always enjoyed her job, but lately she has felt dissatisfaction creeping in around the edges. It’s partly the patients. “We call them the Amazon Prime generation,” says Mount. “They’re used to ordering something and it comes the next afternoon.” Three or four years ago, Folly Lane would get a patient complaint every three to six months. “We’d get really upset about it,” Mount says, “and spend ages replying to it.” Now, it’s not uncommon to get a complaint every day.

When patients don’t get what they want, they harangue reception staff. The surgery records incoming and outgoing phone calls, and Mount gets emotional when she listens back to them. If a patient is particularly abusive, Mount will send out a zero-tolerance letter, warning them that if it happens again, they will have to find a new GP practice.

Today, in her treatment room at the beginning of October, Mount writes one such letter. The patient was abusive because they didn’t get their prescription as fast as they would have liked, even though they got it the same day. In her letter, Mount suggests the patient comes in and listens back to the audio of their phone call. The patient won’t take her up on this offer. They never do.

The other thing grinding Mount down is the recent spate of hostile headlines in the press. In May, the Daily Mail launched [a campaign](#) to make GPs see all patients face-to-face. The newspaper has condemned GPs for being

“[overpaid](#)” and “[moaning](#)”, suggested part-timers choose not to treat patients on Fridays so that [they can](#) “enjoy long weekends off” (a claim [debunked](#) by the factchecking organisation Full Fact), [accused them](#) of being uncaring, and castigated GPs who choose to work part-time. Similar pieces have appeared in the Times, Daily Express, the Sun and the Telegraph. In September, the Doctors’ Association UK complained [to the media regulator](#) IPSO about the Telegraph columnist Allison Pearson’s inflammatory anti-GP rhetoric. (In one column, Pearson urged the public to “turn the heat up” on GPs.)

To Mount and many of her GP colleagues, opening the newspaper every day feels like sticking their hand in a box of sharps. She is in a WhatsApp group for fellow [GPs](#), which lights up as another invective-laden article is published. “I can cope with long hours and being busy,” says Mount. “I don’t mind working hard. I do it for the patients. But when you are actively being slagged off in the media and being made out to be the villain, that is the lowest point of my career. I feel really demoralised.”

What makes the whole thing so infuriating is that GPs were following orders when they switched to remote models of triage. NHS England [advised them](#) to do so in March 2020, to mitigate the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, and did not revoke this guidance [until May 2021](#). And yet in September, the health secretary, Sajid Javid, [backed](#) the Mail. “I am grateful to the Daily Mail for launching this campaign,” he said, adding that it was “high time” GPs went back to their pre-pandemic operation models.



Mount talks with a patient at Folly Lane medical centre. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

This perception that GPs are refusing to see people face-to-face has contributed to increased patient hostility. A September survey of 1,000 GPs from the healthcare publication Pulse found that 74% had experienced increased levels of abuse post-pandemic. Sometimes, patients complain about the lack of face-to-face appointments while sitting in Mount's office. "I say: 'What are we doing right now?'" she says. In the period October 2020 to October 2021, 48% of Folly Lane's patients were face-to-face; in pre-pandemic times, this figure was 60%.

While it is true that face-to-face primary care appointments are not back to pre-pandemic levels – in October 2021, 64% of English primary care appointments were face-to-face, compared with 80% in January 2020 – GPs are demonstrably working harder than ever. The number of appointments provided by English primary care increased from 27.2m in January 2020 to 30.2m in October 2021. This is despite the fact that England has lost 1,307 GPs since 2015, nearly 5% of the former total.

"Twenty years ago," says Prof Azeem Majeed, a GP and primary care expert at Imperial College London, "being a GP was very attractive." In 2005, Majeed would expect 50 applicants for a GP position at his surgery; now,

he's thrilled if they get one decent candidate. There are two vacant GP positions currently open at his practice.

"All this press about how we aren't seeing patients," says Mount. "Well, maybe you can't see us because there aren't that many of us, because it's such an undesirable profession. Don't beat up the ones who are still around." Many of Mount's friends and colleagues have left. Those who remain have to pick up the slack, in an era of ever-increasing patient numbers. Across England, the average [number](#) of patients per GP practice is up 22%.

By October, Folly Lane had treated 7,000 more patients than it did in 2019, and there were still two months of the year to go, and winter months at that. "We can't say we're full," says Mount. "It's uncontrollable. More people will keep coming, and you don't want to leave them without being seen."

This is Mount's account of a winter of exceptional demand.

14 October NHS England writes to GPs, [announcing a](#) £250m package for primary care – but [only if](#) GPs increase the number of patients they see face-to-face. It also informs them that it will be publishing data on face-to-face appointments, and naming and shaming underperforming surgeries.

"It's like another kick," Mount says. "You aren't doing a good enough job, and we're going to punish you for it." Almost immediately, patients start citing the [NHS](#) England letter in their complaints. Morale among GPs is at an all-time low – their WhatsApp groups are aflame.

"It's a job I love," says Mount. "But some days I also hate it."

21 October The British Medical Association (BMA) England GP committee rejects the government's funding package, – specifically [the decision](#) to name and shame GPs. It [ballots its members](#) on industrial action. English GPs have only gone on strike once since 1975, in a 2012 dispute over pensions. During this strike, GPs continued to [treat urgent](#) cases.

"The ballot was a cry for help," says the BMA England GP committee chair, Dr Farah Jameel. "Saying: 'We can't carry on like this any more.'" (While the ballot suggested a range of potential options, a strike of GPs was not on

the table.) But the issues predate Covid: for years, primary care has been underfunded. In 2005, general practice received 9.6% of the NHS budget. In 2019-20 this figure was about 8.7%. The BMA has called for a minimum of 11% of the NHS budget to go to GPs.

In a way, GPs have been enacting a private form of industrial action for years now. “The workforce is leaving,” says Jameel. “We can’t retain clinicians. We can’t even retain reception teams. Do we need to organise for it to be a strike?”

Early November Newly installed security cameras blink in the reception at Folly Lane. The partners are spooked: in September, four members of staff were injured in an attack at a surgery in Manchester. Two people had to be taken to hospital with head injuries.

“I have members of my reception team who left because they couldn’t cope,” says Jameel. “They were constantly crying at how they were being spoken to by the patients.” She has found it impossible to replace them, despite advertising the role five times. GPs, she says, are inured to the abuse. “Like boiling frogs,” she says. “We’ve learned to live with it.”

Were politicians to have realistic conversations with the public about the pressures GPs are under, things might be different. “This frustration,” says Jameel, “is because the public is being led to believe that everything is fine, and GPs are lazy, and that’s why you can’t see them. That’s how the public is being stoked. And of course, if that’s what you believe, you would be angry, too. But if they understood the challenges, they might direct that anger at policymakers.”



Mount talks with the Folly Lane reception staff. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

In Mount's office, her patients are distressed, with good reason. The pandemic has created a huge backlog in non-Covid care. Between April 2020 and November 2021, [there were](#) 4.2m fewer elective procedures, and 29.1m fewer outpatient attendances. In October 2021, 312,665 patients had been waiting more than a year for treatment; in October 2019, this figure was 1,321.

Mount sees a patient in his late 60s who has been waiting months for a urology consultation for a prostate operation. Technically, he's a low-risk patient, but his condition is seriously affecting his quality of life. He can't leave the house for more than an hour or two, because he constantly needs the toilet. There's nothing Mount can do; she has tried medicating the issue but it doesn't work. He needs surgery.

A woman in her late 40s comes in with a gynaecological issue. The woman has been waiting for surgery for five months. They agree that Mount should refer her to a different hospital where the waiting list is shorter, even though she'll have to go to the back of the queue. "She's in pain," says Mount, "and can't leave the house for a week or two every month."

As the afternoon wears on, it seems that almost every patient is presenting with a waiting-list-related issue. They need a hip replacement, or a knee replacement, and they're in pain. This has never happened to Mount before. "As a doctor, you want to help people," says Mount. "It's not nice when you watch your patients suffer, and you have to explain to them why they have to continue suffering."

12 November Last night, on BBC One's Question Time, Alastair Campbell excoriated the government for its treatment of GPs. "I'm getting really worried about these attacks on GPs," Campbell said. "Which I think are being orchestrated." A colleague shares the clip via WhatsApp. Mount watches it while eating breakfast. "It was nice to hear that someone was speaking up for us," she says. "Because everyone thinks we're shut."

Mid-November Mount spends a day at the vaccine centre. Currently, they are rolling out booster vaccines to over-40s and the clinically vulnerable, although there has been chatter that the rollout will be widened to all adults soon.

Mount is dealing with a routine query when there's a commotion. Staff peer out of the window. There's an anti-vaxxer outside. "Only the vaccinated die young!" he chants. Bizarrely, he's carrying a golf club. Mount is unfazed. He has been coming since spring. Because of him, the practice had to install opaque screens across the windows, so that he wouldn't be able to view confidential patient information. After a few hours, the man gets bored and goes off to play golf.

The worst anti-vaxxers are the ones who disrupt the clinics. In May, Mount was running a vaccine bus outside the town hall when two anti-vaxxers went to the car park, told everyone the clinic had run out of vaccine, and sent them home.

Late November Mount sees a patient with Covid symptoms. Folly Lane has a designated treatment room for patients with suspected Covid, but the patient is insisting she be seen in a regular treatment room.

The woman, who is in her mid-30s, keeps telling Mount that she believes that she has a bacterial chest infection, and is asking for antibiotics. Mount

tells her that she needs to rule out Covid first, and sends her for a PCR test. “People get angry when you ask them to go for a PCR test,” says Mount. “Like you’ve accused them of doing something wrong. They feel like they know it’s not Covid.”

This is a daily occurrence at Folly Lane. “When I say they have to go to a special room, they get upset,” says Mount. “They don’t want to go in that room. That’s the room where patients with Covid have been.” Sometimes patients lie and say they have had a negative PCR, not realising that the results come through to Mount’s computer.

That evening, Mount has a bath when she gets in, and washes her hands. The patient was coughing all over her. The test comes back the following day: the patient has Covid. “It makes me angry that my staff have to expose themselves to the risk because patients refuse to get a test,” says Mount. “They’re expecting us to expose ourselves to the illness. And we can’t say no. We have to see them.”

Despite the fact that Mount’s team regularly see Covid-positive patients, they are not given high-quality FFP3 masks. At the beginning of the pandemic, the surgery couldn’t even get surgical masks from central supply. When they eventually arrived, they had a sticker stuck over the best-before date.

26 November The Omicron variant [has been detected](#) in South Africa. Mount has been given orders to ramp up the booster rollout. Her new target, set by NHS England, is to give out boosters to 90% of those eligible by 19 December. So far, she’s at 68%. Mount would like to give out more vaccines, but just doesn’t have the stock. “We are begging for more vaccines,” she says. “We are going as fast as the supply allows.”

Another patient complaint. A nurse used a tongue depressor to examine his throat, and it made him gag. Mount dashes out the response. “I am very sorry for any distress you have felt,” she writes, explaining that use of a tongue depressor is a routine part of a physical examination.



Thank you cards from patients at Folly Lane. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

Early December An exhausting day at the surgery. “You have to be fully functioning,” says Mount. “It’s like a conveyor belt. Patient after patient after patient.”

Because minor conditions are screened out during telephone triage and assigned to junior doctors or nurses, every person Mount sees has a complex condition. Appointments are scheduled into 10-minute slots, which gives them a Generation Game-like feel, but with life-and-death stakes.

On an average day, Mount treats 40 patients. According to BMA guidance, any more than 25 patient-doctor contacts a day is unsafe. “We are already at the point where patient safety is being compromised,” says Jameel. “It has been for a long time.” She has colleagues who see or speak to 120 patients a day. Every one of these contacts is fraught with risk. Every one of them is potentially life-threatening.

Mount sees a pregnant woman in her early 30s with abdominal pain. Mount suspects an ectopic pregnancy, which can be fatal if untreated. The gynaecological registrar at the hospital won’t accept the patient without blood tests to rule out appendicitis. But these tests can take 24 hours to come

back. Mount pleads with the registrar, who relents. Mount checks the patient's notes the next day: it was an ectopic pregnancy.

12 December In light of the fact that Omicron cases are rocketing, the BMA has offered the government an opportunity to ["reset" its relationship with GPs.](#)

Mount is at home with her family. It's her son's 14th birthday. As she cooks his favourite meal – roast chicken and chocolate cake – news breaks that Boris Johnson has scheduled a press conference that evening. Her WhatsApp lights up. "All the GPs are going crazy," she says. "Saying that the press always finds out about everything before us." She feels a spike of anxiety: throughout the pandemic, she has found out about changes to the vaccination programme via the news, and there's no reason to expect this evening will be any different.

Come 8pm, Mount watches the [press conference](#). Johnson announces that all English adults will have the chance to get a booster by the end of the month, provided they had their second dose of the vaccine at least three months previously. People can walk in for vaccines, without appointments. Getting everyone boosted before the new year is to be the NHS's No 1 priority.

When the press conference is over, Mount opens her laptop. She crunches the numbers: her primary care network needs to deliver 10,000 boosters before January. For context, they have delivered 9,000 boosters since September. They are effectively being told to do three months' work in three weeks, during the busiest time of year for GPs, when patients present with seasonal flu and staff are off for the holidays.

First, Mount applies for permission for all of the surgeries in her primary care network to become vaccination sites. Then, she emails the team at her vaccination centre, to see what extra dates they can put on. Afterwards, she warns her husband that she won't be able to see him and the kids much before Christmas. She tells her daughter she won't be able to take her to the Christmas market in Manchester any more. She cancels all of her days off, leaving only Christmas Eve, for present wrapping.

She sleeps badly and arrives at Folly Lane early the next morning. By the end of the day she has seen 28 patients, reviewed a batch of prescriptions, filled out her paperwork, supervised a trainee GP and a pharmacist, written a plan to increase vaccine capacity to 1,120 doses a day, and obtained all the permits.

“If things feel out of control,” Mount says, “I need to get back in control again, as quickly as possible.”

14 December The Orford vaccine centre is vaccinating 1,000 people a day. The queue stretches around the building.

“A few weeks ago,” says Mount, “ministers were saying not particularly nice things about general practice. We’re doing this for the patients, not for the government. That’s how the NHS runs. It’s on the goodwill of people. Primary care will always deliver.”

Mount puts an out-of-office on her email, informing people that she will only answer urgent queries and emails about the booster rollout. Folly Lane has postponed a few non-urgent disease review clinics. “In three months,” says Mount, “are GPs going to be criticised for what we did have to postpone? Will the government accuse us of earning money from it?”

Her nerves are frayed. She’s exhausted, and living on coffee.



Preparing a vaccine to be administered at the Orford Jubilee Hub vaccination site. Photograph: Warrington Guardian/SWNS

15 December The centre is vaccinating 1,400 people a day. Mount gets a strange email. The person asks for their vaccination data, and then tells them to watch the prime minister's press conference, later that evening.

Come 5pm, Mount is at the vaccine centre, packing Pfizer vials into freezer bags full of ice to take out to GP practices. She turns on the press conference, and is flabbergasted to hear Johnson thank her personally, for her work rolling out the booster campaign. Her dad messages her almost immediately. "The prime minister just said your name!" he writes.

20 December Mount dashes to Asda to pick up bits for the Christmas meal. She's so tired, she leaves her keys at the checkout. A member of the public flags her down.

23 December Mount's final day in the office before Christmas. Across the country, Omicron cases are surging. There are 106,199 cases reported in England today: a new national record, to be broken tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that.

Testing labs are overwhelmed by the sheer number of people presenting for PCR tests. Government-issued lateral flow tests have run out. The local

microbiology lab is so overwhelmed with PCRs, it has had to stop doing urine and sputum samples. Without the samples, they can't find which specific infections the patients have, so Mount has been told to prescribe broader antibiotics than she would typically use. "We've spent years trying to avoid broader antibiotics because of the problems they can cause," she says. "We might end up in a pickle next week with people with resistant infections."

At lunchtime, one of the Folly Lane nurses is getting ready to go out and vaccinate a shelter for rough sleepers. As the nurse is preparing to leave, Mount gets an email from her communications manager. The prime minister wants to video-call her at the homeless shelter, to thank her for the work she has been doing. "I said to the comms lady: 'Are you sure you want me to do this? I'm known for speaking my mind.'"

Mount has a break in between clinics, and she rushes to the shelter. They cram into a small meeting room. The prime minister is characteristically dishevelled and tries to fix the Teams connection halfway through. After 10 minutes, they click off. "If we'd had more time," says Mount wryly, "I might have mentioned a few things about how best to communicate with us. But then he'd probably have said that his computer failed."

Afterwards, Mount and her team vaccinate 30 people at the homeless shelter, which feels amazing. "Sometimes the ones you get the biggest sense of achievement about are the smallest numbers," she says.

Wrapping the children's presents on Christmas Eve, Mount realises to her dismay that she ordered far too many online, and sets some aside. "You overcompensate, don't you?"

29 December Mount is at the vaccine centre. It's ghostly quiet. They have space for 1,100 appointments, but only 250 people are booked in. Over Christmas, studies emerged indicating that Omicron is less deadly than earlier variants of the virus. Mount thinks this is why people aren't bothering to book their boosters. "For someone in their 90s or who is immunosuppressed," she sighs, "it might not be mild."

Around 11am, anti-vax protesters set up a table outside the centre. “You’re not being told the full picture,” a protester tells people as they leave the clinic. He hands them a leaflet. “How many jabs to freedom?” it reads. “Never before has a ‘vaccine’ required continuous top-up every few months! Surely your gut feeling tells you something isn’t right?”

One of Mount’s team waves at the protesters cheerily through the window. “They had a poster last week with a picture of Madeleine McCann on it,” observes a volunteer, eating a biscuit. Mount asks the building manager if they can’t be moved on, but it’s public land so there’s nothing she can do.



Laura Mount: ‘We’re doing this for the patients, not the government. That’s how the NHS runs’ Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

Around 2pm, one of the protesters starts shouting at patients in the observation room. She yells that everyone’s going to die, and it’s all a hoax. Mount tells the woman that she has to leave, at which point the woman falsely accuses her of assaulting her. Mount’s team forms a human chain around the woman, walking her out. The police arrive, investigate the woman’s claim of assault, conclude there’s no case to answer, and leave. The protesters linger outside for a while until a security guard arrives, then disappear.

Afterwards, everyone is worked up. They debrief over cups of tea. Mount is disturbed. “The worry is that you don’t know who could be violent or aggressive towards you,” she says.

5 January Turnout is still low at the vaccine centre. Mount’s more pressing concern, however, is staffing. Two of her GPs are out with Covid, and two of her nurses. The agencies she would usually call for locums can’t help: the north-west has become [the centre](#) of Omicron. It’s a similar picture across the country: [more than 35,000 NHS staff are off sick](#). In London, the military has been drafted into crisis-stricken hospitals.

To prevent her remaining staff from contracting Covid, Mount seeks permission to purchase FFP3 masks out of Folly Lane funds. When fitted correctly, FFP3 masks [are up to 100% effective](#) at protecting the wearer from infection; surgical masks are [only 40-80% effective](#). In the UK, FFP3 masks are only available to NHS staff [performing aerosol-generating procedures](#). Despite this, when Javid visited an NHS hospital this month, he wore an [FFP3 mask](#); he was photographed talking to an ICU doctor who was wearing a surgical mask. “We’re two years into this pandemic,” says the BMA’s Jameel. “We know that Covid is airborne, and we’re still telling general practice: ‘Here’s a flimsy mask. This will protect you.’”

At Folly Lane, Mount drafts in a paramedic and pharmacist to deal with minor ailments, but it’s not enough, and they have to cancel a diabetic review clinic. She’s worried about patient safety should things get worse. “In the next two or three weeks,” Mount says, “it could get to the point where we just haven’t got the people. I don’t know what we’ll do.”

When she has a moment to think, Mount asks herself how long she can continue working like this; how much longer she can keep driving herself at the expense of her family life, wellbeing and health. Not much longer, in all honesty. She has seen other GPs have heart attacks from the stress. She plans to get out by the time she’s 60, at the latest. “There’s no way I can do this until I’m 65,” she says. “No way.”

Until then, Dr Mount and her colleagues hold together the crumbling edifice of primary care with exhaustion and goodwill. There may not be many GPs to replace her, if things carry on as they are.

Some dates and details have been changed for patient privacy.

This article was amended on 25 January 2022 to remove a sentence that said FFP3 masks were mandatory on public transport in Germany. While masks are mandatory in such settings there, they can be FFP2 or medical face masks.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jan/25/as-a-doctor-you-want-to-help-not-explain-why-patients-must-suffer-one-gps-diary-of-this-winter-of-discontent>

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

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Television](#)

Interview

‘Princess Anne is a rock star’: Erin Doherty on stealing scenes in The Crown and creepy new drama Chloe

[Rachel Aroesti](#)



‘Oh, that’s great – that’s so Princess Anne’ ... Erin Doherty. Photograph: Joseph Sinclair

She more than held her own against the likes of Olivia Colman in *The Crown*. Now the actor is the star of her own drama about a down-at-heel temp addicted to Instagram – a role that’s a bit too familiar, she says



Tue 25 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

The last time Erin Doherty was meant to do a big interview with the *Guardian*, she got out of it by faking an illness and sending her grandmother, an eccentric nun, along instead. Admittedly, Doherty was in character at the time, playing [Princess Anne](#) as a sarky 16-year-old in *The Crown*, annoyed with her father’s plan to salvage the royals’ reputation by showcasing her, his headstrong, no-nonsense daughter. Unfortunately, his headstrong, no-nonsense daughter would not comply.

So it does feel quite satisfying to finally pin Doherty down, even if we are Zooming from our homes rather than tête-à-tête-ing amid the gilded majesty of Buckingham Palace, as the fictional journalist in the Netflix hit did. “I’m having a great time!” grins Doherty, her perkiness and high-pitched estuary accent so different from the deep, hyper-posh drawl she used for Anne. But perhaps we should get used to it – now that the 29-year-old is appearing in a

new genre-bending BBC One drama called *Chloe*, in which she plays down-at-heel temp Becky, a woman who is – vocally, at least – much closer to the real Doherty.

The plot revolves around Becky's decision to infiltrate Bristol's stylish arty set after one of their number – a woman Becky obsesses over on Instagram – is found dead, having mysteriously phoned our protagonist during her last hours. The show is part thrilling social media mystery, part glossy Insta-life romp. And Becky is an intriguingly complex character: a wily con artist, a self-hating recluse, a sparkling social butterfly, a reluctant carer, an inveterate scroller – desperate, deceptive and difficult to get a handle on.



No nonsense ... Doherty as Princess Anne. Photograph: Des Willie/AP

In other words, a proper challenge for any actor: Doherty is playing not one character, but multiple, and very different Beckys. At home, she is moody, monotone and distant in the face of hectoring from her ill mother. At work, she is capable, sensible and keen to blend into the background. And in her new, duplicitous social life, she is confident, sleek, witty and well travelled. Doherty negotiates this with subtlety and aplomb. But her great skill is to make us empathise with this often impenetrable woman: we don't quite know what is going on in Becky's head, but feel for her and root for her nonetheless.

Searches about Anne on Google went through the roof. She's now one of the most popular royals

Fans of [The Crown](#) will not be surprised by Doherty's stellar performance: this is a woman who not only comfortably held her own alongside [Olivia Colman](#)'s Queen Elizabeth and Helena Bonham Carter's Princess Margaret, but often stole the scene with her biting wit. The Crown's creator [Peter Morgan](#) has admitted that her performance was so good, he was continually asked to feature more Anne in the fourth series. "Erin's portrayal means that everybody has fallen in love with her," he said. "Searches about Anne on Google went through the roof. She's now one of the most popular royals."

It was a performance fuelled by affection: Doherty became a huge fan of Anne while making the show. Today, she describes her as a "rock star" who "is devoted to telling the truth at all times, regardless of how someone may respond. For me, a rock star is someone who just feels what they feel, and they say it in the moment and the other person just has to deal with that."

As if to prove the point, Princess Anne recently took umbrage with comments made by Doherty, who had said in an interview that it took two hours for The Crown's hair stylists to perfect the royal's idiosyncratic bouffant. The princess said she was baffled, insisting it only took her 10 minutes. "Oh no!" says Doherty, looking mortified. But surely this shows that her portrayal – that straight-talking, suffer-no-fools attitude, that low-key, unfussy style – was spot on? Doherty relaxes and nods. "Oh, that's great. That's so Anne."



Challenging ... Doherty's part in Chloe has multiple characters. Photograph: Luke Varley/BBC/Mam Tor Productions

Doherty does not consider herself a rock star in the Princess Anne mould. In fact, she says she has far more in common with Becky's tendency towards anxiety and doubt. "When I leave a meeting room or whatever, I'm the type of person who will walk back to the train station replaying every moment. I can't let it go unless I've done that."

Chloe is full of lingering shots of Becky scrolling, dead-eyed, through Instagram profiles of people with nicer, more photogenic lives than her. I'd wager there has never been a more uncomfortably realistic portrayal of social media use in British drama. Doherty thinks that's important. "It's not until you see someone behaving that way that you're like, 'Oh crap, I do that.' I wake up in the morning and I reach for my phone and I'm there for an hour, without even thinking about it. It's terrifying. It really impacts your mind."

The self-flagellation that is part of looking at – and aspiring to – lives online is something Chloe captures incredibly well. "That's the scary thing about Instagram. It has all these glorious things. Even for someone like me, who isn't on it day to day, I still find myself looking at all these photos and being like, 'Right, well, where am I going to get that set of plates from?' Why do I

care? It's crazy!" She adds: "People who lived in the 1970s had it sorted. They rang people in telephone boxes and met up at places and that was it. Hopefully, something will happen and social media won't be what our culture revolves around."

At least Doherty was able to enjoy a phone-free 1990s childhood. She grew up in Crawley ("Whenever anyone asks, I just say near Gatwick airport, which is all it has going on") and was heavily into both football and acting. But when her dad got tired of ferrying her between hobbies, she was told to choose. It was acting, she decided, that made her happiest.

School was substantially less joyful. "I never felt at home there. I bunked off a lot – there was no big connection to a subject, there was no social group." Instead, she found friends at her weekend drama classes, and that's how she still operates. "I'm quite introverted, I don't have a big social life. Work provides that."

Despite the detachment, it was actually school that convinced Doherty acting was her calling. In what she calls "the most random but vital experience of my life", her drama teacher took some pupils to a youth theatre festival in Bosnia, where they performed a silent play based on [Timberlake Wertenbaker](#)'s *The Love of the Nightingale*, a feminist retelling of the ancient Greek myth about the rape of Philomela and the revenge she takes. After a week of drama workshops and lectures, Doherty sat on the plane home and thought: "Right, there's no two ways about it: I'm going to be an actor."

That conviction made her initial rejections from drama schools all the more unnerving because "I didn't have another option". She took a year out and worked in the PE department of her old school, "pumping up all the footballs and washing all the football kits. It was really horrible." Eventually, she won a place at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, whose alumni include fellow Crown cast members Colman and Josh O'Connor, who plays Prince Charles.

The rest, however, seems to have been plain sailing. Rave reviews for her theatre work followed, particularly her 2017 performance in [My Name is](#)

[Rachel Corrie](#), a one-woman play, created by the late [Alan Rickman](#) and the Guardian's editor-in-chief, Katharine Viner, about the American activist who was killed by an Israeli bulldozer on the Gaza Strip. So breathtakingly good was Doherty that [this paper called her](#) "one of the year's great discoveries," describing her version of Corrie as "if Sylvia Plath had been crossed with Jane Fonda".

She's certainly not the only talented actor to have been rejected from drama school. Does she think there's a correlation? Doherty nods. "Rejection is really great. Being rejected is an opportunity because you're literally being told no. So rather than just going A to B, you've got to figure something else out. And figuring that out is an amazing opportunity. As an actor, regardless of what you do, you're always going to get told no at some point. You don't get every job you go up for, that's just impossible, so you have to be alright with that."

Judging by the response to Doherty's work so far, it's hard to imagine that rejection is the reason she is currently not working. No, she says, she's just increasingly picky. "It's a privilege to be able to choose, because I've gone through the phases when I would just be gagging to work." Now her criteria for taking a role is "whether I would want to see that. Like, what's the point? Why is this story being made?"

The baton of Princess Anne has now been passed to Claudia Harrison, who plays her as a fortysomething in *The Crown*'s fifth series, currently in production. Doherty would have liked to do an in-person handover, but it wasn't possible in the pandemic. "It's been gutting," she says. "We've sent some texts but we haven't been able to meet up, with all the blimmin' rules changing all the time."

Still, it seems Anne will continue to loom large in Doherty's life for a while yet. "During filming, my family would be like, 'You literally just spoke to me like Anne then.' I had no awareness of it. Even now, I say some words and I'm like, 'That is not my voice.' She's there!"

- Chloe begins on BBC One on 6 February.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2022/jan/25/princess-anne-rock-star-erin-doherty-stealing-scenes-crown-new-drama-chloe-olivia-colman>

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



Photograph: Vasiliki/Getty/Guardian Design

[The long read](#)

Behind the label: how the US stitched up the Honduras garment industry

Photograph: Vasiliki/Getty/Guardian Design

Among the manifold complexities of the global supply chain, a simple principle holds: corporations will always go where their costs – and their responsibilities – can be kept to an absolute minimum

by [Sofi Thanhauser](#)

Tue 25 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

‘It’s like a little Puerto Rico – we’re basically run by the US,’ said Allan, as we drove around San Pedro Sula, the second largest city in [Honduras](#) and the country’s largest manufacturing centre one day. ‘Here there is more ‘freedom’,’ he added, doing air quotes. Allan had spent most of his adult life

working as a production manager for companies such as Gildan and Hanes, making socks and underwear for American bargain shoppers. All of this garment manufacture now takes place behind the gates of Honduras's export processing zones.

When export processing zones (EPZs) proliferated in the 1980s and 90s, their boosters claimed that the employment opportunities inside them would lift up local economies. Allan's story showed the holes in that argument. After all, he wasn't just a low-paid garment worker: he was management. He had done everything right. And now, he said, he was moving to Canada.

Get the Guardian's award-winning long reads sent direct to you every Saturday morning

Allan got a good start: privately educated, he graduated in industrial engineering and got his first job in 2010 at Gildan, as a process engineer. He made and maintained a manual of all the production processes, trained the workers and audited the production floor. After 10 months, he moved to product development. He went to work at Hanes, and for Kattan Group, a manufacturer for companies including Nike. Then he hit a pay ceiling when he was earning \$700 (£520) a month.

When Allan spoke on the phone to his wife, who had gone ahead of him to Ontario to start her studies at a Canadian university, they compared grocery prices. Often, he said, items such as grapes cost less in Canada. That \$700 a month salary didn't go far in Honduras, he said, where his family of three typically spent \$70-\$85 a week on groceries, "and that's just for what you need".

He said it was difficult to imagine how the textile and garment workers who he used to manage, managed. Workers were paid between \$263 and \$465 a month. Many of these workers have three to four kids. The only other job his college degree could get him in Honduras, Allan said, was in a call centre, but that paid \$500 a month at most.

In scouring the globe for cheap labour, US clothing brands are not merely opportunistic, they are also sometimes actively parasitic. Honduras is a case study: one in which US corporations and the US state department have

worked together for decades to bring cheap garments to American consumers, framing job creation as a blessing for the Honduran economy while simultaneously engaging in political interventions that keep Honduran citizens poor.

The story of Honduras's emergence as a garment exporter began in the 80s, when Ronald Reagan moved to confront what he saw as a rising threat to US interests – a communist drift in the Caribbean Basin. His two-pronged strategy was to consolidate US military hegemony over the region, and to encourage the growth of export processing. He launched the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), which granted military aid and one-way duty-free access to the US market for a designated range of products.

US garment and textile interests sensed an opportunity. In the early 80s, many US garment producers were struggling to compete with cheap imports from Asia. The Caribbean Basin offered companies cheap labour and geographical proximity – a manufacturing annexe where they could make goods at more competitive prices. US textile firms, meanwhile, saw that garment factories in the region could be a market for their cloth at a time when struggling US garment manufacturers were buying less and less. Asian garment manufacturers certainly weren't going to buy American textiles when they had such a vast textile industry in their own back yard.

In 1984, the year the CBI first went into effect, US textile corporations, apparel firms, importers and retailers began lobbying to loosen import quotas and reduce tariffs in the Caribbean Basin. They added an important caveat: if US markets were to be thrown open to clothing sewn in the Caribbean Basin, they had to be made with US cloth. The result of these lobbying efforts was the 1986 Special Access Program (SAP), which allowed clothes made of US fabric and sewn in the Caribbean Basin to enter the US with low or no tariffs.

Reagan implemented SAP unilaterally and it went into effect in 1987. Under this programme, apparel exports to the US assembled in the Caribbean more than doubled in four years, from \$1.1bn in 1987 to \$2.4bn in 1991. "The Caribbean," declared Forbes magazine in 1990, "is becoming America's garment district."

The Special Access Program for apparel enticed investment by making export to the US easier, and supplied funding for the development of local infrastructure. Offshore production in low-wage areas demands more than cheap labour. It requires water supply, transport, telecommunications, tax holidays, rental subsidies and training grants. EPZs in the CBI countries offered all these features, sponsored by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and United States Agency for International Development (USAid). USAid had been in existence since the early post-second world war period, funding programmes to support the infrastructure and social programmes of developing countries. Under Reagan, it began to move money through business promotion organisations rather than recipient governments.

A 1992 report put together by the National Labor Committee (NLC), Paying to Lose Our Jobs, pointed out that under the terms of the Special Access Program, Asian garment producers were reaping benefits from American taxpayers' support to the Caribbean. By the mid-90s, South Korea was the largest Asian investor in the region. Most of Guatemala's assembly industry was Korean-owned. In Kingston, Jamaica's free trade zones, the majority of investors were from Hong Kong. Taiwan, too, was well entrenched in Central America.

Although the US put pressure on Caribbean governments to limit the entry of south-east Asian firms, these efforts proved largely unsuccessful, complicated by the fact that the Asian firms were often contractors making goods for American brands. Even without manufacturing, American retailers monopolised control of the most lucrative aspect of the garment trade: design and merchandising. Large US retailers moved to bypass domestic manufacturers by launching lower-cost private-label lines, like JCPenney's Arizona, Saks Fifth Avenue's The Works, or Federated Department Stores' Inc. They relied on firms based in Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan to coordinate the actual manufacture, and these firms subcontracted the garment making to the Caribbean Basin.



From left: Honduras president Roberto Suazo Córdova, US president Ronald Reagan and US secretary of state George Shultz in 1982. Photograph: Bettmann Archive

Although the CBI was intended to spur economic growth, in practice, apparel brands used the Caribbean as a source of cheap labour while scrupulously curtailing any independent production that might benefit local competition. US companies brought little technology, and low-skill and low-wage work. At the same time, quotas made it almost impossible for local companies to develop their own export products for the American market.

In some places, local garment manufacturers were thriving before the CBI ruined them. One of the first Caribbean leaders to enthusiastically embrace the logic and the opportunity of Reagan's initiative was Jamaica's prime minister Edward Seaga. Seaga undertook to transform his country into a garment exporter. In his first three years, US assistance amounted to \$500m, compared to \$56m in the last three years of the previous government. Jamaica became the second-largest per capita recipient of American aid. Loans from USAid, the Inter-American Development Bank, and commercial banks moved cash into the country, along with multilateral aid.

In the ensuing years, the Jamaican garment industry was transformed. Small and medium-sized local enterprises gave way to a group of large-scale firms,

most of which were foreign-owned, and almost entirely export-oriented. In 1980, 85% of the clothing worn by Jamaicans came from domestic manufacturers. The industry exported only about a quarter of its products and most firms were Jamaican-owned. In 1992, by contrast, just 15% of the domestic market was supplied by the local industry. Upward of 97% of apparel exports were produced in free zones, and Jamaican ownership had fallen off precipitously. Jamaica became one of the most indebted nations in the world.

The story of Jamaica's rapid rise as a garment assembler for the US was to be repeated throughout the basin. The so-called Three Jaguars – El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala – surpassed Jamaica in the sheer quantity of clothing they exported to the US. Exports from El Salvador rose by 3,800% between 1985 and 1994. At the same time, the real wages of workers were slashed. In 1998, a garment worker in the EPZ made an average of 56 cents an hour, or \$4.50 a day, which was nowhere near enough to provide for a family's basic needs.

Practically all the major American clothing retailers had arrangements in the region. The list of those found operating in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala under the CBI included Walmart, Kmart, Saks Fifth Avenue, Calvin Klein, Christian Dior, Victoria's Secret and Gap. Using anonymous subcontracting arrangements, these companies distanced themselves from some of the most exploitative working conditions in the Americas.

Asian factories in Central America and the Caribbean were notorious for brutal labour practices and anti-union tactics. A cross-border campaign in 1995 against Mandarin International, a Taiwanese-owned plant in the San Marcos Free Trade Zone in El Salvador, uncovered stories of abuse involving the employment of minors, death threats, physical violence, forced overtime, starvation wages and mass firings of workers who joined unions. Mandarin subcontracted for a number of US companies including JCPenney and J Crew. Asian companies gained a reputation for brutality, but they were operating on behalf of American retailers. In the words of sociologist Cecilia Green: "The most successful and 'advanced' fractions of capital do not appear to get their hands dirty."

When I visited Honduras in 2019, Allan and I drove out to visit the garment factories in Choloma. I had requested access but had received no reply. On a recent reporting trip to Vietnam, I'd had no trouble gaining access to an EPZ by introducing myself as an interested investor. In Honduras, the act hadn't worked. The reason no one returned my emails, I learned, was that Honduran EPZs and factories weren't looking for outside investment. In Honduras, these zones are commonly owned and operated by the same small group that runs manufacturing facilities. They rent space in EPZs to themselves through a web of alias companies.

Shut out of the zones themselves, we took in the perimeter. Labourers were clearing out of work at one of the EPZs owned by Grupo Lovable as Allan and I drove down a side road, past guards with big guns and a wall topped with razor wire. A metal gate swung open to let out a truck. One couple came out of the factory gates, leaving together on a motorcycle. Three girls stopped to chat with a friend who owned a stall. There were a few women who looked older, but for the most part these workers appeared to be teenagers.

The day before, Allan and I had driven to a squatter encampment by a riverbank on San Pedro Sula's northern edge. Chickens pecked while milling about, and a kid climbed a pile of trash. Many of the people here work as house cleaners, Allan said. A lucky few get jobs in the EPZ. At another settlement of squatters by the nearly dried-up Río Blanco, a cow wandered the riverbed, while women with plastic bowls went down to the water.

The riverbank was lined with shanties made from panels of corrugated metal and castoff plywood stitched together. A few more durable cinder-block structures were scattered among them. Settlements like this have become an uncertain refuge for thousands of Hondurans pushed off their lands in recent years, such as those evicted from their farms when businessman Miguel Facussé acquired a 9,000-hectare palm oil plantation in the Aguán through a series of purchases from farmer cooperatives. Local people say these "purchases" were made through intimidation and coercion.

When the river rises, which happens increasingly often as tropical storms grow in intensity, Allan said, the people living on its bank lose everything.

The smell of burning plastic hung in the air. Allan pointed to the cable that the community uses to siphon electricity from the grid.



Honduran president Manuel Zelaya in San Pedro Sula in 2007. Photograph: Yuri Cortéz/AFP/Getty

The CBI didn't create wealth for workers but, in Honduras, it did lead to the rise of a class of oligarchs who would exert a powerful right-leaning force on the nation's politics. Many of Honduras's elite families rose up in the 1980s on the business enabled by the Caribbean Basin Initiative. They made their wealth from the foreign investment that flowed through the garment export processing sector. So when the Honduran government attempted to improve conditions for workers, these elites were the people who had the most to lose, and they intervened.

Former Honduran president Manuel Zelaya was a member of one of the two traditional conservative parties that ruled Honduras for decades. Those parties ruled on behalf of a handful of oligarchic families who controlled, along with the US and transnational corporations, the vast majority of the Honduran economy. Zelaya was elected in 2006, and espoused progressive positions. He supported a 50% increase of the minimum wage and urged the government to restore the land rights of small farmers. He blocked attempts to privatise the publicly owned ports, education system and electricity grid.

As a result, wealthy business owners who had backed Zelaya during his election withdrew their support, and his power began to slip.

In April 2009, Zelaya announced he was asking voters to decide on a constitutional question about expanding democratic rights for traditionally disfranchised groups including indigenous peoples, women and small farmers. On the eve of the June vote, the military refused to distribute the ballots.

At 5.30am on 28 June 2009, in the first successful Latin American coup in two decades, the Honduran military, acting on behalf of the oligarchs, deposed Zelaya, installing in his place Roberto Micheletti. Amid international outcry, and as Hondurans flooded the streets in protest, the Obama administration moved quickly to stabilise the situation, helping the new regime buy time until an already scheduled election in November could take place. That election was fraudulent – opposing candidates withdrew from the race. The US, however, quickly recognised the results and congratulated the new president, Porfirio Lobo, on his victory.

Honduras had long held strategic importance to the US. In the 80s, the US had used Soto Cano airbase at Palmerola, operated jointly with the Honduran government, in the contra war against the leftwing Sandinista government of Nicaragua. Soto Cano, staffed by 600 US troops, retained strategic significance for US military interests in Latin America and continues as a base today.

If the desire to keep Soto Cano was one factor that motivated the Obama administration to protect the coup, the blandishments of the Honduran business community, its garment and textile industry in particular, was another. Weeks after Zelaya's ousting, in July 2009, Lanny Davis was on Capitol Hill, testifying against Zelaya before the House foreign relations committee. Davis had been hired by those responsible for overthrowing Zelaya. "My clients represent the CEAL, the [Honduras chapter of the] Business Council of Latin America," Davis told a journalist. "I do not represent the government ... I'm proud to represent businessmen who are committed to the rule of law."

Juan Canahuati, who has been [identified](#) by the Honduran sociologist and economist Leticia Salomón as one of the main intellectual authors of the coup, was from one of Honduras's largest garment manufacturing clans. The Canahuatis own Grupo Lovable, which owns three EPZs in Choloma and makes products for Costco, Hanes, Russell Athletic, Foot Locker, JCPenney and Sara Lee. It is one of the largest industrial groups in Central America. In 2010, another member of the Canahuati clan, Mario, was President Lobo's foreign minister, even while he remained the director of Grupo Lovable. Jacobo Kattan, president of the Kattan Group, is another of the oligarchs named by Salomón as one of the brains behind the coup. The pro-business oligarchy was eager to keep US aid dollars flowing in, and it seemed the feeling was mutual.

Honduras first appeared on my radar in 2012. I noticed that the tag on my brother's college hoodie read "Made in Honduras". On the same day, I read an article in the New York Times that reported four Afro-Indigenous Honduran civilians, two of them pregnant women, had been mistakenly shot and killed by state department helicopters carrying Honduran security forces and US advisers. Four more were injured. How could our ordinary sweatshirts, I wondered, be made in places so apparently chaotic that innocent women were mistaken for drug traffickers and shot from helicopters? But this was flawed thinking. The violence in Honduras is a direct consequence of the export processing industry. One necessitates the other. EPZs provide islands of security and infrastructure to companies so they can avail themselves of advantageous labour rates. Meanwhile, average citizens struggle to find safety or security, and extralegal violence is sponsored by the police. The EPZ is an extraction unit, just like the sugar plantations or bauxite mines that came before it.

The office of the Honduran Manufacturers Association is located on the eighth floor of the Altia tower, inside the Altia "[Smart City](#)", a gated enclave of San Pedro Sula just around a bend in the highway from a squatter settlement on the Río Blanco. The glittering glass tower forms a marked contrast to the appearance of the rest of the city. Inside the tower are call centres rented out to businesses by the owner, Yusuf Amdani, the president of Grupo Karims, a major presence in textiles and real estate in Honduras. A

young Honduran like Allan could spend his entire life within Amdani's suzerainty. Indeed, Allan almost had.



A textile factory in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, in 2005. Photograph: Reuters/Alamy

Amdami owns Unitec, Allan's alma mater, which gives a discount to students who work in the call centres of the tower he also owns. Students and call centre workers on their lunch break can shop at Altera, a mall within the smart city, also owned by Amdani. When they graduate, they can find full-time work at the call centres, or in one of his many manufacturing facilities in Choloma. There, his holdings include spinning mills, fabric plants and garment factories. Past the Altia tower, Yusuf Amdani's own house is easily recognisable from a distance because it is built higher up in the hills than any other structure in the city.

The day after Allan and I visited the EPZ, I stopped at the tower on my way to the major port in Puerto Cortés. With the help of my interpreter, Gustavo, I asked for a meeting with the manager of the Honduran Manufacturers Association. We waited in the conference room, where portraits of President Juan Orlando Hernández and first lady Ana García Cariás hung on the wall beside a hash of flags and a wooden ship's steering wheel. The manager came to meet us there. Alfredo Alvarado, a product of a powerful family and

an expensive private school, took this job after working at Gildan, where he oversaw quality control. I understood suddenly Allan's sense that without the right connections, he could not expect to rise any further in Honduras.

This port received goods from EPZs all over Honduras. Almost all of it, Alvarado said, went to the US. He was about my age, holding two phones in his hands. A busy man.

We chatted about the main imports – Texas cotton shipped from Houston, grain, fuel and textile machinery. The port is open 24 hours a day, he said. It's three days by ship from here to Port Everglades, Florida, or to Houston or Miami.

I asked about the protesters who had been in the streets since April, following proposed laws to gut public health and education provision. Earlier that week, they had made a barrier of burning tyres on the bridge in Choloma, blocking access to the port. Yes, he said, shaking his head, like a wounded lover. "And not everybody wants to take the risk of trying to ship into this port when there are protests going on. That," he said, looking at me with earnest eyes, "that's like terrorism."

As recently as 1997, more than 40% of all apparel bought in the US had been produced domestically. In 2012, it was less than 3%. The liberalisation of trade and the elimination of quotas to control the flow of garments around the globe eliminated all impediments to buyers, leaving them free to source from whatever country gives them the best price. After the last quotas were lifted in 2005, countries competed on price alone. Honduras is doing well as an exporter under this new paradigm simply because its workers are desperate.

As clothes get cheaper, people buy more. In 1984, 6.2% of the average household's expenditure was on clothing; in 2011 it was 2.8%. Increasing wealth inequality and the abundance of cheap clothes have gone hand in hand.

The global supply chain that brings us our clothing can seem intimidatingly complex. But what if it isn't? Clothing brands farm out the making of goods to whoever in the world can do it most cheaply, and then divorce themselves

in the eyes of customers from the facts on the ground. That's pretty simple. The complexity only comes in when brands really need it to: to prove how many layers removed they are from the human lives being touched – sometimes lost – as a direct result of their purchase orders.



A worker at the site of a collapsed garment factory building near Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 2013. Photograph: Ismail Ferdous/AP

Western brands have come to prefer a model for ethical commitment, commonly enshrined in the Corporate Responsibility Code or the code of conduct. These codes proliferated in the early 2000s as a PR response to the revelations of labour abuse overseas. But studies conducted by sociologists on the ground suggest these codes make no fundamental difference to the way big retailers go about purchasing goods, or in the way contractors and subcontractors go about making them.

The effectiveness of such codes is demonstrated as follows: in Bangladesh, 256 factory fires occurred in the apparel industry between 1990 and 2012, resulting in the deaths of 1,300 workers and hundreds more injuries. In a study conducted of the six largest fires during these years, researchers found that in all cases “exits were blocked, firefighting equipment was deficient or absent and training was non-existent or minimal”. In every case, the companies sourcing from the factories were major European and North

American brands. Each of these brands had codes of conduct with “specific references to safety standards and expectations of compliance among their contractors”. Clearly, these codes do little to protect workers.

This became spectacularly clear on 24 April 2013, at Dhaka’s Rana Plaza, a complex that produced garments for Bon Marché, Primark, Carrefour, Benetton, Walmart and many other major brands. That morning, a government engineer warned workers gathered outside the building that visible cracks in support columns showed that the building was not safe. Still, managers insisted that labourers enter the building to work. Virtually every brand and retailer that sourced from the complex administered their own code of conduct. The building had been built without full permits and floors had been added on top beyond original permissions. At 8.45am, as the workday began, [the building collapsed](#). More than 1,100 workers were killed, and more than 2,500 were injured.

After the collapse, momentum was great enough to lead to the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in May 2013, currently signed by more than 150 global brands and retailers, by the powerful Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, and by two international union federations, IndustriALL and UNI. The accord rejected the voluntary code of conduct model and demanded, rather, that all signatories sign contracts that ensured joint financial responsibility between Bangladeshi manufacturers and the global brands and retailers that use them. These were legally binding obligations; their enforcement could take place in the court of the home country of the signatory party.

Although American retailers represent 22% of Bangladesh’s apparel export market, all of its biggest firms refused to join the accord. Gap, Walmart and at least 15 other companies that source products in Bangladesh [instead established](#) a rival Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety. The most important feature of the American “Alliance” is that it legally liberates American brands from ever being held accountable.

At El Sapo Enamorado, a working-class tourist spot on the beach in Puerto Cortés, my interpreter, Gustavo, and I had lunch, and I watched a container ship make its slow transit across the horizon. It was headed towards

Houston, bearing its many tons of T-shirts and underwear, clean and ironed, their origins sealed up tightly as the containers. When it arrived, and the merchandise was unloaded, it would carry no visible signs of the country, or the history they are so entangled in.

This article was amended on 26 January 2022. The major port and El Sapo Enamorado are in Puerto Cortés, not in San Pedro Sula or “Porto Sula” as stated respectively in an earlier version.

This is an edited extract from Worn: A People’s History of Clothing by Sofi Thanhauser, published by Allen Lane on 27 January and [available at guardianbookshop.co.uk](#)

Follow the Long Read on Twitter at [@gdnlongread](#), listen to our podcasts [here](#) and sign up to the long read weekly email [here](#).

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2022/jan/25/behind-the-label-how-the-us-stitched-up-the-honduras-garment-industry>.

[Apple](#)

Apple AirPods 3 review: solid revamp with better fit and longer battery

Third-gen of popular earbuds have improved design, shorter stalks and virtual surround sound



The AirPods 3 look more like Apple's AirPods Pro with shorter stalks and better fit, but without the silicone earbud tip. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

[Samuel Gibbs](#) Consumer technology editor

Tue 25 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

Apple's AirPods need no introduction due to their ubiquity on the street, but is the third generation of the most popular wireless earbud actually an improvement?

The new earbuds have been redesigned to resemble the Pro models with shorter stalks and a better fit. They don't block your ear canal, like the Pros though, just rest in place with all the benefits and disadvantages of an open fit, including an airy feel and complete lack of isolation from the outside world.

Costing £169 (\$179/A\$279), they are being sold alongside the older 2nd-gen versions, now reduced to £119, and the [£239 AirPods Pro](#).



The AirPods 3 have a more rounded profile, a bigger head and wider aperture for the speaker. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

They stay in place even when jumping around or violently shaking my head, and are fairly comfortable for upwards of 90 minutes at a time. But as anyone who has tried the previous versions only to have them immediately fall out will tell you, your mileage may vary as each ear is unique.

The shorter stalks have the same pressure-sensitive strip on them as [the AirPods Pro](#). Squeeze it once, twice or thrice to pause the music or skip track, or hold to access Siri on an iPhone. Take one out and the music pauses and resumes when you put it back in your ear.

Specifications

- **Connectivity:** Bluetooth 5.0, SBC, AAC, H1 chip
- **Battery life:** six hours playback (30 hours with case)
- **Water resistance:** IPX4 (splash resistant)
- **Earbud dimensions:** 30.8 x 18.3 x 19.2mm
- **Earbud weight:** 4.28g each
- **Charging case dimensions:** 46.4 x 54.4 x 21.4mm
- **Charging case weight:** 37.9g
- **Case charging:** Lightning, Qi wireless (MagSafe)

Features and battery life



The earbuds securely snap into the case with magnets and the lid closes with a reassuring click. The charges via Lightning cable or wireless charging, supporting standard Qi and Apple's MagSafe technology. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The charging case is slightly larger than that of the previous generation, but smaller than the AirPods Pro and is one of the smallest and most-pocketable of all true wireless earbuds.

The battery lasted over seven hours in testing for music. And four for calls. A fully charged case can recharge the earbuds up to four times. A five-minute quick charge of the earbuds gives up to one hour of playback.

The new AirPods have the same H1 chip and advanced features as other Apple headphones. They instantly pair with an iPhone or iPad, share the [audio of one device to two sets of AirPods](#) and automatically [switch connection between Apple devices](#). The latter feature is magic when it works, but can easily get confused requiring manual switching.

They are standard Bluetooth 5.0 earbuds, though, so can be used with most non-Apple devices such as Android phones and Windows PCs, but without the long squeeze, pause-on-remove and advanced features.

Improved sound



Call quality is good, with callers able to hear my voice clearly if a little processed, but they let in background noise on both ends of the call. Each

earbud can be used on its own for calls or mono listening. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The AirPods sound surprisingly good for non-isolating earbuds – a step up over their predecessors – and are able to produce more bass for a more rounded sound despite their open fit.

They have an easy-listening sound with slightly accentuated treble. They handle complex tracks well but lack some of the detail and nuance really good earphones can produce. They can't manage deep, thumping bass, making some tracks sound a bit thin, too.

Their biggest issue is background noise. They can't block anything so you can forget trying to listen to tracks on the London Tube or block out your co-workers in an office. That does mean you're more aware of your surroundings, however.

New for the AirPods is the [support for virtual surround sound with Apple devices](#) called “spatial audio”, which works for movies and music with Dolby sound tracks. It tracks the movement of your head and adjusts the sound so that it is always centred on the screen in front of you. Turn your head to the left and it will still sound as if the voices are coming from the screen, now predominantly into your right ear. It's all very clever.

Sustainability

Apple does not provide an expected lifespan for the batteries. Those in similar devices typically last at least 500 full charge cycles while maintaining at least 80% of their original capacity. A battery service costs from £45.

The earbuds are not repairable, scoring a [zero out of 10 on iFixit's repairability scale](#), but Apple [offers replacements costing £65](#) per earbud. The AirPods and case are made from recycled rare earth elements, tin and aluminium, but Apple does not publish environmental impact reports for accessories such as headphones. The company offers trade-in and free recycling schemes, including for non-Apple products.



The squeezable stalks work well for playback controls, but the AirPods lack on-board volume adjustment so you'll need your phone for that. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Price

The third-generation AirPods cost [£169 \(\\$179/A\\$279\)](#).

For comparison, the AirPods Pro cost [£239](#), the [Beats Studio Buds](#) cost [£130](#), the [Google Pixel Buds A-Series](#) cost [£100](#), the [Microsoft Surface Earbuds](#) cost [£199](#) and the Samsung Galaxy Buds 2 cost [£99](#).

Verdict

The AirPods 3 are a solid revamp of one of the most popular sets of true wireless earbuds, adopting a better design, improved sound, longer battery life and more advanced features such as spatial audio.

Their open-air fit is unrivalled in the industry and certainly has some advantages. But the complete lack of noise isolation makes them hard to use in loud environments and stops them sounding as good as rivals with silicone earbud tips.

They work really well with an iPhone and other Apple gear, but are more limited with Android and Windows devices, so I would only recommend them if you use at least one compatible Apple gadget.

For the money you can certainly buy better-sounding earbuds, but none that have the open fit of the AirPods 3. If you don't like silicone tips in your ear, these are for you.

They are essentially unrepairable, however, making battery replacement improbable and ultimately making them disposable, [losing a star](#).

Pros: open fit, solid sound, decent battery, great case, good squeeze playback controls, great connectivity, special features with Apple devices including spatial audio, decent call quality.

Cons: no sound isolation at all, no noise cancelling, lack features when connected to Android or Windows, no on-board volume control, cannot be repaired, expensive.



The shorter stalks protrude far less from your ear and are less likely to clash with earrings, scarves or the top of jackets. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Other reviews

- [AirPods Pro review: a touch of Apple magic](#)
 - [Beats Studio Buds review: Apple's Android-loving noise-cancelling earbuds](#)
 - [Surface Earbuds review: Microsoft's AirPods rivals](#)
 - [Samsung Galaxy Buds Live review: novel bean-shaped AirPod rivals](#)
 - [Pixel Buds A-Series review: Google's cheaper but good earbuds](#)
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/jan/25/apple-airpods-3-review-solid-revamp-with-better-fit-and-longer-battery>.

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

2022.01.25 - Coronavirus

- [Live Covid: Netherlands expected to drop Omicron measures; Russia sets cases record for fifth consecutive day](#)
- [Canada Trudeau says Conservatives stoking fear over trucker vaccine mandate](#)
- [UK Covid testing after arrival to be scrapped for double-vaccinated travellers](#)
- [US 400m free N95 masks to be distributed to health centres](#)

[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Pfizer launches Omicron vaccine trial; UK reports highest daily deaths since February – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/jan/25/covid-live-news-johnson-faces-outrage-over-lockdown-birthday-japan-to-impose-restrictions-on-70-of-the-country>.

Canada

Trudeau says Conservatives stoking fear over Canada's trucker vaccine mandate

Prime minister says claims that Covid-19 measure will disrupt supply chain and boost inflation are ‘fearmongering’



Justin Trudeau: ‘I regret that conservative politicians ... are fearmongering ... but the reality is that vaccination is how we’re going to get through this.’
Photograph: Blair Gable/Reuters

Reuters in Ottawa
Mon 24 Jan 2022 14.05 EST

Justin Trudeau has accused [Canada](#)’s conservative politicians of stoking fear that Covid-19 vaccine mandates for cross-border truck drivers are exacerbating supply chain disruptions and fueling inflation.

The United States imposed a mandate, meant to aid the fight against the fast-spreading [Omicron variant](#) of the coronavirus, on 22 January, while Canada's started on 15 January. The trucking industry has warned that the measure will take thousands of drivers off the roads during what is already a dire labour shortage in the industry.

Alberta's conservative provincial leader, [Jason Kenney](#), called for a pause of the mandate last week, and on Monday posted pictures on Twitter of empty shelves in supermarkets, calling for "immediate action" by the US and Canadian federal governments.

"This is turning into a crisis," Kenney wrote.

"I regret that the Conservative party and conservative politicians are fearmongering to Canadians about the supply chain, but the reality is that vaccination is how we're going to get through this," Trudeau told reporters when asked about supply chain disruptions resulting from the policy.

Pierre Poilievre, shadow finance minister for the main federal opposition Conservative party, last week called the requirements a "vaccine vendetta against our hardworking truckers" that would drive up inflation and result in "empty shelves" at stores.

Trudeau has resisted industry pressure to delay the mandate, saying everyone should be vaccinated and [Canada](#) is aligned with the United States, its largest trading partner. More than two-thirds of the C\$650bn (US\$521bn) in goods traded annually between Canada and the United States travels on roads.

Canada's inflation rate hit a 30-year high of 4.8% in December and economists said the vaccine mandate may contribute to keeping prices higher for longer. In the United States, inflation surged 7% on a year-on-year basis in December, the largest rise in nearly four decades.

The Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters president and chief executive, Dennis Darby, said he and other manufacturing lobbies spoke with the

industry minister, François-Philippe Champagne, on Friday about problems caused by the vaccine mandate.

Manufacturers are already seeing delays and price increases, Darby said.

“Our supply chain in North America is a very, very efficient supply chain, but it’s not very resilient,” Darby said in an interview on Monday. “It doesn’t have a lot of slack.”

After the meeting with Champagne, Darby’s group and approximately 30 other trade associations called for concrete action to tackle supply chain problems, including reversing the trucker inoculation mandate.

A convoy of truckers started off from Vancouver on Sunday on its way to protest against the mandate in the capital city of Ottawa.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/24/canada-trudeau-trucker-vaccine-mandate-fearmongering>

Coronavirus

UK scraps Covid testing after arrival for double-vaccinated travellers

Requirement to take lateral flow test will end from 4am on 11 February, cheered by airlines as a ‘landmark’

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



Double-vaccinated passengers arriving in the UK will no longer have to take a post-arrival lateral flow test. Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

[Ben Quinn](#) and [Nazia Parveen](#)

Mon 24 Jan 2022 15.01 EST

Coronavirus testing for double-vaccinated travellers arriving in the UK will be scrapped from 4am on 11 February.

In a boost for travel firms and families planning trips abroad, eligible passengers will no longer have to take a post-arrival lateral flow test (LFT). The change will save families about £100 a trip. The industry body Airlines UK said it was a “landmark day”.

The transport secretary, Grant Shapps, said: “That means that after months of pre-departure testing, post-arrival testing, self-isolation, additional expense, all that fully vaccinated people will now have to do, when they travel to the UK, is to verify their status via a passenger locator form.”

Under-18s will continue to be treated as eligible double-vaccinated passengers but Shapps also announced that 12- to 15-year-olds would be able to prove their vaccination status via the digital NHS pass for international outbound travel.

The UK is also set to recognise vaccine certificates from 16 more countries, including China and Mexico, bringing the vaccine recognition total to more than 180 countries and territories worldwide.

The change was first flagged on a visit to Milton Keynes hospital on Monday by [Boris Johnson](#), who said: “We promised we wouldn’t keep these measures in place a day longer than was necessary and it’s obvious to me now that border testing for vaccinated travellers has outlived its usefulness, and we’re therefore scrapping all travel tests for vaccinated people.”

Fully vaccinated people arriving in [England](#) must currently pre-book and take a post-arrival test from a private supplier. This can be an LFT, which typically costs about £19.

There are also changes for incoming travellers who do not qualify as being fully vaccinated. Fully vaccinated means they have had two doses in the case of most approved vaccines or one dose of the Janssen vaccine.

They will no longer be required to do a day eight test after arrival or to self-isolate, but will have to fill out a passenger locator, demonstrate proof of a negative test taken two days before arrival, and do a post-arrival PCR test.

“It’s a proportionate system which moves us a step close to normality, while maintaining vital health measures,” said Shapps, who added that the government intended to move away from “blanket border measures” to a “more sophisticated and targeted global surveillance system”.

The decision to ease travel rules follows growing pressure from the sector, which claims restrictions are ineffective.

The easyJet chief executive, Johan Lundgren, welcomed the update, saying “millions of our customers” would be “delighted to see the return of restriction-free travel in the UK”.

He added: “We believe testing for travel should now firmly become a thing of the past. It is clear travel restrictions did not materially slow the spread of Omicron in the UK and so it is important that there are no more knee-jerk reactions to future variants.”

He added that the airline intended to return to “near-2019 levels of flying this summer”.

The Airlines UK boss, Tim Alderslade, said: “This is a landmark day for passengers, businesses and UK plc.

“Nearly two years since the initial Covid restrictions were introduced, today’s announcement brings international travel towards near-normality for the fully vaccinated, and at last into line with hospitality and the domestic economy.”

Christophe Mathieu, the chief executive of Brittany Ferries, said bookings for spring and summer holidays were already “roaring ahead” but the announcement meant “we can expect demand to soar for the February half-term”.

Abby Penlington, director at the ferry trade association Discover Ferries, said the announcement would make travelling “easier, cheaper and will be a further boost to consumer confidence”.

But while travellers can look forward to what Shapps described as a move to “liberalise” the international travel regime, restrictions in France are this week being tightened. From Monday, a negative coronavirus test will no longer be enough to access leisure activities, some work events and long-distance travel.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/24/england-to-end-covid-testing-for-double-vaccinated-travellers-says-johnson>

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

Biden administration

US to begin distributing 400m free N95 masks to pharmacies and health centers

Biden administration's latest effort to combat surge in cases caused by Omicron variant



N95 and KN95 masks are considered more protective against Covid-19 than widely used surgical and cloth masks. Photograph: Paul Hennessy/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Jessica Glenza and agencies

[@JessicaGlenza](#)

Mon 24 Jan 2022 12.42 EST

The US government will begin distribution of 400m free N95 masks to pharmacies and community health centers this week, in the Biden administration's latest effort to combat a surge in cases caused by the Omicron Covid-19 variant.

N95 and KN95 masks are considered more protective against Covid-19 than surgical and cloth masks, which are still widely used. The free mask distribution comes alongside the launch of a [federal government website](#) where US residents can order four free at-home rapid Covid tests per household through the postal service.

However, it also comes as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) predicts the Omicron wave has peaked – though the number of new daily cases across the US still [remains far higher](#) than at any other point during the pandemic – and later than many public health experts called for.

In an announcement last week, the White House said distribution of three high-quality masks per person would “ensure broad access for all Americans” to protective equipment that was previously in short supply.

N95 masks are more widely available now than at any previous point in the pandemic. However, fakes are prevalent, and the high cost of genuine masks has at times made it difficult to obtain quality protective equipment. Masks distributed by the Biden administration will come from the federal government’s strategic national stockpile, which has 750m of the high quality masks on hand.

A similar state-level effort in [Colorado](#) recently saw enormous demand, as sites ran out of masks on the first day of distribution.

Even as the mask distribution begins this week, CDC director Dr Rochelle Walensky last week stopped short of formally recommending N95 masks to protect against Covid-19. On Friday, Walensky said the best mask “is the one that you will wear and the one you can keep on all day long, that you can tolerate in public indoor settings”.

The Biden administration’s new efforts come as the Omicron-driven surge is subsiding in some parts of the country, such as the north-east, and as Omicron cases nationally are expected to decline sharply in the coming four weeks, according to an [ensemble forecast](#) published by the CDC.

At the same time, many US hospitals are still in crisis. A record number of more than [140,000 Covid-19 patients are hospitalized](#) nationally. More than

[866,000 people have died](#) of Covid-19 in the US, according to a Johns Hopkins University tracker.

The shipments of free at-home Covid-19 rapid tests are expected to begin in late January, though these too come after peak demand. Millions of Americans sought Covid-19 tests before and after the December holidays, overwhelming national PCR testing capacity and clearing store shelves of at-home rapid tests.

Mask and test distribution comes as the CDC has “[pivoted](#)” on how to describe full vaccination amid a drive to persuade people to get a third dose. Nearly 20% of eligible Americans have yet to receive a single vaccine dose, meaning health authorities are working to convince new people to get vaccinated at the same time as they encourage a booster for those eligible.

Walensky said health authorities will work to get people “up to date” on vaccines, though the agency will not change the official definition of “fully vaccinated” to include a third dose.

People who have recently been double vaccinated or received their third-dose booster are far less likely to be hospitalized or die from Covid-19 compared with the unvaccinated. New data released by the CDC showed people aged 50 to 64 who completed their primary series of shots plus a booster were [44 times](#) less likely to be hospitalized than unvaccinated peers.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/24/us-distributes-400m-free-n95-masks-pharmacies>

2022.01.25 - Opinion

- Paul Dacre's all for freedom of expression – except when he's a character in your play
- The verdict is in: George Osborne's help-to-buy scheme has been an utter disaster
- Reparations to the Caribbean could break the cycle of corruption – and China's grip
- One of my kids has gone vegetarian. Now the rest of the family want meat with everything

[Opinion](#)[Paul Dacre](#)

Paul Dacre's all for freedom of expression – except when he's a character in your play

[Tim Walker](#)

Gina Miller and Theresa May are happy to be in Bloody Difficult Women, but the Mail man wanted his lawyers to vet the script



‘Given there has been speculation that Paul Dacre is the ‘villain of the piece’, I can understand he might have special concerns.’ Photograph: Suzanne Plunkett/Reuters

Tue 25 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

The Daily Mail and the [Mail on Sunday](#) have been banging on a lot lately about freedom of expression. An editorial declared it to be a “dark day” when the newspaper group lost its legal battle with Meghan Markle. She’d

sued them for publishing extracts from a private letter she'd sent to her estranged father.

I've got to know the Mail's legal department quite well over the past few months – though its client's commitment to freedom of expression hasn't been quite so clear in my case. The Mail's lawyers appear to be fixated with my play Bloody Difficult Women and have been bombarding the Riverside Studios theatre in west London and my producers with emails and letters. [Paul Dacre](#), the Mail's editor in chief, appears in it as a character, and the lawyers said Dacre would very much like to see a copy of the script to check it for factual accuracy. These repeated requests have all been declined.

The play focuses on the court case my old friend Gina Miller won against Theresa May's government over the issue of parliamentary sovereignty. Dacre is an unavoidable part of that story: the "[Enemies of the people](#)" headline he ran on his paper's front page, alongside photographs of the high court judges who found in Miller's favour, caused uproar. There were a great many – not least in the legal profession – who took the view it was the lowest point in the whole acrimonious Brexit saga.

Apart from Dacre and Miller, Bloody Difficult Women features two other real-life characters, in [Theresa May](#) and Alan Miller, Gina's husband. The Mail's legal team suggested I had given May and the Millers sight of the script. For the avoidance of doubt, none of them has requested – or been granted – that privilege. Quite frankly, I found it hard enough writing a play without four of its leading characters leaning over my shoulder seeing if they come out of it well. Though the lawyers said their client had no wish to restrict my or the theatre's artistic freedom of expression, the prospect of a character as menacing as Dacre going through every word of the script is, of course, more than a wee bit inhibiting.

May's office, while courteous and interested when I told them about the play, raised no objections. Even the title – a nod to [Ken Clarke's famous off-mic description](#) of the former prime minister – left them unperturbed. With Gina, I wanted to check the basic timetable of events leading up to the case and beyond, but that was it. She gamely tweeted that she would be watching it through [her fingers](#).

Still, I can understand, given there has been press speculation that Dacre is the “villain of the piece” (and that I don’t share his views about Brexit), that he might have special concerns. Every day, however, a great many people no doubt have special concerns about what his newspapers are going to write about them, but they are seldom, if ever, granted sight of the stories ahead of publication.

Long before the EU referendum and the start of that almighty national row, I’d worked for Dacre as a feature writer, and, latterly, deputy to the late diarist Nigel Dempster, for almost a decade. Our relationship was respectful, but not close. He was and is, as I make clear in the play, a strident character. The last of the all-powerful – one might say imperial – editors.

The letters from his legal department have made for a few dark days for me, too, but I’ve had the play painstakingly factchecked. From the outset, I strained to be fair to all its characters and kept in mind Chekhov’s rule that plays shouldn’t be about good or bad people, only people.

All I want now is for the show to go on. The plan had originally been to open last June, but that was put back to November on account of the pandemic and so its launch next month will, I’m confident, be third time lucky. It is a play that seems to be acquiring over time a certain radical chic.

All journalists can, of course, be thin-skinned and I am no exception. I recall, when I was working for Dacre, being upset when I’d read that Norma Major, the former prime minister’s wife, had said a biography I’d written of her had been “99% inaccurate”. I asked Dacre if anything could be done and he wearily intoned that if I was going to dish it out, I’d have to learn to take it too.

I await the reviews for Bloody Difficult Women in the [Daily Mail](#) and Mail on Sunday with trepidation, but I’ve no intention of asking to “fact check” them ahead of publication.

- Tim Walker is a journalist and author. His latest book, *Star Turns*, is an anthology of interviews. [Bloody Difficult Women](#) begins its run at the Riverside Studios in west London on 24 February

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/25/paul-dacre-freedom-of-expression-bloody-difficult-women>

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

[Opinion](#)[Housing](#)

The verdict is in: George Osborne's help-to-buy scheme has been an utter disaster

[Polly Toynbee](#)



According to a damning Lords report, it isn't just a waste of £29bn, it has made Britain's unequal housing market even worse



'Instead of paying for lasting brick-and-mortar council homes, the taxpayer subsidises private landlords through housing benefit, costing £22bn a year.'

Photograph: Patricia Phillips/Alamy

Tue 25 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

A rogue prime minister on the verge of defenestration drives out news of almost anything else. But housing usually languishes in the forgotten in-tray anyway. It sits low in voters' and government concerns: the last 17 housing ministers remained in post, on average, for barely more than a year. Housing stories fill news pages, but only if they provide an opportunity to gloat over escalating [property prices](#).

So it shouldn't be a surprise that a shocking report on a Conservative flagship housing policy fell below the news radar. The Lords-built environment committee has revealed that all of the £29bn spent on the help-to-buy scheme [has been wasted](#). The scheme gives subsidies for homeownership, but all they do is "inflate prices by more than their subsidy value". They "do not provide good value for money", which would be "better spent on increasing housing supply."

The report, chaired by the Tory ex-minister and businesswoman Lucy Neville-Rolfe, shows that Margaret Thatcher's signature right-to-buy policy

lies at the heart of the ballooning housing crisis. The council house sales under this policy symbolised a rolling back of the state to create a property-owning, share-holding, Tory-voting electorate. (Pollsters use homeownership as a strong indicator for voting Conservative.) Councils that were forced to sell at knockdown prices were also barred from using the receipts to replenish the council housing stock. This meant a bargain for the 2 million tenants who bought council homes, but a disaster for the low-earners who came after.

In 1980, a third of people lived in socially rented homes, at genuinely affordable below-market rents. That's now fallen to 17%. Over the past 30 years, England has seen a net loss of 24,000 social homes every year on average. Another [29,000 social homes vanished](#) alone through sales and demolitions.

Those disappeared tenants end up in the expanding private-rented sector. Instead of paying for lasting brick-and-mortar council homes, the taxpayer subsidises private landlords through housing benefit, costing £22bn a year. The Lords report quotes the housing analyst Toby Lloyd: “The private rented sector is by far the most expensive, by far the lowest quality and by far the least popular. It is absolutely the worst possible tenure for almost everybody in it.”

Of the many destructive Tory social policies, [help to buy](#), announced in 2013, was always an especially egregious example of naked vote-getting. Its creator, George Osborne, knew a subsidy to buy homes worth as much as £600,000 would just inflate prices – and it did. It slightly speeded up the purchase date for those who were already likely to buy, often via family help. More people on high incomes – over £80,000 – [use the scheme](#) than low earners. Yet ownership is still falling and the age of first-time buyers [keeps rising](#).

Bringing up a family in a private-rented home means living under the shadow of eviction, with private landlords using section 21 orders to evict tenants for no reason. I once followed the misfortunes of one family that was forced to move, time and again, sometimes having to move their children’s schools too, often living in squalor, once through a long winter with a

broken boiler. They weren't destitute, both parents were in work, but their children were deprived of a permanent home in their early years. Last month's excoriating report by the National Audit Office (NAO) on private renting [found that in 29,000 instances](#) in one year, "households were, or were at risk of being made homeless following an eviction that was not their fault".

I heard a few of those voices of distress last week when I listened in to the helpline at the housing charity Shelter, hearing the struggles of those who should be in social housing. Among the many homeless, Jay (not her real name) was typical of those NAO findings. Frail and on personal independence payment, she was suddenly facing eviction. Why? She complained to her landlord about frequent sewage flooding; getting no response she called environmental health. Her landlord, taking revenge, is evicting her, needing no reason. The NAO says a quarter of private rentals are of "non-decent" standard, and [13% have at least](#) one serious hazard. The government [long ago promised](#) a bill to protect tenants, abolishing section 21 evictions, but there's no sign of it.

What hope is there of "levelling up"? Access to quality, affordable housing is going into reverse, according to a [report from Legal & General](#) this week. Property is where the nation's wealth is stored, and there it stays – useless and unproductive. Who dares break the taboo on the sacred right of homeowners not to be taxed on their ballooning unearned property wealth? A hypothecated tax spent directly on council housing would link the winners to the growing numbers of those who lose out in Britain's grossly dysfunctional housing market.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

Opinion[Global development](#)

Reparations to the Caribbean could break the cycle of corruption – and China's grip

Kenneth Mohammed

The belt and road initiative is ensnaring vulnerable countries in debt via corrupt infrastructure projects. Slavery reparations from former colonial powers could help turn the tide

- [Governments around the world used Covid to erode human rights – report](#)



‘Cynics would say there’s no such thing as a free lunch. Just ask Sri Lanka’. After struggling to make debt payments, Sri Lanka leased Hambantota port to China. Photograph: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

Tue 25 Jan 2022 00.01 EST

As Transparency International (TI) publishes their annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) this week, it will be interesting to see where certain countries land: 2021 has been a bumper year for corruption.

In Britain, corruption has been on the minds of journalists, academics and practitioners alike, as Boris Johnson tries to get himself run out, the only hope of him continuing his innings lying with [Sue Gray](#).

However, in the ex-British territories of the West Indies this is not a popcorn moment. Similar scenes of state capture unfold in these islands and, to be honest, it is just not cricket. Very few politicians here play with a straight bat and even when caught out, the umpire is seemingly blind. Spectators are leaving in droves: a massive brain drain has weakened Caribbean economies significantly over the past five decades, alongside cronyism, state capture and procurement fraud. The politicians left behind to run these countries are the most unqualified and unscrupulous one can find, a state referred to as a [kakistocracy](#).

Resources continue to be drained by corrupt infrastructure projects, while expenditure in health and education, critical to nation building, remains

insufficient. But as these sectors fall behind the rest of the world, a new player has emerged in the Caribbean. In 2018, Trinidad and Tobago became the first Caribbean country to officially sign up to China's \$4tn global [belt and road development initiative](#). Suriname, Guyana, Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada and even the [progressive leadership](#) in Barbados followed ("et tu Mia?"). Jamaica was last in to bat and did not put up much of a resistance.

So what is China trying to achieve? Neocolonialism? Cynics would say there is no such thing as a free lunch. Just ask Sri Lanka and Uganda. The Hambantota port development project in Sri Lanka, led by the China Harbour Engineering Company, was predicted to fail and [lived up to that expectation](#). The new Sri Lankan government, after struggling to make payments on the debt, [handed over the port](#) on a 99-year lease, including 15,000 acres of land. More recently, China has been forced to deny reports that it will gain control of Uganda's Entebbe international airport if the country defaults on debt repayments.

An old quote attributed to John Adams states that the way to subjugate a country is through either the sword or debt. China has chosen the latter

An old quote attributed to John Adams states that the way to subjugate a country is through either the sword or debt. [China](#) has assiduously chosen the latter. Debt deals have provoked criticism against Xi Jinping's belt and road initiative and insinuations that his global investment and lending programme is nothing more than a trap, fuelling corruption and autocratic behaviour in struggling and vulnerable democracies.

Some believe that the intent is twofold: to gain strategic trade footholds in the Caribbean and Latin America [through debt and duress](#) and to snare allies in its escalating feud with Taiwan. Taiwan's remaining friends include Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines. Much can be said for the rich kid who owns the bat – you can play as long as you are not mates with Taiwan. This will of course manifest in the UN arena as Xi buys more support though his use of corrosive capital.

One can argue that the [Caribbean](#) islands don't have much choice – the pandemic has been merciless to their economies. Should they approach the International Monetary Fund, cap in hand, and be subjected to austerity measures that make governments unpopular with their people? Is there another option?

A recent photo of Clive Lloyd, captain of history's most successful West Indies cricket team and one of the most successful test captains of all time, being knighted drew mixed reactions. The [sight of Lloyd bending the knee](#), not in support of [Colin Kaepernick](#), but to receive an affirmation from the monarchy of Britain, the ex-colonial masters, ignited fresh debate about reparations.



Clive Lloyd is knighted at Windsor Castle earlier this month. ‘The sight of Lloyd bending the knee to receive an affirmation from the monarchy of Britain ignited fresh debate about reparations.’ Photograph: Jonathan Brady/PA

Could reparations be the strategic tool for Europe to remove China’s hold on the Caribbean, and for these islands to throw off the shackles of poor governance, underdevelopment and inequality once and for all? It could be pure genius.

In 2013, the Caricom Reparations Commission (CRC) was established by the Caribbean heads of governments to establish the moral, ethical and legal case for the payment of reparations by all the former colonial powers [to the people of the Caribbean](#) for the crimes against humanity of genocide, the transatlantic slave trade and the racialised system of chattel slavery.

To deliver the CRC's mandate, the Caricom Reparations Justice Program asserts that victims and descendants of these crimes have a legal right to reparatory justice, and that those who committed these crimes, and have been enriched by proceeds, have [a reparatory case to answer](#). The CRC's action plan includes debt cancellation, alongside financing of programmes including technology transfer, literacy, health and indigenous people's development. It could take a long time to get all the parties to the table – a frequent remark by an old professor of mine resonates: “If you want to not get something done ... form a committee”. But it is an opportunity.

Transparency International's 2021 index will reveal global corruption continuing to thwart opportunity, to hamstring countries' abilities to protect public health and their economies during the pandemic. There has been no progress, only more allegations of Covid procurement fraud and corrupt contracts awarded to ministers' friends and family.

Last year, Delia Ferreira Rubio, the chair of Transparency International, said: “It’s a corruption crisis. And one that we’re currently failing to manage.” It is a sentiment unlikely to have changed.

- Kenneth Mohammed is a Caribbean analyst and senior adviser at [Intelligent Sanctuary](#).

[Sign up for a different view with our Global Dispatch newsletter](#) – a roundup of our top stories from around the world, recommended reads, and thoughts from our team on key development and human rights issues, delivered to your inbox every two weeks:

Sign up for Global Dispatch – please check your spam folder for the confirmation email

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/jan/25/reparations-caribbean-cycle-of-corruption-china>

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

OpinionVegetarianism

One of my kids has gone vegetarian. Now the rest of the family want meat with everything

[Zoe Williams](#)



For a fortnight we all ate black beans and squash lasagne but soon the bickering began. It's rule by the intolerant majority, writes Zoe Williams



We all went veggie for a while, until one of the carnivores noticed.
Photograph: fstop123/Getty Images

Tue 25 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

There's a book by Nassim Nicholas Taleb called [Skin in the Game](#). It's wrong about many things, featuring an account of Prince Andrew's place in UK culture that was hilariously misjudged even before we realised what his place truly was, but has a theory about families and their eating habits that used to sound right. When one person restricts their diet – goes vegan or keto or whatever – the whole unit defaults to that restriction. It's just easier, when three people will eat anything, to build your menu around the one person who will only eat some things. The parable was supposed to illustrate a broader point, that the intolerant minority will always come to triumph over the more tolerant majority.

Let's not dwell on his mental leap, because one of my kids just went vegetarian and I now know that even the starting block is untrue. For about a fortnight, we all went veggie and nobody noticed. It's not as if we were living a traditional, Harvester-buffet, meat-centrepiece, side-salad life before all this. I passed off black beans as a luxury food item, squash lasagne as classic Italian cuisine. Besides, meat substitutes have moved on a lot, and

now they can make pretty much anything taste like pork so long as it has first been rolled into a ball.

Then came a fateful observation from one of the carnivores: “We haven’t had meat for a while.” After that, it became a relentless clash of pre-eminence, in the classic sibling mould. Every domestic argument from the day child two is born until the day child one leaves home amounts to this: in whose interests has this decision been made? If in theirs, then by definition, not in mine.

We forged on for a couple of weeks, making vegetarian food with frankfurters on the side, but soon the incredibly not-silent majority had had enough of sausages. It’s got to the point where they want to know why the potatoes aren’t cooked in duck fat, and who left the ham out of their smoothie. I didn’t think I could ever be reconciled to a meatless future, where all flesh was synthetic, and actual animals only existed for petting and touristic purposes. After a couple of months of bickering, I now honestly can’t wait.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/25/one-of-my-kids-has-gone-vegetarian-now-the-rest-of-the-family-want-meat-with-everything>.

2022.01.25 - Around the world

- [Coronavirus Governments around the world used Covid to erode human rights – report](#)
- [Taylor Swift Singer criticises Damon Albarn for saying she doesn't write her own songs](#)
- [Europe Snowstorm blankets eastern Mediterranean closing airports, schools and vaccination centres](#)
- [Netherlands Dutch university gives up Chinese funding due to impartiality concerns](#)
- ['Time machine' James Webb space telescope takes up station a million miles from Earth](#)

Global development

Governments around the world used Covid to erode human rights – report

Transparency International ranking reveals decade of standstill on tackling corruption, with many countries reaching historic lows in 2021

- [Reparations to the Caribbean could break the cycle of corruption – and China's grip](#)



Protesters tow an effigy of President Rodrigo Duterte in Manila, Philippines. Duterte has overseen severe crackdowns on freedom of expression since his election in 2016. Photograph: Rolex dela Peña/EPA

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Peter Beaumont](#)

Tue 25 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

The global fight against corruption has been at a standstill for a decade, with 86% of countries either worsening or making no progress in tackling the problem, and with numerous governments accused of using the pandemic to erode human rights and democracy, a report has found.

Transparency International's annual corruption ranking, published on Tuesday, also found countries that violate civil liberties consistently have low scores, underlining how failure to tackle corruption exacerbates human rights abuses and undermines democracy.

First launched in 1995, the corruption perceptions index (CPI) has become one of the leading global trackers of public sector corruption, drawing data from 13 public sources, including the World Bank and the World Economic Forum. At least three sources are required to provide a ranking for each of the 180 countries included.

The index gives a mark out of 100 – with 100 representing “very clean” and zero representing “highly corrupt”. Countries are ranked relative to each

other.

chart

The 2021 index highlights the connection between corruption, democracy and human rights – from the lowest-scoring countries to advanced economies.

It notes that out of 331 recorded cases of murdered human rights defenders in 2020, 98% occurred in countries with a CPI score below 45.

The report cites recent cases in the Philippines and Venezuela.

“The Philippines has continued its fall beginning in 2014 to a score of 33, as President Rodrigo Duterte has cracked down on freedoms of association and expression since his election in 2016,” said Transparency International.

“It also has an exceptionally high murder rate of human rights defenders, with 20 killed in 2020.”

In Venezuela, the report says: “The government of President Nicolás Maduro has repressed dissent of political opponents, journalists and even healthcare workers. The country has significantly declined on the CPI over the last decade, earning its lowest score yet of 14 in 2021.”



A man plays the violin during a protest against the Venezuelan president, Nicolás Maduro, in Caracas, May 2017. Photograph: Federico Parra/AFP/Getty

The index also examines regional drivers of corruption.

In eastern Europe and central Asia, the report describes a “vicious cycle of increasing authoritarianism, human rights abuses and corruption [where] political leaders used the Covid-19 pandemic as a pretext to reduce oversight and accountability for public procurement and foreign aid spending, from Albania to Kyrgyzstan”.

Altynai Myrzabekova, Transparency International’s central Asia regional adviser, said: “2021 has been devastating for civil rights across eastern Europe and central Asia. Corrupt leaders repress all dissent – from opposition parties, to activists and the press.

“While doing little to combat the Covid-19 pandemic’s impact on the population, governments have utilised it to further curb rights and freedoms, further entrenching authoritarianism.”

While the index noted some improvements in sub-Saharan Africa, it described them as being “overshadowed by backsliding and stagnation in

others ... [with] serious corruption problems ... exacerbated by ongoing violent conflicts and terrorist attacks in countries from South Sudan to [Mali](#)".

Samuel Kaninda, the group's Africa adviser, said: "A decade of stagnating corruption levels has been devastating for sub-Saharan Africa. Natural resources are plundered and millions of people lack access to public services, while violent conflicts rage on and terrorist threats rise. Meanwhile, grand corruption allows elites to act with impunity, siphoning money away from the continent and leaving the public with little in the way of rights or resources."

Similarly, in the Middle East and north Africa, Transparency International found "systemic political corruption obstructs progress and exacerbates human rights abuses.

"In light of rampant political corruption across the Arab states, the region is struggling to achieve any tangible results in the fight for transparency, human rights and democracy. Not a single country has significantly improved since 2012. Political elites and private interests time and again overtake the common good to benefit themselves and maintain autocracy."

Denmark, Finland and New Zealand topped the index with scores of 88 out of 100, while in its lowest reaches Somalia and Syria each scored 13, and South Sudan 11.

The index also reported 27 countries – among them Cyprus (scoring 53), Canada (74), Lebanon (24) and Honduras (23) – reaching historic lows last year.

Delia Ferreira Rubio, chair of Transparency International, said: "Human rights are not simply a nice-to-have in the fight against corruption. Authoritarian approaches destroy independent checks and balances and make anti-corruption efforts dependent on the whims of an elite. Ensuring people can speak freely and work collectively to hold power to account is the only sustainable route to a corruption-free society."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/jan/25/governments-around-the-world-used-covid-to-erode-human-rights-report>

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

[Taylor Swift](#)

Taylor Swift criticises Damon Albarn for saying she doesn't write her own songs

The Blur and Gorillaz frontman apologised to Swift, claiming that a ‘conversation about songwriting’ in the LA Times was ‘reduced to clickbait’



Damon Albarn cited Taylor Swift as an example of a modern artist who hides behind ‘sound and attitude’. Composite: Rex/Getty Images

[Adrian Horton](#) and [Laura Snapes](#)

Tue 25 Jan 2022 03.21 EST

[Taylor Swift](#) has called out [Damon Albarn](#), lead singer of Blur and later of Gorillaz, on Twitter after the British musician told the [LA Times](#) she “doesn’t write her own songs”.

“I was such a big fan of yours until I saw this,” the American singer, 32, [tweeted](#) at Albarn. “I write ALL of my own songs. Your hot take is completely false and SO damaging. You don’t have to like my songs but it’s really fucked up to try and discredit my writing. WOW.”

Albarn had used Swift, in a promotional interview for a concert in Los Angeles, as an example of modern artists who hide behind “sound and attitude”. When the interviewer pointed out that Swift writes or co-writes all of her songs, Albarn responded: “That doesn’t count. I know what co-writing is. Co-writing is very different to writing. I’m not hating on anybody, I’m just saying there’s a big difference between a songwriter and a songwriter who co-writes.”

He also compared Swift unfavourably to the dark-pop phenom Billie Eilish, whom he called “exceptional”. Eilish co-writes her songs with her brother, producer Finneas.

Albarn later apologised, writing to Swift on Twitter: “I totally agree with you. I had a conversation about songwriting and sadly it was reduced to clickbait. I apologise unreservedly and unconditionally. The last thing I would want to do is discredit your songwriting. I hope you understand.”

Producer Jack Antonoff, who has worked with Swift since her 2014 album 1989, also weighed in on [Twitter](#) on Monday afternoon: “i’ve never met damon albarn and he’s never been to my studio but apparently he knows more than the rest of us about all those songs taylor writes and brings in. herb.”

“[I]f you were there ... cool ... go off. if not ... maybe shut the fuck up?” he added in a separate [tweet](#).

The National’s Aaron Dessner, who has become a frequent Swift collaborator since her 2020 albums Folklore and Evermore, [also came to her defence](#). “Not sure why you @Damonalbarn would try to discredit Taylor’s brilliant songwriting but as someone who has gotten to press record around her ...your statements couldn’t be further from the truth...you’re obviously completely clueless as to her actual writing and work process”.

This is not the first time Swift has taken to social media to address indirect slights. In March 2021, she posted on Twitter to express dissatisfaction with a joke made on the Netflix show *Ginny & Georgia*, in which a character said another goes “through men faster than Taylor Swift”.

“Hey *Ginny & Georgia*, 2010 called and it wants its lazy, deeply sexist joke back,” she [tweeted](#). “How about we stop degrading hard working women by defining this horse shit as FuNnY.”

Albarn, for his part, once publicly [feuded](#) with Adele, after he told an interviewer she was “insecure”, called her 2015 album “very middle of the road”, and speculated that music they had worked on together would not end up on the record.

Adele responded in a [Rolling Stone](#) cover story shortly before the release of *25*: “He said I was insecure, when I’m the least insecure person I know. I was asking his opinion about my fears, about coming back with a child involved – because he has a child – and then he calls me insecure?

“It ended up being one of those ‘don’t meet your idol’ moments,” she added. “And the saddest thing was that I was such a big Blur fan growing up. But it was sad, and I regret hanging out with him.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/jan/24/taylor-swift-damon-albarn-write-own-songs>

Greece

Snowstorm blankets eastern Mediterranean closing airports, schools and vaccination centres

Istanbul airport was forced to shut down while motorists were trapped in cars around Athens as rare heavy snow falls across southeast Europe



A man makes a snowman in Athens as snow falls across south-eastern Europe
Photograph: Miloš Bičanski/Getty Images

Agence France-Presse

Mon 24 Jan 2022 20.17 EST

Europe's busiest airport shut down in Istanbul on Monday while schools and vaccination centres closed in Athens as a rare snowstorm blanketed swathes of the eastern Mediterranean, causing blackouts and traffic havoc.

The closure of Istanbul Airport – where the roof of one of the cargo terminals collapsed under heavy snow, causing no injuries – grounded flights stretching from the Middle East and Africa to Europe and Asia.

Travel officials told AFP it marked the airport's first shutdown since it replaced Istanbul's old Ataturk Airport as the new hub for Turkish Airlines in 2019.

The winter's first snow proved a major headache for the 16 million residents of Turkey's largest city, where cars ploughed into each other, skidding down steep, sleet-covered streets and highways turned into parking lots.



People walk along Taksim Square as snow falls in Istanbul Photograph: Dia Images/Getty Images

The Istanbul governor's office warned drivers they would not be able to enter the city from Thrace – a region stretching across the European part of Turkey to its western border with Bulgaria and [Greece](#).

Shopping malls closed early, food delivery services shut down and the city's iconic "simit" bagel stalls stood empty because suppliers could not get through the snow.

The storm blocked roads across central and southeastern Turkey before crossing into neighbouring Syria, where it piled more misery on the war-scarred country's northern refugee camps.

Istanbul Airport serviced more than 37 million passengers last year, becoming one of the world's most important air hubs.

But critics of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had long questioned his [decision to place the airport on a remote patch along the Black Sea coast](#) that is often covered with fog in winter.

"Due to adverse conditions, all flights have been temporarily stopped for air safety," the airport said in a statement, posting pictures on Twitter of yellow snowploughs circling stranded aircraft.

The airport extended its suspension twice, saying late Monday that service would not resume before 4:00 am (0100 GMT) Tuesday. Most of Turkey's main institutions stayed open.

But in Greece, where overnight temperatures plummeted to minus 14 degrees Celsius (6.8 degrees fahrenheit), the storm suspended a session of parliament and forced schools and vaccination centres to close in Athens.

Hundreds of motorists were trapped in cars around the capital – many of them venting their anger on TV stations – despite attempts by police to seal off motorway entry points to the north of the city.

"My wife has had nothing to eat since morning. We had a small bottle of water between us," one driver who identified himself only as Christos told private Star TV. "Everything is frozen stiff."

The army, firefighters and police began work to free the stranded motorists in the early evening.

Greece's climate crisis and civil protection minister Christos Stylianides apologised for the chaos and blamed the company managing the motorway for not keeping it open.

A cold snap with sub-zero temperatures and gale-force winds last hit Athens in February 2021, killing four people on the islands of Evia and Crete and leaving tens of thousands of households without electricity for days.

Kostas Lagouvardos, research director at the National Observatory of Athens, told ANT1 TV that the capital had not seen back-to-back winters like this since 1968.

The snow uncharacteristically fell on several Aegean Sea islands, isolating some mountain villages on Andros, Naxos and Tinos, and covering beaches in Mykonos, in summer a party island.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/25/snowstorm-blankets-eastern-mediterranean-closing-airports-schools-and-vaccination-centres>

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

Netherlands

Dutch university gives up Chinese funding due to impartiality concerns

Vrije Universiteit will also return €250,000-plus it received in 2021 for rights centre that denied forced labour camps exist in Xinjiang



A facility near what is believed to be a re-education camp where mostly Muslim ethnic minorities are detained in Xinjiang. CCHRC academics concluded in 2020 that there was no discrimination against Uyghurs.
Photograph: Greg Baker/AFP/Getty Images

*[Jon Henley](#) Europe correspondent
[@jonhenley](#)*

Tue 25 Jan 2022 06.40 EST

A decision by a leading Dutch university to refuse all further Chinese funding for a controversial study centre has sparked fresh concern about

Beijing's apparent attempts to influence debate at European educational institutions.

Amsterdam's [Vrije Universiteit \(VU\)](#), the fourth largest university in the Netherlands, has said it will accept no further money from the Southwest University of Political Science and Law in Chongqing and repay sums it recently received.

The announcement came after an [investigation by the Dutch public broadcaster NOS](#) last week revealed VU's [Cross Cultural Human Rights Center \(CCHRC\)](#) had received between €250,000 (£210,000) and €300,000 annually from Southwest over the past few years.

According to NOS, the CCHRC used Southwest's money to fund a regular newsletter, organise seminars and maintain its website – which has published several posts rejecting western criticism of China's human rights policy.

[The CCHRC website](#) was temporarily taken offline on Tuesday. A statement said the centre had concluded not all publications on the site were "compatible with its vision" of human rights. It also wanted to check a "sufficiently clear distinction" was made between statements made on its behalf and "opinions and observations made in a personal capacity".

In October 2020, however, the site noted that academics associated with the CCHRC had recently visited four cities in [Xinjiang](#) province and concluded there was "definitely no discrimination of Uyghurs or other minorities in the region".

NOS cited Tom Zwart, a Utrecht University human rights professor and president of the CCHRC, as telling Chinese state TV that human rights in China "must be seen in the context of domestic circumstances, and cannot copy the west".

Another associate of the centre, Peter Peverelli, has also described reports of forced labour camps for Uyghurs as "rumours" and said it is fashionable to criticise China.

“Xinjiang is just lovely,” Peverelli said, according to the public broadcaster. “Lovely people, breathtaking nature, great food. And no forced labour, no genocide, or whatever other lies the western media might come up with.”

The centre, which counts among its affiliates academics from institutions in the [Netherlands](#), China and other countries, describes itself as an independent research institute aimed at encouraging open cross-cultural debate about human rights concepts and issues.

VU said in a statement that “even the appearance of research not being independent is unacceptable”. The university would accept no further funding from China, return last year’s money and launch a full inquiry, [the statement said](#).

Zwart told NOS the website was a forum for academic free speech and posts did not necessarily reflect CCHRC’s research findings. The fact that some views on the site aligned with Chinese government positions did not indicate formal support, he said.

The Dutch education minister, Robbert Dijkgraaf, said he was “very shocked” by the revelations, adding: “Academic freedom, integrity and independence must be guaranteed and it is important that Dutch institutions remain alert to possible risks of undesired influence by other countries and take adequate measures.”

The incident follows multiple other examples of China’s efforts to exercise soft power through European academic institutions, which in November prompted Germany’s then education minister to demand universities review all their links with China.

Anja Karliczek said Chinese influence over universities was “unacceptable” amid accusations that about 200 state-funded Confucius institutes at academic institutions in Europe were merely “spreading propaganda for the Chinese Communist party”.

Despite fears of “elite capture” and even a threat to national security, Hungary in May announced plans to open a branch of China’s prestigious Shanghai-based Fudan University in Budapest, saying it would raise higher

education standards and bring Chinese investment and research to the country. However, the government has since paused the plans and opposition leaders said this month a petition had gathered enough signatures to force a referendum on the issue.

Britain's former higher education minister, Jo Johnson, [said in March last year](#) that the risks involved in Beijing's investment in the UK's universities was "poorly understood" after a study identified "a significant increase in funding from China and collaboration with Chinese researchers over the past two decades".

"The UK needs to do a better job of measuring, managing and mitigating risks that are at present poorly understood and monitored," Johnson said. Failure to do so risks real damage to our knowledge economy."

The report found a significant increase over the past 20 years in Chinese funding for university research including in such sensitive areas as automation, materials science and telecommunications, as well as in disciplines where collaboration "may threaten freedom of speech".

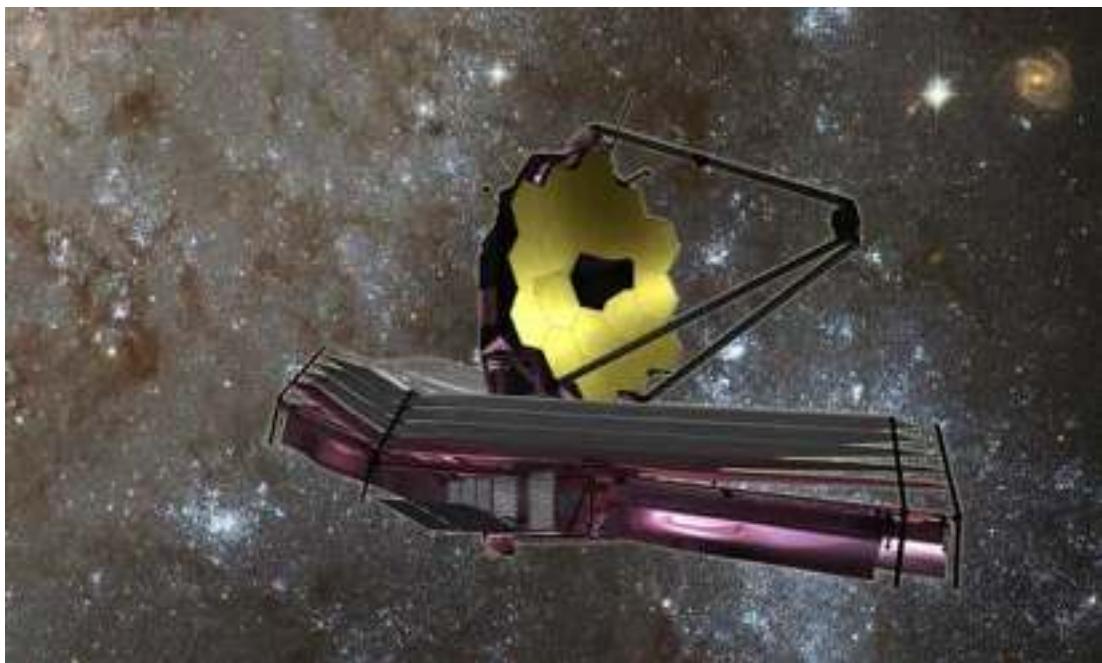
This article was amended on 25 January 2021. Tom Zwart is a professor at Utrecht University, not Leiden University as stated in an earlier version.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/25/dutch-university-gives-up-chinese-funding-due-to-impartiality-concerns>

James Webb space telescope

James Webb space telescope takes up station a million miles from Earth

\$10bn observatory manoeuvred into position at four times the orbit of the moon, with first images expected in June



A Nasa artist's rendition shows the James Webb space telescope, seen as the successor to the Hubble telescope. Photograph: Nasa/AFP/Getty Images

[Maya Yang](#) and agencies

Mon 24 Jan 2022 17.03 EST

The world's largest and most powerful space telescope has reached its final destination – an observation post one million miles away from Earth.

Nasa's \$10bn [James Webb space telescope](#) launched on Christmas Day last year from French Guiana on a quest to behold the dawn of the universe. Due

to its sheer size, Webb had to launch folded inside the Ariane 5, a European rocket.

The mirrors on the space observatory must still be meticulously aligned and the infrared detectors sufficiently chilled before science observations can begin in June. But flight controllers in Baltimore were euphoric after chalking up another success.

“We’re one step closer to uncovering the mysteries of the universe. And I can’t wait to see Webb’s first new views of the universe this summer!” the [Nasa](#) administrator, Bill Nelson, said in a statement.

“Wow, what a ride this last month it’s been,” said Amber Straughn, a deputy project scientist for Nasa.

The telescope has been described as a “time machine” by scientists and will enable astronomers to peer back further in time than ever before, all the way back to when the first stars and galaxies were forming 13.7bn years ago. That’s a mere 100m years from the Big Bang, when the universe was created.

The Webb will also hunt for signs of extraterrestrial life.

On 8 January, Nasa engineers [completed](#) the unfolding of the telescope, which includes an enormous gold-plated 6.5-metre (21ft) mirror and a tennis-court-sized sunshield. The process required a series of highly delicate and complicated manoeuvres, a choreography that has not been performed by any other spacecraft in astronomic history.

The Webb has been designed as a replacement for the Hubble space telescope, which remains in operation after its 1990 launch. Unlike the Hubble telescope, the Webb will not study the visible aspect of the electromagnetic spectrum. Rather, it will study only infrared radiation. As a result, it has been fitted with complex shielding and advanced cooling equipment to protect its equipment from solar radiation that can trigger misleading signals.

At 1m miles away from Earth, the Webb is over four times as distant as the moon. Last December, Nasa scientists [estimated](#) its life span to be “significantly more” than 10 years.

Considered the successor to the Hubble, which orbits 330 miles (530km) up, the Webb is too far away for emergency repairs. That makes the milestones over the past month – and the ones ahead – all the more critical.

Spacewalking astronauts performed repairs five times on the Hubble. The first operation, in 1993, corrected the telescope’s blurry vision, a flaw introduced during the mirror’s construction on the ground.

Whether chasing optical and ultraviolet light like the Hubble or infrared light like the Webb, telescopes can see farther and more clearly when operating above Earth’s distorting atmosphere. That’s why Nasa teamed up with the European and Canadian space agencies to get Webb and its massive mirror – the largest ever launched – out into the cosmos.

This article was amended on 25 January 2022 to clarify that the Webb is the world’s largest space telescope, not the largest of all telescopes.

The Associated Press contributed to this report

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2022/jan/24/james-webb-space-telescope-station-a-million-miles-from-earth>

Headlines saturday 29 january 2022

- [Sue Gray report Redacted version is imminent, say government sources](#)
- [Analysis PM's agenda gripped by paralysis as he fights to survive](#)
- [Partygate Met's request for redactions muddies the picture](#)
- ['Nobody's above the law' Theresa May wades into row over parties](#)

Boris Johnson

Sue Gray report: redacted version is imminent, say government sources

Move follows anger after Met police asked civil servant to hold back details in her ‘partygate’ report

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



Boris Johnson during a visit to RAF Valley in Anglesey on Thursday.
Photograph: Carl Recine/PA

[Aubrey Allegretti](#), [Vikram Dodd](#), [Hannah Devlin](#) and [Heather Stewart](#)

Fri 28 Jan 2022 17.19 EST

A heavily redacted report into Downing Street parties by the senior civil servant Sue Gray will be published imminently, the Guardian understands,

after Scotland Yard provoked fury and confusion by revealing it had demanded key details of the worst offending be removed.

MPs labelled the Metropolitan police a broken organisation after the force admitted it had asked Gray to make [“minimal reference” in her inquiry report](#) to matters its officers were now investigating. The Met, battered by criticism, insisted it needed to protect the integrity of its investigation.

Gray’s team had been considering sending a redacted version of the report to No 10 or waiting for the Met to conclude its inquiry and then sending the full report. On Friday night, government sources said they decided to send a redacted version, at the request of the Met. They are not believed to be intending to submit anything further to Downing Street.

No 10 had vowed on Friday to release whatever findings it receives from Gray but said the Met should be given “time and space” to complete “its independent work”.

Earlier, Labour had called for the full report to be published. It said the government was in a state of extended paralysis, while some Tory backbenchers described Boris Johnson as a “lame duck” without the authority to tackle the looming cost of living crisis and possible Russian invasion [of Ukraine](#).

Scotland Yard had issued a brief statement on Friday morning saying it was in “ongoing contact” with Gray’s team about “the content of the report” to “avoid any prejudice to our investigation”.

Police stressed they had not asked for the document to be delayed, but their request left Gray [unable to publish the report](#) as she intended.

On Friday night after a torrent of criticism, the Met issued a further statement, saying it had received “information” – understood to be evidence such as messages between Johnson’s aides – from the Cabinet Office that helped Gray to reach her conclusions.

Commander Catherine Roper, who leads the Met’s Central Specialist Crime Command, said officers would look at the material “promptly, fairly and

proportionately". She confirmed that those named by Gray as breaching Covid rules would be “contacted in writing, and invited to explain their actions including whether they feel they had a reasonable excuse", after which officers will decide if fines should be issued.

The Met is investigating breaches punishable by fixed-penalty notices, rather than any more serious offences. If those issued with the fixed-penalty notices want to challenge the fine, they would go before a magistrate, not a jury.

Johnson's political future may hinge on whether he and senior No 10 staff are exonerated or criticised, and the Met's intervention prompted concerns that the issue could remain unresolved into the spring if key details remain unpublished.

03:57

'I apologise for the impression': how Boris Johnson has responded to lockdown party claims – video

Questions had been raised about the suitability of sending Johnson the full report, when events he could have been present at are potentially those the Met are investigating.

Earlier, one Tory MP raised concerns that Gray's full findings may not emerge. They told the Guardian: "What people want is justice and the truth – what they expect is a cover-up. If that's what happens, we can take another 5% off our standing in the polls. It's a massive loss for confidence in the police and damaging for the party."

Another called the Met a "broken organisation" and said fears the report would look like a whitewash were the fault of Scotland Yard's "incompetence".

Those with knowledge of the Met's thinking said senior officers do not want Gray's findings of wrongdoing published in detail before those who may be interviewed are spoken to by police, potentially polluting the recall of witnesses.

But the Met's fears that Gray's report could prejudice its own investigation prompted widespread incredulity, given the risk only arises when a criminal investigation is launched that is expected to lead to arrests followed by a trial by jury.

Nazir Afzal, a former chief crown prosecutor for north-west England, called the announcement by the Met defending its demand for redactions "absolute nonsense", adding: "A purely factual report by Sue Gray cannot possibly prejudice a police investigation. They just have to follow the evidence, of which the report will be a part."

Dal Babu, a former Met police chief superintendent, said he was "a little bit confused" about the force's decision. He said he was "struggling to understand why this report would impede the police investigation", given it had "no legal standing" and a lot of evidence was already in the public domain.

One former senior Met officer with extensive experience of sensitive investigations said the force had unnecessarily got itself into trouble and was concerned by its missteps so far, some of which were branded "brain dead". The source said: "They are making it up as they go along."

The former chief whip Mark Harper had pushed for Gray's report to be published in full. He told the Guardian: "A partial publication with crucial details missing would be an insult to the public."

Roger Gale, a backbencher who has already submitted a letter of no confidence in Johnson, said the soaring cost of living and Russian aggression towards Ukraine required Johnson's "full and undivided attention", but instead he was "a lame duck prime minister that is soldiering on".

The government was also accused of being in paralysis by the Labour leader, Keir Starmer. He criticised ministers for being focused on protecting Johnson's position, while people concerned about the tax rise coming into effect in April and rising bills were "getting no answers from a government mired in sleaze and scandal".

Following news that only a redacted version of Gray's report was expected, Ian Blackford, the SNP's leader in Westminster, said: "No one will accept a Westminster cover-up. If the UK government refuses to publish the full unredacted report it will prove, yet again, that Westminster is utterly corrupt and broken beyond repair. It won't save Boris Johnson's skin. It will only add to the calls for him to go."

The Liberal Democrat leader, Ed Davey, said: "Anything short of the full report would be a Whitehall whitewash not worth the paper it is written on."

James Johnson, a pollster with JL Partners who worked in Downing Street under Theresa May, said: "I don't think the brand damage from the parties fades. Voter perceptions of Johnson have changed for good, barring some major event.

"This is very much a Johnson issue, not a wider Conservative party issue. If, sooner rather than later, MPs look to a new leader, then I think you get an almost entire restart moment, and actually I think that you could even see the Conservative government as much as 10 points ahead almost overnight."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/28/sue-gray-report-fears-indefinite-delay-met-intervention-partygate>

Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson's agenda gripped by paralysis as he fights to survive

Analysis: Tory MPs are challenging policies they don't like while other initiatives are going nowhere as No 10 firefights the crisis around the PM



Policy making and execution have stagnated since the prime minister found himself embroiled in difficulties over parties at No 10. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

[Ben Quinn](#), [Richard Adams](#), [Dan Milmo](#) and [Rajeev Syal](#)

Fri 28 Jan 2022 12.39 EST

Faced with the fight of his political life, [Boris Johnson](#) now risks being held hostage by assertive Tory backbenchers making demands on a range of fronts including national insurance and vaccine mandates.

Other policies are also now stuck in paralysis while the shadow of the [Sue Gray report](#) – and a Scotland Yard investigation – hangs over the government, with senior Tory backbencher Roger Gale describing Johnson as a “lame duck” prime minister on Friday. Here are the policies at the mercy of the political storm.

National insurance contributions (NICs)

The Treasury became increasingly alarmed at signs Johnson may be preparing to scrap the national insurance rise in the face of pressure from rightwing Tories.

[The Guardian reported on Thursday](#) Rishi Sunak had been privately stressing to MPs that the tax rise must go ahead as planned. On Friday No 10 insisted there was no policy change.

Obesity strategy

Faced with a potential rebellion, Johnson signalled this week that he was prepared to drop plans to tighten regulations on the promotion of unhealthy food and drinks.

The plans were part of an anti-obesity strategy that the prime minister himself [had promoted in 2020](#) to prevent supermarkets from displaying unhealthy food and drinks at checkouts or using them in buy one, get one free offers.

Animal welfare

There was no noise from the prime minister when the chief whip, Mark Spencer, suggested the animal sentience legislation should be watered down to avoid rows with his backbenches.

Senior Tory sources [have confirmed to the Guardian](#) that a series of policies including [a ban on trophy hunting imports](#), [stricter sentences for puppy thieves](#) and a ban on live exports of livestock have been put on pause after a campaign led by Spencer, a farmer.

Cost of living crisis

Johnson and Sunak had [reportedly](#) been due to meet this week to consider options including council tax rebates and a bonus universal credit payment.

Measures to soften energy bill hikes are also caught in the logjam, amid a standoff with the Treasury on how to fund measures to [ease the cost of living crisis](#). The clock is ticking, however, with the energy regulator Ofgem due to announce the latest increase to the price cap on 7 February, which, as it stands, will increase the average annual gas and electricity bill by about 50% to more than £2,000 when it kicks in from April.

Vaccine mandates

Johnson has come under sustained pressure from Tory backbenchers to do a U-turn on rules obliging NHS England staff to have a first jab by 3 February to allow time to be fully vaccinated by 1 April.

The prime minister resisted concerted calls by Tory MPs in the House of Commons for the mandate to be dropped, but at one point told Mark Harper that the government would “reflect”.

Levelling up

The levelling up white paper was expected to be launched this week but has been pushed back due to the political turmoil. It is the latest delay for the flagship policy designed to spread prosperity outside London and the south-east, after the Omicron wave forced ministers to push back a planned publication before Christmas.

It is widely expected to see the light of day next week, however, as Boris Johnson seeks to relaunch his government and repair his public image, while the Met continues its work.

Education

A logjam of bills and policies inherited by [Nadhim Zahawi](#) has not been improved by the torpor at Downing Street, as white papers and legislation form a tailback.

A bill about freedom of speech in England's universities ended its committee stages in September but there is no word when it will move on. A skills and post-16 education bill is also waiting for a date to continue. Other overdue policies include the long-awaited review of special education needs and disabilities, now being folded into a white paper on schools to be finished later this year.

Gambling

Proposals for a once-in-generation review of gambling laws were initially scheduled for the end of 2021 but were [delayed until this year](#), as Johnson reshuffled his Cabinet. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, headed by Nadine Dorries, is now expected to publish a white paper in March. However, sources familiar with the review process say that even that date could now slip, given the chaos in Westminster.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/28/boris-johnson-agenda-gripped-by-paralysis-as-he-fights-to-survive>

Gray report

Met's request for Sue Gray report redactions only muddies the picture

Analysis: Scotland Yard's new request for minimised partygate report looks like questionable policing and perverse politics



New Scotland Yard in central London. Redacting the Gray report would only 'feed a perception there is some kind of collusion between government and policing'. Photograph: Ian West/PA

[Haroon Siddique](#) Legal affairs correspondent

Fri 28 Jan 2022 12.44 EST

Scotland Yard's statement that it has asked for "[minimal references](#)" to certain events covered in Sue Gray's report provoked confusion and anger.

The effect of Friday's intervention was to diminish the [chances of Gray's report being published](#) in full any time soon. It also heightened speculation

about what the force is *actually* investigating.

Scotland Yard said it did not want Gray's report to "prejudice" its own inquiries – which had only begun when the civil servant shared her findings with the Met last weekend.

Scotland Yard's request has no legal force

So, has Gray been snookered by talking to the police?

Experts say this isn't the case. The Met's request is just that – it has no legal force. "They have no legal power to cause a redaction or the report being published in some shorter version," said [Nazir Afzal](#), former chief crown prosecutor for north-west England.

With respect to the prejudice the Met are trying to avoid, some lawyers suggested it may refer to the risk of unfairly influencing any court case.

However, [contempt of court](#) only applies when proceedings are "active", usually when someone has been arrested. "I am sure that there would have been an announcement if someone had been summonsed or charged, and so I think that can be discounted," said Kate Bex QC, a criminal barrister at Red Lion chambers. "There is an active police investigation, but that is different to proceedings being ongoing."

Also, none of the crimes committed by individuals under the [Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) Regulations](#), which covers social gatherings during lockdowns, can be tried by jury.

At the lowest level are [fixed penalty notices](#), which are issued by police, with the only alternative being a magistrates court hearing or a case dealt with under the [single justice procedure](#), where rulings are made by a single magistrate sitting with a legal adviser.

So, could the police be investigating more serious offences?

Given this, some raised the prospect that the Met's statement indicated it was investigating offences that could be tried before a jury.

The Green party peer, [Jenny Jones](#), has [called on the police to investigate misconduct in public office](#) – where a public officer wilfully neglects his or her duty and which carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment – in respect to the alleged breaches.

Similarly, there have been suggestions that officers could be investigating perverting the court of justice, which also carries a maximum sentence of life, over possible attempts to cover up wrongdoing. This was fuelled by [a report in the Independent](#) that No 10 advised staff to “clean up” their phones amid allegations about lockdown parties.

But the Met seemed to scotch this idea on Friday when it clarified it was looking only at possible breaches of Covid rules – equivalent to a parking fine.

Andrew Keogh, a barrister who runs the [CrimeLine](#) website, said the police were likely to be attempting to protect their hand when carrying out their own interviews. “If there’s any level of detail in the report about the alleged events, naming people and accounts of what went on and who might have initiated this, that and the other, then it seems to me from a policing points of view you wouldn’t want that in the public domain.

“You want to put things to people so they’re sort of blinded by it, so: ‘Were you in the basement of number 10 on this date?’, they say no, and then you say: ‘Well, we’ve just spoken to John Doe and John Doe says: “You were dancing on the photocopier etc.”’

“This is quite powerful, playing off lots of people against each other and holding the cards to your chest as to whatever evidence you do have and, as importantly, what evidence you don’t have.”

‘It makes no sense’

Afzal agreed that a fear of “contaminating evidence” might be behind the Met’s move but said it was misguided given that witnesses would already

have had plenty of time to confer, as well as the wider public interest in the case.

“This is not a subject that has been in the shadows,” he said. “People have been talking about this for weeks and months. I have little doubt that witnesses have discussed this, so the idea that something will be said in this report that might contaminate the case, I think, is an exaggerated risk. Anyway, they’ve got to balance that with public confidence and the court of public opinion.

“They want this report in full because they’ve been promised it in full. As recently as three days ago the Met said they had no objections to it being published in full and so it makes no sense. All it is doing is feeding a perception that there is some kind of collusion going on between government and policing.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/28/mets-request-for-sue-gray-report-redactions-only-muddies-the-picture>

Boris Johnson

‘Nobody is above the law’: Theresa May wades into Downing Street parties row

Former prime minister breaks silence to express her anger and expectation of full accountability



Theresa May said it was vital that those who made the rules should also follow them. Photograph: Andy Buchanan/PA

Matthew Weaver

Fri 28 Jan 2022 08.53 EST

Theresa May has made her first intervention in the row over Downing Street parties, saying she was angry to hear about them.

The former prime minister, who has frequently criticised Boris Johnson on other issues, has been conspicuously silent in the weeks since [the “partygate” allegations](#) first emerged at the end of November.

Now, however, she has said that if evidence were to emerge of deliberate wrongdoing then “full accountability” should follow and that “nobody is above the law”.

In a letter to her local newspaper, the Maidenhead Advertiser, she wrote: “It is vital that those who set the rules, follow the rules … This is important for ensuring the necessary degree of trust between the public and government.

“Like so many, I was angry to hear stories of those in No 10, who are responsible for setting the coronavirus rules, not properly following the rules. All those working at the heart of government should conduct themselves with the highest of standards which befits the work they do, and this applies as much to those working in No 10 as to other parts of government.”

The letter was sent before the Metropolitan police launched an inquiry into alleged parties after receiving evidence from Sue Gray, the senior official who has been asked by Downing Street to investigate possible Covid rule-breaking in Whitehall.

May said that “if there is evidence of deliberate or premeditated wrongdoing, I expect full accountability to follow”.

News of May’s intervention came as it emerged that key parts of Gray’s report into the parties could be pared back at the request of the police. Scotland Yard revealed it had asked for references to matters it was now investigating to be removed.

Johnson’s resignation from May’s cabinet was seen as one of the blows to her authority that led to her leaving No 10 in 2019.

She has since been a vocal critic of her successor, making a number of sharp interventions in the Commons and the media. She accused him last year of abandoning Britain’s “position of global moral leadership” by threatening to break international law during Brexit trade negotiations.

She also attacked the government’s decision to cut foreign aid, saying it had “turned its back on some of the poorest in the world”, and she dismissed

government assurances on post-Brexit security arrangements as “utter rubbish”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/28/theresa-may-wades-into-row-over-downing-street-parties>

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

2022.01.29 - Spotlight

- Golden years What was the greatest 12 months for pop culture?
- Ben Whishaw ‘Sometimes, with straight actors playing gay parts, I think: I don’t believe you!’
- From milk to crisps Why the price of basic food items is rising
- Big Narstie ‘Describe myself in three words? Electrifying, orgasmic and charismatic’

Advertisement

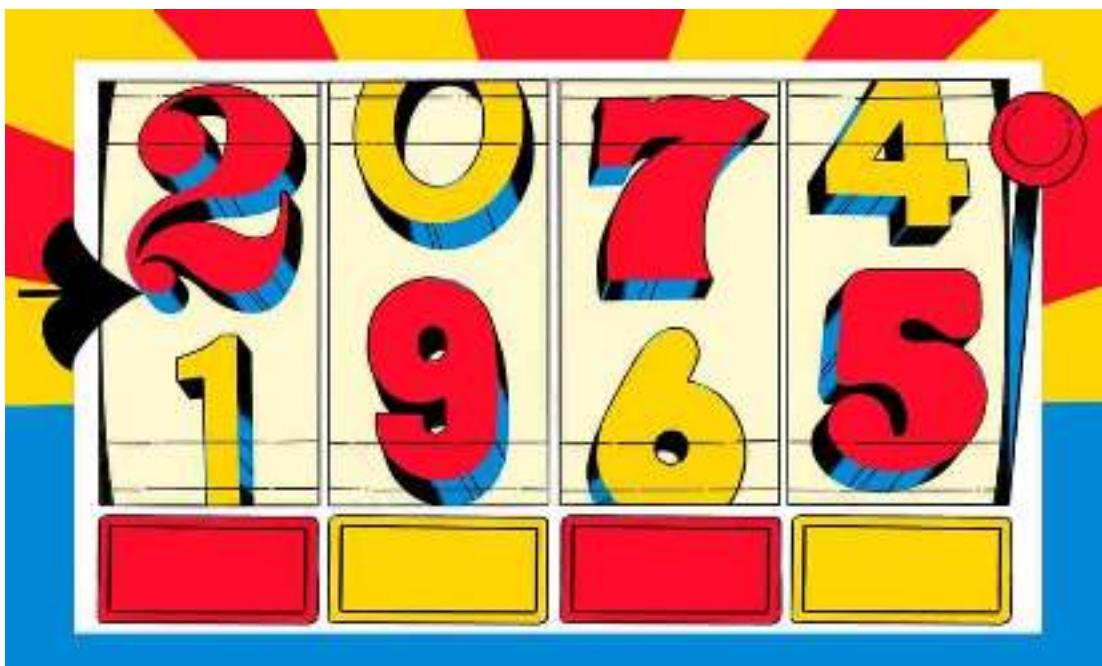
US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Culture](#)

Golden years: what was the greatest 12 months for pop culture?



Reeling in the years ... but which was the best for pop culture? Illustration: Toby Triumph/The Guardian

Is it 1965, with Dylan, the Stones and James Brown? 1984, with Eddie Murphy and Madonna? Or 1999, with The Sopranos and Britney v

Christina? Writers and critics stake their claim for the most important ever

John Harris, Kelefa Sanneh, AS Hamrah, Hadley Freeman, Pandora Sykes,
Chuck Klosterman and Yomi Adegoke

Sat 29 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

1965

John Harris

In 1988, Bob Dylan was [inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame](#) by Bruce Springsteen. Springsteen made a speech that started by describing a single sound: the snare shot that began Dylan's revelatory 1965 single Like a Rolling Stone, which propelled music somewhere new. It sounded, he said, "like somebody kicked open the door to your mind".

So 1965 was the year that pop gave rise to rock: music with a new depth, plus a sense of revolt and confrontation. The Who released I Can't Explain and My Generation. The Beatles came up with Help!, Ticket to Ride and the pairing of We Can Work It Out and Day Tripper. Dylan's new adventures were heralded by the Byrds' reinvention of his Mr Tambourine Man.



1965 Composite: Toby Triumph / Guardian Design/Toby Triumph / Getty

But if anyone distilled the year's mixture of noise, intelligence and revolt into its purest essence, it was the Rolling Stones, then at the peak of a pop-art phase that produced an amazing trilogy of hits: The Last Time, (I Can't Get No) Satisfaction and Get Off of My Cloud. If you want an idealised picture of life at the mid-60s cutting edge, the latter song should do it: "I live in an apartment on the 99th floor of my block / And I sit at home looking out the window, imagining the world has stopped."

In Detroit, Tamla Motown was producing records full of creativity and depth: Martha and the Vandellas' Nowhere to Run; Smokey Robinson & the Miracles' The Tracks of My Tears; the Supremes' Stop! In the Name of Love. In Charlotte, North Carolina, James Brown and his band recorded Papa's Got a Brand New Bag, Parts I and II, which blazed a trail into funk.

This was also the year that David Bailey took his [celebrated portrait of Michael Caine](#); Julie Christie starred in [Doctor Zhivago](#) and Jean-Luc Godard released [Alphaville](#)). In 1965, the idea that stuff by and for young people had to be full of ideas and importance was so firmly established that it has endured ever since; if there was a year when popular culture was invented, this was surely it.

John Harris is the author of [The Beatles: Get Back, the official companion to the Disney+ series](#)

1975

Kelefa Sanneh

When I think about my favourite years, I think about times when things are changing, and no one quite knows how. I think, in other words, about 1975, when Smokey Robinson released [Quiet Storm](#), a light-headed falsetto fantasia about a lovesick man who compares himself to "a butterfly caught up in a hurricane". The song was not a huge hit (it went to No 61 in the US), but an imaginative DJ in Washington DC was inspired by its smooth sound, and soon the name of the song became the name of a show, then a radio format. For decades, so-called Quiet Storm stations thrived, playing a mix of

plush R&B and mellow jazz, an elegant counterpoint to the boisterous hip-hop that was just being born.

Punk was being born, too: Patti Smith (her first album), the Ramones (their first record deal), the Sex Pistols (their first gig). And electronic dance music, in the dual form of sublime disco tracks (Silver Convention's [Fly, Robin, Fly](#); Donna Summer's [Love to Love You Baby](#)) and electronic experiments (Kraftwerk's Radio-Activity; Tangerine Dream's Rubycon). It was the year of Ali-Frazier III, the Thrilla in Manila – a classic fight broadcast on an upstart network called HBO. And there were other new reasons to stay in the house: US department store Sears began to sell the first Atari video-game system.

It was, I think, an unusually unpretentious year. It gave us crowd-pleasing classics such as Jaws and Monty Python and the Holy Grail, alongside a fistful of cult favourites: The Stepford Wives, Dolemite, The Rocky Horror Picture Show. Perhaps it was all a bit miscellaneous and confusing, especially if you were living through it. (I was not; I arrived the next year.) But that's the thing about golden eras: they often don't seem so golden at the time.

Kelefa Sanneh is the author of [Major Labels: A History of Pop Music in Seven Genres](#)



1984 Composite: Toby Triumph/Getty

1984

AS Hamrah

If 1984 was the best year for pop culture, that landmark period was countered at every turn by lower-end work that showed Ronald Reagan's US as dysfunctional or corrupt. The inevitable re-evaluation of Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four began things. Apple released the first Macintosh. Ridley Scott directed the TV ad, alluding to the book. Represented by a heroine who shattered "Big Brother" with a hammer, Apple framed itself as against conformity.

Van Halen named their new album after the year. Bruce Springsteen's Born in the USA was misinterpreted and exploited by Republican politicians. With Purple Rain, Prince showed that self-creation is harder to co-opt. The MTV Music Video Awards debuted; [Madonna writhed in a bridal gown](#) on a wedding cake, singing that she was beat, incomplete. New York once again seemed like the capital of pop culture, with the painters Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Raw comics. Musician-performance artists Talking Heads and Laurie Anderson created a new, smarter, simpler pop aesthetic, and Run-DMC brought hip-hop to the world.

At the movies, for every Footloose and Sixteen Candles, there was Jim Jarmusch's Stranger Than Paradise or the Coens' Blood Simple; for every Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, John Sayles's The Brother from Another Planet. Eddie Murphy combined the two strains in Beverly Hills Cop, the highest-grossing film of 1984. It was pro-police or anti-cop, depending on your mood.

There was a strong undercurrent in the US that things were not working. John Cassavetes made the disturbing Love Streams, while post-hardcore bands Hüsker Dü, Minutemen and Meat Puppets, recorded unpopular songs of anger and confusion, of what LA band the Gun Club called "Bad America".

The cinema of 1984 belonged to Harry Dean Stanton, who starred in *Paris, Texas* and *Repo Man*. He was also in *Red Dawn*, which US House minority leader Kevin McCarthy mentioned during his eight-and-a-half-hour filibuster speech last November. It was a reminder that at a certain level of American success, everything comes back.

AS Hamrah is the author of [The Earth Dies Streaming: Film Writing, 2002-2018](#).

1989

Hadley Freeman

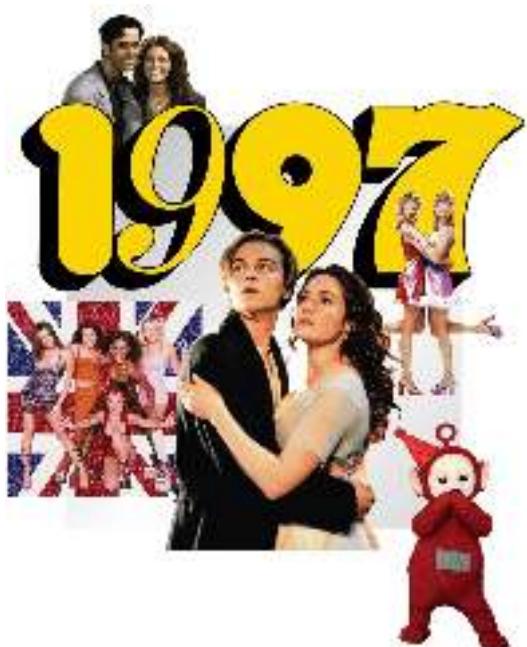
Look, I get that taste is subjective. But anyone who says that the best year in pop culture was anything other than 1989 is deluded or in denial. Let's look at this question with the sober neutrality the matter requires: 1989 is when all the best genres of 80s movies peaked, and it is a scientific fact that the 1980s had the best movies and best genres of any decade ever, so this means these were the greatest movies ever created. In 1989, there was *When Harry Met Sally* ... (the greatest ever romcom), *Say Anything* (the greatest ever teen movie), *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* (the greatest ever Keanu Reeves movie) and *Batman* (the greatest ever superhero movie and the movie with the greatest ever soundtrack because it was made by Prince).

And you want to know something shocking? Prince's *Batman* soundtrack was great, but it wasn't nearly the greatest album that came out in 1989. What can a person even begin to say of a holy year that produced the Cure's *Disintegration* and De La Soul's *3 Feet High and Rising*; two albums that have absolutely nothing in common, except that they remain as influential and modern-sounding as they were 33 years ago? Or one that birthed Janet Jackson's *Rhythm Nation 1814* and Neneh Cherry's *Raw Like Sushi*? New Order's *Technique* and Beastie Boys' *Paul's Boutique*? Pixies' *Doolittle* and Tears for Fears' *The Seeds of Love*?

What albums have come out recently that will still be listened to in four decades' time? Well, 1989 had about a dozen, while also gesturing at the best of the 90s to come, with the release of Nirvana's *Bleach* and, on TV, the launch of *The Simpsons*. Taylor Swift didn't name her most fun album 1989

for no reason, and Taylor ain't no dummy. To close, four words for you: Madonna's Like a Prayer. The defence rests, case definitively closed.

Hadley Freeman is the author of [Life Moves Pretty Fast: The Lessons We Learned from Eighties Movies](#)



1997 Composite: Toby Triumph/Getty

1997

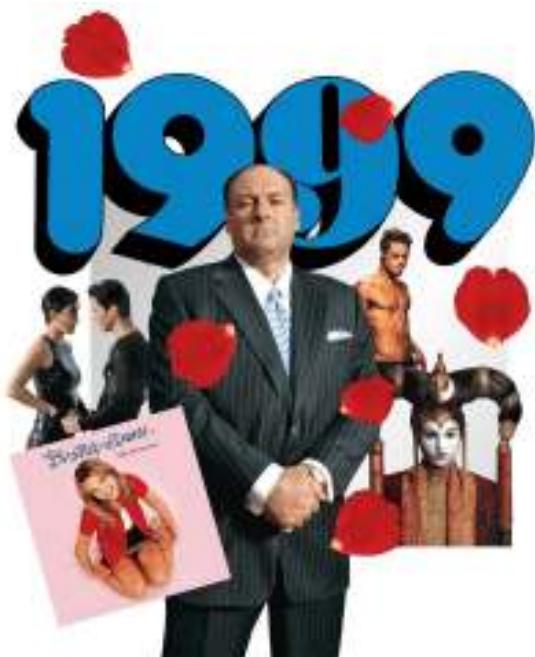
Pandora Sykes

You know that mindfulness tip for alleviating anxiety and grounding you in the present: to think of your “happy place”? My happy place is leading the conga line at my 10th birthday party in 1997, a dozen preteen girls in different Spice Girls crop tops wiggling along to Wannabe behind me. Come Christmas, we would be granted the cinematic triumph that was Spice World. An acid trip of a film featuring luminaries such as Richard E Grant, Bob Geldof, Elton John, Dominic West and Meat Loaf, it was slammed by the dreary critics, despite some frankly epic one-liners: “This dress is dry clean only, Melanie.”

I was only vaguely aware that we'd entered the Blair Years, but even to my young mind things felt exciting – fruity, even – the air rich with optimism and excellent “chick flicks” (loathsome term) such as Romy and Michelle's High School Reunion and My Best Friend's Wedding. Most importantly, it was the year of Kate and Leo. Being just 10, I had to wait to watch Titanic on general release from the comfort of my blow-up chair, but my older sister went to see it at the cinema about seven times, contributing to the biggest box office release of all time (until Avatar came along 12 years later). I soon came to know Leo's features better than my own, because my sister had not one, not two, but three Leonardo DiCaprio calendars. It is a year of seeing Leonardo's perfectly greased blond curtains every single day.

When I wasn't lining up my £1.99 Spice Girls cassette singles like Pogs and rating the members of boyband 5ive in order of cuteness, I was dreaming about crystal chokers, matching crop top and miniskirt sets, and Gap-logoed everything. It was also, of course, the year that Princess Diana died, prompting a mass wave of public emoting that Britain had never witnessed before. For that reason, some might suggest it's not the best year ever – but it's inarguable that it's among the most iconic.

Pandora Sykes is the author of [How Do We Know We're Doing It Right? And Other Thoughts on Modern Life](#)



1999 Composite: Toby Triumph/Getty

1999

Chuck Klosterman

To categorise any year as “great for pop culture” is different from claiming that it was positive for culture. A good year for the culture at large involves transformations in thought; a good year for pop culture means that thoughts are chaotic and transitory, and art mostly discussed for how it is presented and perceived. For the past four decades, most years have been better for pop culture than for non-pop culture. But in 1999 the most interesting things were assumed to be disposable on purpose.

Was there still “real culture” in 1999? Of course. *The Sopranos* debuted and is frequently cited as the apex of its medium. Yet what’s most regularly noted about it tend to be ancillary details: its invention of prestige TV; and a growing generational discomfort with antiheroes. It was an excellent year for film, but its signature movies have become symbols of ideological projections: *The Matrix* (now seen as a way to describe a mediated reality); *Fight Club* (shorthand for toxic masculinity); *American Beauty* (an evisceration of white suburban parochialism); and *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* (the prime example of nostalgia as futurism). There was a shift in the perception of anything commercially dominant. Content mattered less than analysis of that content.

The first Britney Spears album was released two days after *The Sopranos* pilot. Everything about it was fascinating – Spears’s celebrity, the marketing, the presentation – except for the music, which was merely OK. That dichotomy felt deep. It was now essential to take someone such as Spears seriously even if her songs were the least important aspect of her celebrity. Christina Aguilera put out her own CD, and could sing the quills off a porcupine – but again, the music was less crucial than her persona (most notably, her role as Spears’s alleged rival). In almost any previous era, both acts would have been popular, but dismissed as unserious. They would have been marginalised as music for kids who didn’t care about music. Such thinking was over. In 1999, the fact that teen pop was unserious meant you needed to think about it more.

Chuck Klosterman is the author of [The Nineties: A Book](#)

2003

Yomi Adegoke

What was in the water in 2003? Its cultural output was so strong, it could nearly be forgiven for its disc belts and Von Dutch hats. The year saw Finding Nemo, two Christmas classics in Love Actually and Elf, and the first Pirates of the Caribbean film. And while we're now sick to the back teeth of sequels, in 2003 they were still something to look forward to: Charlie's Angels 2: Full Throttle, 2 Fast 2 Furious, X2: X-Men United, Bad Boys II and two Matrix sequels. The third Terminator film came out, as did the third American Pie movie and the final instalment of Lord of the Rings, which became one of the highest-grossing movies of all time. It was nominated for a whopping 11 Academy Awards (and won them all).

It was a golden era for TV, too. We lost Dawson's Creek but gained The OC. Chappelle's Show hit screens in the US and so did NCIS. In the UK, Peep Show, Little Britain and QI were airing for the first time. BBC Three was launched, too. And let's not forget: 2003 was the year reality TV came into its own. America's Next Top Model aired, without which we wouldn't have RuPaul's Drag Race or Project Runway. Queer Eye for the Straight Guy was a watershed moment for LGBT+ representation. This era was the genesis of "rich bitch TV", with Rich Girls following wealthy 18-year-olds Ally Hilfiger and Jaime Gleicher, and the much more famous offering The Simple Life, with Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie. Madonna and Britney Spears's kiss at the VMAs sent the world into meltdown.

Beyoncé blessed us with her Grammy-winning solo debut Crazy in Love and the Dangerously in Love album. 50 Cent dropped his debut In Da Club and followed up with Get Rich Or Die Tryin'. Girls Aloud's first album Sound of the Underground topped charts. iTunes was launched and so was Myspace, arguably establishing social media as we know it. It was a blessed year: technology was advanced enough to usher in genre-defining TV and films, but still gave us an optimistic naivety we may never see again. Not all it pioneered was good: 2003 was the first year the UK scored "nul points" at Eurovision with Jemini's Cry Baby, becoming the first English-language

song to do so. That's a trend I think we'd all be happy to see the back of.
Yomi Adegoke is the co-author of [Slay in Your Lane: The Black Girl Bible](#)

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2022/jan/29/golden-years-what-was-the-greatest-12-months-for-pop-culture>

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



Ben Whishaw: ‘Even the thought of reading a speech terrifies me.’

Photograph: Elliott Morgan/The Guardian

Ben Whishaw: ‘Sometimes, with straight actors playing gay parts, I think: I don’t believe you!’

Ben Whishaw: ‘Even the thought of reading a speech terrifies me.’

Photograph: Elliott Morgan/The Guardian

He’s been Paddington, Keats, and now a doctor in *This Is Going to Hurt*. He talks about his off-stage shyness and why he wasn’t delighted by the reveal of Q’s sexuality in *No Time to Die*

by [Tom Lamont](#)

Sat 29 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

Ben Whishaw, quite apart from being one of the best British actors we have, is an expert dunker of his biscuits in tea. I've seen it: he's a McVitie's ninja, with a method all his own. We meet one afternoon in the offices of a London film company and I get the chance to observe his distinctive work first-hand, as digestive after digestive gets taken up by Whishaw, then dipped (sometimes double-handed) into a cuppa that he props on a table in front of him. Each biscuit gets submerged for so long, you suppose there's no chance of it ever coming out whole. Each biscuit later re-emerges, sodden, milliseconds from ruin, still intact.

"I'm no good at interviews," Whishaw, 41, apologises, right away.

He has played Hamlet, Sebastian Flyte, Ariel, [Paddington](#), James Bond's gadget man Q; all manner of bold fictional characters behind which to hide an innate, real-world shyness. In February, Whishaw will appear in the BBC's adaptation of Adam Kay's bestselling medical tell-all, *This Is Going to Hurt* – another cocksure character, another place to hide. "I find it hard meeting people for the first time," Whishaw shrugs. "I find it anxiety inducing. I get a shaky, unsettled feeling in my belly. Just warning you now!"

And it's true that the actor, with his wiry limbs crossed at sharp angles, the focus of his green eyes often darting away to the middle distance, comes across as socially nervous. Even so, he's compelling company, and before the end of our conversation he'll have spoken with careful thought and bracing honesty about sexuality; self-knowledge; LGBTQ+ casting in the film industry; his frustration with the Bond franchise, all sorts. Along the way I start to notice that, actually, there are telling parallels between the way Whishaw approaches a one-on-one interaction such as ours and his perilous technique for dunking biscuits. Whenever the conversation takes a turn, he'll start out strong. Ideas. Confessions. Then he might lose faith and check himself ("God. I'm waffling ... I have no idea what I'm saying, Tom"). Then, right when all looks lost, the biscuit doesn't break apart, he regathers his efforts, he comes at some idea anew, and often winds up making a point that is richer and subtler than the one he started with.

I ask whether being good at acting has ever helped him with his social anxiety. Can't he use his proven performance skills (the playful sprite he

played in 2010's *The Tempest*, the complicated rogue in 2018's *A Very English Scandal*) and fake it?

I'm fascinated by the masculine and feminine energies we carry within ourselves. But for years I felt I had to deny something

"Yeah, no," he chuckles, darkly. "I don't find acting helps. A nightmare situation for me would be to have to make an impromptu speech at someone's wedding. Whenever I feel like someone I know might be about to ask me to do it, I say: 'Nope!'" Whishaw does an immaculate impression of a gruff, irritable old man. "'Nope! Nope! Nope! Go away!' ... Even the thought of reading a prepared speech terrifies me."

Wouldn't reading out a prepared speech at a wedding be just like performing from a script, though?

"I just don't ever want to appear in front of other people," Whishaw says, "and be myself."

He thinks some more. "I dunno, Tom! I'm probably talking rubbish. But sitting here, today, with you, I find the idea of my words being put down in print for ever a frightening thing. Today I could have one set of thoughts. Tomorrow another. The black-and-white of things – it clams me up."

The Bedfordshire village of Langford, where Whishaw grew up with his twin brother James and their parents, could be black-and-white in outlook. "There was definitely a keeping-up-appearances thing going on." He was a timid young man with many unanswered questions about himself, confused about his sexuality as well as the gender norms he seemed to be expected to conform to. Some refuge was found in drama workshops at a nearby youth theatre. From about 14, he started taking regular train trips to London, mostly to watch plays.

"Total theatre nut. I was about 16, I think, when I saw Mark Ravenhill's [Shopping and Fucking](#). I remember how much I loved *arriving* in London. I could feel there was another life here, another way of living. Answers. Experiences. A different community of people." His mum Linda, who

worked in retail, and his dad Jose, who worked in IT, were not artistically inclined, but they supported their son's decision when he said he wanted to audition for drama schools in the capital. He left home at 18 when he got into Rada and moved into student digs in the north of the city. Whishaw recalls coming back to Langford for weekend visits, "and I couldn't wait to leave again. I remember driving back on Sundays with a friend and feeling London encroaching, surrounding me – this incredible feeling of potential and possibility."



'I'm no good at interviews.' Photograph: Elliott Morgan/The Guardian.
[Cardigan](#) and [trousers](#), hermes.com. Shoes, [Stefan Cooke](#). Jewellery throughout: Whishaw's own

As a fresh new drama grad in 2003, he raced out on an implausibly blazing start to his acting career. He was in the original cast of His Dark Materials at the National, then almost right away (ludicrous, best-case-scenario stuff) [he got to play Hamlet](#) in a production by Trevor Nunn at the Old Vic. Critics immediately ranked him alongside the greats. Nunn and his team let Whishaw share three of the week's nine performances with an understudy, to lessen the load on such a newbie: he was just 23. In his personal life, Whishaw remained a confused, scared and overwrought young man. It came naturally to him to portray a confused, scared and overwrought Danish

prince on the London stage. “I do remember feeling like I knew what I was doing in that one,” he says.

Screen work came plentifully in those early years, too. At the same time as playing Hamlet, he was filming a supporting role for Chris Morris and Charlie Brooker on the comedy series *Nathan Barley*. (Whishaw played the much-bullied office receptionist, Pingu.) The German director Tom Tykwer came to see him at the Old Vic and cast him as the lead in his 2006 adaptation of Patrick Süskind’s novel *Perfume*. In 2008 he was the rake, Sebastian, in Julian Jarrold’s big-screen *Brideshead Revisited*. He toured the world to film and promote these films and whenever he returned to his home in London, he remembers, he felt as excited as he’d done as a Langford teenager, riding in on that southbound train.

Even so, despite the stimulation of the city and its massive human and cultural diversity, he had not yet finished reckoning with who he was. “I’m fascinated, now, by the masculine and feminine energies we carry around within ourselves,” he says. “But for years I felt I had to deny something. Because that ‘something’ was perceived as weak by the world I grew up in. Even when that ‘something’ felt quite good to me.”

He didn’t feel comfortable coming out as gay to his family and friends until he was about 26 or 27, he says. “I remember sexuality weighing on me [before then]. That was really unresolved for me.” In 2008, while starring as John Keats in Jane Campion’s biopic [Bright Star](#), Whishaw began a relationship with the film’s Australian composer, Mark Bradshaw. They married in a civil ceremony in 2012, though it took another year before Whishaw made any sort of public statement confirming this (and then in a terse few sentences that were issued through a publicist). He has never liked to talk about Bradshaw in interviews. Today, when I ask what he’s learned about himself during a decade of marriage, he stares at the ground for five, six, seven seconds before answering: “Um. Lots of things.”

Am I crazy? If a character is too likable, I’m slightly repelled by them. I don’t think it’s life, being likable

Another five, six, seven seconds. “I suppose I don’t feel like I’ve got to a sort of plateau of serenity, or any sort of marvellous equanimity, about everything. I don’t feel I’ve got *there* yet.” He ponders some more, then says: “I wonder if having children does something towards that? I think it does. I see it in my brother James. I see that if you have to think about something other than yourself, that’s extremely powerful and it changes a person. I don’t have that experience.” He laughs. “I’m still very self-absorbed. And that’s OK, I suppose.”

What social life he has beyond acting, he keeps pretty private, too. No Twitter, no Instagram. Today, over a T-shirt that in its bright blue swirls gestures to one of David Hockney’s swimming pools, Whishaw wears a gold necklace inlaid with dark stones, made by a friend of his, a jewellery designer. When I ask what sort of people he likes to surround himself with, as friends, he says: “Direct people. I dig direct people. It’s really exhilarating to me when people don’t pussyfoot around or hide who they are through timidity or politeness.”

I ask Whishaw about his coming out – whether he always knew who he was on the inside and felt too timid or intimidated to present himself in a truthful way to the world, or whether the uncertainty he has described was as much internal as external. “Oh, internal and external, both, yeah,” he says. “I don’t know why it took me so long. But it did.”

Ben Whishaw in This Is Going to Hurt

Whishaw frowns at his cup of tea. In *This Is Going to Hurt*, he plays a hospital doctor who is gay and whose experience of coming out to others is a protracted thing that creates continuing ripple effects through his adult life. “I think it’s really interesting what happens to you if you grow up thinking there’s something wrong with you because you’re attracted to a certain thing,” he says. “That takes a lot of time and understanding to get over. And understanding doesn’t just arrive because you’ve been explicit and open to other people.”

He asks if he’s making any sense (of course he is), then adds: “The equating of homosexuality with weakness – it’s taken a long time for me to

understand there's no reason why it should be anything of the sort. Honestly? I feel like I'm only starting to conquer that now.”

While working on *This Is Going to Hurt*, which is set in London in 2006, Whishaw had to remind himself how much less forgiving people could be of demonstrations of affection between same-sex couples as recently as 15 years ago. Things are far from perfect in 2022, Whishaw carefully qualifies. “But I definitely remember feeling, for me at least, that it was much less easy to be tactile with a gay partner then. It’s still amazing to me that a display of affection between two men could be so distressing that someone would throw things, or tell me to ‘find a fucking room’.”

I ask how those experiences made him feel at the time. Scared? Angry?



‘I’m still very self-absorbed. And that’s OK, I suppose.’ Photograph: Elliott Morgan/The Guardian. Cardigan by Marni, from [matchesfashion.com](https://www.matchesfashion.com). Shirt, [basicrights.com](https://www.basicrights.com)

“Sometimes it could be scary. But I don’t think I remember being angry. I guess I have the basic perception that if you have a problem with gay people showing each other affection, it’s because something around that issue is unresolved within yourself.”

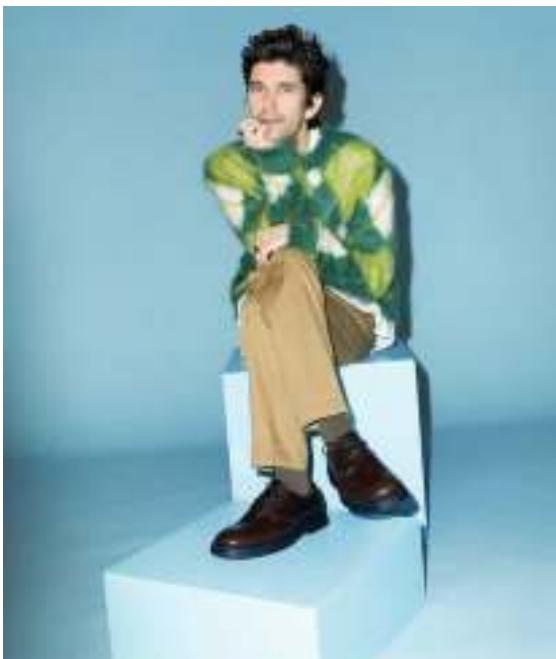
Typical that Whishaw should find ambiguity of motive even in the dickhead behaviour of some half-forgotten bully throwing rubbish at him 15 years ago. Ambiguity has always stimulated and excited him, he says. “Contradictory things. Things that don’t quite add up. Oddness. Kinks.” Certainly it’s in his most ambiguous roles that he has done his best screen work. Playing Liberal politician Jeremy Thorpe’s lover, Norman Scott, in *A Very English Scandal*, Whishaw somehow positioned himself as the villain of the piece as well as its desperate victim, drawing out the audience’s sympathy and disdain in alternating measures. The quality of that performance was confirmed by a rare hat-trick of awards – Emmy, Globe, Bafta – in 2019.

I would suggest Whishaw even managed to invest his computer-animated *Paddington* (a contemporary interpretation of Michael Bond’s character that he voiced in two movies in 2014 and 2017) with hints of anarchic knowing. It was as though, in Whishaw’s hands, this clumsy domestic bear was exasperating to his adopted family, the Browns, as much on purpose as by accident – perhaps driven by a sort of manic compulsion to create chaos and mess. “If a character is one thing, as opposed to many things, I’m not interested,” Whishaw explains.

Sign up to our Inside Saturday newsletter for an exclusive behind-the-scenes look at the making of the magazine’s biggest features, as well as a curated list of our weekly highlights.

This said, it’s a surprise to me that he should ever have signed on to appear as a slightly one-note supporting player in the [James Bond](#) series. Whishaw had crossed paths with Daniel Craig in a series of early movies, 1999’s *The Trench* and 2004’s *Enduring Love* and *Layer Cake*. A few films into Craig’s run as Bond, Whishaw joined the extended 007 cast as its youthful and geeky weapons inventor, Q, adopted this time by a family that was much less tolerant of chaos and mess. Craig and Whishaw shared a pleasurable chemistry, as far as their scenes together in 2012’s *Skyfall* and 2015’s *Spectre* went. But by the time of last year’s *No Time to Die*, Whishaw had settled into the background, a space peopled by seriously good British actors (him, Naomie Harris, Ralph Fiennes, Rory Kinnear) who were kept subordinate to the scarred baddies, the expensive watches, the endless car chases and so on.

Happily, there have been lots of edgier, more three-dimensional roles that have overlapped with his Bond years. Your skin crawled watching Whishaw as the toadying Uriah Heep in Armando Iannucci's David Copperfield in 2019. He was hypnotic as a security officer going through a breakdown in the 2020 independent movie Surge. Between lockdowns he filmed This Is Going to Hurt, plainly enjoying himself as an over-confident junior doctor who patrols the obstetrics and gynaecology ward of a London hospital. Or the "brats and twats" ward, as Whishaw's character calls it in the first 30 seconds of the show. Punchy!



'Bond is a very big machine.' Photograph: Elliott Morgan/The Guardian.
Jumper by Marni, from [matchesfashion.com](#). Shirt, [ssdaley.com](#). Trousers by Isabel Marant, from [mytheresa.com](#). Socks, [falke.com](#). Shoes, [vagabond.com](#)

He had wanted to spend time on a real ward, to research the specifics of the job – “To *feel* it – but Covid put a stop to that. “We couldn’t go in.” There were doctors on set to consult, though, and he had Kay’s source book to turn to. In the coming dramatisation, as in the book, the narrator is a medic who always seems to know what he’s doing – but only seems to. “I would have been curious to see that contradiction play out in real life,” Whishaw says. “How doctors are when they’re chatting to colleagues, and how they are when talking to patients. They’re actors in a sense.”

He stops what he's saying to ask: "Did you find the character too unlikable, by the way?"

The opening episodes of the show have just been sent to critics and other interested parties. Whishaw has started to get feedback and he says he was surprised to be asked why the audience should care for a character who was so difficult to like. "Which was so interesting to me because ... am I crazy? I don't need characters to be likable. If someone is too likable, I'm slightly repelled by them. I don't think it's *life*, being likable. It serves no one to depict life that's likable in art."

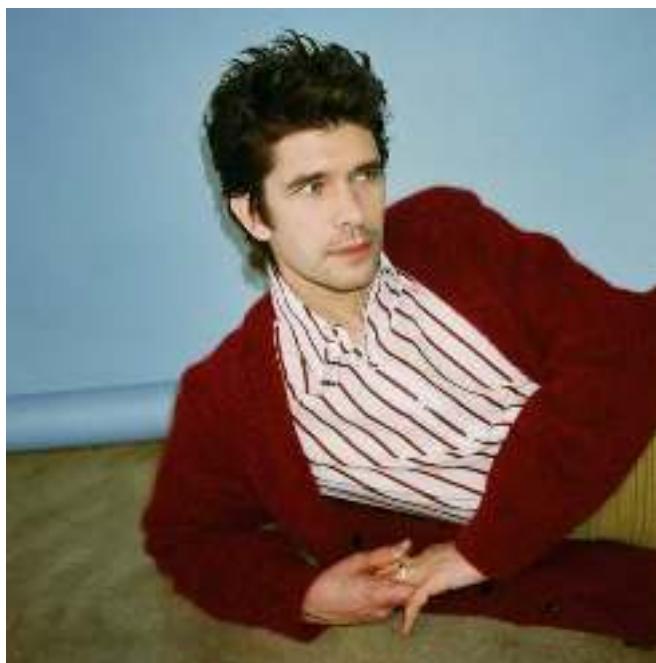
Inside our meeting room, the table is now strewn with biscuit crumbs. Two cups of tea are down to their dregs. Outside, the production office goes about its business. A young staffer has been given one of those unenviable, near-impossible research tasks, telephoning around meteorologists and weather agencies, trying to get an answer as to where in the British Isles it will *definitely* snow at some distant date in 2023. Nearby, a publicist checks her emails and notices that the Bafta film awards [longlist](#) has just been published. There are lots of nominations for the cast and crew of No Time to Die, though, alas, none for Whishaw. When the actor is told this, he doesn't blink or register any response. He's fine.

When the night of the Bond premiere came around, last September, after multiple launch delays due to Covid, Whishaw didn't want to go. His brother persuaded him into the taxi. "James said, 'Don't be stupid, the whole family's been looking forward to this, you have to.'" He and his twin have always been different characters, James bold and forthright where Ben is hesitant and shy. So he went to the premiere. He walked the red carpet. He saw to it that his family got to their seats. *Then* he fled. It meant Whishaw was not around to watch the scene where his character, Q, makes a passing reference to dating a man. In a thin and fleeting way, this was a moment of cinematic history. The first acknowledgment that a main character in James Bond's universe might be anything other than straight.

We can end up polarised when we don't need to. Have a discussion!
There can be disagreement! Different points of view!

When I saw the film, I assumed this nudge about Q's dating preferences must be leading us somewhere in narrative terms. Perhaps the male villain, played by Rami Malek, would turn out to be Q's date, adding an interesting wrinkle to the story of MI5's perennial efforts to overcome evil. Or would the producers take this opportunity to chide or tease themselves for never once admitting the existence of an LGBTQ+ community in the 24 Bond films that preceded No Time to Die? In fact, the singular reference to Q's male date (it amounted to a pronoun) was the start and end of it.

I mention to Whishaw my mixed feelings about this and he asks: "What were they? I'm curious to know." He promises he won't be offended. He can recall only one positive text message he got about the scene, sent by Russell T Davies, who claimed he thought it was cool that Q had a boyfriend. "Otherwise, no one has given me any feedback. So I'm really interested in these questions. And I'm very happy to admit maybe some things were not great about that [creative] decision."



Photograph: Elliott Morgan/The Guardian, assisted by Carlos Duro. Styling: Helen Seamons, assisted by Peter Bevan and Roz Donoghue. Set styling: Hannah at Propped Up. Hair: Jody Taylor at Leftside Creative using Babyliss. Grooming: Nathalie Eleni using Decorté. Cardigan, shirt and trousers by Erdem, from mytheresa.com

I lay out my own subjective response as honestly as I can. That, on the one hand, it was a relief to see some diversity of representation in this particular film franchise, which can be so creakily conservative in its mores. On the other hand, in handling the matter so timidly, in such glancing and underdeveloped fashion (Whishaw's line could be easily scissored out of the movie on its release in less liberal territories), it created the impression of a creative decision taken grudgingly or embarrassedly – a studio with a gun to its head.

Whishaw raises his eyebrows. He says: “I suppose I don’t feel it was forced upon the studio. That was not my impression of how this came about. I think it came from a good place.”

He shifts in his seat, recrossing the limbs, drumming his fingers on his kneecap. He admits that he had similar concerns when the idea was first explained to him, during a one-on-one meeting with Barbara Broccoli, years ago. Later he was shown a partial script. “And I think I remember feeling something like what you’ve just described. I think I thought, ‘Are we doing this, and then doing nothing with it?’ I remember, perhaps, feeling that was unsatisfying.

“For whatever reason, I didn’t pick it apart with anybody on the film,” Whishaw continues. “Maybe on another kind of project I would have done? But it’s a very big machine. I thought a lot about whether I should question it. Finally I didn’t. I accepted this was what was written. And I said the lines. And it is what it is.”

Before our time together winds down, I ask him about a more interesting, certainly more complicated movie he made a few years ago: Tom Hooper’s *The Danish Girl*, in which Eddie Redmayne starred as a trans pioneer, Lili Elbe, and Whishaw took a supporting role as one of Lili’s lovers. Redmayne has long wrestled with his decision to take on this part that might have gone to a trans actor. A few weeks before my meeting with Whishaw, [Redmayne went on record](#) calling it a categoric mistake – that he would not take the role if offered it today.

I ask Whishaw what he makes of the years of contention that have surrounded this movie since its release in 2015. Typically, in his long answer, Whishaw starts off strong; he panics; he ends up somewhere rather modest and lovely and wise.

“I think Eddie did a beautiful job,” he says. “And it’s done. Going forward, there will be other films in which the role is given to someone who lived that experience. Why shouldn’t a role like that be given to someone who knows, inside, what the character is? I’m all for that. I feel the same, sometimes, about straight actors playing gay parts. I’m critical if I don’t think the performance is, from my subjective experience, accurate. I might think, ‘I don’t believe you!’ And even a small moment of hesitation or inauthenticity will block my engagement with the whole story. So I understand these questions.”

He hesitates. “Am I making sense? This is why I clam up! I just feel that we can end up arguing over these black-and-white things and get extremely polarised over these questions when I don’t think it needs to be that way. Have a discussion! There can be disagreement! There can be different points of view!”

Finally, Whishaw gets where he’s going. “As I said before, I love contradictory things. Ambiguity. And if we look, if anyone takes a moment to look inside themselves about how they’re thinking or feeling on a subject, they’ll immediately see all manner of things that are not consistent. So I’m on the side of listening to each other. And I’m on the side of forgiving each other. We have to believe in listening and forgiveness,” he says, “don’t we?”

This Is Going to Hurt starts on 8 February at 9pm on BBC One and BBC iPlayer.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2022/jan/29/ben-whishaw-straight-actors-gay-parts-this-is-going-to-hurt>

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Cost of living crisis](#)[Inflation](#)

From milk to crisps: why the price of basic food items is rising



Inflation on food and drink prices was running at 4.8% in December.
Composite: Guardian Design

Be it meat, coffee or pasta, the costs of UK grocery staples are going up. We look at the cocktail of cause and effect inflating your bills

Hilary Osborne and Sarah Butler

Sat 29 Jan 2022 03.01 EST

Households in the UK are facing a cost of living crisis as the price of essential items goes up and a cut in take-home pay looms in the shape of a national insurance increase.

Across the board, the latest official figures show inflation on food and drink prices was running at 4.8% in December, although that disguises bigger rises in the cost of some essentials.

In the first of a series examining the causes and effects of rising bills, we've looked at why some of the basic items in your supermarket basket now cost more than they did a year ago – and why there could be more pain to come.

Pasta



Photograph: JoKMedia/Getty Images

The cost of pasta has been pushed up by a rise in the price of its key ingredient: durum wheat. About two-thirds of the world's traded durum wheat comes from Canada, and the extreme heat and drought that hit the

[country last year](#) took its toll on crops. Other countries also produced lower harvests than expected, resulting in a scramble for supplies that pushed prices to a 13-year high.

A 500g bag of supermarket own-brand pasta that cost about 55p in late 2020 is now typically 70p – a rise of more than a quarter. According to the website [Italianfood.net](#), planting in Italy was delayed in the autumn as a result of drought followed by heavy rains, which could affect this year's harvest and mean prices stay high. Ultra-cheap penne could be a thing of the past.

Margarine



Photograph: Getty Images/Science Photo Library

The latest official inflation figures showed margarine and similar spreads had risen in price by more than 27% in the year to December. On the shelves at Tesco, for example, a 1kg tub of Stork has gone up from £2.10 to £2.65 since last January. Meanwhile, the official figures showed cooking oils were up by 13%. It's the oil in margarine that has pushed up the price: rapeseed and palm oil have hit [record high prices](#) in recent months.

Bad weather conditions in Canada and Europe are again to blame in part, as is Covid. Rapeseed crops were hit by drought and high temperatures, while Malaysia, a big producer of palm oil, imposed restrictions on foreign workers and on the number of people at work in the industry in an attempt to slow infections. Another factor is the rise in the price of crude oil that has boosted demand for the oil crops for biodiesel.

Milk



Photograph: Nick Moore/Alamy

At farm level there has been a 24% increase in the cost of producing milk since January 2020, says John Allen, a managing partner at Kite Consulting. “That’s a massive rise, and the biggest since 2007-2008 when we had a spike in commodities.”

Probably the biggest factor is the cost of feeding cattle, he says, which has been driven up in part by the cost of fertiliser which, in turn, has been driven up by gas prices. Farmers have also faced rising labour costs and machinery prices. “The price of producing a litre of milk has gone up from 28p in January 2020 to 35p this spring,” Allen says. Then the processors face higher costs, with energy and labour prices on the up. As a result, he says, consumers are typically paying 7p-10p more for a litre of milk.

And it's not over. Although only about 10% of milk is traded globally, the price influences what we pay for domestically produced pints. Efforts by governments in countries such as New Zealand and the Netherlands to cut dairy farming for environmental reasons means supply is falling. Demand is rising by 2% a year. That puts upwards pressure on prices. "We've got rising demand and we've got a fixed supply," says Allen. "We think this spring there will be further increases. It wouldn't be unrealistic to expect 20% rises – we're in for significant inflation in dairy."

Sausages



Photograph: Getty Images/iStockphoto

An increase in the cost of processing meat and moving it around is leading to higher supermarket shelf costs for sausages, says Sarah Baker, an economic strategist at the Agriculture & Horticulture Development Board.

"Pork farmers aren't getting good prices," she says. "Processors are paying more for labour, there are absences because of Covid, and then there's the rising cost of transport, with the shortage of HGV drivers and rising fuel costs."

Baker says abattoirs have struggled to replace skilled EU workers who worked as butchers and packers but have left the UK as a result of [Brexit](#).

Beef prices have been pushed up by some of the same issues, and also by demand. Throughout the pandemic, demand for products such as mince has remained high as people have cooked at home instead of eating out. “The key drivers [for inflation] are your input costs – feed and fertiliser – and labour and transport. Then you have the EU aftershock – the loss of very skilled labour. And then there’s Covid.”

Coffee



Photograph: LoudTrombone/Alamy

That morning caffeine hit will cost you more as long-term issues around climate change combine with short-term problems caused by the pandemic. The wholesale price of Arabica coffee, used in ground coffees, surged 70% last year while Robusta, more commonly used in instant, jumped 60%, according to analysts at Rabobank. This is after one of the biggest producers, Brazil, suffered from a mix of droughts and the worst frost in over two decades.

The price of coffee has also been forced up by problems in global shipping. The cost of shipping a container soared 240% last year while concerns about securing deliveries prompted some buyers to stockpile. Brands tried to hold back those costs but they are now filtering through to the shelves. Almost 100 different coffee products rose in price in the supermarkets this month, according to Assosia data for The Grocer trade journal. Its survey registered some packets instant coffee rising by as much as a third in price. Others rose by a more modest 4% or 6%.

Crisps



Photograph: Mark Gillow/Getty Images

It's a tough time for salty snack lovers as the price of some of the UK's favourite brands has shot up in the past year. The average price of Pringles, for instance, rose by 10.3%, Sensations were up by 8.8%, and Quavers up 8.5% in September last year, according to The Grocer. More recently, its first weekly grocery basket survey of 2022 showed a six-pack of Walkers crisps had gone up by 6% to £1.53.

Prices are being pushed up by a host of factors, ranging from increases in oil prices and energy costs to the ubiquitous HGV driver shortages that have raised the price of distribution. The cost of producing potatoes is also on the

rise, with every aspect, from labour, transport and fertiliser costs, up by more than 10%. There have also been specific problems linked to Brexit. There is a still unresolved issue on the trade in seed potatoes, which hits the trade in the export to Europe and the import of European seeds.

Toilet roll



Photograph: Getty Images

The rising costs of paper pulp, transport and energy are all being absorbed by buyers of toilet roll and nappies. In recent weeks, manufacturers have spoken about the impact of higher input costs, and talked of plans to pass them on to retailers and consumers.

Accrol, which makes toilet roll for shops including Tesco, Aldi and Morrisons, said this month it would have to put up its prices. Last week, delivering its latest set of accounts, its chief executive, Gareth Jenkins, outlined the problems: “Tissue pricing has reached unprecedented levels, driven by escalating energy costs (rising as much as 500% for certain suppliers) and global sea freight charges, combined with increased UK transport costs, resulting from HGV driver shortages.”

This week Essity, which makes the Cushelle and Velvet brands, said it would be putting up prices again this year. Wood pulp prices have been driven up by shipping delays as well as changes in consumer behaviour that have boosted sales of paper products at home and demand for cardboard to pack home deliveries.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/jan/29/from-milk-to-crisps-why-the-price-of-basic-food-items-is-rising>

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

The Q&ATelevision & radio

Interview

Big Narstie: ‘Describe myself in three words? Electrifying, orgasmic and charismatic’

Rosanna Greenstreet

The British rapper on preferring dogs to people, his phobia of kissing and his crush on Debbie McGee



The dogfather ... rapper Big Narstie. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

Sat 29 Jan 2022 04.30 EST

Born in south London, Big Narstie, 36, was a rapper with N Double A and later went solo. His music includes the hit When the Bassline Drops, a 2015 collaboration with Craig David, and his 2018 album BDL Bipolar which

features Ed Sheeran. He has a Bafta-winning chatshow on Channel 4, The Big Narstie Show, which he presents with Mo Gilligan. Big Narstie's Narstie Night Out is on BBC Sounds, with new episodes on Radio 1Xtra every Sunday. He lives in Essex and has two children.

Sign up to our Inside Saturday newsletter for an exclusive behind-the-scenes look at the making of the magazine's biggest features, as well as a curated list of our weekly highlights

What is your greatest fear?

Leaving my children destitute.

Which living person do you most admire and why?

Ed Sheeran, a little ginger boy from the farmlands in Suffolk who ran away to London, slept on the streets and became the biggest musician in the world.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

My stubbornness.

What is the trait you most deplore in others?

I don't really like people, I prefer dogs.

What was your most embarrassing moment?

When I was around 10 or 11, I went swimming and someone stole all my clothes. I had to go home in my Speedos, down Brixton high road, with my cousin laughing all the way.

Aside from a property, what's the most expensive thing you've bought?

Passion projects. I built the world's first CBD steam room, opened the first Jamaican restaurant in Tenerife, I'm about to open a bar. Because I come from poverty, I want to make sure my children have a better start than I did.

Describe yourself in three words

Electrifying, orgasmic, charismatic.

What makes you unhappy?

Boris Johnson.

What do you most dislike about your appearance?

Nothing, I'm fucking sexy.

If you could bring something extinct back to life, what would you choose?

Winston Churchill, to sort this country right out. I think he should come right out of the grave and punch Boris on the jaw. Old school.

What is your most unappealing habit?

Telling the truth.

What scares you about getting older?

Nothing.

Who is your celebrity crush?

Debbie McGee – she is buff for 63!

What is the worst thing anyone's ever said to you?

We'd be here all day.

What does love feel like?

It isn't supposed to hurt, I know that.

What was the best kiss of your life?

I don't like to kiss, I've got a phobia. I am destined for loneliness.

What did you dream about last night?

Erotic sex.

What is the worst job you've done?

When I first got excluded from school at 15, my dad gave me experience as a roofer. That's when I came to realise I'm scared of heights.

When did you last cry, and why?

Yesterday – I'm bipolar.

How often do you have sex?

As much as I can.

What keeps you awake at night?
Documentaries, my dog and Pornhub.

How would you like to be remembered?
As an honest person who tried to help where he could. Nothing fancy.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?
Don't put anything past anyone.

What happens when we die?
HMP Satan or Costa del Heaven.

Tell us a secret
I've got crazy ambitions of making a school in central London.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/jan/29/big-narstie-describe-myself-in-three-words-electrifying-orgasmic-and-charismatic>

2022.01.29 - Coronavirus

- [Live Lung abnormalities in long Covid patients; 36 new Winter Olympics cases](#)
- ['People want to put Covid behind them' Pubs hopeful as drinkers return](#)
- [NHS Group of medics launch legal bid against compulsory jabs](#)
- [Diego Verdaguer, Popular Mexican-Argentinian singer, dies from Covid](#)

[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Covid live: France reports 332,398 new cases; some UK schools reintroduce mask wearing in classrooms – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/jan/29/covid-live-lung-abnormalities-long-covid-winter-olympics-partygate>

Hospitality industry

‘People want to put Covid behind them’: UK pubs hopeful as drinkers return

Fuller’s chief thinks Monday will be ‘trigger point’ for revival as plan B eases and Dry January ends



Ye Olde Mitre pub manager Judith Norman. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

[Rob Davies](#)

[@ByRobDavies](#)

Fri 28 Jan 2022 11.09 EST

In its nearly 500-year history, Ye Olde Mitre in Holborn has served beer under 21 monarchs, survived the English civil war and emerged unscathed from the Great Fire of [London](#).

But few events have affected the pubs trade quite so profoundly as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Lockdowns choked off trade for months at a time. Even once venues reopened, social distancing restrictions and work-from-home guidance left city centres deserted and [ruined the key Christmas period](#).

“We’re a real ale house so people come from far and wide for our beers: regulars, office workers and tourists,” said Judith Norman, the historic pub’s landlady.

“Our regulars tried to support us through the pandemic but with working from home we were a lot quieter than normal.”

At Fuller’s, the pub chain that owns Ye Olde Mitre, trade was down by as much as 70% at some of the city centre venues that rely heavily on after-work drinkers. Some had to shut their doors temporarily.

Now though, as plan B restrictions in England are eased, hope is returning at Ye Olde Mitre and elsewhere. Familiar faces are gradually resurfacing, dropping in for a pint after the odd office day here and there.

“They’re easing themselves back in and we’re hoping they’ll return full time next week,” Norman said.

The Fuller’s chief executive, Simon Emeny, thinks this weekend is building to a Monday “trigger point” for revival, with easing of plan B coinciding with the period just after payday and the end of Dry January, which [came at the worst possible time](#).

“I detect a growing desire for people to put Covid behind them and start behaving as they used to,” he said.

“You’ll see an escalation next week and I suspect that normality will build back faster and stronger than it did in the autumn.”



The Revolution bar chain said events and parties booked for December are being rescheduled. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

Bookings have been strong, he said, echoing a recent [statement from the nationwide bar chain Revolution](#), which said events and parties booked for December are being rescheduled.

“I feel really excited about February and beyond,” Emeny said.

“The first step is to get back to where we were in October, then 2019 levels and we’ll see where it goes from there.”

The early signs are encouraging.

In December, with Omicron concern at its peak, pub sales were 12% lower than pre-pandemic levels, according to industry analysts CGA. The decline was an even more sobering 23% within the M25, with London particularly hard hit by work-from-home guidance.

But by the third week of January, the deficit had eased to 11%.



The Diageo chief executive, Ivan Menezes said consumers were waiting to get outside the home to socialise as restrictions ease. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Diageo, which makes Guinness and Johnnie Walker, has seen the same patterns in the more than 180 countries where it stocks the bar.

“What we see around the world is that as restrictions ease consumers are really waiting to get outside the home to socialise,” the Diageo chief executive, Ivan Menezes, said. The company is expecting trade to reach up to 90% of pre-Covid levels imminently.

Help is also at hand from Wales, where nightclubs have been allowed to reopen from Friday and social distancing rules have been relaxed.

But most leading lights of the hospitality industry are cautious, particularly given how much debt many are nursing as a lasting legacy of the pandemic.

Kate Nicholls, the chief executive of the trade body UKHospitality, warned the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, not to be complacent about the health of the sector.

“The hope is that the return to eating and drinking out will happen quicker than in previous lockdowns, when it took six to eight weeks for recovery to

come through.

Sign up to the daily Business Today email or follow Guardian Business on Twitter at @BusinessDesk

“But that shows it’s going to be a long haul, not an immediate bounce back.”

The best thing the government could do, she says, is to defer plans, scheduled for March, to bring the rate of VAT on hospitality from its temporary rate of 12.5% back to 20%.

The rise, she said, would “make a bad situation worse”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/jan/28/people-want-to-put-covid-behind-them-uk-pubs-hopeful-as-drinkers-return>

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

NHS

Group of NHS medics launch legal bid against compulsory Covid jabs

Group includes intensive care doctor who told Sajid Javid he did not agree with policy in England

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



All NHS staff in England who have direct contact with patients are required to get two Covid-19 vaccinations by 1 April or risk losing their jobs.
Photograph: Finnbarr Webster/Getty Images

[Sarah Marsh](#)

[@sloumarsh](#)

Fri 28 Jan 2022 12.41 EST

An intensive care doctor who challenged the health secretary, [Sajid Javid](#), over compulsory Covid vaccines for NHS staff has launched a legal bid against the government to end the policy.

Dr Steve James, who is unvaccinated and works as an anaesthetist at King's College hospital, is seeking a judicial review with seven other medical professionals. It would look at the lawfulness of the decision to require health professionals to be jabbed.

The government directive requires all [NHS](#) staff in England who have direct contact with patients to get two Covid-19 vaccinations by 1 April or risk losing their jobs. However, critics have argued that imposing a deadline could lead to staff shortages.

James and other NHS staff, represented by the legal firm Jackson Osborne, have submitted a document to the high court calling for a review. The document argues the decision to impose the mandate "is itself unlawful, irrational, and disproportionate".

James became known to the public after [he confronted Javid](#) as the minister visited King's College hospital in south London.

In an encounter captured by Sky News, Javid had asked doctors and nurses what they thought about government plans to require vaccination for all NHS staff. After a brief silence, the consultant anaesthetist, who has been working throughout the pandemic, said: "I'm not happy about that."

James told Javid: "I've had Covid at some point, I've got antibodies, and I've been working on Covid ITUs since the beginning; I have not had a vaccination, I do not want to have a vaccination. The vaccine is reducing transmission only for about eight weeks with Delta. With Omicron it's probably less. And for that I would be dismissed if I don't have a vaccine? The science isn't strong enough."

"That's your view," Javid replied. Turning to a group of nurses, he asked: "And your views?" However, they did not respond. Turning back to James, Javid continued: "I respect that but there are also many different views."

Javid added: “I understand that but obviously we have to weigh all that up for both health and social care, and there will always be a debate about it.”

James replied: “Maybe there is an opportunity to reconsider with Omicron and the changing picture, or at least the nuance that will allow doctors who have had antibody exposure, who’ve got antibodies, who haven’t had the vaccination, to not have it, because the protection I’ve got is probably equivalent to someone who is vaccinated.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jan/28/group-of-nhs-medics-launch-legal-bid-against-compulsory-covid-jabs-england>

Music

Diego Verdaguer, popular Mexican-Argentinian singer, dies of Covid

Star who racked up almost 50m sales dies of coronavirus complications at age of 70



Diego Verdaguer on stage in Mexico City in 2019. Photograph: Joselin Mota/EPA

Associated Press in Mexico City

Sat 29 Jan 2022 04.20 EST

The Mexican-Argentinian singer-songwriter Diego Verdaguer, whose romantic hits such as Corazón de Papel, Yo te Amo and Volveré sold almost 50m copies, has died of complications from Covid-19, his family said. He was 70.

Verdaguer died on Thursday afternoon in Los Angeles, his daughter Ana Victoria said in a statement released by Diam Music, his record company.

“With absolute sadness, I regret to inform his fans and friends that today my father left his beautiful body to continue his path and creativity in another form of eternal life,” his daughter said. “My mother, I and the whole family are immersed in this pain, so we appreciate your understanding in these difficult times.”

The statement was also published on the Twitter account of Verdaguer’s wife, the singer Amanda Miguel, with the hashtag #restinpeace.

Verdaguer dedicated his last blogpost to his wife. “I will never tire of dedicating this song to you. You are the thief who stole my heart!” he wrote, referring to his song Thief.

Verdaguer contracted Covid in December and was admitted to hospital. His publicist in [Mexico](#), Claudia López Ibarra, said he had been vaccinated against the virus. “Yes, he was vaccinated … but the virus attacked him in the US when the Delta variant was present,” she said.

She said Verdaguer travelled frequently to the US, especially after the birth of Lucca, the eldest son of Ana Victoria, who lives in LA.

Verdaguer was born in Buenos Aires on 26 April 1951 and debuted as a soloist at the age of 17 with the single Lejos del Amor.

Since 1980 he had lived in Mexico, to which he dedicated his album Mexicano hasta las Pampas, which was nominated for two Latin Grammys, and its sequel, Mexicano hasta las Pampas 2, as well as the live album Mexicanísimos.

“I can tell you, I am more Mexican than anything. I love Mexico, I love what Mexico has meant in my life, I love the opportunities that Mexico has given me,” he said in an interview in 2019.

Verdaguer met Miguel when she was 18 and he was 24. Ana Victoria was born in 1983. “Amanda Miguel has been my inspiration since I met her,” he

said. “I really appreciate everything we’ve done together as a couple, as artists, as individuals.”

Verdaguer made the leap to streaming in recent years and accumulated more than 2 million followers on social networks. “You have to evolve spiritually and understand the meaning of life,” he said.

“We came to live a divine experience, we came to learn, we came to give ourselves, we came to perfect ourselves, we came to give, we came to help, because giving and helping one feels better.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/jan/29/diego-verdaguer-popular-mexican-argentinian-singer-dies-from-covid>

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

2022.01.29 - Opinion

- [We don't need Sue Gray's report to tell us that Britain is run by a liar](#)
- [My Spotify playlists tell the story of my life – can I really quit now?](#)
- [The Joe Rogan v Neil Young furore reveals Spotify's new priority: naked capitalism](#)
- [Why it's the right time to lift plan B restrictions in England](#)

Opinion[Boris Johnson](#)

We don't need Sue Gray's report to tell us that Britain is run by a liar

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



The Met police delay of the partygate report will only deepen the public feeling that those in authority cannot be trusted



‘Even Boris Johnson’s admirers concede his proven record of mendacity. They remember the fictional £350m on the side of the bus.’ Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Fri 28 Jan 2022 12.17 EST

It’s beginning to look a lot like a cover-up. Is that too cynical? Maybe we should just congratulate Boris Johnson on a wonderful piece of luck, a convenient turn of events just in the nick of time. Having seen nothing to investigate in the partygate affair until this week, the Metropolitan police swooped down at the very moment Sue Gray was ready to press print on her long-awaited report – one that threatened to terminate Johnson’s premiership – and stayed her hand.

The Met told Gray she can say what she likes about parties in Downing Street, so long as she says nothing about parties in Downing Street. Or as it put it: “For the events the Met is investigating, we asked for minimal reference to be made in the Cabinet Office report.” It stresses that it “did not ask for any limitations on other events in the report”, which is a bit like saying: “On all the stuff that no one cares about, go ahead: knock yourself out.” Indeed, with this move, the Met have all but ensured that whatever remains of Gray’s report will, if ever published, be waved away by Johnson

and his defenders: if Gray was allowed to publish it, they'll say, it can't be that serious.

That is not where the bar should be set. The issue is not only whether Johnson was guilty of criminal violations of Covid regulations, but whether he broke a lockdown that he imposed on everyone else and whether he misled parliament. Those judgments cannot be outsourced to a police force, especially one led by a commissioner who has good reason to feel she only remains in her post [thanks to the mercy of the prime minister](#). Those are decisions that should be made by politicians and voters, with access to all the facts.

That prospect is receding. Gray now faces a choice: either publish a gutted version of her report, which Downing Street will falsely spin as having cleared the prime minister, or delay it until the police have completed their work. It's all too plausible to imagine a Met statement, weeks or months from now, announcing that, having conducted its investigation, it has concluded that no further action need be taken. Team Johnson will spin that too as exoneration. And whatever facts Gray discovered will remain in the drafts folder of her laptop.

What would be the effect of that? I don't mean in narrow political terms, though it would clearly boost Johnson's prospects of retaining his job. I mean the consequences for our public and collective life. What does it do to a country to be led by a documented liar?

That's a question we can ask with or without the Gray report. We can put aside the entire partygate affair and the question still stands. Even Johnson's admirers concede his proven record of mendacity. They know that he was [sacked twice for lying](#), once by the Times, once by Michael Howard, then his party leader. They remember the [fictional £350m](#) on the side of the bus. They have seen more evidence of his dishonesty this week, when [documents emerged](#) saying Johnson intervened personally to help Pen Farthing get his animals out of Kabul – ahead of desperate Afghans whose help for Britain had put a Taliban target on their backs – despite the prime minister's insistence that he had done no such thing. The pattern is so clear, it cannot be denied. What is that doing to us?

We can see the effect in two countries that are or were led by practised liars. Vladimir Putin is what the moral philosopher Quassim Cassam calls “a strategic liar”: his lies are part of a worked-out strategy, aimed less at convincing the Russian public than confusing it, making it dependent on the strongman in the Kremlin who can present himself as the only source of clarity in a fog of doubt. Donald Trump’s lies, meanwhile, fall into the “pathological” category, a function of a sociopathic personality. The effect in the US is obvious enough: Trump, in office and out of it, has entrenched a situation in which a large chunk of the American population inhabits a realm heedless of truth, evidence and science. The strongest predictor of whether or not an American has taken the Covid vaccine is whether or not they voted for Donald Trump.

Johnson is his own case. The £350m was a strategic lie, advanced to great effect, but many of his lies are casual and opportunistic, the kind of lie someone offers to get themselves out of a tight spot, “the kind of lie”, says Cassam, “that people who have affairs have to tell”. It is a habit Johnson cannot break. He could, for example, have defended his role in the Kabul pet airlift. Instead he denied it. It was his first reflex.

Even casual lies have their effect. The first could be a shift in democratic norms, which change more than you might think. It was once taboo for a chancellor to reveal any of his budget until he had delivered it: in 1947, Hugh Dalton had to resign for breaking that unwritten rule. Now it’s routine for chancellors to give the papers multiple sneak previews of their budgets. The old norm faded. We may well be witnessing another, much more significant shift right now, upending the convention that a minister proven to have misled parliament must resign. If Johnson stays, that norm will come to look as archaic as the one that felled Dalton.

Will the Johnson effect spread beyond Westminster, so that even among regular people the taboo on lying erodes? It’s tempting to laugh that off, to insist that few Britons base their day-to-day behaviour on the conduct of politicians. Besides, the insistence on truth is one norm that society cannot afford to let slip. As Cassam notes: “Human beings are social beings, who need to be able to rely on each other. That requires trust, and trust requires truth-telling.”

But there is a third zone, between parliament and day-to-day life: namely, our public institutions. It's naive to think that they are not affected, or contaminated, by the actions of the man at the top. If Johnson's lies go unpunished, that will surely alter the norms that currently govern, say, senior civil servants. Which prompts a much sharper worry. If the public decides it can no longer trust those in authority, then when the chief medical officer stands up to warn of a new threat to public health, there is no guarantee that anybody will listen.

In the US, they're halfway there. The death threats against Dr Anthony Fauci are so frequent and severe, he now has 24-hour armed security. As trust has declined, it's been replaced by "raw anger and hatred, conspiracy theories to explain the world, the belief that facts and evidence do not matter", says Peter Pomerantsev, a keen student of politicians' lies and author of *This Is Not Propaganda*. That's what can happen when a liar runs the country. In November 2020, Americans got rid of theirs. Ours clings on – and now, it seems, his friends in the Met have helped him live to fight another day.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/28/sue-gray-report-britain-liar-met-police-partygate-report>

OpinionSpotify

My Spotify playlists tell the story of my life – can I really quit now?

[Sarah Ann Harris](#)

The Neil Young and Joe Rogan row may be the final straw for some, but many music lovers like me are in a dilemma



Neil Young, who has had his music taken off Spotify. Photograph: Gary Burden

Sat 29 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

It was September 2009, and I was anxiously waiting to head off to university. My friends had already all left and my small home town in Wales felt even more claustrophobic than before. It was also the month I downloaded a relatively new music streaming service called Spotify. I was immediately in heaven. I'd sneaked in just before they ended a free sign-up offer and so, for precisely zero pounds, I suddenly had access to a musical

library that had previously been unthinkable.

I made a playlist titled, very imaginatively, “September 09”, and added all the songs I was listening to at the time. The soundtrack to my small-town angst? Frank Turner’s [This Town Ain’t Big Enough for the One of Me](#) and Bright Eyes’ First Day of My Life. I soon made it to university and, even now, listening to December 09 (Emmy the Great, LCD Soundsystem, Frightened Rabbit) gives me an almost painful pang of nostalgia for evenings in my grotty but much-loved student bedroom, with the new friends I’d made.

If I’d been born a few years earlier, I’m sure I’d have been painstakingly making mixtapes (I still remember my excitement at about the age of 10 when we got a CD burner and I could produce my own compilation discs), but [Spotify](#) let me carefully curate playlists quickly and easily. Sure, it wasn’t quite as romantic as a custom-made cassette with a hand-drawn cover, but it had its own charms.

Looking back through the playlists, which I’ve kept going to the present day, is like reading a map of my experiences. You can spot heartbreaks, where the playlists are dominated by sad indie music; you can track the recovery, when strong female artists such as Amy Winehouse, [Self Esteem](#) and Julia Jacklin start to dominate. The average BPM definitely rises in 2012 when I started running more, and there’s a brief foray into some dodgy 2000s worship music when I became a Christian in 2015 (I later discovered that there was some less cringey contemporary stuff to be found). More recently, you can see a surge in classical music and film soundtracks from “March 20” onwards, as the pandemic turned my kitchen table into an office and I used music to help me focus.

I adore this musical autobiography, which has endured far longer than any attempt at keeping a diary. But it does tie me to one particular company – and an increasingly controversial one at that. The streaming giant is currently in the news because of Neil Young’s demand that [his music be pulled](#) from the platform in protest against its hosting of Joe Rogan’s podcast, the Joe Rogan Experience, which Young believes spreads vaccine misinformation. (Rogan has a \$100m deal with Spotify for exclusive

streaming rights to his show, and it's listed as the most popular podcast on the platform.) This comes after 270 experts in the US signed an open letter to Spotify [expressing concern](#) about medical misinformation on Rogan's podcast.

Do I like the idea of the £9.99 a month I now pay funding possible misinformation about vaccines during a pandemic? No. And on top of that, services like Spotify are often criticised by artists who point out they can't live off the [royalties they receive](#) from streaming. None of this is great if you care as much about music as I – and so many of us – do.

So what should I do? I'm yet to be convinced that other streaming platforms offer anything that can really compete, and many of the issues with Spotify may still apply to them. There is, of course, the resurgent [popularity of vinyl](#), which is wonderful to see – I myself am the proud owner of a growing collection. But I dread to imagine how much it would cost to replace my playlist collection if I wanted to own physical copies on vinyl (or even CD). Plus, I'm not sure how my gym would feel about me carting them along to accompany me on a workout.

Ultimately, however, it's the collection of playlists I've built since I was 18 that keeps me subscribing, and I imagine there are many other members of Generation Spotify who feel the same. That's why I struggle with the idea of dumping Spotify – in doing so, I'd be burning 13 years of musical diaries, a personal, evocative and immersive account of my whole adult life.

- Sarah Ann Harris is the Guardian's deputy audience editor
-

OpinionSpotify

The Joe Rogan v Neil Young furore reveals Spotify's new priority: naked capitalism

[Eamonn Forde](#)

The streaming service's decision to back the controversial podcast shows it might have lost its way



Joe Rogan, host of The Joe Rogan Experience podcast. Photograph: Syfy/NBCU Photo Bank/NBCUniversal/Getty Images

Fri 28 Jan 2022 09.29 EST

Neil Young this week [issued Spotify](#) with a blunt ultimatum: it's me or Joe Rogan. The Canadian-American musician criticised its exclusive hosting of the Joe Rogan Experience podcast in a letter to his manager and record label published online, which asked his music be removed from the streaming

service. [Spotify chose Rogan](#), removing Young's entire back catalogue.

Young's objections were based on what he saw as "life-threatening Covid misinformation" being pushed by Rogan. This claim was supported in a letter sent to the streaming service earlier this month, [signed by 270 medical and scientific professionals](#) who called for Spotify to stop spreading Rogan's unfounded point of view. Young had the courage of his convictions – and the backing of his long-term label Reprise Records (part of Warner Music Group), because, as he said in a [statement on his website](#), removing his music would mean "losing 60% of my worldwide streaming income in the name of Truth".

The decision from Spotify draws an entirely new battle line for the service when facing down artists. In the past, fights tended to be around commercial issues, with artists arguing the micro-payments it made for streams were unfairly low; this new conflict is remarkable for being entirely ideological. These recent moves feel like a grand betrayal of Spotify's roots in liberal Sweden, where it was founded. This is a company where diversity is applauded, paternity leave is encouraged, the mental wellbeing of staff is deemed paramount and efforts to promote artists from outside of a heterosexual and Caucasian orthodoxy have become part of the raison d'être – such as the [Unlike Any Other initiative](#) around Pride 2020 and the [Frequency campaign](#) in 2021, which was intended to help elevate Black artists.

What is unfolding is a complex ethical and financial conundrum for Daniel Ek, Spotify's co-founder and CEO. Is he happy for Spotify to amplify medical misinformation through, among others, its crown-jewel podcast, a show it paid a [rumoured \\$100m](#) (£75m) to have on an exclusive basis? Or will he have the company tightly police and factcheck what its podcasters say? The rapidly curdling, and inherently Faustian nature of the Rogan deal should not surprise anyone. Rogangate says a tremendous amount about Spotify's new priorities. No longer just a music streaming service, Spotify now regards itself as an audio platform and podcasting as its new centre of gravity. Part of the appeal of podcasts for Spotify is that they represent a different type of listening: rather than an album every two or three years from a favourite artist, there is new content every week, at least. Such

frequency of output reinforces consumer loyalty – and so subscribers – far better than any single artist can, which may be why Spotify is so hesitant to let Rogan go, or even just to curb some of his more extreme opinions. Rogan draws in listeners – with an estimated 11 million for each episode – and he holds them there.

We can date the shift to April 2018, when the company launched its direct listing on the New York stock exchange – and Manhattan, rather than Stockholm, became the company's geographical and cultural epicentre. This was the moment Spotify became more Wall Street, and less Stortorget. Spotify has a history of making bad decisions. There was an ugly and public [war with Taylor Swift](#) in 2014 over its royalty rates. Then there was its bungled "[hate content and hateful conduct](#)" policy in 2018, which was seen to remove a disproportionate amount of content by Black artists. But in those instances, Spotify eventually softened its stance. This tendency to conciliation has collapsed as the company recalibrates its ethical and ideological viewpoints to be much more American: naked capitalism, regardless of the negative consequences, seems now to triumph internally at the company over all.

The problem, though, with not just flirting with, but financially enabling, someone who prides themselves on “saying the unsayable” is that they may go further and wilder with every utterance. It’s not as if Spotify was hoodwinked into giving Rogan a show: he self-produced his podcast since 2009 and the media provider signed him up precisely because the controversy he generates brings in audiences. While it might make sense in terms of its balance sheet, fighting Rogan’s corner could prove to be Spotify’s most reckless, arrogant and hubristic decision yet: the ultimate cost being not its market cap, but its reputation, its listeners’ loyalty and its soul.

- Eamonn Forde is a music business and technology journalist

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

OpinionCoronavirus

Why it's the right time to lift plan B restrictions in England

[Raghbir Ali](#)

Thanks to the vaccines, we no longer need harsh restrictions – but we should still act with caution and consideration



Commuters at Waterloo station, London, after plan B measures were lifted in England, 27 January 2022. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

Fri 28 Jan 2022 10.39 EST

It's been two months since the first cases of Omicron were identified in the UK. In the weeks after it emerged, [modelling scenarios](#) presented to Sage suggested we were facing a situation even worse than last winter, with potentially tens of thousands of hospital admissions and thousands of deaths a day. Thankfully, as we now know, these scenarios did not materialise.

The numbers of admissions and deaths peaked below the level expected in even the best-case scenarios. Pressure on hospitals remained very high, but in most cases, the situation was better than feared. The editor of the Lancet, Richard Horton, this week described scientists' response to Omicron as "[a case study in error](#)". He attributed this to an "over-reliance on mathematical modelling and too little emphasis on the experience of health workers on the frontlines of care", with insufficient attention paid to the views of South African doctors.

"Following the science" in relation to restrictions was always a misnomer, as "the science" was often uncertain, leading to models that inevitably provided a very wide range of scenarios with different levels of restrictions. Many people are now understandably concerned about the potential negative impact of [ending plan B restrictions](#). But again, it is important to look at what's actually happened to see how effective these restrictions have been – and whether they've led to better outcomes.

Plan B restrictions have effectively been in place in Wales and Scotland since July (in England, the government announced the move to plan B on 8 December). A comparison of death rates since 19 July from [ONS data](#) shows that England has actually had the [lowest death rates](#). (It is not possible to directly compare case and hospitalisation rates due to differences in how they are measured, but these are both closely linked to death rates.)

Many have long assumed that more and earlier restrictions lead to better outcomes than voluntary behaviour changes. This assumption is largely based on evidence from the pre-vaccination era, when the countries that locked down quickly against Covid experienced far fewer deaths and hospitalisations. But over the last few months, the real-world evidence no longer appears to support this assumption: now, the main determinant of hospitalisation and death rates is the level of immunity in a population, through both vaccination and natural infection. This is especially the case among older and higher-risk groups. This is why England – where 98% of over 15s [have some immunity to Covid-19](#) – appears to have fared relatively well since July compared with other European countries, despite having fewer restrictions.

Behaviour change and compliance to rules also play a role, of course. There is evidence that household mixing in England rose and fell along with perceptions of risk rather than necessarily because of the rules in place at the time. And we have now seen that it is voluntary behaviour changes over the last few weeks, such as reducing contacts, that has led to the same reduction in admissions and deaths that the models showed would be produced by a return to step 1 of the roadmap.

At the other extreme, lockdown sceptics now say that because lockdowns and other non-pharmaceutical interventions such as social distancing are no longer needed, they were never needed – even though before the vaccine programme, Covid-19 overwhelmed the NHS and the health service was not able to provide all of its services.

Even during this wave, the pressure on the NHS remains very high – particularly due to staff absence – and many of my colleagues on the frontline are physically and mentally exhausted. That is why it's so important for everyone to continue to follow the public health guidance – including wearing masks – even after mandatory restrictions end.

Medical and public health interventions are usually judged by the criteria: do they have a clinically significant benefit? Does that benefit outweigh any harms? And are they the best use of resources – or would spending money on something else produce greater benefits? Of course, during the first wave this evidence was lacking – which is why lockdown measures were justified. Even in the second wave, there was sufficient evidence to show that the benefits of lockdown outweighed the costs – especially with the arrival of vaccines, when lockdowns were not just delaying admissions and deaths but actually preventing them.

Vaccines have since transformed the situation. The cost-benefit equation has changed, and the benefits of lockdown restrictions do not outweigh the harms. It's important to remind ourselves of what we are trying to achieve – not just a reduction in harms from Covid, but also from the measures used to control it. This is best measured by quality-adjusted life years (QALYs), not deaths – a measurement that takes into account disability too, and has been used in the most comprehensive analyses of the impact of Covid and

restrictions. The key is to implement restrictions that have the most favourable cost-benefit and are most acceptable to the public to ensure these benefits are actually realised.

So it makes sense to now focus on interventions that cause the least harm and that people are most likely to comply with. The use of lateral flow tests is one example; so is improved ventilation in schools and workplaces. Of course we must not ignore the needs and concerns of those who are most vulnerable to Covid, including those with long Covid and especially people for whom vaccines don't provide good protection. Fortunately there are things clinically vulnerable patients can do to protect themselves – including wearing well-fitted FFP2 or FFP3 masks, which have been shown in hospitals to greatly reduce the risk of infection. The arrival of antiviral drugs will also provide additional protection from hospital admission and death.

We need to establish the effectiveness of any potentially harmful restrictions before they are brought in again, and ensure their benefits outweigh the harms. Most importantly, although restrictions are ending, Covid is far from over. With our new freedoms we all have the responsibility to continue to protect others and be considerate of those who are more vulnerable to the virus.

- Raghib Ali is a senior clinical research associate at the MRC epidemiology unit at the University of Cambridge

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/28/lift-plan-b-restrictions-england-vaccines-restrictions>

2022.01.29 - Around the world

- ['I didn't know who I was any more': How CIA torture pushed me to the edge of death](#)
- [Ed Pilkington How CIA lied to justify torturing one prisoner after 9/11](#)
- ['Our culture has changed' Young Thais boycott graduation ceremonies](#)
- [Pittsburgh Bridge collapses hours before Biden's infrastructure speech in city](#)

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Guantánamo Bay](#)

‘I didn’t know who I was any more’: how CIA torture pushed me to the edge of death



Abu Zubaydah made several drawings, including this one, to depict the torture he experienced at secret CIA black sites. Photograph: © Abu Zubaydah

Abu Zubaydah has been held by the US without charge for the past 20 years. His own words and images depict the relentless, round-the-clock, prolonged and illegal abuse he has suffered

Abu Zubaydah

Sat 29 Jan 2022 04.30 EST

Abu Zubaydah, the Guantánamo prisoner who has been held by the US without charge for the past 20 years, kept notes of the torture to which he was subjected by the [CIA](#) between his arrest in 2002 and his transfer to Guantánamo four years later. In personal discussions with his attorneys, and in his own writings and drawings from inside Guantánamo, the detainee recalled in harrowing detail the torture techniques applied to him at secret CIA black sites in Thailand, Poland and other countries. In one month alone, August 2002, he was put through the barbaric water torture known as waterboarding 83 times. In his account he referred to the method, a form of controlled drowning, as the “water bed”.

The notes were [first published](#) in How America Tortures by the Center for Policy and Research at Seton Hall Law School where one of Zubaydah’s lawyers Mark Denbeaux is professor emeritus. Here is an edited version of that account of the torture Zubaydah endured, in his own words and drawings.



Abu Zubaydah. Photograph: AP

I found myself chained to a steel bed in a white room. As soon as I started letting myself fall asleep, a small amount of water was thrown at my face which made me startle, as it was cold and took me by surprise. I looked around but there was nobody there.

I suddenly saw a black object carrying a water tank standing behind the bars of the cell. Water was thrown at me again. I said, "Hey, what is wrong with you?" That black object turned out to be a man all dressed in black. His face was covered, his eyes were covered with what look like black diving goggles. I closed my eyes from tiredness, and as soon as I did the guard in black clothes would throw water at me.

I started shivering and the guard returned throwing water at my face as soon as I closed my eyes. I was categorically prohibited from sleeping, even for an instant.

The noise was so loud inside the cell I was almost unable to hear anything else. Two people came in and sat on chairs close to each other. They were holding notepads and pens and they started a round of interrogation. When they realized I was shivering so heavily from the cold I was no longer able to talk they covered my chest with a towel and started questioning me again.

I laughed and said: "First of all, I am not from al-Qaida."

"Don't go there," they said. They repeated that phrase a thousand times before they stopped the torture.

During that time I reached a level of psychological, nervous and physical exhaustion that, if it were not for God's protection, I could officially have been declared psychotic.

The next day they sharply reduced the temperature in the room. They took turns on me with no sleep, no food, no drinking, and total nakedness. I was chained to the bed for three, maybe four days or more. Only once they slightly adjusted my position when I became unable to talk from the pain in my back and the stiffness in my wounded thigh [Zubaydah was shot several times during his capture in 2002].



In this drawing, Zubaydah depicts several torture techniques simultaneously being used on him. He is chained by his limbs, sprayed with powerful water hoses while an air conditioner and fan blow cold air at him, and loud rock music is blaring – all for hours on end. Mark Denbeaux, a lead lawyer for Zubaydah, told the Guardian: 'There is no evidence that [the justice department] gave the go-ahead for multiple techniques to be used at the same time.' Photograph: © Abu Zubaydah

Following the period chained to the bed, they sat me on a plastic chair totally naked and chained me very tight. I would urinate into a special can, but the chains were so tight that many times I found myself urinating all over myself and on the bandages that were wrapped around my wounded left thigh.

Sometimes they would leave me for days on the chair. I was deprived of sleep for a long period. I don't know how long, maybe two or three weeks or more. It felt like an eternity to the point that I found myself falling asleep despite the water being thrown at me by the guard who constantly shook me to keep me awake. I couldn't sleep even for a second.

I got used to the shaking just as I got used to the water being thrown at me, so I was able to sleep for a second. So then they started standing me on my feet to prevent me from sleeping. I found myself during interrogation sessions falling asleep for two or three seconds, and they did their best to stop me by pouring water on me. Sometimes I wouldn't wake up, so they would force me to walk on my wounded leg and I would fall and then they would take me back to the chair and resume the interrogation.

I don't know how long I was chained to the chair. It felt like six weeks but I can't be positive. During that time they started allowing me to sleep a little after I started hallucinating and my words and behavior became all confused.

Half of what was happening to me was the result of a breakdown and the other half was the result of letting myself go. I would refuse to open my eyes not because I wanted to challenge them but because I was hoping I could let myself go into this state of sleepiness. I wanted to sleep for one more beautiful second before they realized I was sleeping. I would sleep for one second, then wake for another second, and then I would sleep again and wake up again. They stood me up. I slept again. They walked me around the cell. I slept while they were dragging me.

Then the doctor came and gave me an injection. He started making signals to them without saying anything as if he was trying to tell them: "He needs to sleep, otherwise he will go crazy."

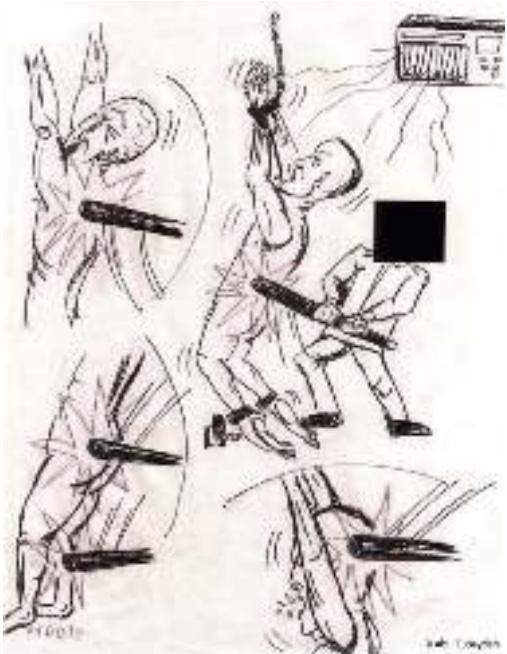
After some time, they replaced the noise device with loud music and singing. I smiled as soon as this happened. I said to myself that maybe this was a good sign. Yet after a day I became confident this was not a good sign but a sign of disaster approaching. The very loud music and the disturbing singing made my ears hurt. The noise device had been loud but monotonous: *Boum! Boum! Boum!* This new music was a collection of tunes: *boum*, then *zen*, then *zzzz*, then *wazzzz*. I felt my brain going up and down, left and right. The singing would end with a loud, long scream. The song would last five to 10 minutes and was played again and again, non-stop to the point that I became afraid for it to end with the screaming. I finally found myself screaming along with it. As soon as the song ended with the long scream, I would scream myself. I would do it unconsciously like someone collapsing. I wanted to plug my ears with my fingers, yet I couldn't as my hands were tied.

The situation lasted for days and I started hallucinating. The interrogations were long and they took turns on me. As soon as two interrogators were done with me after harsh hours of interrogation, two others would come to replace them.

With time they took me down from the chair and tied me to the cell's bars where I could move just enough to fall asleep on the very cold floor. The floor was so cold that I couldn't lie down completely. All I wanted to do was put my back or shoulder on the floor even though it was freezing and very filthy.

I begged them to inform me about prayer times so that I could pray, yet they refused and made fun of me. I said to them: "Do whatever you wish but don't make fun of religious matters like prayer time, my beard and covering my genitals." These are religious matters and they had no right to make fun of them. They would laugh and say: "You have no rights whatsoever and we are entitled to do to you whatever we please so that we can get information from you."

One day a female nurse came in while I was vomiting on the floor. The guards had chained me to a chair so I couldn't cover my genitals. She said: "Why are you naked?" I said: "Ask them."



Here, Zubaydah depicts himself being hit with a baseball bat. ‘It’s important to understand that this was never approved,’ Mark Denbeaux a lead lawyer for Zubaydah, said. ‘Most people believe the justice department would be unlikely to approve a technique that has a man shackled hand and foot and hit with a bat including in the head.’ Photograph: © Abu Zubaydah

Later they gave me very light clothes. I said to myself: “Praise God, I am finally able to cover my genitals.” The interrogators showed up and started a very long and harsh interrogation session during which they screamed at my face: “The good treatment is not going to work with you. We gave you clothes.” The guards then came in and stood me on my feet with my hands held high. They covered my head with a hood. A man came in and started screaming loudly and cutting my clothes. I felt he was cutting my skin.

Standing for long hours on one foot is very hard. I don’t recall how long I stayed in the standing position but I know that I passed out. I remember waking up with my body and head [illegible] to the floor with my hands tied to the upper bars. It felt like they were paralyzed or severed. They were blue or green. The chains left traces of blood.

The guards came in, having noticed the colour of my hands. They rushed in and brought me down to the chair. The interrogators came and interrogation vertigo resumed – the cold, the hunger, the little sleep and the intense

vomiting which was caused by I don't know what, maybe the cold, the noise or the Ensure nutritious liquid that was at times my only food.

Here we go again. The interrogators asked me questions about my knowledge of some operations. I didn't provide them with any information, as I didn't know anything. They gave orders to the guards to tie me up again in the standing position and left me hanging for hours or days, I don't know any more.

[For a period of 47 days between June and August 2002 Zubaydah was kept in isolation and all interrogations were suspended. This was to give CIA chiefs back at headquarters time to lobby the justice department for assurances that their personnel would never be prosecuted for torturing Zubaydah. In July, the then-attorney general approved the use of 10 interrogation techniques, and on 4 August the torture resumed on an almost 24-hour basis.]

They didn't show up at all for one month or more and I didn't see anybody except for the guards who came once a day. I was tied to the metal bed. They would leave a dish of food that consisted of white dry rice with a little amount of string beans and a can of water. I was totally naked except for a towel they threw on my genitals. I was freezing from the intense cold and my nerves were about to break from the constant noise coming from an unseen device. I spent one month in that vertigo of noise and thoughts. I didn't know where I was, and with time I almost didn't know who I was.

After the month passed, I was put back in the hanging position, naked. Then they unchained my hands from the cell bars and chained them to around my legs which kept me permanently in a bowing position. They brutally dragged me to the cement wall. I saw a man wearing black clothes and a military jacket. His face was uncovered. There was anger in his face. He yelled words that I did not understand. Before I could respond he started banging my head and my back against the wall. I felt my back was breaking. He started slapping my face again and again.

He then pointed to a large black wooden box that looked like a casket. He said: "From now on this is going to be your home."

A guy dragged me and brutally shoved me inside the box along with a toilet bucket, a can of water and some Ensure. He yelled: "We will give you another chance, but a short one, to think about whether you are going to talk." He violently closed the door. I heard the sound of the lock. I found myself in total darkness. The place was very tight, I couldn't sit down length- or width-wise. They made the chains so tight I could barely move my hands.

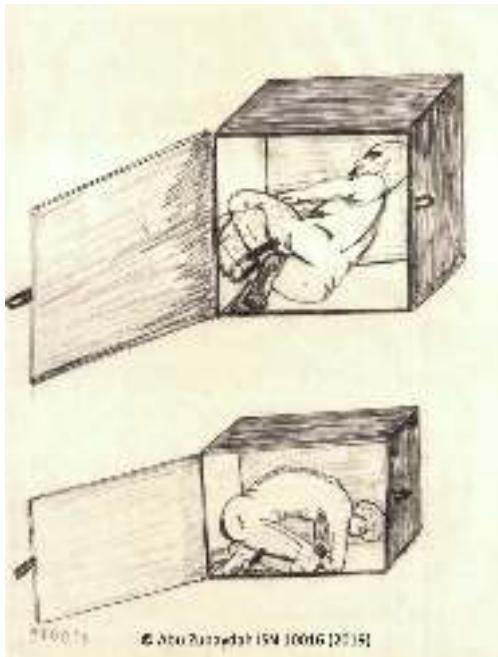
Hours went by, then I heard the click of a lock. A man was twisting a thick towel wrapped with plastic tape into the shape of a noose. He wrapped it around my neck and brutally dragged me [out of the casket]. I fell on the floor along with the bucket, with all its content that fell on me.

[Zubaydah spent a total of 266 hours confined in the coffin-shaped box.]

Then the guard dragged me towards the wall. There was a wooden wall now covering most of the original concrete wall. Without saying anything, the guard started banging me against that wooden wall. They didn't want to leave any trace of beating on my body that turns green and then immediately blue. He kept banging me against the wall. He was hitting my head so strongly I fell to the floor with each banging.

When he realized I had collapsed completely he started talking breathlessly. He was cussing, threatening. He started slapping my face. I tried to defend myself. I felt so humiliated despite the large amount of humiliation I had already endured. He said: "You think you have pride. I will show you now what pride is about." He started banging my head against the wall with both his hands. It was so strong that I felt my skull was in pieces. He then dragged me to another very tiny square box. With the help of the guards he shoved me inside it.

[The dimensions of the box were 21in wide by 2.5ft deep by 2.5ft high. Zubaydah spent a total of 29 hours in it.]



In this drawing, Zubaydah depicts himself being trapped in a tiny cubical box in 2002 with his hands and feet chained. Photograph: © Abu Zubaydah

As soon as they locked me up inside the box I tried to sit up, but in vain, as the box was too short. I tried to take a curled position, but it was too tight. I spent countless long hours inside that box. I felt I was going to explode from bending my legs and my back, unable to spread them not even for a moment. The pain was so strong it made me scream unconsciously.

Suddenly the door opened and a light went on. When they pulled me out of the box it took me a long time to be able to stand on my feet. They restrained me to a metal bed so totally that I was unable to move at all. After restraining my body, they restrained my head using strong plastic cushions which made it impossible for me to move it, not even a centimeter to the left or right, neither up nor down. I didn't understand the reason for this severe restraint. Suddenly they put a black cloth over my head, covering it completely. I felt water being poured. It shocked me because it was very cold. The water didn't stop. It was poured continuously over my face to give me the feeling of drowning, of suffocation. They kept pouring water on my nose and mouth until I really felt I was drowning and my chest was just about to explode from the lack of oxygen.

That was the first time I felt I was going to die from drowning. All I remember is that I started vomiting water, along with rice and string beans.

They set the bed in a vertical position while I was restrained to it. They removed the hood. As soon as I emptied my stomach from the water and food they brought back the bed to the horizontal position. I was coughing and trying to get some breath. Only a few minutes went by before they put the black cloth back over my head. I tried to yell: "I don't know anything" but I suddenly felt the water flowing again. They performed the same operation three times that day. Each time they deflated the cushion holding my head a little bit so my head lowered which made it more difficult for me to bear the water flowing inside me. The suffering was more intense every time. They interrupted the operation for a few minutes to allow me to breathe or vomit, and then they would resume. After the third time that day they kept the hood on with all the water on my head and started asking me questions which I had difficulty answering due to the trouble I had breathing and to the fact I didn't know what they were asking me about.

Then they removed me from the bed and dragged me to the long box. They shoved me inside and locked the door.

They repeated the routine: the banging against the wall, the little box, the water bed, the long box. This time they increased the harshness and brutality and the time spent inside the little tight box. They also increased the number of times I suffered water drowning from three to four and sometimes five [each day]. They increased the amount of cold water poured over my naked cold body.

[Zubaydah was waterboarded 83 times.]

The humiliations, the terrorizing, the hunger, the pain, the tension, the nervousness and the sleep deprivation lasted for some time until one day they did all these things to me but with more intensity and for longer periods of time before they brought me back to the big box.

I noticed during the torture with the water bed that my right hand and right foot started shaking. It would last for days. I would wake up to find my right foot and hand shaking.

I also realized that I started mumbling words at times, which I thought was due to the torture and the freezing temperature. That happened more than a few times. I lost control of my urination during the torture on the water bed. Once that happened while I was standing for hours – another torture method – and later it started to happen as a result of nervous tension, sometimes even when I wasn't chained or being drowned.

One night I had a vision, a dream. I was immersed in my saddest moments and I had lost hope except from God. In my dream, I saw a guy who said to me one simple thing while I was collapsed on the floor tied up and exhausted. He said: "It's gonna be fine." It will be OK, things will get better. The vision ended with them coming in and resuming the beating, but that was the last time.

[In 2006 Zubaydah was transferred to Guantánamo where he has been held ever since.]

In early 2006, one of my former torturers came to visit me in my cell. He said that he was sorry for what they had done to me, that they had been acting without rules, giving me no rights, trying to get information from me in any way they could, and that he realized I did not know anything about what they were asking me. He then began to cry. He was ashamed and tried to hide this from me. He left to wipe his eyes.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/29/abu-zubaydah-cia-torture-waterboarding-guantanamo>

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[CIA](#)

The CIA tortured him after 9/11. Then they lied. Will the truth ever come out?



Demonstrators with Witness Against Torture march in front of the US supreme court in Washington DC on 27 May 2008 protesting that the rights and humanity of Guantánamo Bay detainees be respected. Photograph: Jim Watson/AFP/Getty Images

Calls mount for release of full Senate report on the torture of Abu Zubaydah, to counter a narrative too many Americans still believe – that torture works

[Ed Pilkington](#)

[@edpilkington](#)

Sat 29 Jan 2022 04.30 EST

On the morning of 6 October the nine justices of the US supreme court filed into their wood-paneled courtroom in Washington to hear arguments in a dispute between the US government and Abu Zubaydah, a Guantánamo prisoner who has been held incommunicado and without charge for the past 20 years.

A government lawyer addressed the panel, arguing on grounds of “state secrets” that Zubaydah should be blocked from calling two CIA contractors to testify about the brutal interrogations they put him through at a hidden black site in Poland. Within minutes of his opening remarks, the lawyer was interrupted by Amy Coney Barrett, one of the rightwing justices appointed to the court by Donald Trump.



Abu Zubaydah. Photograph: US Central Command/AP

Barrett wanted to know what the government would do were the contractors to give evidence before a domestic US court about how they had “waterboarded” Zubaydah at least 83 times, beat him against a wall, hung him by his hands from cell bars and entombed him naked in a coffin-sized box for [266 hours](#). “You know,” she said, “the evidence of how he was treated and his torture.”

“Torture.”

Barrett said the word almost nonchalantly, but its significance ricocheted around the courtroom and far beyond. By using the word she had effectively acknowledged that what was done by the CIA to Zubaydah, and to at least [39 other “war on terror” detainees](#) in the wake of 9/11, was a [crime under US law](#).

After Barrett uttered the word the floodgates were opened. “Torture” echoed around the nation’s highest court 20 times that day, pronounced by Barrett six times and once by another of Trump’s conservative nominees, Neil Gorsuch, with liberal justices Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan also piling in.

Supreme Court hearing, 6 October 2021

Justices Amy Coney Barrett and Neil Gorsuch use the word "torture" in the Abu Zubaydah hearing

00:00:00

00:00:41

The flurry of plain speaking by justices on both ideological wings of the court amazed observers of America’s long history of duplicity and evasion on this subject. “The way the supreme court justices used the word ‘torture’ was remarkable,” Andrea Prasow, a lawyer and advocate working to hold the US accountable for its counterterrorism abuses, told the Guardian. “You could feel the possibility that the ground is shifting.”

Prasow was astonished a second time three weeks later when Majid Khan, a former al-Qaida courier also held in Guantánamo, became the first person to

[speak openly](#) in court about the torture he suffered at a CIA black site.



Majid Khan. Photograph: Center for Constitutional Rights/AP

Khan's description of being waterboarded, held in the nude and chained to the ceiling to the point that he began to hallucinate was so overpowering that seven of the eight members of his military jury [wrote a letter](#) pleading for clemency for him, saying his treatment was a "stain on the moral fiber of America".

The ground does appear to be shifting, and as it does attention is once again falling on one of the great unfinished businesses of the 21st century: the US torture program. In the [panicky](#) aftermath of 9/11, when the world seemed to be imploding, the CIA took the view that the ends – the search for actionable intelligence to thwart further terrorist attacks – justified any means.

With the enthusiastic blessing of the justice department and George W Bush's White House, the [CIA](#) abandoned American values and violated international and US laws by adopting callous cruelties that they consciously copied from the enemy.

We did not need torture to get information.

Ali Soufan, former FBI special agent

They took one prisoner, Abu Zubaydah, and made him their experimental guinea pig. On Zubaydah's back they built an entire edifice of torture – “enhanced interrogation techniques” as the bloodless euphemism went – that in turn was founded upon a mountain of lies. When the worst of the torture was completed, to spare themselves from possible prosecution the CIA insisted that Zubaydah remain “in isolation and incommunicado for the remainder of his life”.

“The torture program was designed for only one person – they gave him a name and that name was Abu Zubaydah,” Mark Denbeaux, Zubaydah’s lead habeas lawyer, told the Guardian. “After they tortured him, they demanded that he be held incommunicado forever so that his story could never be told. Since that moment the only people he has ever spoken to are his torturers, his jailers, and his lawyers, including me.”

Twenty years after Zubaydah was waterboarded, slammed repeatedly against a wall, sleep-deprived, face slapped, chained in painful stress positions, hosed with freezing water, stripped naked, and blasted with deafening noise, his story still has not fully been told. In 2014 the Senate intelligence committee released a heavily redacted, 500-page executive summary of its seven-year investigation into the torture program, generating headlines around the world and leading Barack Obama to conclude that “these harsh methods were not only inconsistent with our values, they did not serve our national security”.

Yet at the insistence of the CIA the full report from which the summary was drawn remains under lock and key to this day. All three volumes of it. All more than 6,700 pages. All 38,000 footnotes. All the detail distilled from 6.2m pages of classified CIA documents.

The persistent refusal to release the full Senate torture report has left a black hole at the centre of one of the most shameful episodes in US history. Now, with the T-word being heard even in the hallowed halls of the US supreme court, renewed calls are being made for the report to be published so that this sorry chapter can finally be closed.



A US military guard keeps watch from a tower overlooking the perimeter of Camp Delta detention center at Guantanamo Bay in June 2006. Photograph: Brennan Linsley/AP

Several of the individuals most closely involved in the battle for the truth over Abu Zubaydah's treatment have told the Guardian that 20 years is long enough. It is time for the American people to be told the full unadulterated facts about what was done in their name.

"More than seven years after the completion of the torture investigation, it remains critically important that the public see the full report," said Ron Wyden, the Democratic senator from Oregon who was an important advocate for the Senate investigation and who played a critical role in ensuring that at least some of its findings have emerged into daylight.

Wyden called for a full accounting of the CIA's handling of detainees. He said a wealth of information still shrouded in secrecy would confirm that the torture program was ineffective – it simply didn't work.

"The withholding of the full report, and the redactions in the public executive summary, have hidden from the public the story of how the program was developed and operated. Understanding how all of this happened is important because it must never happen again."

Daniel Jones, [the chief author of the US Senate report](#), said that now was the moment for its release. “The country is ready. It’s what you do in a transparent democracy: when you mess up you admit it and you move on as a better country. We’ve reached that point now.”



A US army captain walks past an unoccupied detainee cell at Camp 6 of the detention center at Guantánamo Bay. At its peak in 2003, the facility held nearly 680 prisoners; there are now 39 prisoners left. Photograph: Ben Fox/AP

Abu Zubaydah, 50, (actual name Zayn al-Abidin Muhammad Husayn) is a Saudi-born Palestinian who was one of the CIA’s “high-value” targets in the wake of 9/11. He was captured in Faisalabad, Pakistan, on 28 March 2002 in a raid in which he was shot several times including in the thigh and groin. He later [lost his left eye](#) while in US custody in unexplained circumstances.

John Kiriakou, a former CIA counter-terrorism officer, was a leading member of the team that seized Zubaydah, sitting guard at the prisoner’s bedside after the raid. Though Kiriakou did not participate in the prisoner’s subsequent interrogations at secret black sites in Thailand, Poland, [Lithuania](#) and other countries, he continued to keep tabs on his captive.

In December 2007, having by then left the CIA, Kiriakou gave an [interview](#) to NBC News in which he became the first former government official publicly to state that Zubaydah had been waterboarded – the process where a cloth is placed over a detainee's face and water poured over it as a form of controlled drowning. Kiriakou declared that he had come to view the procedure as torture.



John Kiriakou. Photograph: Andres Serrano/Courtesy of the artist and a/political.

Kiriakou's comments marked the first chink in the wall of official silence surrounding the CIA's abuses. The move displeased his former employers and he was made the subject of a leak inquiry that ended in a sentence of 23 months in a federal penitentiary – he is convinced as an act of revenge – ostensibly for having [revealed](#) the identity of a covert CIA agent to a journalist.

Unbeknownst to him at the time, Kiriakou in fact gave erroneous information in his NBC News interview. He said Zubaydah had been waterboarded only once and that the detainee had instantly cracked, divulging good actionable intelligence in less than a minute.

In fact, the prisoner was waterboarded not once but at least 83 times over more than a month. After the torture began in earnest at “detention site green” in Thailand in August 2002, the CIA gleaned no valuable information from Zubaydah whatsoever.

Kiriakou told the Guardian that his remarks to NBC had been based on what he picked up at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. “This was all a lie and we didn’t know it was a lie until it was declassified in 2009. So on top of being illegal, unethical and immoral, it was also false.”



Artist Steve Powers’ depiction of waterboarding, an interrogation technique in which cloth is placed on the detainee’s face and water poured over it to simulate drowning. Photograph: Mario Tama/Getty Images

To Kiriakou, the supreme court’s ease with the word “torture” 14 years after he used it for the first time on network television is “vindication that it was wrong”. He said he was dismayed that the CIA continues to cover up its “barbaric crimes” by resisting release of the full Senate report, likening the study to the defense department’s internal account of the Vietnam war that changed the course of history when it was leaked in 1971.

“We knew a lot about what was happening in Vietnam but we didn’t have official government confirmation until Daniel Ellsberg released the

Pentagon Papers. It's the same here. We have had some testimony from torture victims but we don't have official confirmation of what the CIA did from the CIA itself, and that's what release of this report would do."

The lies to which Kiriakou fell foul were intrinsic to the torture program from its inception. Zubaydah was used as the prototype for a new type of "enhanced interrogation" that crossed the line into torture.

In April 2002 a pair of psychologists, [James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen](#), were brought on board by the CIA on contract to create the program. They based the plan partly on experiments on dogs that found if you hurt and humiliated the animals sufficiently, eventually they would stop resisting – "[learned helplessness](#)" as it was known in the trade. (At least in this regard the torture program proved successful – Zubaydah did reach such a place of helplessness. It got to the point that as soon as an interrogator snapped his fingers twice, the detainee would lie flat on the waterboard and wait supinely for the controlled drowning to begin.)

The psychologists, whom the CIA [paid more than \\$80m](#) for their efforts, consciously modeled their interrogation methods on the so-called SERE training of American soldiers on how to resist torture were they to fall into enemy hands. The contractors openly adopted the enemy torture techniques, without irony, despite the fact that the methods were designed to extract propaganda statements from US prisoners of war and not accurate intelligence.

The justice department was duped into approving the torture of a man who was never a member of al-Qaida.

Mark Denbeaux, Abu Zubaydah's lead habeas lawyer

Senior CIA officials knew that they faced an uphill battle in persuading the Department of Justice that what they planned to do was legal – after all torture was categorically prohibited under the 1949 Geneva Conventions that the US had ratified. So they presented the DoJ with a "[psychological assessment](#)" of Zubaydah justifying why he needed to be made to talk using

aggressive interrogation methods, warning that “countless more Americans may die unless we can persuade Zubaydah to tell us what he knows”.

It was all a smorgasbord of lies. “The reasons they gave for why he had to be tortured were false and known to be false,” Denbeaux said.

“The justice department was duped into approving the torture of a man who was never a member of al-Qaida. They said he was number two, three or four of al-Qaida – not true. They said he was part of 9/11 – laughable and not true. They said he was part of all al-Qaida operations around the world – totally untrue.”

Denbeaux added that one of the most urgent arguments in favour of releasing the full Senate report was that it would expose the lies at the core of the program. “It would show in detail how the falsity was made up, and who in the CIA put these false facts together.”

Zubaydah’s psychological profile was not the only aspect of the untruths that formed the building blocks of the torture program. The CIA was also misleading about the efficacy of “enhanced interrogation techniques”.

Ali Soufan has personal knowledge of how distorted the official CIA account was. A former FBI special agent, he was one of the first US officials to interrogate Zubaydah at a black site.



Ali Soufan. Photograph: Antonio Olmos/The Observer

He did so using conventional interrogation methods that would be familiar to students of Law & Order. He learned everything he could about his subject, spoke in the prisoner's own language (Arabic), built up a rapport with Zubaydah, and played mind games on him such as giving him the impression that the FBI knew much more about his activities than in fact they did.

All without recourse to force, violence or humiliation. "We did not need torture to get information," Soufan told the Guardian.

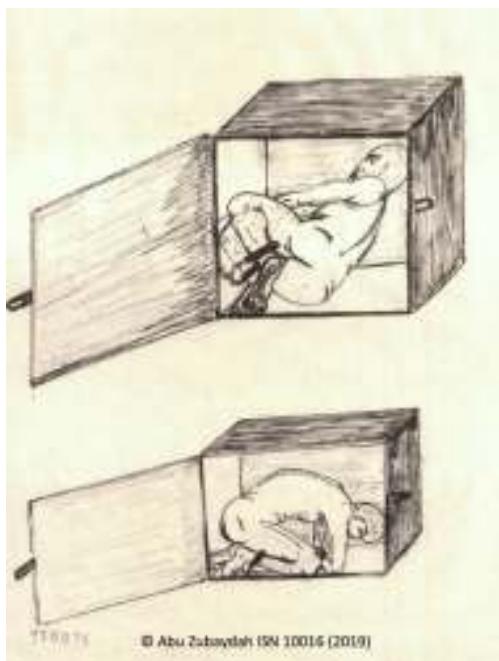
Soufan and his FBI partner succeeded in securing Zubaydah's cooperation and extracting significant intelligence from the prisoner, including the central role played by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed as the architect of 9/11. Even so, they were abruptly pulled off the job and replaced by the CIA contractors armed with a very different approach.

Release the full Senate report and you will see that the CIA shaped a false narrative. The torture did not work, it did not produce information that saved lives.

Ali Soufan, former FBI special agent

Soufan watched aghast as CIA operatives, under the instruction of Mitchell and Jessen, began to torture the prisoner. “At the beginning it was mostly loud music,” Soufan said. “He was held naked in the cell. That shocked me at the time. It was stupid, why are we doing it, the guy is already giving information. And then it evolved, one step after another.”

Starting at 11.50am on 4 August 2002, Zubaydah was tortured through a variety of methods, almost 24 hours a day, for 19 days without break. After a waterboarding session he was noted to have “involuntary leg, chest and arm spasms” and to be unable to communicate. On one occasion he became “completely unresponsive, with bubbles rising through his open, full mouth”.



Zubaydah drew this to depict incidents in 2002 when he was forced into a small box with his hands and feet chained for a total of 29 hours.
Photograph: Abu Zubaydah ©

Given Zubaydah’s incommunicado status, he has never been allowed to recount his experiences directly to the American people. But over the years his lawyers have managed to put together notes in which the Guantánamo detainee describes his abuse.

Excerpts of those notes, together with some of Zubaydah's drawings that he sketched from memory in Guantánamo that illustrate his treatment at the CIA black sites, are being [published by the Guardian](#). They amount to a harrowing account in Zubaydah's own words and images of the relentless, round-the-clock, prolonged and illegal abuse he suffered.

Soufan, who is now CEO of the Soufan Group, said the release of the full Senate report is essential to counter the CIA narrative, which he fears that too many Americans still believe – that torture works. “Most of the American public believe the Hollywood version: you beat someone up, they give you the information you want, you save lives.”

Soufan added: “Release the full Senate report and you will see that the CIA shaped a false narrative. The torture did not work, it did not produce information that saved lives, it did hinder our counterterrorism operations and destroy our image and reputation around the world.”

Soufan's own experiences give some hope that the full Senate report might one day be made public. When his book on the war of terror, *The Black Banners*, was published in 2011 it was [so heavily redacted](#) by the CIA that he even had to black out any reference to himself including the words “I”, “me”, “our” and “we”.

It took him a legal battle lasting nine years, but in 2020 he was finally able to bring out a declassified edition. Soufan hopes that the softening attitude of CIA chiefs towards his book bodes well for an eventual release of the Senate report.

“The CIA is now a very different organization from what it was in 2002. The people who were directly involved in the torture program, they are all out and there is a new leadership who understand the impact of all this.”

Kiriakou is more pessimistic about a CIA change of heart: “For the next 100 years the CIA will do anything it can to stop that report being made public.”

The Guardian asked the CIA whether it had plans to revisit the question of whether the report could be published, and invited the agency to comment. It did not immediately respond.



An exhibit on waterboarding at the International Spy Museum in Washington DC. Photograph: Jacquelyn Martin/AP

For all the uncertainty about the CIA's intentions, calls for release of the full Senate report are growing. Prasow said that the US will find it all but impossible to close Guantánamo without grappling with the torture issue first.

"The public has been sold a false story that torture victims were somehow less deserving of human rights protections. For far too long it's been too easy to see torture victims as 'other'. It's time to bring them out into the light."

Denbeaux, Zubaydah's lawyer, said that releasing the report would help fill in some of the void that was left in 2005 when the CIA destroyed videotapes of the torture of Zubaydah. "In the absence of the destroyed footage, the full Senate report would bring home to the American people the cumulative horror of how the torture worked, day after day, hour after hour, continuously, endlessly. This was a hideous awful thing, and they'd like us to forget about it?"

Jones, the report's chief author, said that were it to emerge in its totality it would "shut the book and remove any lingering doubts" – about the torture,

about its ineffectiveness, and about the lies that were told. “There are so many examples in it of the CIA misleading Congress, the White House, the public.”



A detainee sleeps on a mattress on the floor in Camp 5 of the Guantánamo detention facility in Cuba in 2008. Photograph: Brennan Linsley/AP

Among the items still waiting to be revealed is a photograph that has never been made public that Jones and his team discovered of a waterboard that was stored at the notorious “Salt Pit”, a black site outside Bagram airbase in Afghanistan. The device appeared extremely well used, and in the photo it is seen surrounded by buckets of water and bottles of a peculiar pink solution.

The photograph puzzled Jones and his team of investigators because there were no official records to indicate that waterboarding had ever been practiced at the Salt Pit. When the Senate team asked the CIA to explain the photograph, the agency said it had no answer.

In the last analysis, Jones said that it all points to a massive failure of accountability – a failure that until the full report is made public will continue to gnaw away at the nation’s standing and self-respect. “We’ve failed at every level of accountability – criminal, civil and societal,” he said. “If this is never to happen again, there has to be a reckoning.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/29/the-cia-lied-to-justify-torturing-one-prisoner-after-911-20-years-later-his-story-is-still-shrouded-in-secrecy>.

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

Thailand

‘Our culture has changed’: young Thais boycott graduation ceremonies

Students who speak out against royal family’s role in universities face jail but can also be pressured by pro-monarchy parents



Protesters at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok hold portraits of pro-democracy activists who were charged under the lese majeste law over an earlier demonstration last year. Photograph: Peerapon Boonyakiat/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Andrew Nachemson

Fri 28 Jan 2022 23.15 EST

When 24-year-old Krai Saidee returned to his alma mater Chiang Mai University on 14 January, nearly two years after his graduation, he came not just to support his friends but to make a political statement.

Painted gold, he held up a sign attached to a graduation gown: “You took my dream, and gave me this,” the message read.

Krai is part of a growing number of young Thais who are refusing to attend their graduation ceremonies because they are presided over by members of the royal family.

“The protests taught me a lot about the monarchy and how much money goes to the monarchy,” said Krai, referring to demonstrations that erupted in 2020 calling for reforms to the powerful monarchy.

Two of Krai’s friends and fellow protesters were [arrested](#) during the January protest but released that same day after paying a fine. Many who speak out against the monarchy aren’t as lucky. Thailand’s infamous lese majeste law, which prohibits insulting members of the royal family, is punishable with up to 15 years in prison.

Despite the risks, Krai said he would continue protesting against the monarchy, with another demonstration scheduled for March. “I’m planning to give some gifts to the graduating students,” he said, adding that he didn’t know what the gifts would be yet, but promised they would be “something political”.



Krai Saidee demonstrating at Chiang Mai University. He says only about 50% of students attend their graduation ceremonies today. Photograph: Krai Sridee

“It’s my duty to open the space for young artists and for my friends,” he said, claiming that some of his friends who felt they had to attend the January ceremony thanked him for speaking out.

Paul Chambers, a lecturer at Thailand’s Naresuan University, said the arrests might make “martyrs” of the activists and therefore “could succeed in encouraging more students to boycott graduations overseen by royalty”.

Freelance actress Panita Hutacharern, 26, who refused to go to her graduation in 2017, said: “There will be people who are more afraid but there will also be people that are more angry.”

But it’s not just legal repression that activists have to worry about – many also face pressure at home.

Chambers said that “people of all ages in Thailand are divided regarding monarchy” but “most Thais who venerate the monarchy do come from older generations”.

“Parents tend to want to see their sons and daughters attend the rituals of graduation, but these have traditionally been overseen by monarchy so many parents do not mind if royals oversee the ceremonies,” Chambers said.

“I argue a lot with my mother,” Panita said, because she was more pro-royalist.

Panita said she identified as “anti-royalist” and that attending her graduation ceremony would have been “a waste of time”. “I don’t know why the royal family has anything to do with our graduation.”

Luckily for Panita, she had a readymade excuse for her family, because her graduation ceremony took place the same day as her sister’s wedding rehearsal.

In Krai's case, his older sister had already skipped her graduation because of the cost. "I just told my family that it's about the money," he said.



Thai king Maha Vajiralongkorn leaves after leading a graduation ceremony at Thammasat University in Bangkok in 2020. Photograph: Soe Zeya Tun/Reuters

Graduation ceremonies can be expensive endeavours, with many students shelling out to hire a photographer, a make-up artist and a hair stylist and renting uniforms. The royal family also profits from the ceremonies.

"The monarchy makes a great deal of money overseeing graduations so I doubt this practice will end any time soon," Chambers said, adding that if the monarchy were to cave in to protester demands on this issue, it could "encourage the students to press more".

Boycotts of the graduation ceremonies appear to have picked up steam in recent years. When 35-year-old designer Sina skipped his ceremony more than 10 years ago, 90% of his peers attended, he said. In comparison, Krai said only around 50% of people attend the ceremonies today.

"In that time people didn't realise about all this, nobody talked about the monarchy," Sina said.

In response to the shifting tides, some royalist business owners tried to start a [campaign](#) encouraging people to refuse to hire recent graduates that can't produce a picture of themselves receiving a diploma from the royal family.

"I think that it's good for those students that they are not going to work with those kinds of people," Panita said, adding that she didn't think the campaign would catch on.

Sina agreed, saying: "They don't know that people have already changed, that our culture has changed, so they just keep saying the same things that worked before, but it doesn't work any more."

Using another example, Sina said that in the past, nearly everybody stood out of respect during movie screenings, when a clip played in honour of the king. Today Sina estimates that only around 10% stand.

"More than 10 years ago the royalists would pour soda on the people that didn't stand, but I don't see any of that any more," he said. "Now if you stand up, you would be like a person stuck in time."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/29/our-culture-has-changed-young-thais-boycott-graduation-ceremonies>

[Pennsylvania](#)

Pittsburgh bridge collapses hours before Biden's infrastructure speech in city

At least 10 injured and a bus and several cars left stranded in wreckage after 477ft-long bridge on Forbes Avenue caved in



A Port Authority bus that was on the bridge when it collapsed on 28 January is visible through trees in Pittsburgh's East End. Photograph: Matt Freed/AP

[Ed Pilkington](#) in New York

[@edpilkington](#)

Fri 28 Jan 2022 15.52 EST

It would be hard to imagine a more dramatic way to illustrate the need for investment in US infrastructure that Joe Biden spoke about in Pittsburgh, [Pennsylvania](#), on Friday.

Hours before his visit and just four miles from where the president was scheduled to speak, one of Pittsburgh's major car bridges collapsed.

At about 7am, the 477ft-long bridge on Forbes Avenue caved in, leaving a mass of concrete rubble and twisted metal as a visual metaphor for America's crumbling infrastructure.

At least 10 people were injured, three taken to hospital, and a bus and several cars were left stranded in the wreckage. Rescue crews had to rappel 150ft down the hillside to reach injured people, according to the [Pittsburgh Post-Gazette](#).

Biden kicked off his Pittsburgh tour with a visit to the stricken bridge. Praising first responders at the scene, he noted that the city has more bridges than any other in the world and promised: "We're going to fix them all."

In his formal remarks, he said: "Across the country there are 45,000 bridges in poor condition. That is simply just unacceptable. That is why your governor, your members of Congress and your mayor has been saying for years."

He continued: "I've talked about it every time I've come to Pittsburgh, and we finally got it done: a [bipartisan infrastructure law](#), including the largest investment in our nation's bridges since Eisenhower put together the interstate highway system."



Vehicles were left stranded after the bridge collapse. Photograph: Jeff Swensen/Getty Images

Local officials stressed how close the catastrophe was to inflicting fatalities.

“If this would have occurred an hour later, this is a road that gets probably about 15,000 cars on it a day, and if it was rush hour, we would be looking at a couple hundred cars down in that valley,” [said](#) Corey O’Connor, a Pittsburgh city council member.

He added: “We got very, very lucky today, and hopefully those individuals at the hospital recover quickly and they’re home safe in the next couple days.”

Mike Doyle, the Democratic Congress member for the Pittsburgh area, [said](#) the bridge collapse was a “tragic example of why the infrastructure bill Congress just enacted is needed. We should be constantly investing more in our infrastructure so our bridges and other public works don’t reach this point of disrepair.”

The timing of the disaster was uncanny. Biden was visiting Pittsburgh to promote his \$1.2tn infrastructure package, [which he signed into law in November](#) after it passed through Congress with exceptionally rare bipartisan support.

The bill is designed to inject vastly needed resources into the repair of the country's infrastructure, including roads, railways, drinking water and bridges. Under the scheme, Pennsylvania is earmarked for \$1.63bn of federal funds specifically for bridge improvements.

The Forbes Avenue Bridge itself told a story. The structure was built in 1972, putting its age – 52 – years above the national average of 44 years for US bridges. A recent report from city inspectors found that both its deck and superstructure underneath the road were in poor condition.

That story is one that is repeated across the country. Years of inadequate public investment have allowed critical constructions and networks to age and deteriorate. Six people were killed in a [catastrophic bridge collapse](#) in Miami, Florida, in 2018.



Emergency vehicles parked at the edge of the collapsed bridge. Photograph: Gene J Puskar/AP

Last year the American Society of Civil Engineers surveyed the landscape of US infrastructure and gave it a [C-minus](#). The report [noted](#) that of the country's 617,000 bridges, 42% were at least 50 years old and more than 46,000, or 7.5%, structurally deficient and in a poor state.

By the society's reckoning, the US needs not only an emergency injection of funds to rehabilitate its bridges, but a regular increase of investment from the current \$14bn to \$23bn annually.

Again, Pennsylvania tells the tale. The state is fourth in the national table for the proportion of its structurally deficient bridges and 15% of its bridges are in poor condition, after Rhode Island (22%), Iowa (19%) and South Dakota (17%).

Pittsburgh politicians made the connection between the Forbes Avenue Bridge collapse and Biden's visit. The city's mayor, Ed Gainey, said they were fortunate to have had no deaths and added: "We know we have bridges we need to take care of."

With Biden visiting on the same day as the disaster "to talk about this infrastructure bill and why this funding is so important, today is significant", Gainey said.

In his remarks, Biden, who was born in Pennsylvania but represented Delaware as a senator, told his audience he had "come home".

He also said: "Right here in Pittsburgh, the future is being built on this city's storied past. We know what happens when we stop investing in places like Pittsburgh."

The infrastructure bill was one of the rare instances in recent times, and during Biden's presidency, when a modicum of accord has been reached between the two main parties. The package passed the House of Representatives in November by 228 to 206 votes, with 13 Republicans backing it.

Soon after the Senate gave its blessing, with [69 votes to 30](#), clearing the 60-vote filibuster that has so often strangled Biden's initiatives.

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

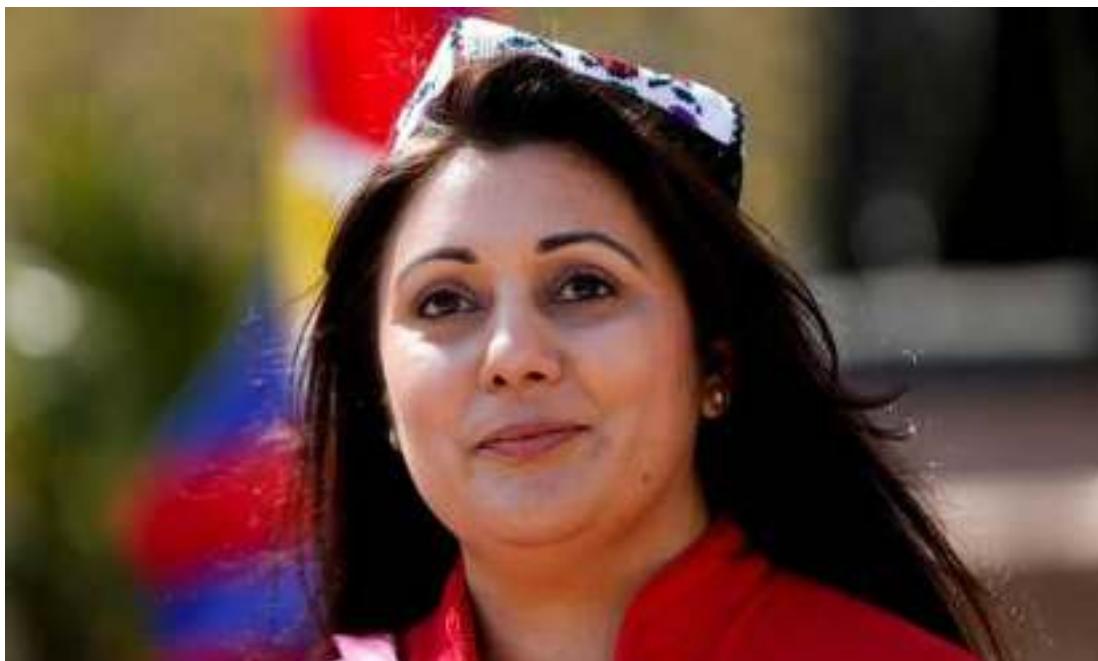
Headlines monday 24 january 2022

- [Conservatives Johnson orders inquiry into Nusrat Ghani ‘Muslimness’ sacking claims](#)
- [Live UK politics: Labour says PM’s response to Nusrat Ghani’s Islamophobia claims too limited](#)
- [Ukraine UK pulls some embassy staff from country amid Russian threat](#)
- [Ukraine US and UK withdraw families from embassies but EU to stay put](#)

Conservatives

Johnson orders inquiry into Nusrat Ghani ‘Muslimness’ sacking claims

PM has asked Cabinet Office to conduct inquiry into allegations, says spokesperson



Nusrat Ghani. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Peter Walker](#) Political correspondent

[@peterwalker99](#)

Mon 24 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

Boris Johnson has ordered a formal inquiry into allegations by the Conservative MP Nusrat Ghani that she was [sacked as a minister](#) after being told her “Muslimness” was “making colleagues uncomfortable”.

In a brief statement early on Monday, a Downing Street spokesperson said: “The prime minister has asked the Cabinet Office to conduct an inquiry into

the allegations made by Nusrat Ghani MP.

“At the time these allegations were first made, the prime minister recommended to her that she make a formal complain to CCHQ [Conservative campaign headquarters]. She did not take up this offer.

“The prime minister has now asked officials to establish the facts about what happened. As he said at the time, the prime minister takes these claims very seriously.”

In a [tweeted response](#), Ghani said that the terms of reference for any inquiry “must include all that was said in Downing Street and by the whip”.

She wrote: “As I said to the prime minister last night, all I want is for this to be taken seriously and for him to investigate. I welcome his decision to do that now.”

Ghani, an MP since 2015 who lost her job as a junior transport minister during a reshuffle in early 2020, said Tory whips told her that her “Muslim woman minister status was making colleagues feel uncomfortable”.

She told the Sunday Times: “It was like being punched in the stomach. I felt humiliated and powerless.” She received public support from the ministers [Nadhim Zahawi](#) and Sajid Javid.

Downing Street accepted [on Sunday](#) that Ghani had raised her concerns personally with Johnson at a meeting in 2020, and said he had responded by encouraging her to make a formal complaint with the Conservative party.

In a subsequent statement on Sunday, Ghani said she had made clear at the time that she did not think the party complaints process was the right way to tackle her allegations.

“He [Johnson] wrote to me that he could not get involved, and suggested I use the internal Conservative party complaint process. This, as I had already pointed out, was very clearly not appropriate for something that happened on government business,” she said. “All I have ever wanted was for his government to take this seriously, investigate properly and ensure no other colleague has to endure this.”

Zahawi, the education secretary, defended Johnson's initial approach, saying Ghani had not initially told No 10 that it was possible those who raised concerns about her faith might not even have been Tory members.

"This is a new piece of information that we learned from Nus's statement," Zahawi told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. "When parliamentarians deal with the whips office, this is very much a political party matter."

Zahawi called for the investigation to happen swiftly: "This is very serious. It takes a lot of bravery for someone to stand up and say, my religion was taken into consideration when I was being assessed for what I do as a job. That should never happen."

Anneliese Dodds, the Labour chair and shadow minister for equalities, said: "This inquiry is welcome, but doesn't replace the need for an immediate investigation into whether the chief whip broke the ministerial code."

Dodds said one immediate step that could be taken would be to remove the Tory whip from MP Michael Fabricant, who [said in an interview](#) on Sunday that he doubted Ghani would have faced prejudice as it was "not apparent" she was Muslim.

The Conservative chief whip, [Mark Spencer](#), has identified himself as the person accused of making the remarks. "These accusations are completely false and I consider them to be defamatory. I have never used those words attributed to me," he tweeted.

An independent inquiry into the Conservative party's handling of complaints of discrimination said in May last year that there was "clear evidence of a party complaints system in need of overhaul".

The Muslim Council of Britain said on Sunday that the Equality and Human Rights Commission should carry out a full inquiry into the party to determine if any breaches of the law had taken place.

A Cabinet Office spokesperson said: "At the request of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Office will investigate the facts of this case. The Independent Adviser will be available to provide advice as required."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/24/boris-johnson-calls-for-inquiry-into-nusrat-ghani-muslimness-sacking-claims>

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

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

[**Politics**](#)

Boris Johnson had birthday party at No 10 during 2020 lockdown, report claims – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2022/jan/24/uk-politics-boris-johnson-conservatives-labour-nusrat-ghani>

Ukraine

UK pulls some embassy staff from Ukraine amid Russian threat

About half of British staff in Kyiv reportedly scheduled to return to UK in response to threat of Russian invasion



Volunteer defence units training in Kyiv, Ukraine, on 22 January.

Photograph: Sean Gallup/Getty Images

[Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic editor

Mon 24 Jan 2022 04.44 EST

Some British staff and dependants are being withdrawn from the embassy in [Ukraine](#) in response to a growing military threat from Russia, the Foreign Office has said.

Officials said there were no specific threats to British diplomats, with about half of the staff in Kyiv reportedly scheduled to come home to the UK.

The move follows US officials ordering relatives of embassy staff to leave Ukraine as a Russian invasion could come “at any time”. [Russia](#) has repeatedly denied having any plans for military action in Ukraine.

The Foreign Office said: “Some embassy staff and dependants are being withdrawn from Kyiv in response to the growing threat from Russia. The British embassy remains open and will continue to carry out essential work.”

Britain came under criticism over its [failure to withdraw some staff from Afghanistan](#) before the Taliban seizure of Kabul in August. It is likely that British diplomats in Ukraine would be exposed since the UK has taken one of the most prominent roles in sending military equipment including anti-tank missiles to Ukraine.

But officials in Kyiv believe the move is too circumspect. A spokesman for the Ukrainian foreign ministry said: “We have taken note of the state department’s decision re departure of family members of US embassy staff. While we respect the right of foreign nations to ensure the safety and security of their diplomatic missions, we believe such a step to be a premature one and an instance of excessive caution.”

The EU foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, said he did not know of plans for EU states to withdraw staff from their embassies, adding there was no need to dramatise the situation. “We are not going to do the same thing because we don’t know any specific reasons. But [the US] secretary [of state, Antony] Blinken will inform us,” Borrell told reporters as he arrived for a meeting with his EU counterparts.

Blinken is expected to join the meeting by video link in the afternoon to continue his consultations with his European partners, and report back on the meeting he had with the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, in Geneva on Friday.

The German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, said it was important not to “contribute to further uncertainty in the situation, but it is important to continue to support the Ukrainian government and, above all, to maintain the stability of the country”. But Germany later reversed its position, saying it

was allowing diplomats' family members in Ukraine to leave if they so wished on a voluntary basis.

The Kremlin has repeatedly denied planning to invade, but former UK national security adviser Mark Lyall Grant, speaking on BBC radio, said he feared an invasion was imminent because of the build-up of Russian troops in Belarus making an attack on Kyiv more likely.

Explaining his belief that diplomatic staff could remain in place in Ukraine, Borrell said: "Negotiations are going on," adding he thought staff should not leave "unless secretary Blinken gives us an information that justifies a move".

The EU's foreign ministers are expected to issue a warning to Russia over its troop buildup at Ukraine's border. They will also discuss the formal written proposals to be sent by Nato to Russia on its proposed agenda for talks.

The Foreign Office took the unusual step on Saturday night of naming former Ukrainian MP [Yevhen Murayev](#) as a potential Kremlin candidate to take over in Kyiv – a claim dismissed as provocative "nonsense" by Moscow.

Dominic Raab, the UK deputy prime minister, said on Sunday there was a very significant risk of a Russian invasion of Ukraine. The UK defence secretary, Ben Wallace, is due to travel to Moscow to hold talks with his Russian counterpart.

No 10 also issued a warning at the weekend that without a successful combination of deterrence and diplomacy thousands of lives could be lost in a war that would not be confined to conventional arms, but also cyber-attacks.

The US embassy in Ukraine is one of the larger American missions in Europe. It has about 900 employees the vast majority of them Ukrainians, some of whom have been with the mission since it opened three decades ago.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/24/uk-pulls-some-embassy-staff-from-ukraine-amid-russian-threat>

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

Ukraine

US and UK withdraw families from Ukraine embassies but EU to stay put

State department says dependants of staffers must leave the country amid growing tensions over Russia's military buildup



US embassy staff in the Ukraine capital Kyiv have been ordered to leave the country. Photograph: Sean Gallup/Getty Images

[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow, [Dan Sabbagh](#), [Lisa O'Carroll](#) with agencies

Mon 24 Jan 2022 04.47 EST

The US and UK are withdrawing diplomats' families from Ukraine, but the EU has said dependants will stay put for now, amid [heightened fears of a Russian invasion](#).

The state department told the dependants of staffers at the US embassy in Kyiv that they must leave the country. It also said that non-essential embassy

staff could leave [Ukraine](#) at government expense.

US officials stressed the Kyiv embassy would remain open and that Sunday's announcement did not constitute an evacuation. The move had been under consideration for some time and did not reflect an easing of US support for [Ukraine](#), the officials said.

"Military action by [Russia](#) could come at any time," the US embassy said. Officials "will not be in a position to evacuate American citizens in such a contingency, so US citizens currently present in Ukraine should plan accordingly", it added.

On Monday [the Foreign Office said](#) some British staff and dependants were being withdrawn, but the EU foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, said the bloc did not plan to follow suit for now.

"We are not going to do the same thing because we don't know any specific reasons," Borrell told reporters as he arrived for a meeting in Brussels with his EU counterparts that the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, is expected to join by video link.

Ahead of the meeting, a senior European official said the EU would be ready to launch sanctions "within days" if Russian troops launched an invasion.

Rising tensions about Russia's military buildup on the Ukraine border were not eased during talks on Friday between Blinken and the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, in Geneva.

On Sunday a senior Ukraine government adviser said the country was reacting "seriously" to UK allegations that Moscow has plans to invade the country and install a puppet government and that Kyiv was resisting Russian efforts to destabilise its government and economy.

The Foreign Office claims that Moscow may topple the government and install Yevhen Murayev, a former MP who controls a pro-Russia television station, were met with shock and some scepticism in Ukrainian political and media circles.

The Foreign Office made the allegations as the UK pledged to take a more aggressive posture over Russia's buildup of more than 100,000 troops and weaponry on the border with Ukraine.

Murayev himself denied that he was involved in any plot, [telling the Observer](#) he had been banned from entering Russia and was in a conflict with a close ally of Vladimir Putin. "It isn't very logical," he said.

The Foreign Office has not provided any evidence to support the allegations, which came as Boris Johnson's domestic political troubles deepened.

British sources emphasised on Sunday afternoon that the coup plot warning on Saturday followed a UK intelligence assessment, a different formulation from earlier briefings that had suggested it was based on "US-led intelligence".

01:33

Boris Johnson warns Russia invading Ukraine would be 'painful, violent and bloody' – video

The UK allegation came days after [the US alleged](#) that Russian intelligence was recruiting current and former Ukrainian government officials to take over the government in Kyiv and cooperate with a Russian occupying force.

The accusations have increased tensions as discussions rage about how best to deter Vladimir Putin from launching a new invasion of Ukraine. Russian tanks and artillery, military vehicles and fighter aircraft continued to arrive within striking distance of Ukraine's borders this weekend, and Russian troops have been sighted less than 20 miles from the border.

Moscow has announced sweeping naval exercises that will put its ships in close proximity with Nato forces while potentially positioning landing craft for an amphibious assault on Ukraine's southern coast.

The British deputy prime minister, Dominic Raab, told Sky News on Sunday: "There'll be very serious consequences if Russia takes this move to try and invade but also install a puppet regime."



Civilian participants in a Kyiv territorial defence unit train on a Saturday in a forest in Ukraine. Photograph: Sean Gallup/Getty Images

On Sunday, the US state department said: “The security conditions, particularly along Ukraine’s borders, in Russia-occupied Crimea, and in Russia-controlled eastern Ukraine, are unpredictable and can deteriorate with little notice. Demonstrations, which have turned violent at times, regularly occur throughout Ukraine, including in Kyiv.”

The department’s travel advisory, which had warned against travelling to Ukraine because of Covid-19 as well as the tensions over Russia, was changed Sunday to carry a stronger warning.

“Do not travel to Ukraine due to the increased threats of Russian military action and Covid-19. Exercise increased caution in Ukraine due to crime and civil unrest. Some areas have increased risk,” the department advised.

The travel advisory for Russia was also changed: “Do not travel to Russia due to ongoing tension along the border with Ukraine, the potential for harassment against US citizens, the embassy’s limited ability to assist US citizens in Russia, Covid-19 and related entry restrictions, terrorism, harassment by Russian government security officials, and the arbitrary enforcement of local law.”

The state department would not say how many Americans it believes are currently in Ukraine. US citizens are not required to register with embassies when they arrive or plan to stay abroad for extended periods.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/24/us-orders-families-of-embassy-staff-out-of-ukraine>

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

2022.01.24 - Spotlight

- ['Warm, loving, generous – but he had demons' Inside the life of Meat Loaf](#)
- ['I stayed at the party too long' Jason Bateman on Ozark, smiling villains and his lost decade](#)
- [Architecture Sou Fujimoto's House of Hungarian Music: 'We wanted to transform the forest into architecture'](#)
- [Money How to speed up your broadband internet](#)

Meat Loaf

‘Warm, loving, generous – but he had demons’: inside the life of Meat Loaf

Steve Buslowe played bass for the rock star for 20 years, witnessing his brilliance and his violent moods at first hand. He recalls a musician determined to always evolve



Steve Buslowe, centre, performing with Meat Loaf: ‘You had to always watch him to make sure that you understood what he was going to do.’
Photograph: Bill Tompkins/Getty Images

[David Batty](#)

Mon 24 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

The morning after [Meat Loaf died](#), his former bass player Steve Buslowe was reading through the many celebrity tributes to the bombastic singer when he came across one that made him laugh.

“I saw a comment that Stephen Fry had made about Meat [being cuddly and frightening at the same time](#). I laughed because that’s perfect. He was such a big teddy bear. He was sometimes warm, but then he could also get a little manic, a little out of control, maybe a little violent. So you never knew who he was going to be. He was kind of fearless in being warm and generous, but also in his anger. If he got frustrated with something, he wouldn’t go in a corner and pout. He’d throw a chair. He’d be in your face to let you know how he felt.”

Buslowe, 67, is in a contemplative mood as he speaks via Zoom from his home in Connecticut. The [musician and backing vocalist](#), who is my uncle, played with Meat Loaf for the best part of the singer’s career, witnessing his rise to megastardom during the [Bat Out of Hell](#) tour in 1977-78, the wilderness years of dwindling sales in the mid- to late-80s, and his resurgent global success in the early 90s with [Bat Out of Hell 2: Back Into Hell](#).

The singer’s talent and temperament made a strong impression on Buslowe from their first meeting, after the bass player auditioned to join Meat Loaf’s live band, later called the Neverland Express. “When I first met him at the rehearsals, I knew he was a unique person,” he says. “I still remember having chills watching this man sing four or five feet away from me. He had this amazing operatic voice. I knew I was dealing with somebody very special but complicated. As time went on, I saw how complicated he would become.”

Buslowe, who had been playing with funk fusion bands before the tour, admits he didn’t immediately get Meat Loaf’s dramatic sound. “I said to myself: I can’t believe I just joined a band that has a song called [Paradise by the Dashboard Light](#). Though, of course, I grew to love it.”

He was not alone in having this initial reaction. The band was met with a hostile crowd at their first gig in Chicago, opening for the rock group [Cheap Trick](#). “People were swearing at us, throwing things, saying really nasty things about Meat Loaf being overweight,” says Buslowe. “It was horrifying. But I think it got us revved up, [no pun intended](#), to say screw you, we’re going to push it.”

This rocky start to the tour was amplified by Meat Loaf's erratic behaviour. Buslowe recalls how the singer hired one of his friends to be their driver-cum-tour manager, despite having no relevant experience. On the way to a gig in Youngstown, Ohio, the friend's fast, nausea-inducing driving led to a punch-up.

"Meat had gone up to the front and said slow down, everybody's going a little crazy," says Buslowe. "Well, the guy wouldn't. Meat went nuts and he goes: 'Pull over!' Well they pull over at a rest stop right off of this highway and the two of them get out and start beating the crap out of each other!"

Buslowe remembers looking through the window of the band's RV at the songwriter [Jim Steinman](#), the creative mastermind behind Bat Out of Hell and Meat Loaf's other most epic hits, watching bemusedly the fight on the grass in the truck stop. "I'm sitting there going: what did I get myself into? This is madness! Of course, Meat and the guy wound up being friends again. But that was Meat's personality: he could get really angry with you, and after he gets that out of his system, he can be your best friend."

Steinman and Meat Loaf's musical partnership was infamously fractious. Buslowe recalls how the balance of power shifted towards the singer as that first tour gained momentum and his star rose. "There were some people who said, not that I would use this expression, it was like Frankenstein and the monster – where Jim was really the brains behind the songwriting and Meat was just the singer," he says.

"As the tour developed, Meat got a more dominant role because he got the attention. But he also knew that instead of it just being like a theatrical show, he had to be more aggressive on stage and make it more rock'n'roll. And I think he was proven right."

However, as detailed in his 1999 autobiography, To Hell and Back, the singer increasingly struggled with the demands of touring. His voice began to give out on him. He started using cocaine. He raged at the band members and audiences, throwing microphone stands at them. Then in May 1978 he fell off the stage at a gig in Ottawa, breaking his leg and leaving him unable to perform. He had a nervous breakdown.

“My memory, a lot of times, was sitting in a hotel lobby waiting for Meat to walk out of the elevator door,” says Buslowe, who did not discuss the singer’s drug and mental health issues. “Depending on the look on his face or the way he walked, I knew what kind of day I was going to have. I really learned to recognise what to say and when to say it, and, more importantly, if he’s in a lousy mood, when not to say anything.”

“Meat wasn’t always good with a lot of pressure. I felt sorry for him because he was a little fragile in that way. But without him there was no band. We were really hired musicians. For me, it was a struggle to be waiting on him because you have no control. There was also a lot of frustration coming from the record company and the managers because everybody’s trying to make money.”



Steve Buslowe performing at the Ritz in New York in June 1983.
Photograph: Bill Tompkins/Getty Images

Amid the singer’s ongoing crisis, Steinman decided to make his own album, [Bad for Good](#). Although he subsequently wrote Meat Loaf’s 1981 album, Dead Ringer for Love, best known for his [hit duet with Cher](#), neither record performed on a par with Bat Out of Hell, which Buslowe partly attributes to them being released so close together. With this diminishing success, the singer and songwriter’s relationship fell apart.

During this period, Buslowe co-wrote four tracks on Meat Loaf's third album, [Midnight at the Lost and Found](#), including [the title track](#), which reached a disappointing peak of No 17 in the UK. "It was thrilling for me to perform my own songs," he says. "Regrettably, the album didn't get good reviews. I don't think Meat cared for it all that much."

The bass player left the band in 1984, returning two years later when Meat Loaf began touring smaller venues, including pubs and clubs, in an attempt to revive his career back and stave off bankruptcy. Paradoxically, Buslowe says the singer's voice was at its best during this low point of his fame.

"It was fun for me because he was a lot more relaxed," he adds, attributing much of this to the calming influence of the singer's first wife, Leslie. "He didn't have a big record deal. We were just going day by day, building it back up. It was a real healthy time for him, and also for me to watch him grow."

By 1990, Meat Loaf and Steinman had reconciled, leading, three years later, to the release of Bat Out of Hell 2. The album sold more than 14m copies worldwide, with its lead single, [I'd Do Anything for Love \(But I Won't Do That\)](#), topping the charts in 28 countries. "When things got successful again, there was more money, but there was more pressure again, and I could feel that from him," says Buslowe, who by this point had become the musical director of the Neverland Express.

"I was kind of middle management between the band and Meat. I helped translate what he wanted. He liked to think of himself as an actor doing a role as opposed to just somebody singing words. He took it upon himself to do a lot of improvisation. You had to always watch him to make sure that you understood what he was going to do. It was always evolving because he was into the performance and really looking at and responding to the audience, and a lot of musicians can't do that."

His time with the band ended in 1997, two years after the release of the seventh studio album, [Welcome to the Neighbourhood](#). "I think the relationship ran its course," Buslowe says, adding that this coincided with Meat Loaf moving from Connecticut to the west coast to pursue his acting career. "I could sense that there was a change in his direction. I'd been

wanting to move away from the music business and I felt I wasn't going to be rehired. I just didn't feel it anymore."

Although I remember him being frustrated with Meat Loaf during this period, Buslowe, who has also worked with Bonnie Tyler, Air Supply, Céline Dion and Barbra Streisand, is now more sanguine about the split.

"I wasn't necessarily unhappy that it ended but it could have ended better. But I have heard from other people over the last couple of years that he still had good feelings about me. So that made me feel good. I think he always respected me and he knew that I was fairly loyal to him. But neither of us picked up the phone to call the other.

"There was a time when I thought he would take a bullet for me," he says. "I really think that he had this ability to be very protective of people that he cared for. Then there were times when he just didn't handle people well. I could feel it happening to me a little toward the end of our relationship. I don't want to say I didn't take this personally but I just knew that's the way he was. He really could be a very loving, warm, generous guy. But he had his demons and his struggles."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/jan/24/warm-loving-generous-but-he-had-demons-inside-the-life-of-meat-loaf>

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

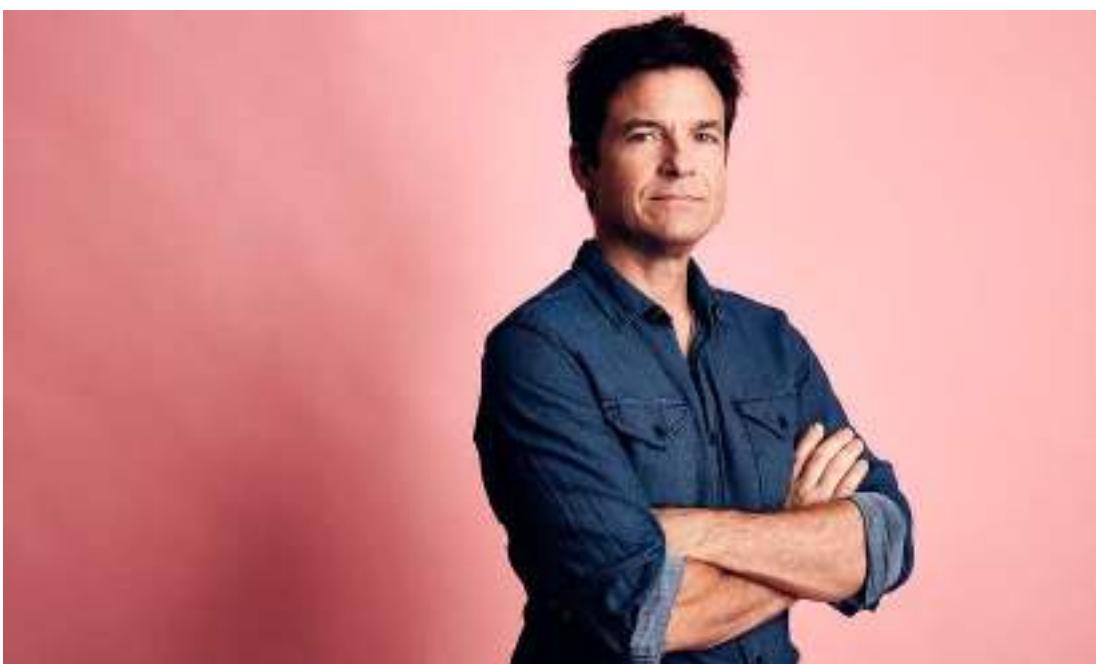
[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[The G2 interview](#)[Television](#)

Interview

‘I stayed at the party too long’: Ozark’s Jason Bateman on Arrested Development, smiling villains and his lost decade

[Zoe Williams](#)



‘In a drama, I’m not the person with a knife, I’m the person getting chased’
... Jason Bateman. Photograph: Robby Klein/Contour by Getty Images

Forty years after his breakthrough role in Little House on the Prairie, the actor is thrilling TV audiences as a drug cartel money launderer. But he almost threw his career away



[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Mon 24 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Jason Bateman appears on a Zoom screen from Los Angeles, bespectacled, calm and in uncluttered, butter-coloured environs. It’s as if Michael Bluth, the character he played in [Arrested Development](#), had dressed up as a therapist for some hilarious purpose. To fans of the show, its entire cast will always have traces clinging to them, as if they have all been, well, arrested in that dysfunctional family. But today we’re here to talk about [Ozark](#), a drama with a reputation that has been climbing each season (it’s now in its fourth and final) and so has, arguably, become even more defining for Bateman.

Tense and lingering, Ozark has the dizzying pace and visual sumptuousness that the modern long-running box set demands. What was haunting about it from the start were the subtle performances of Bateman and his co-star,

[Laura Linney](#); just a regular, affluent, middle-aged couple, except he was about to launder \$500m for a drug cartel and she'd just watched the murder of the lawyer she was having an affair with. They were on the run, but only sort of. They hated each other, except they didn't. What passed between them gave such propulsive energy to their characters that from the very beginning you could trust one thing: it might be improbable, but it was never going to be boring. But all that nuance was a double-edged sword. "Marty and Wendy are really intelligent characters," Bateman says. "Sometimes that narrows your options as a writer, trying to keep things plausible. They can't do really stupid things. The smart thing to do is to turn yourself in. Then the show's over."

Typically (although not this time, because of Covid) Bateman would direct the first two episodes of each season. He starts off describing the appeal of being an actor/director quite neutrally. "It's more efficient for me to be playing a character in something, because that's one less person I need to direct," he says. "I don't have to have any sort of creative negotiation with that actor." Then he slides into the territory of the self-aware control freak: "Especially when I'm the lead character, I can just adjust my own performance to motivate a different performance out of the other actor. I can get them to speed up or slow down or trick them by being more emotional." Finally, he clarifies forcefully and winningly, he's not a control freak at all. "I had a very fortunate first experience. My first big job, Little House on the Prairie, had Michael Landon as the director, actor, producer – and sometimes writer. There's this theory that you need to scream at people to get them to work their hardest. I saw by example there that the opposite is true."



A regular, affluent, middle-aged couple on the run ... Jason Bateman and Laura Linney in Ozark. Photograph: Courtesy of Netflix

It's pointless of course to pretend not to have been a child star if you were one, but it also takes a certain kind of comfort in your skin to underline immediately how incredibly long your career has been. [Little House on the Prairie](#) first aired in 1974. Bateman didn't join the cast until the early 80s. His career dates officially from a Golden Grahams advert in 1980, when he was just 11 (he's now 53). He talks about his mother – a Pan Am flight attendant, originally from the UK – a lot. If something is hilarious to him, it's because "my mother is British and everything is dry to her". His father would be the more obvious role model in professional terms. Kent Bateman was an actor, writer and director, and the producer of the 1987 fantasy comedy sequel *Teen Wolf Too*, the lead role that sealed his son's teen-idol status as mischievous, unthreatening and very 80s.

Bateman became a complete sitcom fixture in titles that are familiar to US viewers but less so in the UK (TV didn't travel so much then). *Silver Spoons*, *the Hogan Family*, "these shows in front of a live audience, where there's a performance type of obligation: you're incorporating their laughter, it's more like being on stage". Inevitably, trying to make the transition from child to adult, while simultaneously trying to morph for audiences from cute kid to serious actor, was fraught.

He describes the 90s as effectively wilderness years, while robustly objecting to the term “wilderness years”. “It was a combination,” he says. “Me stopping everything on purpose, to catch up with all these inabilities I had as a kid, because I was always working.” (“Inabilities” is a curious word – he’s saying his early career meant he missed out on a carefree childhood and teenage years, trying not to offend his parents, perhaps.) “I wanted to get the wiggles out.”



Wholesome ... Bateman in Little House on the Prairie. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

He has described in the past how his wife, Amanda Anka, also an actor and mother of their two daughters, Francesca and Maple, gave him an ultimatum about his partying. It's such an imprecise term, “partying” – it can mean anything from too many beers to a heroin habit, but it's nothing like as imprecise as “wiggles”. He has been less oblique in the past, describing all-night booze and drug binges (“It's like French fries and ketchup – I don't want one without the other”) before he finally decided to go into AA. Information, it seems, is often sprinkled, rather than hosed, with Bateman. Later, talking about Smartless, the podcast he started in 2020 with Will Arnett (a magnificent comedian and ex-alcoholic, who played Gob in Arrested Development), he says: “Will started everything by saying, ‘Who's gonna listen to some boring thing about sobriety?’ And I said: ‘At least let

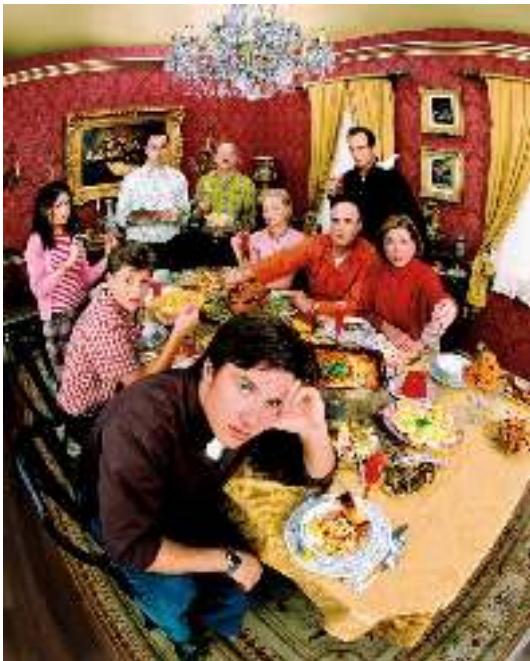
me be on it, so we can talk about sobriety and “the journey.”” When Smartless arrived, also featuring Sean Hayes (from Will & Grace), it was nothing really to do with partying, it was all about friendship. It’s also absolutely stop-in-the-street-to-laugh brilliant.

Back to the lost decade. “Having thought, ‘This is really fun,’ and staying at the party a little bit too long, I’d lost my place in line in the business; it was a case of trying to claw that back towards the end of the 90s, and not getting a lot of great responses.” The official end of that dry spell was Arrested Development, which first aired in 2003, but also, *Juno*, in 2007, a fascinating indie film about a teenager who gets accidentally pregnant and agrees to have the baby adopted. It’s quite an uncomfortable movie, seen, at the time, as implicitly anti-abortion, and deliberately vague and airbrushed on what the experience of giving a baby up for adoption is actually like. But the characterisation is complex and interesting, in large part because of Bateman’s prospective adoptive dad, reversing and messing with expectations.

He starts out as something you think you understand – a wholesome everyman – then becomes a much darker character, on whom the coating of nice-guy shellac shimmers somewhere between shtick and active deception. It’s not a huge role but is a perfect distillation of Bateman’s mature performances; the guy who uses his everyman face like a Trojan horse. He says he likes to play characters as “not too far from the average person. Even if the part is not right in that lane, but maybe adjacent to it, I will pull the character into that. Even if they’re not vanilla on the page, I like pulling them into vanilla.” He has said before that he only took the role in Juno because Francesca, recently born, had colic, and it was a guaranteed three weeks out of the house. “No, no, no,” he now says, disapprovingly. “I said that to be fun. I said it with, hopefully, an obvious wink.” There he goes again, pulling himself back into vanilla.

To rewind to Arrested Development: it started at Fox and was an immediate success, winning five Emmys for the first season. It was cancelled, because Fox is crazy. The first three seasons were breathtakingly good – and surprising. The way each actor was so distinct and yet so locked together in the ensemble, the sheer quality of the cast – Jeffrey Tambor and the late Jessica Walter as the parents, Bateman, Arnett, Portia de Rossi and Tony

Hale as their adult children – was remarkable. Bateman is very clear about what made it funny: “This is not funny to anybody inside the show. This is a drama to them. Almost like an animal documentary, where you’re watching these freaks, and how they gather their food, and how they make their house. And let’s make sure we all whisper because we don’t want these folks to know how much we’re laughing at them.”



Breathtakingly good ... clockwise from front: Bateman, Michael Cera, Alia Shawkat, Tony Hale, David Cross, Portia De Rossi, Will Arnett, Jeffrey Tambor and Jessica Walter in Arrested Development. Photograph: 20 Century Fox/Sportsphoto/Allstar

Having been dropped, it was picked up six years later by Netflix, back when the streaming behemoth had no real track record of programme-making, except for David Fincher’s House of Cards. “What’s good for David Fincher sure as shit better be good enough for us,” is how Bateman describes the united attitude of the cast.

There were plenty of people queueing up to say it wasn’t as good at Netflix, and truthfully, the fourth season wasn’t. Critically, the reception went up and down – at its putative worst, it’s still funnier than most things – and career-wise, he says: “I will always respect the access and relevance that that show gave me, and try not to take that for granted again, and do everything I can

to earn this place in the business that I love. It created an environment; I loved going there every single day.”

This is surprising, since if Arrested Development is famous for one thing, other than itself, it’s for a terrible atmosphere on set. Or at least, that was the story in a [New York Times cast interview](#) in 2018. Walter, [who died in March last year](#), said of Tambor: “In almost 60 years of working, I’ve never had anybody yell at me like that on a set.” Bateman and Hale tried to damp down the situation, and the whole thing – particularly coming when it did, when the lid was just being lifted on Hollywood harassment, sexual or otherwise – saw them accused of minimising.

Bateman remains adamant about his original stance and says of that interview: “Things got misinterpreted and there was a fallout – it was unfortunate. But it was an anomaly. Any family work environment, you’re going to have situations where things go a little pear-shaped every once in a while. I just have the fondest memories of 100% of that experience. You know, the ups and the downs, the good, the bad, the funny, the sad: all of it was a positive to me.”

There’s a lively internet chat scene on the similarities between Marty Byrde in Ozark and Michael Bluth in Arrested Development – that they are morally so alike, Ozark must have been (consciously or not) conceived as a prequel to Arrested Development. In this fan-fictional universe, Michael is actually Marty post-witness protection scheme. I disagree with that. Part of the genius of Bateman’s Arrested Development performance is how completely, learning-resistantly hapless he is, while as Byrde he can see round corners and get the better of any situation. He doesn’t really want to adjudicate on this question and ruin any fan debates, so says mildly: “I think they have similar blind spots. Their arrogance and hubris leads to early decisions. Perhaps they should think a little bit longer about what they do.”

If there’s another through-line, Bateman says, it’s that: “I’m not too far removed from a drama when I’m doing Arrested Development and I’m not too far from a comedy when I’m doing Ozark.” He reaches to describe some quintessence to his acting another way: “In a drama, I’m not the person with a knife, I’m the person getting chased. In a comedy, I’m not the person farting, I’m the person who smelled it.” It’s so neat, so succinct, and so

drolly sums up the paradox: it's actually terribly rare to meet an everyman, almost unique to meet one who's everymanning on purpose.

Ozark is available to stream on Netflix. The “Smartless” podcast live tour kicks off on 2 February with sold out shows across six cities in the US

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2022/jan/24/i-stayed-at-the-party-too-long-ozark-jason-bateman-on-arrested-development-smiling-villains-and-his-lost-decade>

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

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Architecture](#)

Sycamore stunner: how the crumpet-shaped House of Music swallowed a forest



Otherworldly ... sycamores rise through the sculpted roof. Photograph:
Városliget Zrt

Budapest's £67m new museum doesn't just nestle among trees – they grow through it. But is Sou Fujimoto's ravishing creation just another cultural bauble for repressive leader Viktor Orbán?



[Oliver Wainwright](#)

[@ollywainwright](#)

Mon 24 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

A great big crumpet appears to have landed in the middle of Budapest's City Park, its circular hole-studded mass impaled on a thicket of trees. It droops down here and there, revealing little terraces cut into its top, and flares up elsewhere, showing off a sparkling underside of tiny golden leaves.

This surreal sight is the work of [Sou Fujimoto](#), a Japanese architect known for making his models out of piles of crisps, washing-up scourers, or whatever else may be to hand. In this case, it wasn't a crumpet but a lotus root that inspired this canopy, which now provides an otherworldly home for the capital's new [House of Music](#). In a city that already has a renowned opera house, music academy and numerous concert halls, what could this €80m (£67m) project possibly add?

“We want to show the wonder of music to a younger generation,” says music

historian András Batta, managing director of the new centre, which opened on Hungarian Culture Day this weekend. He is standing in the building's glade-like interior, where oval openings bring light down through the swooping ceiling, and an aperture in the floor gives a glimpse of the exhibition level below. Faceted glass walls enclose a 320-seat concert hall and a small lecture theatre, while a suspended staircase spirals up to a library, cafe and classrooms, housed in the undulating roof. "Budapest has a very rich musical life already," he adds, "so we didn't want to repeat what you can get elsewhere. This is not just for high and classical, but ethnic, folk and pop – the really exciting side of music."



Cultural showcase ... the House of Music takes shape. Photograph: Balázs Mohai

The building is one of the first major elements of the €1bn [Liget project](#), a controversial vision concocted by populist prime minister Viktor Orbán's rightwing government to transform the Városliget area into a showcase of Hungarian national culture. A €120m [Museum of Ethnography](#) is nearing completion nearby, in the form of two gigantic sloping wedges rearing up out of the ground, clad in a strange lacy wrapping that nods to Hungarian national dress.

With these contemporary buildings we can put Budapest on the map, creating the most complex cultural district in Europe

A colossal €300m [National Gallery](#) is planned to the north, designed by Japanese architects Sanaa as a topsy-turvy stack of tilting white planes that looks caught in mid-collapse. There are plans to reconstruct a palatial neobaroque pile, bombed in the war, as a [House of Hungarian Innovation](#), as well as rebuild an art nouveau theatre, demolished in the Soviet era, as a [children's centre](#). And if that's not enough, the construction of "[Europe's largest biodome](#)" is under way in the zoo next door (unfinished and on hold after funding ran out).

"Budapest doesn't have an obvious identity for tourists," says László Baán, ministerial commissioner in charge of the Liget project, standing over a large model of the park, dotted with the new attractions. "With these contemporary buildings we can put Budapest on the map, creating the most complex cultural district in Europe."

It is every (would-be) dictator's dream leisure-scape, clearly conceived to echo the scale of ambition in the Habsburg era, when the park was laid out and flanked with regal palaces of art for the [1896 Millennial Exhibition](#). Critics suggest the scheme is chiefly motivated by Orbán's desire to move the government to Buda Castle, where the National Gallery is currently housed, further aligning himself with imperial glory days. His self-styled "[illiberal democracy](#)" may have curtailed the free press, crushed academic freedoms and curbed gay rights, but he is keen to ensure a legacy of large cultural baubles.

The future of his vision, however, is in jeopardy, after Gergely Karácsony – Budapest's centre-left mayor who was elected on a green platform in 2019 – called for a halt to the "[government concrete mania in one of the world's first public parks](#)". Echoing the activists who [chained themselves to structures](#) to try to prevent construction of the House of Hungarian Music, he has said he will defend the park from future development "with my own body, if necessary, and I will encourage all Budapest residents to do so". He has agreed that projects under construction can be completed, but no further work will begin – for now, at least.



Seductive ... the spiral staircase. Photograph: Liget Budapest/György Palkó

The changes to the park so far have had a mixed reception. A big new playground, running track and public sports pitches have been wildly popular with some, while others lament the transformation of what was a quiet and leafy, if rather scruffy, haven into a busy outdoor activity centre. An impressive new conservation and storage facility has brought world-class restoration labs, but the looming ethnographic museum, by local firm Napur, seems widely disliked. (Ironically, its cartoonish form was chosen in an anonymous competition by a jury who thought they were picking the work of Danish star Bjarke Ingels.)

Given this context, the House of Hungarian Music stands out as the most thoughtful part of the jumbled offering. Replacing a cluster of dilapidated Soviet-era expo offices, which had been run down and off limits for years, the building keeps a low profile and does its best to nestle among the trees. The roof is sculpted and punctured to allow existing sycamores to rise through its holes, extending beyond the building line to shelter an outdoor stage. In Fujimoto's words: "We wanted to transform the forest into architecture."

The architect grew up on the edge of woodland in rural Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan's main islands. He often talks of trees, glades and

clearings as an inspiration, enjoying the sense of being in an open field while also protected and enclosed, encouraging people to walk and discover. Further probing of his intentions wasn't possible: he declined interviews and hasn't visited the completed building. The pandemic was cited as the reason, but perhaps he is also wary of being photographed with Orbán, mindful of the backlash after Ingels was [snapped with Brazil's president Jair Bolsonaro](#).

This is Fujimoto's first permanent public project in Europe, and it's a departure from what you might expect, given his [2013 Serpentine Pavilion](#) in London and his [housing block in Montpellier](#), France. His competition-winning scheme depicted a smooth white world, in the familiar contemporary Japanese style, but his clients wanted something warmer and cosier. They took him to visit the secessionist palace of the Liszt Academy of Music, whose art nouveau ceiling writhes with gilded leaves, and inspired an about-turn. The seamless white pancake became encrusted with geometric golden leaves, and its roof cutouts also lined with gold, while the columns turned from mirror-finished to dark grey to match the tree trunks outside. In places, it can feel a bit much, Fujimoto's organic minimalism dressed in a kitsch folk costume, but the festive garb is fitting for a place dedicated to celebrating the magic and theatre of music.



Outdoor stage ... the House of Hungarian Music does its best to nestle among the trees. Photograph: Liget Budapest/György Palkó

The exhibition itself, curated by Batta and operational director Márton Horn, is a family-friendly riot, charting the history of European music through a sequence of interactive displays. Reached via a white spiral stair, it begins with a circle of drums, which must be pounded to lure wild animals out of a virtual forest, before introducing the Hungarian dance house movement, where you are invited to copy traditional folk dances on a responsive dancefloor inside a little wooden cabin.

Next you can conduct a virtual choir of Gregorian monks, alongside a display of early codices, before being thrust into the holographic worlds of Haydn, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and into a section on opera – complete with an interactive screen of operatic face filters for the selfie generation.

A section on technology charts innovations from the phonograph to the cloud while, elsewhere, you can remix classic film soundtracks, try your hand at DJing and learn a range of instruments. A second temporary exhibition space will open later in the year with a show on Hungarian pop music from 1957-93, which promises to be full of equally bizarre delights.

The party continues in a room next door in the form of a “sound dome” inspired by the [Kugelauditorium](#) – a spherical concert hall created by Karlheinz Stockhausen for the 1970 World Expo in Osaka. With 32 speakers arranged behind a perforated hemispherical dome, it plunges visitors into an immersive audio-visual experience, beginning with a selection of short films shot in the countryside, but it promises to liven up with planned DJ nights and screenings.

The spiral stair carries you into the depths of the crumpled, where Fujimoto’s vision begins to feel more compromised, the architectural idea trumping practical needs. The competition drawings looked seductive, showing a hidden world tucked inside the roof, but when you’re in the library, lit from above, it’s hard not to think it might have been nicer to have some windows looking out on to the park. The classrooms and offices also feel squeezed into the restrictive floorplan, rather than the form of the building being designed around them, although a cafe terrace does look out on a fun musical playground outside.

The House of Music is, ultimately, a welcome addition to the park, but it's not enough to convince that pursuing the rest of the Liget plan would be wise. With [six opposition parties joining forces](#) in an attempt to topple Orbán in the April elections, there is a chance that his overblown vision might remain just that.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/jan/24/sou-fujimotos-house-of-hungarian-music-we-wanted-to-transform-the-forest-into-architecture>

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

Money hacksWifi

How to speed up your broadband internet

A slow connection affects not only your entertainment but also your ability to work from home



Fixing your broadband speed will get you surfing the internet faster.
Illustration: Jamie Wignall

[Samuel Gibbs](#) Consumer technology editor

Mon 24 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

Do a speed check

Find out the speed you are getting using a computer connected to your router via an [ethernet](#) network cable. Many routers and other devices come with one, or they cost about £5 separately.

You may also need a USB ethernet adapter (about £10) if your computer does not have a port built-in.

If you can't connect via ethernet, use a modern phone, laptop or tablet on wifi as close to your router as possible with a clear line of sight.

[Ookla's Speedtest.net](#) and [Netflix's Fast.com](#) are reliable speed-testing services.

Some more advanced routers have speed testing services built into them, too. They are typically accessible via a router's settings pages in your browser or a companion app, if they have one.



Connecting your device to the router with an ethernet cable can improve speeds. Photograph: Tetra Images/Getty Images/Tetra images RF

If your broadband is slow at the router, it might be time to switch providers. Some fixed-line ISPs offer speeds in excess of 200Mbps in certain areas, while 4G/5G home broadband is an alternative.

If you are not getting near the speed your ISP advertises, you may be able to get a discount, or switch to a plan with higher speeds.

Work out what you need

When it comes to broadband the faster the better, particularly with multiple people and devices using the internet at once. However, the minimum speed needed for most online activities is fairly slow.

Video calling services, such as Zoom, typically need up to 4Mbps upload and download.

Online gaming services, such as Xbox Live, need at least 3Mbps down and 0.5Mbps up, while game streaming services need a minimum of 10Mbps down.

Video streaming, such as Netflix, needs at least 5Mbps for HD or 25Mbps for 4K content.

The median broadband speed in the UK is 50.4Mbps down and 9.8Mbps up, [according to data from Ofcom in March 2021](#). That means that the majority of connections should be able to handle most popular services.

But bear in mind that with more than one device, or person, using your connection simultaneously, including updates and downloads when idle, slower broadband packages can quickly get choked.

Reposition your router

If your broadband connection is fast enough but your wifi is weak, there are things you can do. If possible, move the router closer to the centre of the house, or towards the rooms in which you need the strongest signal. Keep it in the open, not in a cabinet, and away from solid and metallic objects.

And try to position it away from dense walls, particularly those made out of [concrete blockwork](#) or with pipes and wires running through them.

Check your settings

Most modern routers will automatically select the best settings for your home, but you can manually check using the web interface of your router

accessed through a browser on a computer. Consult the help pages for your ISP's router for how to do so.

Wifi operating at 2.4GHz uses a range of frequency “channels”, only some of which do not overlap with each other. To reduce interference from your neighbours' wifi, switch to channel 1, 6 or 11, which do not overlap, and therefore are less likely to cause or suffer interference.

If you have a connection under 200Mbps, enabling prioritisation or “quality of service” for your key devices, might help. This stops other things from sucking up all the available bandwidth – it will prevent a game download on an Xbox cutting off a video call on your laptop, for instance.

Set a strong wifi password using at least WPA2 security, not the lowest WEP option. This will make sure no wifi thieves can log on to your network and steal your bandwidth.

Check your devices

An internet slowdown may be down to your devices rather than your router. For older computers, upgrading the wifi adapter may help. USB wifi 5 adapters cost under £15, while the latest wifi 6 models cost about £50, but you will need a compatible router to take advantage of the extra speed.

For a non-portable device, such as a media streamer or a console, use an ethernet cable if it is close to the router, as this will be faster and more reliable than wifi.

If you have about 40 devices connected at once, consider disconnecting unnecessary ones to help provide more bandwidth for those you need most.

Weaker routers struggle with lots of devices connected at once.

Extend the wifi reach

If your wifi can't reach parts of your house you can extend the signal of your current router with add-on gadgets.

Powerline networking devices use your home's power cables to transmit data. They typically cost between £20 and £70. They plug into standard electrical sockets with one connected to the router via an ethernet cable, and others placed about the home providing ethernet ports and/or wifi for your devices. The speed you get through them is dependent on the condition of your electrical wiring.

Wifi extenders (£25-70) do a similar thing, but simply connect to your router via wifi, then rebroadcast it for other devices.

A network switch (under £20) can add more ethernet ports to your router if you need to connect more devices.

Upgrade to a better router



Mesh wifi systems come in various shapes and sizes, spreading your broadband all over your home using a series of wirelessly interconnected satellite units. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Replacing your existing router is often the most effective way to improve your wifi, but is also the most costly. Before committing to a third-party router, speak to your ISP as it may be able to provide you with a more

modern one for free. Virgin and other ISPs are currently rolling out more powerful wifi 6-capable routers.

Otherwise, there are broadly two options: a beefy single router with much more powerful wifi broadcasting ability than the cheap one provided by your ISP, or a mesh system, which uses a series of satellites dotted about your home to blanket it in wifi.

Both typically use your existing router as a modem and then broadcast their own more robust wifi network.

Single unit wifi 6 routers start at about £60 but can reach the hundreds for powerful gaming-orientated devices. They connect to your old ISP box via ethernet cable, which means they are often easier to place in a more central area of your home. Running a long ethernet cable under floorboards, carpets, behind skirting boards or picture rails, or just under furniture can help keep things neat.

Good wifi 5 mesh systems start at under £100 for a triple pack of satellites, which should be enough for most homes with connections under 200Mbps. For those with faster broadband, [good tri-band wifi 6 models cost about £300](#).

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2022/jan/24/how-to-speed-up-your-broadband-internet>

2022.01.24 - Coronavirus

- [Live Covid: Beijing reports new cases for seventh consecutive day; WHO chief says pandemic ‘at a critical juncture’](#)
- [England Long Covid: nearly 2m days lost in NHS staff absences](#)
- [St Lucia Covid danger in tiny courts puts stop to murder trials](#)
- [US Rising Covid cases in nursing homes prompts hospital warnings](#)

[Coronavirus live](#)

[World news](#)

Testing for fully vaccinated travellers to UK to be scrapped; new vaccine pass rules in France – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/jan/24/covid-live-news-omicron-could-mean-pandemic-endgame-in-europe-who-says>

Long Covid

Long Covid: nearly 2m days lost in NHS staff absences in England

MPs urge support for workers after data shows extent of ongoing illness in first 18 months of pandemic

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



An estimated 1.82m days were lost to healthcare workers with long Covid from March 2020 to September 2021 across England's 219 NHS trusts.
Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

[Ian Sample](#) Science editor

[@iansample](#)

Sun 23 Jan 2022 19.01 EST

NHS trusts in England lost nearly 2m days in staff absences due to long Covid in the first 18 months of the pandemic, according to figures that reveal the hidden burden of ongoing illness in the health service.

MPs on the all-party parliamentary group (APPG) on coronavirus estimate that more than 1.82m days were lost to healthcare workers with long Covid from March 2020 to September 2021 across England's 219 NHS trusts.

The estimate is based on data obtained under the Freedom of Information Act from 70 NHS trusts and does not include the impact of the highly transmissible Omicron variant that has fulfilled record-breaking waves of infection in the UK and globally since it was first detected in November.

Layla Moran, the Liberal Democrat MP who chairs the APPG, said the government had paid “almost no attention to long Covid and the severe impact it was having on vital public services” and called for immediate support for those affected.

“Thousands of frontline workers are now living with an often debilitating condition after being exposed to the virus while protecting this country,” she said. “They cannot now be abandoned.”

The Office for National Statistics estimates that [1.3 million people](#), or 2% of the population, are living with long Covid, based on people self-reporting symptoms that last more than a month after a Covid infection. More than half a million have had symptoms for at least a year, with [ailments](#) ranging from breathlessness, fatigue and a cough to muscle aches and pains, “brain fog”, headaches and palpitations.

While the figures are only a rough estimate of the impact long Covid is having on health service staff, the MPs have called on the government to recognise the condition as an [occupational disease](#). The move would help standardise support and care for those affected, and improve data collection on the problem across the country. In a further step, the MPs urged ministers to set up a compensation scheme for key workers who have suffered financially through loss of work.

The APPG estimates that long Covid caused thousands of staff to be off work for four weeks or more in any given period of the epidemic up until September 2021. The average trust had more than 100 staff off with long Covid and lost more than 8,000 days in absences over the period examined.

Only four NHS trusts provided details on the duration of staff absences due to long Covid. These suggest that on average staff were off for more than 80 days with long-term symptoms.

Moran said the government must create a compensation scheme for “any of these key workers who have been unable to return to work” and “as a first step in protecting our public services from the impact of long Covid, they must recognise it as an occupational disease and provide formal guidance to employers.”

Saffron Cordery, the deputy chief executive of NHS Providers, which represents hospital trusts in England, said while additional funding had been set aside for long Covid services, demand was likely to grow given the large number of people infected in the Omicron wave.

“We will need to see more long-term, structural support for treatment of long Covid, as the shorter term horizon of fixed pots of funding make it difficult to develop and train a sustainable workforce,” she said. “This is particularly important for community trusts and primary care services which have been on the frontline of managing long Covid support.

“As we start to grapple with the long term effects of Covid, the government will need to look at the wider socio-economic impacts of the disease, including who needs specific support. While this is a decision for government, we know that worklessness and economic deprivation increase demand for mental health services, which are already under incredible strain.”

The Observer[**St Lucia**](#)

Covid danger in St Lucia's tiny courts puts stop to murder trials

Ninety wait for justice as infection controls prevent juries from sitting for two years



Castries, the capital of St Lucia, where courtrooms are too small for Covid safety. Photograph: Brian Jannsen/Alamy

[Emma Graham-Harrison](#)

Sun 23 Jan 2022 05.15 EST

St Lucia has not been able to hold a homicide trial for two years, because courtrooms are too small to safely seat a jury under Covid rules, the [Caribbean](#) nation's director of public prosecutions has said.

The build-up of untried cases is one of the most extreme examples of the damaging impact of the pandemic on access to justice globally. Rule of law

has deteriorated around the world, the World Justice Project found. Three-quarters of the countries evaluated for its Rule of Law Index experienced a decline in 2021.

In [St Lucia](#), efforts to control Covid have contributed to a backlog of people waiting for trial, even as the murder rate has risen to record levels, the DPP, Daasrean Greene, told an online event this month marking the start of the legal year in the Eastern Caribbean States.

“My office has not been able to embark on a murder trial since January of 2020,” he told senior judges, magistrates and lawyers and other legal officials from across the region. “There are over 90 persons awaiting trial for the offence of murder, while we continue to struggle with the difficulty of finding appropriate housing for our courts.”



The first district court in Castries, St Lucia, where no murder trials have taken place for two years due to Covid restrictions . Photograph: Keith Larby/Alamy

Physical distancing rules meant none of the courtrooms could accommodate the number of jurors required to try offences of murder, he added. Greene’s office did not respond to requests for comment on future plans for prosecution in St Lucia.

The country is in a fifth wave of Covid-19, and was last week added to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [“avoid travel” list](#). Since the pandemic began, there have been nearly 19,000 infections and more than 340 deaths in a population of fewer than 200,000 people.

St Lucia had struggled with courtroom infrastructure before the pandemic. It does not have a central judicial building, with courts set up in locations including a shopping mall, according to a UN report. “Courts are scattered around the city in inconvenient locations,” it said. “Among other problems, this presents logistical problems for lawyers juggling cases in civil and criminal courts.

“Security, size and other concerns surrounding repurposed court buildings led to protracted suspensions of cases as recently as 2018, with the shutdown in St Lucia contributing to an over 50% reduction in the number of cases heard.”

Covid-19 has turned those difficulties into insoluble problems for St Lucia and serious challenges elsewhere. Neighbouring St Vincent went several months without holding jury trials because of distancing rules.

“The pandemic has been devastating to the criminal justice system in the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States,” said Dame Janice M Pereira, the chief justice of the Eastern Caribbean supreme court, who chaired the gathering.

“Jury trials have been stalled in many of our member states and territories, due mostly to our inability to provide the required physical distancing protocols for a jury in many of our courtrooms.”

However, there had been some benefits from the pandemic including an embrace of digital technology that would, she hoped, improve the courts’ accessibility, efficiency and effectiveness.

“In just over the past year we have seen the use of digital platforms and other innovations becoming significant and essential features of our court system,” she said.

“As COVID-19 lingers on and even beyond the pandemic, digitally driven courts will be critical to the continued administration of justice ... There is no turning back,” she said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/23/covid-danger-in-st-lucias-tiny-courts-puts-stop-to-trials>

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

US news

Rising Covid cases in US nursing homes prompt hospital warnings

Omicron wave has led to staff shortages, meaning hospitals that would normally release patients into care homes are backed up



A nursing home in New York City. There were more than 31,500 cases among nursing home residents in the week ending 9 January. Photograph: Yuki Iwamura/AP

[Melody Schreiber](#)

Mon 24 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

Covid cases are rising rapidly among US nursing home residents and staff, causing shortages in admissions, exacerbating bed shortages at hospitals in turn, and in some cases requiring the national guard to be called in.

The Omicron wave has sent many staff home sick at care facilities and rehabilitation centers that offer round-the-clock medical care. As a result, hospitals that would normally release patients into such stepped-down care are now holding off, creating a backlog of patients stuck in hospital.

“Things are condition critical today. Individuals can’t find an empty or staffed bed out there,” said David Grabowski, professor of health care policy at Harvard Medical School.

“It really puts hospitals in a difficult position,” he said, noting that they can’t admit new patients until they find a spot at a care facility for those patients well enough to be transferred. “That’s a huge problem, because they’re occupying a bed that would otherwise go to a new patient.”

There were more than 31,500 cases among nursing home residents in the week ending 9 January, nearly as many as last winter’s peak, [according](#) to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Cases among staff are even higher – more than double last year’s highest record, with more than 57,000 confirmed cases in the week of 9 January, a tenfold increase in just three weeks.

The rapid rise in infections compounds existing worker shortages, with [234,000 caregivers](#) having exited the industry during the pandemic so far – a 15% reduction in the workforce in only two years.

In Wisconsin, the shortages are so acute that more than 200 members of the national guard will be [trained to work as nursing aides](#).

“Right now, the only thing that is on their minds is the essential of, ‘How do we stay open without shortchanging our patients?’” said Leemore Dafny, professor at Harvard Business School.

Yet the acute care offered by some nursing homes is “a really important release valve for the hospitals”, she said, adding that without it hospitals may become even more overwhelmed: “It causes this ricochet effect.”

Care facilities, already buffeted by the pandemic, are a little-acknowledged part of the health system, particularly for patients who don’t need hospital-

level care but aren't yet ready to go home.

"Nursing homes, including the post-acute care parts, have just always been kind of secondary to hospitals, and I think that comes back to bite us. Because it turns out they're a pretty essential link in the chain," said R Tamara Konetzka, professor of public health sciences at the University of Chicago.

"Nursing homes throughout the early part of the pandemic were really the epicenter of the tragedy of Covid-19," Konetzka said. At various times, they accounted for 30% to 50% of the total deaths in their areas.

Residents of nursing homes have had some of the highest fatality rates of the pandemic, because of their close living quarters and the increased susceptibility of residents to Covid-19.

The pandemic was also brutal on staff. "They put themselves at risk. Cases among staff have been among the highest" among workers, Grabowski said. At one point in the pandemic, he said, being a nursing home worker was the most dangerous job in America, based on the death rates.

Nursing homes had already struggled with understaffing for decades, and the pandemic amplified those problems. Workers feared getting sick and [bringing the virus home](#) to vulnerable family members. Some struggled to find child care during school and daycare closures. Others became disabled, and still others died. Some, meanwhile, found they could work elsewhere for equal or better pay.

Yet having enough staff during nursing-home outbreaks can be a defining factor in how well residents do, according to [research](#) from Konetzka, Grabowski, and others.

"You really need enough staff to try to stem the outbreak," Konetzka said. Nursing home staff test patients regularly, move those who are positive into isolation areas, and provide care both for Covid and any underlying conditions.

Admissions to nursing homes remain below pre-pandemic levels. The pandemic has seen some patients defer care and hospitals delay scheduled procedures, such as hip replacements, that would require a stay in a step-down facility.

Many patients were worried by headlines about high rates of cases and deaths in nursing homes, as well as isolation and loneliness.

“There was a real reluctance to enter a nursing home during the pandemic,” Grabowski said.

Omicron has so far led to significantly lower deaths than previous Covid waves, though deaths can be a lagging indicator, following cases and hospitalizations by a few weeks. High vaccination rates among residents – 87% are fully immunized – may keep fatalities low.

“The original vaccine effort was one of the real success stories during the pandemic when it comes to nursing homes,” Grabowski said.

However, there is high turnover in care facilities, both of staff and residents. “Even if you got everybody vaccinated the first time around, a few months later, there are going to be different people there,” Konetzka said.

Residents of nursing homes are also at generally higher risk of breakthrough infections, in part because the vaccines don’t work as well to spark lasting immune systems of older adults. Boosters can help, Konetzka said, but “that’s also not been very organized or systematic.”

Staff vaccination rates are lower, too, at 81%. That means one in five nursing-home employees are unvaccinated, putting them at higher risk of passing the virus on to residents and getting ill themselves. Even if staff are out for a few days, it puts pressure on the entire system.

But staff vaccination rates may soon increase with the federal vaccine mandate for facilities accepting Medicaid and Medicare, which could help reduce soaring cases and shortages.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/24/covid-coronavirus-us-nursing-homes-hospital->

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

2022.01.24 - Opinion

- Distrust, disengagement and discord will be the disgraceful legacy of Boris Johnson
- We can afford to reverse poverty and climate breakdown. What we can't afford is the alternative
- A measure of autonomy in eastern Ukraine is the only way out of this crisis
- Waiting lists must not be a pretext for privatising the NHS

Opinion**Boris Johnson**

Distrust, disengagement and discord will be the disgraceful legacy of Boris Johnson

[John Harris](#)



The damage done by this prime minister's misrule goes way beyond him, his inner circle and even his party



Illustration: Matt Kenyon for the Guardian.

Mon 24 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

As Boris Johnson and the Conservative party anxiously tread political water while repeatedly being pulled under by strife and disgrace, two plotlines are unfolding. One is about the immediate moment, and will reach another key juncture with the imminent [report](#) by the senior civil servant Sue Gray, which may finally focus wavering Tory minds on the impossibility of the prime minister's position. Meanwhile, amid new [allegations of blackmail](#), rumours of yet [more illicit gatherings](#) and Dominic Raab's characteristically clever insistence that his boss is "[like a seasoned prizefighter](#)" who has "taken some knocks", another story is in danger of being lost: the dire implications of Johnson's antics for people's trust in politics, and a gap between Westminster and the country that may now be bigger than ever.

All those Downing Street and Whitehall parties – along with the prime minister's evasions, half-apologies and desperate attempts to shore himself up – have been reported in terms of shock-horror revelation. But for many voters, they will confirm longstanding ideas about the kind of people who run the country, or aspire to.

In 1944, about a third of Britons endorsed the idea that MPs and ministers were merely “out for themselves”, but late last year [that figure was put at 63%](#). According to pollsters and academics, the first phase of the pandemic [saw political distrust briefly fall](#) before it reverted to pre-pandemic levels. They may have dutifully followed the government’s rules and restrictions, but millions of people evidently have much the same view of politics and power as ever: either indifference or a tendency to outrage and a readiness – fair or not – to assume the worst of politicians, whichever party they represent. The real tragedy of Johnson’s fall is that it will send that alienation soaring: when Sajid Javid [recently conceded](#) that the accounts of all the parties have “damaged our democracy”, this is presumably what he meant.

In [12 years of political reporting](#), I have never felt that the reasons for such disaffection are all that complicated. Any meaningful sense of a social contract has long gone; many people’s lives are so precarious and chaotic that politics sounds like white noise, and its practitioners inevitably seem cosseted and privileged. Episodes such as the Iraq war, the crash of 2008 and the MPs’ expenses scandal only accelerated that estrangement. To cap it all, Facebook, Twitter and the rest have fostered a bitterly angry and divisive public discourse, and created a spectrum of disengagement that runs from an extreme outer edge to the heart of public opinion. At one end are people who think the world is run by a [secret order of vampiric lizard people](#) or worse; beyond this hardcore lie various shades of the belief that politicians are a strange and hypocritical clique, and most of what governments get up to confirms this.

Some politicians [have said](#) they want to prove all this stuff wrong and restore the reputation of both their profession and the state. Johnson, by contrast, is one of those figures who surveyed the ferment and saw mouthwatering possibilities. Notwithstanding [his first, aborted run for the Tory leadership](#), he soon made it to the top of his party, thanks to the EU referendum of 2016 and the success of a leave campaign that tapped into millions of people’s feelings of distance from power, raising their hopes with [promises](#) that everyone involved must have known would quickly turn to dust. His thumping election victory in 2019 was at least partly based on the selling to the public of a politician who supposedly wasn’t a politician, with a contempt for convention that held the key to Brexit’s impossible puzzles.

Since then, most of his behaviour in office has apparently been based on the belief that if people's faith in leaders and institutions was so low, old-fashioned "delivery" would hardly matter, and he would have the moral latitude to get away with just about anything. As proved by the [panicky rag-bag](#) of policies he recently floated – attacking the BBC, sending the armed forces into the English channel, somehow tackling NHS waiting lists – to look for coherence, or to imagine many of his ideas being implemented, is to miss the point: his political approach is as chaotic and volatile as the public mood that gave rise to it, and really about nothing but him. As many have long known, what we have basically been dealing with is a [political-psychological cousin of Trumpism](#), rooted on the playing fields of Eton rather than suburban New York – and it is all about defying the demands of traditional politics by using turmoil, misinformation and endless performance. But this is not America – yet – and Johnson has discovered that even if the public are jaded and cynical, some things remain beyond the pale.

Perhaps, like an initial crack on a car windscreen, the disgrace of partygate will shatter just about every aspect of his record. But here we hit one of the most glaring consequences of his misrule: the fact that even if he is forced out, the ramifications of his time in office will spread far further than him and his inner circle. Some of his Conservative colleagues evidently think that after he has gone, a new leader will be able to announce a completely fresh start. On that score, I would direct them to the opinion of a first-time Tory voter in the newly Conservative constituency of Bolton North East, whose opinions were [recently recorded](#) by the former Downing Street pollster James Johnson: "They're all up there backing him, most of them. That's my worry now, with the [Conservative] party: 'Oh, he's apologised, let's just get on with the job.' No – you've lied about doing the job."

Even if they have [kept their distance](#), whoever succeeds Johnson will be faced by lingering anger about his rule-breaking and deceit, and how much he was indulged by his colleagues – not to mention the consequences of Brexit, the fallout from his largely disastrous handling of Covid, and the [cost-of-living crisis](#), which by raising National Insurance and scrapping the £20-a-week rise in universal credit his government has managed only to deepen.

There is a rather naive view that as Johnson's popularity tumbles, Labour's will carry on rising, and – by some as yet unexplained miracle – Keir Starmer and his party will eventually win enough seats to take power. But like all Labour leaders, he will depend on the public being open to his ideas, and prepared to believe that government can make a difference to their lives. His [current leads in the polls](#) aren't bad, but you can find [similar](#) numbers in the history of plenty of Labour leaders who went on to lose – which perhaps suggests that the disaffection and anger spread by Johnson's misconduct and broken promises may partly bypass Labour and feed into something much more insidious and grim.

This is the prospect that should worry people on all sides of politics. Long before partygate, years of public disengagement gave us Nigel Farage, Tommy Robinson and millions of people concluding that the system was broken and simply switching off. In those circumstances, the first duty of anyone in high office should have been to try to heal the breach. But, having become prime minister in the midst of a crisis of trust, Johnson then made it even worse, sometimes as a matter of deliberate design, with consequences that will long outlast his time at the top. Whenever he goes, this will be his most lasting legacy – which is surely the greatest disgrace of all.

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/24/boris-johnson-prime-minister-legacy>.

OpinionAid

We can afford to reverse poverty and climate breakdown. What we can't afford is the alternative

[Kevin Watkins](#)

Our global finance system is failing to rise to the challenges we face. It's time it was reimagined – and grounded in our shared humanity



‘There is an urgent need to convert unpayable debts into investments in health, education and safety nets.’ Camp for the internally displaced in Mozambique. Photograph: Baz Ratner/Reuters

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

Mon 24 Jan 2022 03.15 EST

“The peoples of the Earth,” Henry Morgenthau said, “are inseparably linked by a deep underlying community of purpose.”

In July 1944, Morgenthau, the US Treasury secretary, was [closing the Bretton Woods conference](#) with a reflection on extreme nationalism and the failures of cooperation that had led to war. Cautioning against the pursuit of national interest through “the plan-less, senseless rivalry that divided us”, he outlined an accord for new institutions grounded in an appeal to shared humanity.

Reading Morgenthau’s speech today is a jolting reminder of how a generation of political leaders sought to remake the world. The institutional architecture – the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and what became the World Trade Organization – that emerged from Bretton Woods may have been deeply flawed. But this was an attempt to underpin through practical financial and monetary cooperation the human rights and freedoms envisaged in the [UN charter](#).

Today we need institutions equipped to rise to the great challenges posed by Covid-19, poverty and the climate crisis. Yet political leaders gripped by

vaccine nationalism, climate nationalism and economic nationalism are manifestly lacking the “community of purpose” their citizens and the world need in this moment of crisis.

Nowhere are the failures more starkly evident than in the financial response to the pandemic. When Covid-19 struck, governments in rich countries acted decisively to contain the social and economic impacts. Fiscal rulebooks were torn up and monetary orthodoxies abandoned. Even the most conservative finance ministers responded to the crisis like Keynesians on public finance steroids. [According to the IMF](#), economic stimulus measures equivalent to about one-quarter of GDP were implemented.

Contrasts with lower-income countries could not be more striking. Most were unable to muster more than 1-2% of GDP in increased public spending, leaving vulnerable populations unprotected and economies trapped in a downward spiral.

Recession magnified pre-pandemic debt problems, leaving more than half of low-income countries either in, or at risk of, [debt distress](#). Amid the public health crisis triggered by the pandemic, 43 lower-income countries were left spending [more on debt than public health](#).

The financing disparities have fuelled what some commentators have described as a [Great Divergence](#). While rich countries have all but recovered the economic ground lost during the pandemic, average incomes in the poorest countries will remain below pre-pandemic levels until [mid-decade](#). Meanwhile, budget austerity is reinforcing inequalities within countries as vital public services are cut.

The human consequences have been devastating. Progress towards the 2030 sustainable development goals (SDGs) has been thrown into reverse. The number of people in [poverty](#) has increased by more than 90 million. Two decades of progress towards [universal health coverage](#) have ground to a halt, raising the spectre of setbacks in child survival and maternal health.

[Malnutrition](#) is rising. [Disruption to education systems](#) could leave 70% of children in the poorest countries in “learning poverty”, lacking the skills

they need to escape their circumstances.

It would be folly for citizens in rich countries to imagine they will be immune to the instability and insecurity that will accompany these reversals. Yet their governments have responded with a trickle of increased aid, which gives new meaning to the phrase “too little, too late”, and a conservative approach to the governance of the Bretton Woods institutions.

To be fair, the [World Bank and IMF](#) have demonstrated leadership. Commitments for the poorest countries under the bank’s International Development Association (IDA) [rose by a fifth](#) in 2021, to \$36bn (£27bn). The IMF has [scaled up its programmes](#), underwriting a surge in emergency financing, and providing \$14bn in [zero-interest loans](#) to poor countries. The fund’s managing director, Kristalina Georgieva, navigated a new \$650bn allocation of special drawing rights (SDRs) – a central bank reserve asset – through the G20.

None of which is enough. Financing from the [World Bank](#) and regional development banks will provide limited protection against the fiscal retrenchment now in prospect. IMF loans are short-term and must be repaid. Under current allocation rules, two-thirds of the new SDRs will be allocated to rich countries that don’t need them.

We are fighting a forest fire with financial water pistols

In effect, we are fighting an SDG forest fire with financial water pistols. The [IMF estimates](#) that low-income countries alone will need an additional \$550bn to get back on an accelerated recovery pathway. Meanwhile, recession and human development reversals have increased the SDG financing gap by 70% to about \$4.2tn, according to the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) – and that’s without the additional \$1tn needed to finance a green energy transition in developing countries.

The time has come to reimagine a development financing system. More could – and should – be done on aid. The UK’s retreat on that front, most recently in [slashing support for the IDA](#), has been profoundly harmful. But

aid cannot substitute an international public finance system aligned to the SDG ambition.

The World Bank and other multilateral development banks (MDBs) should be deployed far more aggressively. Less risk-averse approaches to [capital adequacy](#) and modest increases in finance would enable MDBs to triple their lending portfolios to [more than \\$1.3tn](#), helping to unlock the private finance for a green recovery and deliver investment in global public goods, such as pandemic preparedness. In a period of low interest rates, this is a no-brainer. So why is the G20 [endlessly reviewing](#) options instead of acting?

The new allocation of SDRs has opened up opportunities now at risk of being squandered. Rich countries do not need the \$433bn in additional reserves bestowed on their central bank balance sheets through the IMF. [Recycling the SDRs](#) through multilateral banks or other mechanisms could provide developing countries with the liquidity and finance they need to support an SDG recovery and a green transition.

Debt relief is critical. If there is one lesson from the 1980s, it is that delayed action on debt is the route to a lost decade of development. With IDA countries scheduled to pay [\\$35bn in debt servicing](#) this year, much of it to private creditors, there is an urgent need to convert unpayable debts into investments in health, education and safety nets. The IMF and World Bank should now be equipped to buy back unsustainable commercial debts at a hefty discount.

John Maynard Keynes, one of the architects of the Bretton Woods system, once dismissed the argument that Britain had reached the limits of affordable social provision with a simple rejoinder: “Anything we can actually do, [we can afford](#).” As an international community we can afford to deliver on the SDGs and prevent climate catastrophe. What we can’t afford is the alternative.

- Kevin Watkins is visiting professor of development practice at the [Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa](#) at the London School of Economics and was until recently chief executive of Save the Children

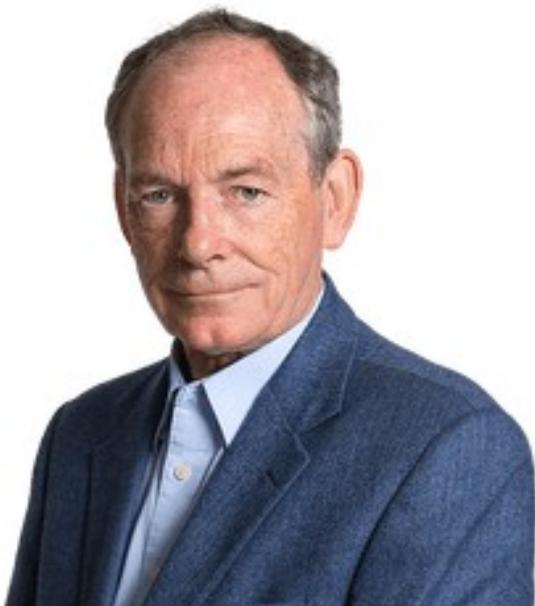
This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/jan/24/we-can-afford-to-reverse-poverty-and-climate-breakdown-what-we-cant-afford-is-the-alternative>

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

OpinionUkraine

A measure of autonomy in eastern Ukraine is the only way out of this crisis

[Simon Jenkins](#)



Nato's treatment of Russia almost guaranteed a chauvinistic reflex. The way forward is to implement the Minsk settlement



‘A thin-skinned dictator flexing such muscle as he can still muster.’ Vladimir Putin parades in Sevastopol, Crimea, 2014. Photograph: Ivan Sekretarev/AP

Mon 24 Jan 2022 04.00 EST

The movement of troops round the Ukrainian border now clearly heralds a crisis. [Russia's level of provocation](#) is grotesque, but nothing on the ground poses any strategic threat to Britain or any other western government, or even to Europe’s security as a whole.

Ukraine’s relations with Russia have been fraught since the toppling of the pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych in a coup in 2014. The country is split. When Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine rebelled, it was aided by Russia. [Moscow seized Crimea](#). The longstanding ties with Russia were one reason why Nato left Ukraine out of its reckless post-Soviet rush to advance its security boundary as near as it could to the Russian border during the 1990s.

All evidence suggests that [Vladimir Putin](#) wants a regime in Kyiv favourable to Russian interests, much as Soviet leaders wanted in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The west wisely did not argue or intervene on either of those occasions. Russia’s motives today seem much the same. Putin

is determined to oppose the emergence of possible liberal, western-oriented societies in Belarus and Ukraine. He watched the other states in eastern Europe crumble and defect from the Warsaw Pact in 1990. He does not want to be the Russian leader who lost these two great territories to his immediate west.

The concept of spheres of interest, regions where the interests of one nation are more important than the interests of another, has always been controversial in diplomacy. There is no UN doctrine of such spheres, but they are potent and all too real. They are relics of ancient empires and modern paranoias. The US regarded Moscow's placing of missiles in Cuba in 1962, and support for Central American states as an intolerable threat. Likewise, Moscow is not prepared to tolerate US missiles in [Ukraine](#) or US troops rolling in to support an anti-Russian regime in Kyiv.

Strategists of spheres of influence are left with the facts of geography and of crude balances of power. China has clearly been extending its reach into south-east Asia and the South China Sea. The US can object, but it is hard to see what gains are achieved by the current buildup of military machismo in the western Pacific, including Britain's ludicrous decision to [deploy an aircraft carrier](#) in the South China Sea.

The reality is that the west took a calculated gamble in expanding Nato in the 1990s. There was no suggestion of imitating Finland's careful and pragmatic neutrality towards its Baltic neighbours that lie in Russia's sphere of influence. Nato had post-Soviet [Russia](#) on the floor and simply could not resist the opportunity of kicking the country when it was already down.

The way [Nato](#) treated Russia almost guaranteed there would be a chauvinist reflex. Moscow's initial feelers from Boris Yeltsin that it might associate with Nato were rebuffed. Mooted associations with the EU were ridiculed. Everything was done to rub Russia's nose in its shame. Putin and his present antics were the predictable result.

The Russian president has now indicated that he wants the 2015 Minsk II settlement implemented. That settlement is sound. It requires autonomy for Russian-speaking Donbas, an end to Nato expansionism, Russian withdrawal and a reinstatement of Ukraine's border. Samantha Power, US

ambassador to the United Nations at the time of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, remarked that Minsk was the "[only viable way out of this deadly conflict](#)". Subsequent US administrations have supported that position. Yet no one has applied sufficient diplomatic effort to put it in place.

Any reasonable observer would see Minsk as a practical and fair way out of this crisis. It has largely been blocked by a Kyiv regime that has long feared Donbas's pro-Russian sentiment and resisted its "home rule". Recognise the autonomy of the Donbas region, Putin says, and he will withdraw. He cannot want to keep 100,000 troops mobilised on the Donbas border indefinitely, any more than he can seriously fear a western army storming east across Ukraine.

At that point, the realpolitik of power comes on stage. It is inconceivable that Nato, in the shape of the US and Britain, would confront Russian battle lines in Donbas. Germany and France would have no part in it. Nor do the US and Britain have the necessary troops. They have the threat of missile barrages, but without logistical support these merely sow destruction.

Moreover, Britain has no obligation to defend Ukraine. Nor does it have an obligation to deter or confront what appears to be an imminent Russian attack. The country has no alliance with Ukraine. Ukraine is not a member of Nato. And Britain has no significant means of influencing the outcome of a battle on the ground. For these reasons, it should stay well out of the situation.

Putin's current show of strength is that of a thin-skinned dictator flexing before his people and the world such muscle as he can still muster. If he goes ahead and invades Donbas, the world will descend on his head with massive damnation, as well as savage but pointless economic sanctions. We saw that over Crimea.

The root of peace in these crises lies in strength, strength to keep everything in proportion and to see a way through. The risk is always that curse of history: when hostilities turn to crisis, war can seem the simplest, most glorious way forward.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/24/autonomy-eastern-ukraine-crisis-nato-russia-minsk>

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

OpinionNHS

Waiting lists must not be a pretext for privatising the NHS

[Stella Creasy](#)

During the pandemic the government has poured money into private healthcare firms. But who is really benefiting?

- Stella Creasy is the Labour MP for Walthamstow



‘The government has funded private healthcare firms, nominally to relieve pressure on overstretched NHS hospitals.’ Paramedics outside the Royal London Hospital. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

Sun 23 Jan 2022 11.43 EST

Millions of patients are currently on tenterhooks, often in agony, hoping the NHS will find time to treat them. In my local hospital trust alone, there are

[100,000 people stuck in this limbo](#), with 8,000 of them waiting for more than a year to date. The backlog for operations has reached an [all-time high](#), with Covid making an already difficult situation impossible. Those patients expecting surgery may be shocked by how the current system could encourage those who treat them to see pound signs rather than patients.

During the pandemic, the government has poured funding into private healthcare firms, nominally to relieve pressure on overstretched NHS hospitals. The kind of spending that was once deployed for cataracts and hip operations is now [being used routinely](#) to deliver cancer and cardiology care.

Nobody objects to every effort being made to cut waiting lists: but that has not happened, and costs have also rocketed. During the Covid crisis, private companies have [pocketed millions in furlough](#) payments while billing the NHS for services that we now know [weren't fully used](#).

This is not just a consequence of trying to respond to a virus; it may also be symptomatic of an inbuilt potential conflict of interest that has seeped into commissioning. Throughout the history of the health service, many NHS consultants have worn two hats, using private practice to top up their public salaries. As the NHS increasingly relies on capacity bought in from the private sector, many consultants have direct shares – and so a financial interest – [in joint venture companies](#).

Research by the [Centre for Health and the Public Interest](#) shows £36m of taxpayers' money has been spent by London NHS trusts on cancer services alone with just one of these companies, HCA Healthcare. At the same time, [120 NHS doctors](#) who work for these same trusts are engaged in joint ventures with HCA.

Their accounts show that over the last six years, £249m in dividends have been generated as a result, of which £26m [went to mainly NHS doctors](#). HCA is not the only company forming such joint ventures, with hundreds more consultants involved.

Patients need to have confidence that if they are referred to a private provider, it is in their interests, not their consultant's. So, too, that any delay

does not reflect the cost of treatment. A constituent who was booked in for urgent [NHS](#) cancer surgery at a hospital run by a major healthcare firm just before Christmas had the surgery cancelled at the last minute. They were told that this was because the facilities were needed for private – and so likely more lucrative – patients. This incident, and the pressures behind it, should concern anyone who understands that the NHS will only thrive if it is medical urgency, and not money, that drives decisions.

Ministers may argue that more than 300,000 people left waiting [more than a year for surgery](#) is a side-effect of the pandemic, but lists have been creeping up for years. Rather than invest in NHS capacity, recent years have seen a conscious decision to divert funding to profit-making private healthcare companies.

Without more scrutiny, this could see healthcare outcomes shaped not by need but whether you have the money to jump the queue, with taxpayers and patients alike paying the price.

- Stella Creasy is the Labour MP for Walthamstow
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/23/waiting-lists-privatising-nhs-pandemic-private-healthcare>

2022.01.24 - Around the world

- [Greece Government blamed for hunger crisis in refugee camps](#)
- [Thierry Mugler French fashion designer dies aged 73](#)
- [Australia Man admits abducting four-year-old Cleo Smith from campsite](#)
- [US Sarah Palin takes on New York Times in defamation trial](#)
- [Burkina Faso Government denies coup after army mutiny and gunfire near president's home](#)

[Greece](#)

Greek government blamed for hunger crisis in refugee camps

Aid charity says 6,000 people, many of whom are children, believed to have no food allowance due to cuts in service



The Diavata refugee camp in Thessaloniki. EU officials and many aid groups are urging Greek authorities to distribute food to everyone who needs it, regardless of status. Photograph: Nicolas Economou/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Helena Smith](#) in Athens

Mon 24 Jan 2022 00.00 EST

Humanitarian groups have accused the Greek government of fomenting a hunger crisis in refugee camps with “conscious” policy choices that have left thousands unable to access food.

Decisions aimed at deterring migrant flows had, they said, created an intolerable situation in which refugees have been left struggling to feed themselves for months.

“It is unthinkable that people are going hungry in [Greece](#),” said Martha Roussou of the International Rescue Committee. “Through no fault of their own they have fallen through the cracks and all because of a problem created by gaps in legislation and policy.”

The IRC said it estimated that 40% of camp occupants – about 6,000 refugees – had been denied basic means of subsistence because of the centre-right administration’s decision to halt food provisions for those no longer in the asylum procedure.

Worryingly high numbers were children. About 40% of the population residing in the state-run facilities are minors.

“Teachers in local primary schools have reported children turning up to school without having eaten, without even a snack to see them through the day,” the New York-based group said in a statement.

Although 16,559 refugees were registered in camps on the Greek mainland, new catering contracts had been agreed to provide food for only 10,213 people, it revealed.

Aid organisations first raised the alarm in October after a change of law resulted in vital services not only being cut for recognised refugees and rejected asylum seekers but those who had failed to register applications, often because of chronic processing delays.

In an open letter addressed to Greek and EU officials, the 33 groups demanded that food be given to all camp residents irrespective of their legal status. The European home affairs commissioner, Ylva Johansson, responded that Greek authorities had been repeatedly called on to “ensure that all persons, particularly the vulnerable” receive food and other necessities.

Athens' migration ministry vigorously rejects any suggestion of a hunger crisis. Manos Logothetis, who oversees refugee reception, described the allegation as "nonsense", saying it had been manufactured by NGOs.

"If there are 10 refugees in this country who have been denied food I will quit my job," he said. "If a hunger crisis really existed there'd be riots and protests. We are in discussion with the EU commissioner every week and have reassured her that there is no issue with food, that everyone who is supposed to receive it, including the vulnerable and incapacitated, is getting support."

But in a written statement the ministry reiterated that under Greek and European law only people applying for international protection could be considered "beneficiaries eligible for material conditions of reception, and therefore food".

In recent months camp residents who do not fit that description have grown, despite Athens also being applauded for accelerating asylum claims.

Rights groups said excessive expectations of successful asylum seekers are partly to blame. Under legislation implemented last year recognised refugees are quickly left to fend for themselves, with benefits they once enjoyed, including cash assistance and food, suspended after 30 days.

In a society with little integration support, survival is often impossible, and most are forced to return to camps after confronting bureaucratic hurdles, linguistic challenges and difficulties finding work.

Turkey's refusal to readmit rejected asylum seekers has not helped either. A landmark deal reached between the EU and Ankara in 2016 aimed to send migrants who failed to win refugee status back to [Turkey](#). The country has refused to take any back since March 2020 when the president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, encouraged thousands of asylum seekers to enter the bloc, via Greece, sparking a border crisis that further soured the Nato allies' already strained ties.

With their claims rejected and without anywhere to go, they, too, are forced to remain in camps.

But rights groups say it is the Greek government's controversial decision to rule Turkey as a safe third country that has mostly accounted for the build-up of people no longer considered part of the asylum process. Since June, Afghans, Syrians, Somalis, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis have been denied the right to seek refugee status, with Athens saying they should apply for asylum in neighbouring Turkey.

"It has created a situation where thousands have been left in legal limbo and in utter destitution without access to food and other basic rights in the camps," said Minos Mouzourakis, legal officer at Refugee Support Aegean, a migrant solidarity group in Athens. "What is absolutely clear is that the hunger crisis unfolding in Greece is a direct result of the conscious policy choices of the government."

It was imperative, he said, that given Turkey's stance, Greek asylum officials ended the impasse by examining the asylum requests of all five nationalities based on merit.

About 90,000 refugees currently live in Greece and arrivals are much reduced from the height of the migrant crisis when close to 1 million Syrians crossed the country en route to the EU. [Kyriakos Mitsotakis' administration has taken a much tougher approach](#) to the issue than that of Alexis Tsipras, his leftist predecessor.

Last year the government assumed control of the running of all 24 camps on the mainland, previously administered by the International [Migration](#) Organization, and in a much-delayed process took charge of a EU-funded cash assistance programme formerly run by the UN. The chaotic transition further exacerbated the food crisis and handouts for refugees who were eligible for cash disbursements in camps and private housing were frozen for three months.

Logothetis acknowledged the problem but insisted that as of last week payments were being "rolled out".

"So much of this crisis is the result of mismanagement, disorganisation and not thinking policies through," said Roussou at the IRC. "We work in

Afghanistan where there is hunger and it is so difficult to resolve. Here in Greece it should be so easy.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/24/greek-government-blamed-for-hunger-crisis-in-refugee-camps>

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

Fashion

French fashion designer Thierry Mugler dies aged 73

Mugler's daring collections came to define 1980s power dressing, while he later dressed Beyoncé and Lady Gaga



French fashion designer Thierry Mugler has died, aged 73. Photograph: Martin Ouellet-Diotte/AFP/Getty Images

Guardian staff and Agence France-Presse
Sun 23 Jan 2022 21.30 EST

French designer Manfred Thierry Mugler, known for the powerful-shouldered, cinch-waisted silhouettes that reigned over fashion in the 1980s, died on Sunday at the age of 73 of "natural causes", according to his agent.

A former ballet dancer, Mugler's bold collections – presented at highly stylised, themed runway shows – were at the forefront of the structured,

decadent style that came to be known as “power dressing”.

“He was timeless and ahead of his time,” supermodel Jerry Hall – the face of his bestselling Angel perfume – said of the designer in 2019. “He knew all about gender fluidity and his clothes reflected the heat and sexuality of the late 70s and early 80s,” [she told the New York Times](#).

Though Mugler retired from the label that bore his name in 2002, he did not give up on making clothes. He was responsible for [Beyoncé’s science fiction-inflected Sasha Fierce looks in the late 2000s](#). He also created costumes for Lady Gaga and Cardi B. In 2019, he created Kim Kardashian’s Met Gala look, a latex dress dripping in crystals.



Kim Kardashian West attends The 2019 Met Gala Celebrating Camp: Notes On Fashion in a dress designed by Thierry Mugler. Photograph: Rabbani and Solimene Photography/WireImage

“We are devastated to announce the passing of Mr Manfred Thierry Mugler on Sunday January 23rd 2022,” said a post on the designer’s official Facebook account.

Born in Strasbourg in December 1948, he arrived in Paris aged 20 and created his own label “Cafe de Paris” in 1973, a year before founding Thierry Mugler.

The LGBTQ community was a frequent source of talent and inspiration for the designer. Mugler cast trans models in his runway shows as early as the 1980s, and frequently collaborated with drag artists and club kids on and off the runway, including corsetmaker Mr Pearl.



Thierry Mugler on the runway with Sharon Stone in 1992 in Los Angeles.
Photograph: Bei/REX/Shutterstock

By the late 1990s, the Mugler name was associated more with fragrance than fashion, thanks to his blockbuster perfume Angel. The rights to his name were acquired by cosmetics giant Clarins in 1997, and that fragrance and its offshoots, remain bestsellers.

[In 2002, the fashion division of Mugler shut down](#) but the brand was revived in 2010 under the creative direction of stylist Nicola Formichetti and later Casey Cadwallader.

Mugler's use of corsetry and his exaggerated approach to the female body has drawn criticism, but the designer was no less extreme with his own physique. In 2019, the normally reclusive designer [posed for a nude photoshoot with Interview Magazine](#) and discussed his exhaustive body-building routine and cosmetic surgeries. "I think it's important for people to

be a complete realisation of themselves. I have always been fascinated by the human body, and I wanted to pay homage to what it can do,” he said.

In 2019, the designer was the subject of a major retrospective exhibition, Thierry Mugler: Couturissime, which debuted in Montreal before touring to Paris in 2021.

The designer had been due to announce new collaborations early this week, his agent Jean-Baptiste Rougeot told Agence France-Presse.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2022/jan/24/french-fashion-designer-thierry-mugler-dies-aged-73>

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

Western Australia

Cleo Smith: Terence Darrell Kelly pleads guilty to abducting four-year-old from WA campsite

Kelly, 36, admits in court to taking child from a tent last year. Other charges have been adjourned to a later date

- [Get our free news app; get our morning email briefing](#)
- [Follow our Australia news live blog for the latest updates](#)



Cleo Smith was found alive and well in early November, 18 days after going missing. Terence Darrell Kelly has pleaded guilty to abducting the four-year-old. Photograph: Western Australian police force/AFP/Getty Images

Australian Associated Press
Sun 23 Jan 2022 23.00 EST

A man has pleaded guilty in court to abducting Cleo Smith from her family's West Australian campsite, sparking a widespread search and attracting global attention.

Terence Darrell Kelly, 36, on Monday admitted taking the four-year-old from a tent at the remote Blowholes campsite last year.

He faced a magistrate via video link from custody, pleading guilty to forcibly taking a child under 16.

The matter has been adjourned to Perth district court on 20 March.

Kelly is also facing other criminal charges, including assaulting a public officer. Those matters have been adjourned to a later date.

Kelly remains in custody.

Cleo was found alive and well in early November, 18 days after she went missing from the campsite.

She was rescued from a property just minutes from her family home in the nearby town of Carnarvon, almost 1,000km north of Perth.

Police forced entry to the home and found the little girl alone in a room, physically unharmed and playing with toys.

- [Sign up to receive an email with the top stories from Guardian Australia every morning](#)

Sign up to receive an email with the top stories from Guardian Australia every morning

Kelly was arrested on a nearby street around the same time. He is alleged to have acted alone and is yet to enter a plea to his other charges.

Police have said he has no connection to Cleo's family.

Kelly was shackled and accompanied by armed riot squad guards on a charter flight from Carnarvon to Perth after his first court appearance.

According to police the extra security was put in place after Kelly was twice hospitalised with self-inflicted injuries while in custody.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/24/man-accused-of-abducting-cleo-smith-to-face-fresh-charge-in-court>

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

Sarah Palin

Sarah Palin tests positive for Covid, delaying New York Times defamation trial

- ‘She is, of course, unvaccinated’, judge says after positive test
- Former Alaska governor suing newspaper over 2017 editorial



Sarah Palin in 2016. Rakoff said rules would permit Palin to return to court on 3 February as long as she has no symptoms. Photograph: Steve Nesius/Reuters

*[Martin Pengelly](#) and agencies
[@MartinPengelly](#)*

Mon 24 Jan 2022 12.11 EST

Sarah Palin has tested positive for the coronavirus – delaying her defamation trial against the [New York Times](#) until next month.

Jed Rakoff, the US federal judge presiding over the case in Manhattan, announced the former Alaska governor and 2008 Republican vice-presidential pick's results on Monday.

“She is, of course, unvaccinated,” the judge said.

Two years into a pandemic that has killed more than 865,000 people in America, resistance to vaccinations and other public health measures is common on the political right.

Palin has urged followers not to get vaccinated. In December, she [told](#) an audience at a conservative event in Arizona: “It’ll be over my dead body that I’ll have to get a shot. I will not do that. I won’t do it, and they better not touch my kids either.”

She [tested positive](#) last March – and advised followers to wear masks.

Her first positive test before the New York trial was an at-home test, Rakoff said. After another positive test, Rakoff announced that jury selection would not be delayed.

“Since she has tested positive three times, I’m going to assume she’s positive,” Rakoff said.

Rakoff said courthouse rules would permit Palin to return to court on 3 February, even if she still tests positive, as long as she has no symptoms. If she does have symptoms, she can be looked at on 2 February by a doctor who provides services to the courts.

Palin, 57, says a 2017 Times [editorial](#) falsely linked her to [a mass shooting](#) in Tucson, Arizona.

The editorial was published after [a shooting in Alexandria, Virginia](#), in which Steve Scalise, a member of House Republican leadership, was wounded.

The Times said the Tucson shooting, in which six people were killed and a Democratic congresswoman, Gabby Giffords, was severely injured, came after Palin's political action committee circulated a map putting 20 Democrats including Giffords under "stylised crosshairs", and that "the link to political incitement was clear".

Palin objected to language that James Bennet, the Times's former editorial page editor, added to a draft prepared by a colleague. She contends that the added material fitted Bennet's "preconceived narrative", and that as an "experienced editor" he knew and understood the meaning of his words. She is seeking unspecified damages, but according to court papers has estimated \$421,000 in damage to her reputation.

The Times corrected the [editorial](#) to remove any connection between political rhetoric and the Arizona shooting. Bennet has said he did not intend to blame Palin.

A Times spokesperson [told CNN](#): "We published an editorial about an important topic that contained an inaccuracy. We set the record straight with a correction. We are deeply committed to fairness and accuracy in our journalism, and when we fall short, we correct our errors publicly, as we did in this case."

Many contend that Palin deserves criticism for employing dangerous rhetoric – if not in direct relation to the Tucson shooting.

On Sunday, the gun control campaigner Shannon Watts [said](#): "In 2010, Sarah Palin created a target list with crosshairs of a gun sight over Congress members' districts. While that campaign may not have been directly related to the Tucson shooting, she helped create today's culture of political threats and violence."

But on the right, many hope Palin's case will lead to a revision of the high standard for proving libel of US public figures – an aim cherished [by Donald Trump](#) among others.

Freedom of the press is enshrined in the [first amendment](#) to the US constitution, ratified in 1791. The supreme court adopted the "actual malice"

standard, which makes it difficult for public figures to win libel lawsuits, in 1964, in the landmark [New York Times v Sullivan](#) decision.

Two justices on the current, conservative-dominated supreme court, Clarence Thomas and Neil Gorsuch, have suggested revisiting that standard and Palin has signaled that she will challenge the Sullivan precedent on appeal if she loses at trial.

Most observers expect her to lose, particularly because the paper so swiftly acknowledged its error. But the Times faces an embarrassing few days in court.

Benjamin Zipursky, a Fordham University law professor, told Reuters Bennet's "immediate sort of emergency mode or panic mode" upon learning what happened strongly suggested he had been unaware of any mistake.

"Negligence or carelessness – even gross negligence – is clearly not good enough for Palin to win," Zipursky said.

But Bill Grueskin, a former senior editor at the Wall Street Journal and Bloomberg News who now [teaches at Columbia University, told NPR](#): "It's going to be great courtroom theatre.

"You're going to have [Sarah Palin](#) up there on the stand. You're going to have some of the top people at the Times – at least of the opinion section. I don't see how that can fail to be interesting."

Grueskin also said that when it comes to rightwing attacks on press freedom, the case "could add more fuel for that fire".

Roy Gutterman, a professor of law and communications at Syracuse University, told Reuters: "This is a potentially dangerous area. If we give public officials a green light to litigate on editorials they disagree with, where's the end?"

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

Burkina Faso

Coup in Burkina Faso as army confirms removal of president

Military says deteriorating security situation in west African country forced it to depose Roch Marc Kaboré



Bullet holes in a presidential car following heavy gunfire near Roch Marc Kaboré's residence in Ouagadougou. Photograph: Reuters

[Emmanuel Akinwotu](#) in Lagos and agencies

Mon 24 Jan 2022 13.54 EST

Burkina Faso's military has announced it has removed the president, Roch Marc Kaboré, from office, suspended the constitution and dissolved the government and parliament, confirming a coup in a statement on the state broadcaster.

In a statement signed by the coup leader, Lt Col Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, and read by another official, the army announced the takeover by a previously unknown group – Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (MPSR).

“MPSR, which includes all sections of the army, has decided to end President Kaboré’s post today,” said the statement, which came following a frenetic day of confusion as well as silence from the now-deposed government.

The deterioration of security in the West African country, beset by jihadist violence, had forced it to seize power, the MPSR said, also announcing an overnight curfew and the closure of land and air borders.

The statement confirmed a coup that followed heavy gunfire at military barracks in the country and at Kaboré’s residence on Sunday night in the capital, Ouagadougou.

Earlier, Kaboré was arrested and detained by soldiers in a move condemned by the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas), and hailed by groups of protesters in the capital.

Many in the country had lost faith in Kaboré, angry at relentless attacks by jihadist groups, including an attack killing 48 military police officers and four civilians last November, which sparked renewed protests and anger at the government.

Despair at the continuous violence since 2015, despite the significant military presence of former colonial ruler France, has also fuelled anger.

On Monday morning, armoured vehicles belonging to his presidential guard were seen covered in bullets and their seats soaked in blood, near the president’s residence.

Before the televised statement, a statement from Kaboré’s Twitter account urged soldiers behind the coup attempt to lay down their weapons. “I invite those who have taken up arms to lay them down in the higher interests of the

nation. It is through dialogue and listening that we must resolve our contradictions,” the statement said.

It is not clear if he personally made the statement. His ruling MPP party also said that the president had survived an assassination attempt and that the national broadcast stations had been occupied by the army.

Military convoys were seen surrounding the country’s state broadcaster on Monday morning, with anti-government protesters gathering outside the building in fevered anticipation of the statement which finally came on Monday evening.

The scene of soldiers announcing military takeovers from public broadcast stations has grown increasingly familiar in West Africa. Similar powergrabs have occurred in Guinea, Mali and Chad in the last year, amid growing jihadist and political instability in some West African countries and the Sahel region.

On Monday Ecowas released a statement condemning the soldiers’ “extreme acts”. It said: “Ecowas asks the military to return to the barracks, to maintain a republican position in favour of dialogue with the authorities to solve these problems.”

After previous coups in West Africa, the regional body has reacted with sanctions, hurting poor economies and drawing criticism from populations that have largely supported recent coups.

According to Andrew Lebovich, a policy fellow at the European Council of Foreign Relations, “a rush to sanctions may help solidify support for coup leaders and entrench them further in power”.

“While it is important not to encourage further overthrows of civilian governments in the region, it is equally important to understand why these coups are occurring more frequently, and the extent of frustration with civilian governments among regional populations,” he said.

Details of the coup gradually emerged after gunfire was heard at several military barracks on Sunday, with initial reports of a mutiny by soldiers,

demanding the sacking of the country's military leadership and lamenting a lack of resources in the conflict with jihadist groups.

As reports of gunfire spread on Sunday, protesters looted and set fire to the headquarters of Kaboré's ruling party, while police dispersed demonstrations in support of a potential coup, held in the centre of the city.

Overwhelmed by the toll of attacks and a resulting humanitarian crisis, many in Burkina Faso have grown angry at Kaboré's government, especially after some of the worst [mass killings by jihadist groups](#) in the last year.

In recent months, protests against the government by civilians and a coalition of opposition groups had put Kaboré's regime under pressure and forced a raft of changes, including a new cabinet and military leadership.

Yet it has done little to quell antipathy to Kaboré, or to the country's former colonial ruler, France, who has committed to reducing its military presence in the Sahel.

The unrest comes a little over a week after 12 people, including a senior army officer, were arrested on suspicion of planning to "destabilise" Burkina's institutions.

An African diplomat in the country said: "Widely within the military there is what you could you liken to dissension. In November he sacked a lot of the top military officials – that has likely caused some to see an opportunity to take advantage.

"Then there is of course the fact they are taking a cue from what is going on in the region, in [Mali, Guinea](#)," they added, referring to military coups in the region.

The government initially dismissed the military unrest, with the defence minister, Gen Barthélémy Simporé, stating on nationwide TV on Sunday that "none of the republic's institutions has been troubled" by the revolt.

Kaboré came to power after the former president Blaise Compaoré was overthrown by a popular uprising in 2014 and fled to Ivory Coast. Compaoré is being tried in absentia for the assassination of the former revolutionary leader Thomas Sankara.

Since 2015 a jihadist insurgency, spreading from neighbouring Mali, has overwhelmed the large and poor west African country. Thousands have died and about 1.5 million people are internally displaced.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/24/burkina-faso-government-denies-coup-after-army-mutiny-and-gunfire-near-presidents-home>

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

Headlines friday 28 january 2022

- [Sue Gray report Met asked for ‘minimal reference’ to No 10 investigation in report](#)
- [Live Downing Street parties: Met asks for references to its investigation to be removed from Gray report](#)
- [‘Time for the truth’ MPs call on Johnson to publish report](#)
- [Sue Gray report Why is the report into No 10 parties taking so long?](#)

Boris Johnson

Sue Gray report facing further delay after Met police intervention

Force says it has asked for report to make minimal reference to Downing Street events it is investigating

- [Follow all the day's political developments – politics live](#)



The force says it has had 'ongoing contact' with the Cabinet Office on the content of the report. Photograph: WIktor Szymanowicz/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

[Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Ben Quinn](#)

Fri 28 Jan 2022 09.39 EST

The publication of the Sue Gray report could be delayed significantly after Scotland Yard revealed it had asked for references to matters it is now

investigating to be removed.

Key parts of the [long-awaited report](#) on allegations of parties in No 10 that may have broken Covid rules could be pared back after the move.

The [Metropolitan police announced](#) on Tuesday that they were launching their own investigation, prompting wrangling with the Cabinet Office about what needed to be censored in the findings handed to No 10 to avoid prejudicing officers' inquiries.

Scotland Yard initially denied holding up Gray's report, but in a statement on Friday it said that for events it was looking into "we asked for minimal reference to be made in the Cabinet Office report".

The Met said it "did not ask for any limitations on other events in the report, or for the report to be delayed, but we have had ongoing contact with the Cabinet Office, including on the content of the report, to avoid any prejudice to our investigation".

The admission led the Liberal Democrats to warn it would be "profoundly damaging" for there to be a hint of an "establishment stitch-up" between the Met commissioner, Cressida Dick, and the government.

Keir Starmer, the Labour leader, accused the government of being distracted by a "charade of Johnson's making", and "paralysed" by attempts to "save his skin". He said people concerned about tax rises and rising energy bills were "getting no answers from a government mired in sleaze and scandal", and it was "offensive" that ministers' "sole focus is on cleaning up after themselves".

Starmer called for Gray's report to be published "in full, as soon as possible" and urged the Met to "get on with their investigation", adding the prime minister was "unfit for office".

Johnson's spokesperson said the Met "should be given time and space" to complete its "independent work".

No 10 has committed to publishing the findings it receives from Gray. But if what is presented is heavily redacted, Johnson's spokesperson refused to

confirm that the full version would be released at a later date, once Scotland Yard's inquiries are over.

Alistair Carmichael, the Liberal Democrats' home affairs spokesperson, said: "Police officers need the trust and confidence of the public to do their jobs and keep our communities safe. That's why we called for the police to investigate No 10 weeks ago and put this whole sorry business behind us, instead of waiting for Sue Gray."

"The Sue Gray report must be published in full, including all photos, text messages and other evidence. If it is redacted now, a full, unredacted version must be published as soon as the police investigation is complete."

The former prime minister [Theresa May broke her silence](#) on "partygate" to say she was angry at the allegations of Covid rule-breaking and warn that if there was evidence of deliberate wrongdoing then "full accountability" should follow.

In a letter to her local newspaper, the Maidenhead Advertiser, May said "nobody is above the law" and stressed: "It is vital that those who set the rules, follow the rules ... This is important for ensuring the necessary degree of trust between the public and government."

Tory MPs vented their fury with the Met, with one saying the move would "undermine public confidence in police". Another said it was a "broken organisation", commenting: "If No 10 could run a conspiracy like this, we wouldn't be in this mess."

Asked on Friday morning why the Gray report had been delayed, the technology minister, Chris Philp, told LBC: "You will have to ask Sue Gray that, because the timing of the report is up to her."

"You will have seen, as I have seen, press speculation it is because she's discussing with lawyers and police exactly what can and can't go in it. But the bottom line is I don't know, because it is a report she's compiling independently and I have no visibility of what may or may not be in it, or what her thought process is."

Asked what he could offer in terms of a defence of the prime minister, Philp said he would not speculate on what had happened in No 10.

“Like everybody else, I’m just going to wait until it is published,” he said. “I’ll read it very carefully when it comes out and I’m not going to speculate ... about what the report may or may not contain and what that may or may not mean. Let’s just wait until it comes out. Hopefully it will be soon because I think all of us want to be able to draw a line under this.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jan/28/met-asked-for-minimal-reference-to-probe-of-no-10-events-in-sue-gray-report>

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

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

[**Politics**](#)

Downing Street parties: No 10 denies talking to Met police about Gray report and what could be published – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2022/jan/28/boris-johnson-gray-report-partygate-downing-street-parties-met-police-covid-coronavirus-live-news>

Boris Johnson

‘Time for the truth’: MPs call on Boris Johnson to publish ‘partygate’ report

Cabinet Office officials wrangle over final version of Sue Gray’s findings on alleged Covid rule-breaking parties



Boris Johnson claimed he had ‘absolutely not’ been involved in delaying the report. Photograph: Carl Recine/AP

[Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Vikram Dodd](#)

Thu 27 Jan 2022 14.31 EST

Boris Johnson has been told it is “time for the truth to be released” as he faced more calls to publish a long-awaited report into “partygate” in full and not “suppress crucial details”.

Officials in the Cabinet Office are still wrangling over the final version of Sue Gray’s findings on a string of alleged Covid rule-breaking parties in

Downing Street and other parts of government.

Despite anticipation reaching fever pitch earlier this week that the report on which the prime minister's premiership could hang was close to completion, its publication was delayed when Scotland Yard opened its own investigation.

Sources said on Thursday night that the senior civil servant's findings had still not been sent to No 10, with government lawyers studying the document amid concerns that publishing some information could prejudice the new investigation.

Gray is said to want to send it in a state that can then be published by Downing Street in full, without the need for any further redactions.

Some Tories believe the report will not be released until early next week, given they think Gray will be mindful of criticism it is being sneaked out if publication came on Friday or the weekend, when most MPs will be back in their constituencies.

Government insiders have rejected accusations they are responsible for the delay, and suggested instead it is because of the Metropolitan police's discussions with the Cabinet Office.

But Scotland Yard has not formally objected to full publication of the Gray report, sources said.

Gray's findings were sufficiently clear cut in their detailing of rule breaches to trigger a criminal investigation, according to the explanation about why police were acting, from the Met commissioner, Cressida Dick.

00:52

Boris Johnson says he welcomes police investigation of alleged Downing Street parties – video

Johnson claimed he had “absolutely not” been involved in delaying the report, stressing people should wait for the independent inquiries.

He said “of course” it would be published in full, but Downing Street has made clear that is only the intention of No 10, as it is not yet aware what the format will be and whether any sensitive personal or security information would need to be redacted.

“We are in no way seeking to block the report,” the prime minister’s spokesperson said. “It remains our intention to publish the report as it is received from the investigation.”

But one Tory critic feared Johnson would “wriggle out of the scrutiny he deserves once again”.

Another senior backbencher, Mark Harper, said: “The report must be published in full. Any attempt to conceal or suppress crucial details would be wrong.”

Opposition parties also raised concerns over the handling of the report’s publication.

Angela Rayner, Labour’s deputy leader, said in a letter to Johnson it “would be unconscionable that after the public has sacrificed so much in our collective effort against this pandemic, you would allow any obstruction of the truth or any unnecessary delay to the publication of this report”.

She said it was time for the truth to be released, and pressed the prime minister for a commitment to publish the report in full along with any evidence also submitted to him, with any redactions accompanied with a full explanation.

Ed Davey, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, said photos, emails and messages should be released too. He said “any attempt to whitewash this matter or spike this report or to start to hide again” would provoke even more public anger.

Davey said: “It would be a bitter insult to the public, especially to the bereaved, if the report was not now published in full.”

Some Tory MPs are waiting to read the Gray report before deciding whether to submit a letter calling on Johnson to stand down. If 54 are sent, a vote of no confidence will be held.

Allies of the prime minister believe the longer-than-expected wait for the official civil service investigation is proving helpful for him, because it is letting anger in the party ebb.

Nevertheless, even some ministers who are being loyal in public admit they are preparing to reevaluate their support for Johnson in private once they have seen the full extent of Gray's report.

Even if Johnson manages to avoid or win a vote of no confidence, his restive backbenchers are concerned about the growing cost-of-living crisis, coupled with the planned national insurance hike due to come into effect in April, just when the energy price cap is also dramatically raised.

This article was amended on 28 January 2022 because an earlier version referred to April, when the energy cap is “is also dramatically reduced”. That should have said “dramatically raised”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/27/mps-call-on-boris-johnson-publish-partygate-report-sue-gray>.

Boris Johnson

Why is Sue Gray report on No 10 parties taking so long?

Boris Johnson's premiership hangs on civil servant's findings but contents remain a mystery



A “party” hat worn by a protester outside parliament. Photograph: David Cliff/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Aubrey Allegretti](#) Political correspondent

[@breeallegretti](#)

Thu 27 Jan 2022 07.58 EST

A long-awaited report on the extent of Covid rule-breaking at parties in Downing Street and across government was expected to be published this week.

Boris Johnson's premiership could hang on its findings; Tory MPs have said they want to see what evidence of wrongdoing is dug up by Sue Gray – a senior civil servant known as a ruthless Whitehall enforcer – before deciding whether to call for him to quit.

But despite speculation reaching fever pitch on Tuesday that the report would be released imminently, its contents remain shrouded in mystery.

Has Sue Gray finished her report?

Government sources have indicated Gray has finished the report, but pushed back on the suggestion there has been a “delay” because, they say, there was no previously announced date for its publication.

Undoubtedly, the handling of the report’s release has been thrown into chaos by the announcement – also on Tuesday – that Scotland Yard was opening [its own investigation](#) into the party allegations.

It would make sense to assume that the timing is not coincidental; Gray is unlikely to have shared her findings with the Metropolitan police unless she was nearing the end of her own investigation.

Because Gray is working with the Cabinet Office’s propriety and ethics team, No 10 has been unable to provide any updates on the report’s status besides confirming it has not yet been sent the final version.

What are the roadblocks preventing publication?

Little is known about why there seems to be so much wrangling over the report, but it is thought that lawyers and human resources officials are inspecting its contents and deciding what can and cannot be published.

If there is a risk of prejudicing the Met’s own investigation, then it is possible parts of Gray’s report may have to be redacted or held back. However, that would probably prompt accusations of a cover-up.

The Met has reportedly been briefing that it is not asking for Gray's report to be held back.

Unions are also apparently pushing for junior civil servants to have their names redacted before the document is released.

A former No 10 adviser, who has been involved in publishing similar reports, said that when such sought-after documents are officially submitted to No 10 it is very difficult to avoid leaks.

"Informally agreeing when it is sent is best practice," they said, noting that "as close to the weekend as possible is always a good idea" for decreasing the level of attention paid to the report.

What might eventually emerge?

Johnson's spokesperson has committed to publishing the "findings" of Gray's report. This has prompted concern that only the conclusions will be made public rather than the full report.

However, No 10 has said this is because they do not know what format Gray's report will take, and are adamant "it remains our intention to publish it as received".

What will happen when the report is released?

Gray expects that when her final version is delivered to Downing Street it will be published within a matter of hours.

Johnson has previously promised to place a copy in the House of Commons library for all MPs to see, and to answer questions in parliament at the earliest opportunity. But even if the report is published this week, the chance of it getting much scrutiny by MPs is diminishing.

Most MPs are already back home in their constituencies for the weekend, and No 10 does not want to rile Tory backbenchers further by being seen to publish the report while they are away from Westminster, meaning Johnson may not have to face questions in parliament until next week.

When the report is finally released, MPs will pore over it closely; dozens have said they will consider submitting a letter expressing no confidence in Johnson if there is any evidence he misled the Commons, or if there is evidence of criminality.

MPs could also decide that even if Johnson is found not to have done anything wrong, the political pain of a prime minister not being able to control the office where workers broke the very Covid rules they wrote is enough to push Johnson out.

What would happen in a vote of no confidence – triggered if 54 Tory MPs submit letters calling for one – is even less certain. Some ministers could vote against him, but Johnson's supporters have been running a shadow whipping operation to prepare for such an eventuality and are confident he would convincingly win such a ballot.

It is also possible the pressure on Johnson recedes. His allies are known to be planning to give assurances he will overhaul his Downing Street team and other key parts of the government machine. That may be enough to win MPs over, and let Johnson escape a vote of no confidence through the eye of a needle.

This article was amended on 27 January 2022 to remove an incorrect statement that the House of Commons was not sitting on Friday.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/27/why-sue-gray-report-boris-johnson-no-10-parties-taking-so-long>.

2022.01.28 - Spotlight

- [Tom Tugendhat Tory centrist loathed by Boris Johnson could be ‘a relief’](#)
- [‘She immediately saw herself’ How Encanto strikes a major chord in a diverse world](#)
- [Road pricing Will it answer the UK’s net-zero car-tax conundrum?](#)
- [Jethro Tull’s Ian Anderson ‘Dressing up was fun – but my codpiece was distinctly unfragrant’](#)

Conservative leadership

Tom Tugendhat: Tory centrist loathed by Boris Johnson could be ‘a relief’

Tonbridge MP’s chances of being PM may be slim at 16-1 odds but military career may attract party right



Tom Tugendhat: ‘Would it be great to be PM? Yep, it would be.’
Photograph: AFP/Getty



[Jessica Elgot](#)

[@jessicaelgot](#)

Fri 28 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

Tom Tugendhat, the high-profile chair of the foreign affairs committee, once described the job of prime minister as like “winning the lottery”.

With a dearth of options in the cabinet for the party’s centrist wing to rally behind in a future leadership contest, he is the name many more have started to mention should [Boris Johnson](#) lose a vote of no confidence.

“Tom would be my first choice,” one former cabinet minister said. “I think a lot of people think he would be the best chance for a fresh start with someone who has a lot of relevant experience and deep thinking.”

On paper, the MP for Tonbridge’s chances of success seem slim – his name comes up often as one of the rank outsiders to succeed Johnson, with odds of about 16-1. But his name is the one that MPs most often bring up of their own accord, once they have finished expressing their varying degrees of doubt about Rishi Sunak or Liz Truss.

Tugendhat is from pure Tory stock, the nephew of the Tory peer Lord Tugendhat and the son of a high court judge. He had a long and

distinguished military career, serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, working for the FCO in Afghanistan and for the then chief of defence staff Lord David Richards.

During the fall of Kabul, he was furious at the chaos of the evacuation and the approach of world leaders, including Biden, and gave a raw and personal speech in the Commons that was widely praised.

Like the prime minister, his speeches often lapse into multiple languages, in Tugendhat's case, Arabic, Dari and French. But the pair have a unique loathing for each other, clashing pointedly at select committee hearings and Tugendhat has made little secret of his disdain for the prime minister's approach.

One senior MP said it would be “a relief, by all accounts, to have someone like that in the job at the moment”. Another minister said they were also hoping for Tugendhat to run – “though he'd need to convince other colleagues he's got any sort of domestic policy ideas whatsoever. We all know what he thinks about China or Afghanistan.”

One issue is Tugendhat has no ministerial experience, although an ally was quick to note he had “experience running governments, just not this one” – a nod to his time in Afghanistan.

Observant MPs say they have noticed a slew of recent interventions by Tugendhat on wider policy matters – particular in the Mail on Sunday – on the need for nuclear reactors, action to stop the deaths of migrants crossing in small boats and social media regulation.

There are aspects that could still attract some on the party's right. Tugendhat has been prepared to judiciously vote against stricter Covid measures – an issue likely to be high on the agenda for any leadership race.

He was also a key player in the China Research Group of Tory MPs calling for a more hawkish approach to China, including opposing Huawei's role in building 5G networks in the UK and lobbying for an amendment to the trade bill as part of recognition of the Uyghur genocide.

He was banned from China as a result, along with fellow MPs Nusrat Ghani, Tim Loughton and Iain Duncan Smith, although when Johnson invited them to the Downing Street rose garden in the aftermath, Tugendhat was not among them.

But Tugendhat has his fair amount of detractors on the party's right, the chief whip, Mark Spencer, is said to have nicknamed him "Tom Tugendtwat" for his pointed criticism of the government and its actions on the world stage, including rebellions on aid, the trade bill and vehement criticism of the Kabul evacuation operation.

"That kind of saintly disposition is not popular among my lot," one MP said. "I can't see him realistically getting past the first round [of leadership voting]". Another called him "the [Rory Stewart](#) of the race", a reference to the former development secretary's failed bid in 2019.

One experienced MP said the legacy of Brexit was one that could damage Tugendhat. "There is likely to be significant resistance in [Tugendhat's] wing of the party if the government goes down the road of triggering article 16. I don't think we are in that place yet but for sure any block on that would not play well with the membership."

But he still has some admirers in the cabinet, particularly the levelling-up secretary, Michael Gove, whom he backed for the [Conservative leadership](#) in 2017. The pair almost cleared the dancefloor spinning enthusiastically to Whitney Houston at Conservative party conference's karaoke this year.

Whatever the future of his leadership ambitions, Tugendhat has made it clear he would at least like to be offered the chance at a cabinet role.

"I will serve at whatever level I'm asked to," he told Politics Home. "Would it be great to be PM? Yep, it would be. Would it be great to be foreign secretary? Fantastic. Would it be great to be defence secretary? Wonderful. Would it be great to be a minister of any kind? Yes, because all of those opportunities to serve are very much winning a lottery."

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

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Family films](#)

‘She immediately saw herself’: how Encanto strikes a major chord in a diverse world



Extraordinary gifts ... the animated cast of Disney's Encanto. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

The runaway success of the Colombia-set animation, with its infectious Lin-Manuel Miranda songs, is in no small part thanks to its Latinx characters, cast and key film-makers

Cath Clarke

Fri 28 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

“My kids LOVE it!” “It’s MASSIVE in our house!” The WhatsApp group for my daughter’s reception-year class – usually home to messages about lost school jumpers and tips for half-term clubs – explodes into emojis and capital letters at the mention of [Disney’s Encanto](#). One obsessed eight-year-old has learned the words to all the songs – and so have most of their classmates. A’s five-year-old is demanding to know how to say the words in Spanish. [Encanto-mania is taking over kids’ lives](#).



Star ranking ... Stephanie Beatriz, who voices Mirabel. Photograph: Ringo Chiu/Reuters

For the uninitiated, Encanto (which is Spanish for “charm”) is [Disney’s 60th animated feature film](#), featuring ridiculously catchy songs by [Lin-Manuel Miranda](#), the composer of Hamilton. It tells the tale of the magical Madrigal family who live in an enchanted house hidden in the mountains of Colombia. Every member of the clan is blessed with an extraordinary gift –

except 15-year-old Mirabel (voiced by Brooklyn Nine-Nine's Stephanie Beatriz) who is struggling to find her place in the family.

Encanto is not so much a fairytale as a family saga with a sprinkling of magical realism. It's about unconditional love, understanding your worth and the burden of living up to family expectations. It's possible that Covid lockdowns have put us in the mood for a film about complex family dynamics – with added Miranda hip-shakers.



No free gift ... the struggling Mirabel in Encanto. Photograph: Disney

In the US, Encanto opened in cinemas over Thanksgiving weekend in November a few weeks after children aged from five to 11 became eligible for coronavirus vaccinations. But its arrival coincided with news of the Omicron variant, which dented ticket sales. The movie made \$40.3m (£30m) in the US during the holiday break, plus \$29.3m in the rest of the world. Nothing to write home about. “A fair opening by pandemic standards, and a weak opening by Disney+ standards,” said an expert in the New York Times. It launched on Disney+ on Christmas Eve.



Music man ... Lin-Manuel Miranda, who wrote songs for Encanto.
Photograph: Kristina Bumphrey/Rex/Shutterstock

Two months after its theatrical release, Encanto is an unexpected Disney hit – a cultural moment and craze. Plenty of families I speak to spent Christmas watching it on repeat, playing the songs from breakfast to bedtime. The cumulative global total of streams from the soundtrack is 1.5bn. “I think we’re probably responsible for 50% of plays in the UK” jokes one of the WhatsApp mums. The industry magazine Toy Insider reported that an \$80 Encanto Magical Casa Madrigal was one of the top-selling toys over Christmas.

And we need to talk about Bruno. Last week, the Encanto song We Don’t Talk About Bruno [reached No 1 in the UK chart](#), the first original Disney song to do so. It’s an ensemble number sung by the Madrigals and tells the story of their long-lost uncle, Bruno, the outcast of the family (he prophesied they would all lose their magical powers). The song is classic Miranda musical fusion – Cuban folk with Broadway and hip-hop. It’s been viewed 137m times on YouTube. One critic joked that it was the second most addictive thing to come out of Colombia.

Watch the video for We Don’t Talk About Bruno

Not even Jared Bush, one of the film's two directors, expected Bruno to be the breakout song. Speaking over Zoom from Los Angeles he shakes his head with disbelief, grinning: "What's happening now, the Bruno song, the fact that it's taken off and everyone wants to sing those parts ..." He pauses to take it all in. "There's no way I'd have thought that's the song that would go kerchunk. I love it so much, but it's a complicated song that requires context."

Bush first got an inkling of Encanto-mania when people started telling him to check out [TikTok](#). "People were like: 'Have you seen these TikToks? You've got to get an account, man.'" The #Encanto hashtag has been viewed more than 13.6bn times on the app, where users are sharing videos of themselves lip-synching and acting along to scenes.

TikTok has even created Encanto social media stars. In December, 23-year-old Maribel Martinez [posted a video of herself lip-syncing to Surface Pressure](#) – for my money the catchiest song of the movie. It's sung by middle sister Luisa Madrigal, who has superhuman strength but feels the stress of always having to be the strong one. "Give it to your sister, it doesn't hurt, and see if she can handle every family burden," Luisa sings. Martinez filmed herself after friends pointed out her resemblance to Luisa. Her video has been viewed more than 35m times.

Martinez added a heartfelt caption to the video: "This is more than me just looking like her. It tells my story." In an interview with NBC News she explained how the film held up a mirror to her experiences growing up: "[It] relates to a Hispanic community where the family dynamic is brought up like that and we're put under so much pressure."



Man behind the mask ... John Leguizamo, who voices Bruno. Photograph: AFF-USA/Rex/Shutterstock

I ask Yvett Merino, one of the producers of the film who is Latina, about the connection Latinx audiences have with Encanto. Merino's path to the Disney boardroom was not a traditional one; after studying sociology, she became a social worker for a year, then joined Disney as a temp and worked her way up. She tells me that Latinx Disney staff formed a group called Familia, which became a kind of advisory board to the film: they met once a month to talk about their lives and experiences, read draft scripts and watched early cuts. Their feedback was blunt, says Merino, laughing: "I joked that they were a real family, because they would be honest. When they didn't like it, they let us *know*."

Disney worked hard to capture an authentic sense of culture and place in Encanto. The film-makers worked with Colombian documentary-makers and writers on recce trips. They cast actors with Colombian heritage: Stephanie Beatriz's father is Colombian; John Leguizamo, who voices Bruno, was born in the capital, Bogotá. Colombian television star María Cecilia Botero voices Alma, Mirabel's grandmother.



Latina voices ... Yvett Merino, one of Encanto's producers. Photograph: Nina Prommer/EPA

It's striking how many of the film-makers are Latinx. Merino is of Mexican heritage while Miranda is of Puerto Rican descent. Latina composer [Germaine Franco](#), who orchestrated and arranged Miranda's songs, grew up 10 minutes from the Mexican border in Texas, immersed in Latin music. Her stunning score features traditional folk instruments that are indigenous to Colombia, she tells me, including the arpa llanera, a harp (different from both a Mexican and Paraguayan harp, she says); and a flute played in Colombia called the gaita, which sounds like a bird. "When people hear the music and they say yeah, that sounds like Colombian music or that sounds like Latin music, then they can feel proud about it. They are seeing themselves, hearing themselves."

Franco is the first woman to score a Disney animated feature, and was the first Latina composer invited to join the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' music branch. She says of Disney Animation hiring more diverse voices: "I notice the difference in the meetings. Having Yvett Merino sitting in and Charise [Castro Smith, co-writer of Encanto] sitting in, I'm not the only person of colour in the room, which has been my experience on many projects. I feel like Disney is making the effort and they are showing their support by hiring people of colour." The studio has, however, come

under fire this week after actor [Peter Dinklage criticised its “backwards” live action remake](#) of Snow White and the Seven Dwarves.



From screenplay writer to co-director ... Charise Castro Smith. Photograph: Willy Sanjuan/Invision/AP

The writer she mentions, Charise Castro Smith, is a playwright hired as a co-writer on the screenplay who went on to co-direct the film. (“The best decision of the movie” jokes Bush). A first-generation Cuban American, one of the first scenes Castro Smith worked on was the prologue that explains the Madrigal “miracle”. In flashback, we see Abuela Alma, Mirabel’s grandmother, as a young woman fleeing her home with her husband, Pedro. When Pedro sacrifices himself to save his family, Alma’s grief sparks the miracle that gives her family its gift. But over the years Alma puts tremendous pressure on her family to live up to their gift.

Merino believes that this storyline of intergenerational trauma and expectation goes some way to explain the emotional responses from Latinx audiences – such as Maribel Martinez’s TikTok followers. These are first- and second-generation immigrants who grew up listening to stories of their parents and grandparents’ sacrifices: “These stories stay with you,” Merino says. “I heard how hard my parents worked to give us a better life. You hold that in you. You grow up with that pressure of saying: I have to do this

because of how much they sacrificed. I think that's really part of what hits, what is connecting with people."



Germaine Franco, who scored the movie. Photograph: Nina Prommer/EPA

And it's not just the Latinx community. I speak to a London mother of south Asian heritage who feels a connection to the family dynamics in Encanto. "The whole film speaks to a different family unit. People from non-white backgrounds can really identify with the complexity of a multi-generational family."

Her kids are not regular Disney watchers, "My older daughter doesn't like princesses and she's a bit of a film snob." But they are on their fifth viewing of Encanto. "There's something about a really good Disney that hits," she says. "Something that you can put into practice straight away. With Encanto, it's the message: Let's be gentler to each other. We've all been through shit. It's an understanding that our parents, our grandparents, had a tough time of it; things were different 50 years ago."

One last question for Merino – it might be a bit cheesy, I warn. As a child, how would she have felt watching Encanto? "It's not cheesy at all! I always say this is the film I wished I would have had as a little girl. Growing up, I didn't see stories that looked like my family, that looked like me."

“I have a son who is 12 and a seven-year-old daughter. I get to see Encanto through their eyes. I know that my children are growing up seeing themselves. My daughter came home yesterday saying that everyone is singing the Bruno song at school. When the dolls first came, she opened it up and was like: She’s got brown eyes like me! She immediately saw herself in the dolls.”

Over on the school WhatsApp, a mum shares a video of her daughter doing an expressive dance in front of the telly, Encanto playing. She is in her own universe, dancing with the kind of over-dramatic intensity you might remember from virals of kids belting out [Let it Go from Frozen](#) a few years ago. I check the Disney online store: Mirabel dresses are sold out.

- Encanto is in cinemas and on Disney+

This article was amended on 28 January 2022. In the film, Abuela Alma’s husband is Pedro, not Pepa as an earlier version said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/jan/28/encanto-diverse-colombia-animation-linmanuel-miranda>

Business

Will road pricing answer the UK's net-zero car-tax conundrum?

Politicians dislike discussing how to replace fuel duty and road tax but a clear option is now in view



The London congestion charge was less of a vote loser than anticipated.
Photograph: Alessia Pierdomenico/Reuters

Gwyn Topham Transport correspondent

[@GwynTopham](#)

Fri 28 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

Road pricing may promise a fairer, sustainable way to make polluting drivers pay, ease congestion and fund better transport, but few politicians in power have ever wanted to take the flak that would come with introducing it.

The Treasury has stressed the move from petrol and diesel to electric cars as part of Britain's net zero strategy will require new sources of revenue to replace billions in lost fuel and vehicle excise duty. However, despite a year of speculation that the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, was warming to the idea, there has been no mention of road pricing as a possible solution in his budgets.

Sadiq Khan has been bolder, announcing last week that London [will bring in more charges for motorists](#), in some form, by 2024.

[Fuel duty from cars is projected to decline as drivers switch to electric vehicles](#)

While Khan has backed road pricing in principle, last week's announcement still contained the familiar caveat that the technology to make a London-wide scheme work wouldn't be ready until some time later in the decade.

The city is potentially the canary in the coalmine for the rest of the UK. [Congestion has grown](#), and London needs to tackle widespread air pollution and meet challenging environmental targets, with an ambition to drive down car use by more than a quarter. But there is also an imminent funding crisis after Covid, with billions in lost revenue from transport and the government unwilling to fully [help the mayor](#).

Why is road pricing likely to happen, how might it work and what are the potential obstacles?

The finances

Roads, unlike most utilities, are essentially unmetered, with the way they are paid for failing to reflect when and where they are used.

Instead the Treasury collects money from motorists via fuel duty and vehicle excise duty. Fuel duty is a blunt tool that charges motorists for how much they drive, and the efficiency of their vehicle. Raising it has become politically toxic – Conservative chancellors have frozen the 57.9p-a-litre levy for a decade – but the bigger longer-term problem is the move to

electric cars. That puts fuel duty revenues, about £28bn a year pre-pandemic, on their own path to net zero.



Conservative chancellors have frozen fuel duty for a decade at 57.9p per litre levy. Photograph: Geoffrey Swaine/Rex/Shutterstock

Vehicle excise duty, worth roughly £6bn a year, is also currently not paid by electric car owners, who are likewise exempt from London's congestion or clean air charges. That is seen as an acceptable trade-off for the high purchase price of electric cars for early adopters, but car owners driving "for free" could soon feel politically tricky, and in the long term new funding, such as road pricing, feels inevitable.

The logistics

Worldwide, basic road-charging schemes currently range from tolls for bridges, tunnels, or stretches of motorway, to the kind of congestion zone London already has, often relying on number plate recognition cameras, transponders or other sensors.

Singapore has arguably come closest to a comprehensive road-pricing scheme, with motorists billed automatically for journeys calculated via in-

car units triggered when they pass a series of gantries. The system was first put in place before the millennium.

But the grid road system in the small city state makes it relatively easy to calculate where someone has driven from a series of fixed points. London's eventual scheme – particularly if it does, as the mayor suggested, take account of factors such as the relative availability of public transport, congestion, or time of day as well as distance travelled – would require some form of GPS tracking.

The technology

Khan said the tech could be ready in two and half years, just beyond his remaining term in office. The Green party and others argue it has been ready for years, in various forms. For example, car owners have grown used to insurers installing black boxes that can track speed and performance.

A smart road-pricing scheme could require in an in-car device, as used in Singapore – but that could be replaced by a smartphone and app. As any user of satnav or exercise apps knows, an individual's movements can already be tracked effectively.



Singapore has operated a road-pricing scheme for more than 20 years.
Photograph: Suhaimi Abdullah/Getty Images

However, Steve Gooding, the director of the RAC Foundation, is less convinced: “Is [the technology] ready at the scale it needs to be, for everything it needs to do, for all the vehicles moving in Greater London 365 days a year?”

Civil liberties

London’s congestion zone was originally set up in 2003 by the then mayor, Ken Livingstone, with clear separation from the other arms of the state. But in 2015 his successor, Boris Johnson, [instructed Transport for London](#) to give full access to the data to the Metropolitan police, and records of who drives into central London are now stored for two years.

The Green party’s Siân Berry, a London Assembly member who has long backed the idea of road pricing, says stricter safeguards should be in place around the data – and more would certainly be needed should journeys be logged by GPS. That could be via an app that is under the driver’s own control in terms of details, or an in-car unit that tots up charges but does not keep a journey history, she suggests. “But you need to put privacy into the conversation early on, not later, or you risk it becoming an issue that cancels the scheme.”

Fairness

As a report in 2021 from Tony Blair’s Institute for Global Change noted, this cuts both ways: do nothing to reform the system and the wealthiest electric car owners will forever get a free ride while still using roads and creating congestion – and particulate pollution.

While it is argued that overall, road pricing should be fairer and beneficial, there may be winners and losers, particularly at the borders of schemes, and key workers with fixed shift times may not be able to avoid peak charges.

But the status quo is not fair for non car-owners, argues Berry. She adds: “It’s 20p for petrol or £1.50 for the bus for a short journey – the price signals

are completely wrong.”

Sign up to the daily Business Today email or follow Guardian Business on Twitter at @BusinessDesk

Public opposition

The London congestion charge proved less of a vote-loser for Livingstone than many anticipated. However, attempts by Labour in 2007 to implement a nationwide road-pricing scheme attracted what was then one of the biggest protest petitions from the public.

The tide may be turning, slowly. Concerns over car use and urban air quality are firmly on the agenda.

Motoring organisations have also joined the call for charging in some form: the RAC Foundation backs it, while the AA’s Edmund King has proposed tradeable “road miles”, measured through telematics. A [recent report](#) from the Social Market Foundation thinktank claimed that the formerly hostile UK public could now be won over.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from [https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/jan/28/will-road-pricing-answer-the-uks-netzero-car-tax-conundrum](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/jan/28/will-road-pricing-answer-the-uks-net-zero-car-tax-conundrum)

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Music](#)

Interview

Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson: 'Dressing up was fun – but my codpiece was distinctly unfragrant'

Graham Fuller



‘I’ve always felt a bit guilty about nicking the name Jethro Tull’ ...
Anderson. Photograph: Will Ireland

Playing the flute on one leg, Anderson’s jester-like image turned the prog rockers into global stars in the 70s. With their first new album in 20 years, he talks about the passion behind the pomp – and why he could never be ‘generic, like the Stones and the Who’

Fri 28 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

When I last interviewed Ian Anderson, leader of multimillion-selling prog rockers Jethro Tull, in 1993, he told me that 2000 would be a good time to hang up his flute. “I think I was confusing myself with British Airways pilots who, when they turn 65, are out,” he counters today. “If you’re a professional tennis player and fully vaccinated, you might manage to play on until you’re in your late 30s. But those of us in arts and entertainment get to die with our boots on, like John Wayne in a black-and-white western.”

Appraising Anderson’s face on my laptop screen, I could easily knock a decade off his 74 years, but it’s still hard to reconcile this loquacious, informed analyser of politics and history with the wild hippy dervish he was circa 1970, famous for playing his flute on one leg. His troll-like hair vanished long ago, but that passage of time is “both romantic and encouraging, because it means we can keep on paying our grandchildren’s school fees in our old age. There are others older than me who are still doing their stuff. Mick Jagger’s trousers keep going up and down, so all’s well with the world.”

And indeed it is for fans of Jethro Tull, [who will have wondered if they’d ever get another studio album](#) – the previous one was in 2003, and that was a Christmas album (although done in puckish Anderson style). New LP The Zealot Gene originated in early 2017 with a list Anderson made of primal emotions: “Bad stuff like anger, jealousy, retribution, then good stuff like love, compassion, loyalty,” he says. All the tracks draw on biblical texts Anderson then Googled to support the record’s anti-extremism theme; one song skewers Judas Iscariot, the disciple who kissed Jesus in Gethsemane to

expose him to his enemies: “How does it feel to point the stabbing finger / with perfidious kiss from those deceiving lips?”



Jester minute ... Anderson in codpiece on stage, 1974. Photograph: Ian Dickson/Redferns

The Zealot Gene explores how these emotions govern life today as they did when the vengeful Old Testament God rained sulphur and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah. Mrs Tibbetts is named after the mother of the US air force captain whose B-29 dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima; Jesus is wistfully evoked in the acoustic songs interspersed among the album's spiky rockers. The title track talks about Twitter-happy authoritarian leaders; damaging use of social media is an Anderson bugbear. “Donald Trump was relatively shiny and new when I wrote the songs,” he says, speaking from his Wiltshire home two weeks before Jethro Tull head to Europe for their first post-Omicron shows. “Already you could see the way he thrived on division and polarisation, but there’s another five or six almost-dictators who represent populism and the extremes of left and right equally well.”

Crucified by rock critics for his ambitious conceptual thinking when Tull were in their 1970s pomp, Anderson is loath for The Zealot Gene to be labelled Tull’s biblical album. “The interest I have in a whole variety of subjects, from hard science to the cruel world of politics, is part of who I

am,” he says. “I’m an observer, which comes from my brief art history education – I see a picture in my head and I want to illustrate it musically.

If you’re listing words about me, pompous and vain might come to mind, but hopefully also studious and passionate

“I fully understand if people look at my meanderings over many years and think: ‘Oh, if you’re making lists of words, the ones that come to mind about Ian Anderson would be pompous, vain, arrogant and self-indulgent.’ But, hopefully, you might also think serious, studious, passionate and, above all, engaged.”

The 22nd Tull studio album is the first the current lineup has recorded under the band’s name. When Anderson dismantled the previous incarnation in 2011 – ending guitarist Martin Barre’s four-decade tenure – Tull seemed over. But having made two solo albums in the intervening years, Anderson revived the name for *The Zealot Gene*, since seven of its 12 tracks were recorded live in the studio by the whole band before the epidemic struck.

Alongside other classic-era progressive rock bands still extant – including King Crimson, Yes and Genesis – Tull went global. Integral to their success was the fusion of Anderson’s folk-tinged voice, acoustic plucking and rasping flute with Barre’s scorching riffs and John Evans’s rococo keyboards, in intricate songs that often ignored the rules of conventional pop composition. Tull’s 1971 breakthrough album *Aqualung* presented the layered medieval rock that might have been played in baronial halls and taverns had amplifiers existed in Elizabethan times.

“I loved the blues, but for me it was just a pragmatic way of opening the door, because it wasn’t really what I wanted to do musically,” he says of the band’s path to *Aqualung*. “The signposts were the Beatles’ *Sgt Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* and then Pink Floyd’s *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*. I thought: ‘I want to try to do something like that, something that’s eclectic.’”



Global stars ... Jethro Tull in Tokyo, 1972. Photograph: Koh Hasebe/Shinko Music/Getty Images

Tull's signature sound characterised *Thick as a Brick* (1972) and *A Passion Play* (1973), classically influenced concept albums consisting of single pieces each 45-odd minutes long. Deterred by *A Passion Play*'s complexity and Miltonian afterlife allegory, not to mention the whimsical fable that bridges its halves, music press reviewers tore it to shreds.

The band were distinctly un-glam amid the glam rock of the early 70s, but shed their scruffy look to embrace flamboyant mummery. Anderson's cavorting bug-eyed troubadour was rooted in court-jesterling with its mockery of cant and hypocrisy. Anderson still plays on one leg occasionally, but not to the extent it compromises his elder statesman's dignity. Dressing up "was fun," he says, "and looking back on it, it was too much fun. Much of it was perfectly silly, but at the time I felt if someone was going to wear tights and a codpiece, it might as well be me."

Much of it was perfectly silly, but I felt if someone was going to wear tights and a codpiece, it might as well be me

Tull's manager-producer Terry Ellis took Anderson to the costumer of the Royal Ballet in 1972. "This very creative man came up with a pretty racy

codpiece design. He made a couple of them that were moulded to look like they had a wriggly monster inside,” Anderson recalls, laughing. “In the end, I chose one that had a nice bulgy shape. When I clipped it on, he said: ‘How does it feel?’ I said: ‘It feels great. How did you know my size?’ And he said” – Anderson mimics a flirtatious voice – “‘Well, when I looked at you, I thought we’re about the same size’, which I thought as good a response as any.

“Luckily back then, I had slightly muscular legs and a firm, trim bum, and I looked like some demented Nureyev with a flute. The codpiece was a good investment for getting noticed, but it became a real pain in the arse because I had to truss myself up in it every night to go on stage. Plus, it required very careful dry cleaning, beyond that of the local laundry service. It ended up like a Hell’s Angels original – it just didn’t get washed. So if you were within 20 metres of me on stage in 1972 or 1973, I announced my presence with a distinct lack of fragrance, even if I was just standing in the wings.”

Tull hit an all-time low in 1979 following the death at 28 from a heart condition of their former bass player John Glascock. In the early 80s, the band that began life as a Blackpool blues combo in 1963 experimented with synthesisers, yet it was a blend of hard rock and proggy grandeur that earned 1987’s *Crest of a Knave* an unexpected Grammy award. *Roots to Branches* (1995) and *J-Tull Dot Com* (1999) – the standouts among Tull’s five subsequent albums before *The Zealot Gene* – incorporate global music influences and ponder ageing. Anderson suffers from asthma and hasn’t been able to hit high notes since overtaxing his voice in the early 80s, but that instrument is currently in fine fettle.

Asked what Tull’s legacy should be, Anderson first apologises for “nicking” the name of the Berkshire agronomist who invented the horse-drawn seed drill. “Our booking agent gave it to us, and when I realised who Jethro Tull was, I was embarrassed, but we couldn’t change it because we’d just got the Marquee residency and were beginning to get some positive responses. I’ve always felt a bit guilty about it.

“Then I’d say that, over all those years, Jethro Tull tried hard. Some people might say we tried too hard, but it’s better to do that and fall on your face

once in a while rather than sit comfortably backpedaling in order to keep on an even keel. I'd get restless if I did generic music like the Stones or even the Who, or the Ramones in the world of punk. I feel I've gotta get on and do something that allows me to get close to what I think I *can* do.

“If you can elaborate all of that and put it in a three-line epitaph for my tombstone, I’d be most grateful to receive the result by email at some point,” Anderson says. “In fact, I could get the stonemason working on it right now.”

The Zealot Gene is released on 28 January on Inside Out Music

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/jan/28/jethro-tulls-ian-anderson-dressing-up-was-fun-but-my-codpiece-was-distinctly-unfragrant>

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

2022.01.28 - Coronavirus

- [Live Covid: Russian daily cases approach 100,000 in new record; Philippines to reopen to vaccinated tourists](#)
- [Coronavirus Lifting England rules while 3bn people unvaccinated reckless – experts](#)
- [Analysis What are the new rules for care homes and are they safe?](#)
- [Vaccines UK efforts should target unvaccinated, says expert](#)

[**Coronavirus live**](#)

[**Coronavirus**](#)

UK reports 89,176 new cases and 277 deaths – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/jan/28/covid-news-live-uk-awaits-partygate-report-paris-hospitals-chief-sparks-debate-over-care-for-unvaccinated>

Coronavirus

Reckless to leave 3bn unvaccinated while easing England rules, experts say

Scientists tell Boris Johnson that failure to help poorer countries means new variants will put thousands at risk in UK

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



Boris Johnson was urged to support efforts to suspend intellectual property rules that stop lower-income nations from manufacturing vaccines, tests, and treatments. Photograph: Jack Hill/AP

[Andrew Gregory](#) Health editor

Thu 27 Jan 2022 19.01 EST

Boris Johnson has been accused of taking a reckless approach to public health by failing to take enough action to get jabs to 3 billion unvaccinated people in poorer countries while lifting [all plan B Covid restrictions in England](#).

The prime minister has robustly defended his record on the pandemic this week while awaiting the findings of the [Sue Gray report](#) on the “partygate” scandal, insisting he “got the big calls right” on the biggest global health crisis in a century.

But now more than 300 leading scientists, health experts and academics have said his failure to take sufficient action to boost vaccination levels worldwide means it is more likely new variants will put thousands of lives at risk across the UK.

“We write to you as scientists, academics, and public health experts concerned about the emergence of the Omicron variant and the threat that future variants may pose to public health, the NHS, and the UK’s vaccination programme,” they said in a two-page letter delivered to 10 Downing Street.

“Vaccinating the vast majority of the world’s population is the best way to prevent Sars-CoV-2 from mutating. However, as the UK has provided booster doses to up to 1 million people every day, more than 3 billion people across the world have yet to receive their first dose. More boosters have been delivered in rich countries than the total number of all doses administered so far in poorer nations.

“Allowing huge numbers of people in low- and middle-income countries to remain unvaccinated is a reckless approach to public health that creates conditions where new Sars-CoV-2 variants of concern are more likely to develop.”

Laura Merson, a signatory of [the letter](#) and associate director of the Infectious Diseases Data Observatory at the University of Oxford, said protection provided by boosters would be “critically limited” while most of the world remained unvaccinated.

“The easing of plan B restrictions may give the impression that the pandemic is coming to an end,” she said. “But this won’t be over until we address the risk of new variants at the root – in populations that have not had access to vaccines.”

The letter has been signed in a personal capacity by 13 members of Johnson’s Sage committee and subcommittees, a fellow at the UK [Health](#) Security Agency and an adviser to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

Nigel Crisp, the former chief executive of the NHS in England, Nobel prize winner Sir Richard Roberts, and several World Health Organization advisers are also among the signatories.

They called on Johnson to allow low- and middle-income countries to manufacture Covid vaccines, tests, and treatments for themselves. Vaccinating the vast majority of the world’s population was the best way to prevent further coronavirus variants of concern, they added, including variants that could be more infectious or render current vaccines less effective.

They urged the prime minister to put public health before the interests of the pharmaceutical industry “to prevent another year of uncertainty and tragedy” by supporting international efforts to [suspend intellectual property rules](#) that stop lower-income nations from manufacturing vaccines, tests, and treatments.

Vaccines will not be effective at stopping new variants of concern from arising “unless we share this technology with the world and increase global vaccination coverage”, they added in the letter coordinated by science and health experts working with groups including Global Justice Now.

Crisp said: “Throughout this pandemic, the government has pledged that it will follow the science. The scientific evidence has been clear since the start of the pandemic that the best way to keep ourselves and our NHS safe from new variants is to vaccinate the world.

“However laudable donations of vaccines might be, they will never be enough to end the pandemic. There is untapped manufacturing capacity in the very nations that need vaccines and treatments most. For the sake of people’s lives in those countries and our own, we must use it.”

Maryam Shahmanesh, professor of global health at UCL, added: “By ignoring the demands of low- and middle-income countries and stifling global vaccine production with arbitrary intellectual property rules, the government risks prolonging the pandemic and endangering countless lives. We need a complete step-change if we are to bring this pandemic to an end for everyone.”

This article was amended on 28 January 2022 to clarify that the accusation of recklessness made in the letter was in relation to the failure to get vaccinations to poorer countries.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/28/uk-covid-vaccine-stance-global-vaccination-levels-reckless-experts>

Social care

What are the new Covid rules for English care homes and are they safe?

The self-isolation period for positive cases is being cut and the limit on visitors lifted from next week

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)



A woman visiting her mother at a care home in March last year. Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

Nicola Davis Science correspondent
[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Thu 27 Jan 2022 13.28 EST

From Monday, coronavirus restrictions related to care homes in [England](#) will be eased. Here are the changes, and the science behind them.

What's changing?

Residents who test positive will have to self-isolate for up to 10 days, with a minimum isolation period of five full days followed by two sequential negative lateral flow tests – as is already the case [for the rest of the population](#).

Isolation periods for those having care after an emergency hospital visit will also be reduced to a maximum of 10 days, while a requirement for residents to test or self-isolate after normal visits out will be removed.

Care homes will have to follow outbreak management rules for 14 rather than 28 days, and by 16 February care workers will need to use lateral flow tests before work rather than taking a weekly PCR test.

The limit on visitors to care homes will be lifted. Visitors should still obtain a negative lateral flow test result earlier in the day of their visit, and guidance on the use by visitors of PPE such as face masks remains unchanged.

Why are the rules easing?

According to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), it has been enabled by a [successful booster vaccination programme](#), with 86.5% of care home residents having had their booster jab.

The latest data from the UK [Health](#) Security Agency (UKHSA) shows that with a Pfizer booster – regardless of the vaccines used for previous doses – the effectiveness against hospitalisation is about 90% shortly after receiving the jab, falling to about 75% after 10 to 14 weeks. Very high levels of protection are also seen for Moderna boosters. The figures suggest vaccine effectiveness against death in people aged 50 and older is about 95% two weeks after a booster.

What are the rules around staff vaccinations?

The [DHSC says](#): “Since 11 November last year all care home workers, and anyone entering a care home, have needed to be fully vaccinated, unless they are exempt under the regulations.” That means there may be some staff who, for medical reasons, have not been vaccinated.

Are the changes safe?

The care minister, Gillian Keegan, said the changes were backed by scientists, and experts largely agree. “If lateral flow tests are used in conjunction to prevent most contact with infectious people, then broadly speaking the risk will be low,” said Prof Rowland Kao, an epidemiologist at the University of Edinburgh and member of the modelling group Spi-M.

He said there remained an issue for residents and staff when it came to those with existing conditions or who were unvaccinated, either by choice or for other reasons. “In those cases there should be measures and protocols in place to prevent them from being viewed as second-class citizens,” he said.

Ian Hall, a professor of mathematical epidemiology and statistics at the University of Manchester and a member of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage), backed the changes. “The decision was reviewed scientifically and is a balance of harms of Covid but also the harm of deconditioning and wellbeing from isolation in a highly vaccinated population,” he said. “We strongly recommended that measures are put in place to observe the impact of these measures following implementation and if there are clear episodes of transmission the risk assessment is reviewed.”

Others cautioned against easing measures any further. Dr Helen Salisbury, a GP in Oxford, said it would be “foolhardy” to remove the need for lateral flow tests and masks for visitors, noting that not everyone who had three jabs had had a strong immune response, that people tend to develop more health problems as they get older, and that even among the vaccinated, the risks from Covid increase with age.

“I’m delighted if people are able to see their families, but it doesn’t make sense to me to lift all restrictions completely,” she said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jan/27/what-are-the-new-covid-rules-for-english-care-homes-and-are-they-safe>

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

Coronavirus

UK Covid efforts should target unvaccinated, says expert

Vaccine expert says focus should shift away from booster programme and be directed to first doses

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



Prof Beate Kampmann is the director of the vaccine centre at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. Photograph: Ken McKay/ITV/REX/Shutterstock

[Nicola Davis](#) Science correspondent

[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Thu 27 Jan 2022 11.49 EST

Efforts to increase uptake of Covid jabs in the UK should be concentrated on reducing the number of unvaccinated people rather than booster jabs, a leading expert has said.

As Omicron spread rapidly around the country towards the end of 2021, health advisers and government ministers stressed that two doses “are not enough” to protect against the new variant, urging those eligible to take up a booster dose as soon as possible.

The message hit home: in an attempt to avert another dismal Christmas and protect their loved ones people dashed to get jabbed, with 968,665 booster or third vaccinations reported on 21 December alone. But uptake subsequently fell dramatically, with booster doses now bobbing about 50,000 a day.

Now a leading vaccine expert has said the focus should be placed on reducing the numbers of those who have yet to have even their first jab.

“I think the booster programme might have reached saturation and [it is] best to concentrate on those who had no vaccine at all – as their chance of dying is 11 times higher than vaccinated folks,” said Prof Beate Kampmann, director of the vaccine centre at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

When the booster slowdown first became apparent, the government’s vaccine minister, Maggie Throup said the Christmas break and public holidays were key factors. But the ongoing slump suggests there is more at play.

Dr Simon Williams, a behavioural scientist at Swansea University, said one reason could be that people needed to wait 28 days after testing positive for Covid before they could have a booster.

“At the start of January, cases were astronomically high, with Omicron at its peak, so we might in theory see an increase in booster uptake now, as more people become eligible,” he said.

But he said hesitancy or complacency around booster jabs might also play a role, adding his own research had found many people have “variant fatigue”

– the view that Omicron is just another variant and it is just time to get on with life.

“This has been compounded by a common perception that Omicron is a ‘milder’ variant,” Williams said, adding that, in fact, it is in large part thanks to vaccinations, including boosters, that Omicron has not lead to as many hospitalisations as initially feared.

Williams suggested falling levels of infection might also reduce the sense of urgency around getting boosted – despite boosters being one of the factors behind the decline.

But Kampmann said another reason was the perception of vaccine effectiveness. “I suspect it all has to do with people feeling less confident that the vaccine is going to protect them from Omicron infection, and the observation that despite vaccination people still had contracted this variant,” she said, adding people forgot why the booster programme existed.

“Primarily [it is] to keep individuals out of hospital and protecting those who are the most vulnerable from progressing to severe disease. And for that the booster is definitely needed and has been shown to work very well,” she said.

The latest figures from the UK Health Security Agency reveal [more than 90% of those aged 70](#) and over in England have now had a booster.

While Williams said he agreed a priority should be to continue to attempt to engage and encourage the unvaccinated to get vaccinated, particularly those who are vulnerable, he added boosters remained important, noting while the jabs did not fully prevent transmission, they helped. “To keep rates and illness going down, booster uptake is still needed,” he said.

While efforts are to understand the reasons for hesitancy in some communities and to counter misinformation are needed to encourage uptake of all Covid jabs, Williams said there was another issue to tackle to increase booster uptake.

“For some there might be a bit of a conflict or confusion between the message that boosters are important to help protect against the ongoing threat posed by Omicron, and the message that is sent out by the quite sudden removal of pretty much all policy protections and the reduction of the self-isolation period, coupled with the message of ‘getting on with it’,” he said.

Not for the first time in the pandemic, the message appears to be that when it comes to jabs, communication is key.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/27/uk-covid-efforts-should-target-unvaccinated-says-expert>

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

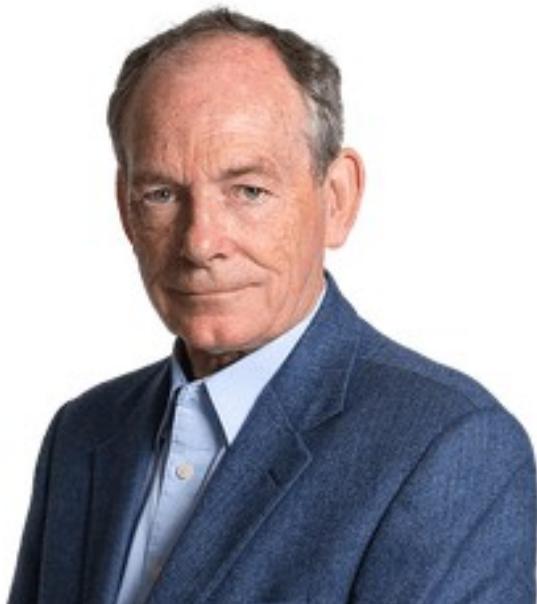
2022.01.28 - Opinion

- Even Johnson's own fraud minister couldn't bear the stink of this government
- Give me the cheeky, racketey Essex I love over a snobby rebrand any day
- Islamophobia isn't just a Tory problem – it runs right through British society
- Prime suspect Boris Johnson gives Sue Gray the slip in Wales

OpinionUK job furlough scheme

Even Johnson's own fraud minister couldn't bear the stink of this government

[Simon Jenkins](#)



With £5bn lost to fraudulent Covid loan claims, Lord Agnew did a rare thing for a minister in 2022: he told the truth and quit



Lord Agnew speaks in the House of Lords before resigning on Monday.
Photograph: PA

Fri 28 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Theodore Agnew was the model of a modern Tory oligarch. A successful businessman, he made enough to dabble in the new politics. He did all the right things. He backed a chain of academy schools and joined a Conservative thinktank, Policy Exchange. He donated a dutiful [£134,000](#) to the Tory party between 2007 and 2009. Part-owner of an AI consultancy called Faculty, Agnew set it to work for Johnson's Vote Leave campaign. He received a knighthood, then a peerage, and was then offered a ministerial post in Boris Johnson's government, at the time being advised by the former Vote Leave director, Dominic Cummings. Faculty won a [fistful of government contracts worth almost £1m](#). All in all, Agnew could feature in an Armando Iannucci satire on Boris's Britain.

Then this week, Agnew went bang. Even he had had enough. In February 2020, he was given the Yes Minister title of "efficiency and transformation", and in a [speech on Monday in the House of Lords](#) he was supposed to congratulate himself on his work. He had been one of the custodians of the £47bn of public money that had been dished out to private companies and banks in bounce-back loans between 2020 and 2021. However, of this sum,

Agnew reckoned £17bn had been lost and at least £5bn of those losses were to fraud, [or 1p on income tax](#). He clearly choked on the task asked of him. And then something unprecedented took place. A Johnson minister proceeded to tell the truth and resign on the spot.

The scheme had been chaos, he said. “Schoolboy errors” had been made by the Covid loans scheme, such as bounce-back loans being given to more than 1,000 companies that had not even been trading when Covid struck. As for the government’s 100% [guarantee](#) to banks that it would underwrite any losses, this had led to gross indiscipline by lenders. By the time checks came in to weed out fraudulent duplicate applications, [60% of the £47bn had already been paid out](#). Agnew estimated that a quarter of the money lost through the scheme would be down to fraudulent claims rather than credit failure. Many fraudsters had simply claimed the loans, then [dissolved their businesses months later](#).

Agnew’s speech was scathing. He declared that the government’s record as guardian of the country’s resources was “desperately inadequate”. The business department and its cash-gushing British Business Bank (BBB) had been “woeful” in their oversight and auditing of the scheme. The Treasury had shown “no knowledge of, or little interest in” the level of fraud. Using his words with care, Agnew accused them of refusing to “lift their game”, even when warned of the scale of the scandal.

As for the resistance of the system to policing itself, the BBB, a government agency, [would not even share fraud data](#) with Agnew, the counter-fraud minister. A presumably desperate letter from Agnew to the bank [released this week](#) was sent on 16 December but went unanswered. The BBB fobbed off enquirers by saying it had been “held up in the House of Lords IT system”.

Agnew estimated that total fraud across the public sector now ran at £29bn a year, or about 5p on income tax. The bounce-back loan fraud is estimated to have [cost a third](#) of the annual revenue of the new national insurance levy of 1.25 per cent due in April.

Some picture of this scandal is already emerging from the mundane world of the courts, from crimes and insolvency records. A [Manchester judge](#) last

week was reportedly [aghast](#) at bounce-back loans having been granted under Treasury guarantee to two serial fraudsters to the tune of £145,000. Loans went to known gangsters involved in expensive car theft. Other loans went into paying off gambling debts or into buying a £2,400 watch, according to [the Times](#).

Clearly much of this money will have gone to deserving businesses caught out by lockdown and genuinely faced with bankruptcy. Most world governments caught up in the pandemic felt entitled to print money to relieve what was assumed to be temporary – and unprecedented – financial hardship. This mostly took the form of “helicopter money”, disbursed to those in the furlough scheme and totalling [£70bn](#).

The bounce-back loan scheme was more like B-52 money. It carpet-bombed the ever murkier financial no man’s land that separates productive business and the City. The £47bn must explain why banks and other financial services survived the lockdown in remarkably healthy shape.

It would seem that Cummings’ “[madhouse](#)” extended far more widely across Whitehall than just Downing Street. It embraced the Treasury and the business department, in what appears to have been a conspiracy of high-spending anarchy. The chancellor, Rishi Sunak, has already responded by [promising](#) to do “everything we can to get that money back”. So far though, HMRC investigators have recovered a mere £536m of stolen money. While Agnew in his resignation speech was kind to the prime minister, he conspicuously did not mention Sunak. It is hard to escape the suspicion that his wrath was directly largely at the Treasury.

While Sunak has been desperate to distance himself from Johnson’s spendthrift tendencies, his leadership pitch, of seeking a responsible and fiscally stable Toryism, must be damaged by these revelations. When Covid is over, there is to be an awesome day of reckoning on many fronts. Ministers can reasonably protest that they faced a wholly exceptional crisis in 2020. From this, Britain emerged hesitantly at first but with some panache later on. Surely it should not suffer comparison with banana republics or kleptocracies?

Last November, the website [Politico](#) published a leaked list of 47 companies that were awarded PPE contracts early in the pandemic through the so-called VIP lane. These went mostly with no competition or serious checking of their often dubious qualifications. The list of those who referred companies to the scheme dripped with the [names of Conservative ministers, MPs, peers and party donors](#) (including Lord Agnew himself). According to the National Audit Office, clearly now a broken reed in Whitehall, this afforded them a [10-times better chance](#) of a contract.

All British politics relies on clubs. To [Alexis de Tocqueville](#) it was this that saved democracy from the tyranny of the majority. The ties of friendship and mutual support that hold communities together also cohere political parties in their shared ideas and interests. Debts are generated, and it is probably as well they are honoured.

But such debts require absolute transparency and audit. Public trust depends on those put in charge of the nation's wealth being seen to distribute it competently, openly and fairly. Coronavirus has been to many Britons a traumatic experience. The fury of the reaction to "[partygate](#)" shows the delicacy of the public mood. That the club of those in power should not just party while the nation suffers but should casually line its pockets and those of its friends is intolerable.

To this there can be only one answer: ruthless inquiry and, insofar as is possible, restitution. At very least, if Sunak knows what is good for him, his penance is to say goodbye to April's stinging [rise in national insurance](#).

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/28/boris-johnson-fraud-minister-covid-loan-lord-agnew>

OpinionEssex

Give me the cheeky, rackety Essex I love over a snobby rebrand any day

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



Why promote my home county as the site of the peasants' revolt rather than birthplace of the vajazzle? Money, of course

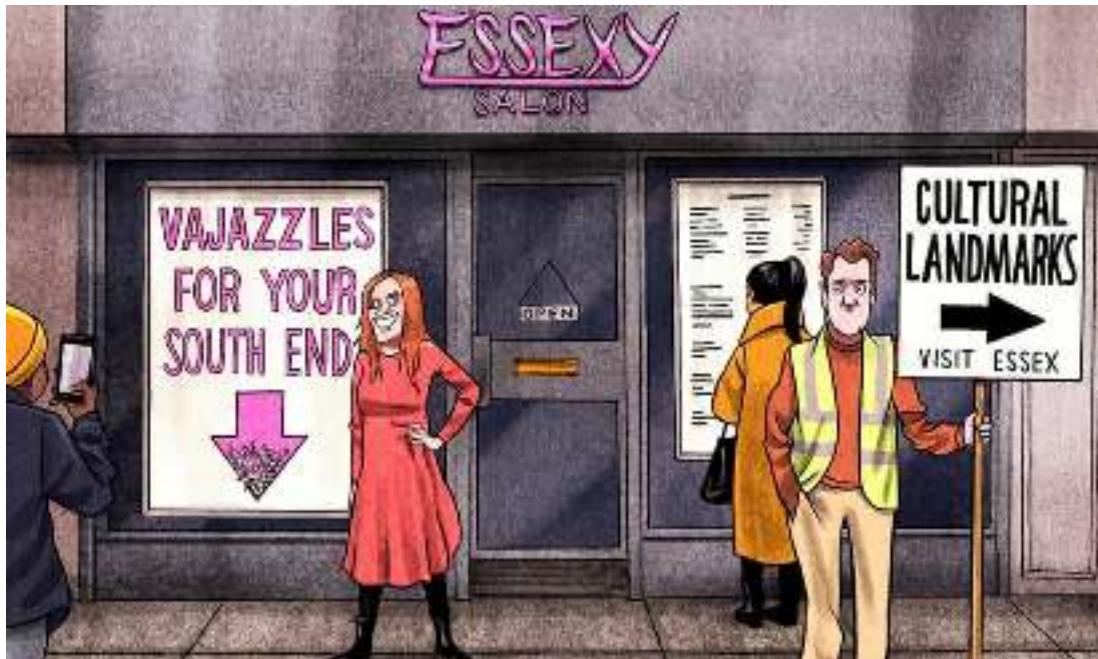


Illustration: Ben Jennings

Fri 28 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

What's the first thing an [Essex](#) girl does in the morning? Gets up and rebrands her home county as very different from the sexist and snobbish stereotypes of it that sadly prevail in the rest of Britain.

Admittedly, this is even less funny than the original punchline – which, if you grew up near Chelmsford, like me, you've probably heard before, and which triggered a [BBC internal investigation](#) a few years ago when someone told it live on Radio 1.

It is, however, very much of a piece with Essex council's [efforts to rebrand](#) a county that – how to put this? – may not previously have topped everyone's travel bucket list as a tourist destination. Forget the world of blindingly white teeth and "no carbs before Marbs" so artfully brought to life by the reality TV show *The Only Way Is Essex*. Instead, adverts featuring scientists, Michelin-starred chefs and Boudicca's campaign of resistance against the Romans will form part of a £300,000 campaign portraying the county as an undiscovered oasis of culture, wine (as in rolling vineyards, not as in getting hammered on pink prosecco) and oysters for lunch on the coast at West Mersea.

This forgotten Essex is the bucolic landscape immortalised by Constable, not the place you go to grab a selfie at Sugar Hut, the Towie crew's nightclub of choice. All of which is technically true, of course. It's just that the old, racketey Essex is the one I actually loved.

This is not the first attempt to posh it up. Although, having just made a nostalgic pilgrimage back with old friends for someone's landmark birthday, I'd say the poshing up quietly happened a while ago. The steady exodus of the priced-out-of-London over the last two decades means the comfortably scruffy countryside we grew up in is commuter land now; the muddy farms are spruced up to within an inch of their lives and the pubs in which we drank furtively, underage, have long since been converted into expensive-looking houses.

Even the towns we remembered as a cheerful riot of white stilettos and fights in nightclubs are now all smart new shopping centres and sleek "riverside eating experiences" – which no longer seems to mean eating crisps while contemplating the shopping trolleys abandoned in the murky depths of the River Chelmer, but dressing up for brunch. Pretty much the only place so unchanged as to be instantly capable of transporting us back in time, as we wandered around arguing about where the Wimpy used to be, was the park where as teens everyone drank cheap cider and threw up in the bushes.

Well, that's just progress, or maybe middle age. You can't go back to the past and expect to find it preserved in aspic, or even (judging by the estate agents' windows) expect to be able to afford to live there now. But the row stirred up by this latest rebranding exercise is really about class rather than money.

As the Towie star Gemma Collins indignantly [told the Sun](#): "To say we need to change our 'reputation' is an affront to every hardworking person from Essex who has grafted to make something of themselves." There was always more than one Essex – rural and town, the metropolitan bit that bleeds into London and the wilder marshy fringes, kiss-me-quick Southend and genteel Frinton – but its public face is brash, aspirational, emphatically working class, and not to be messed with or sanitised even in the name of flogging staycations.

In her book [Essex Girls](#), an intellectual attempt to reconcile that image with her own feelings about growing up in Chelmsford, the author Sarah Perry argues that there is a thread connecting Boudicca to Collins – and that it's one of defiance.

Essex girls have, she writes, for too long carried “the loathing and anxiety of both sides of the political spectrum, and all points in between” on their spray-tanned shoulders, having been not only slut-shamed or dismissed as airheads down the ages, but portrayed as heartless Thatcherites to boot – although it was “[Basildon man](#)” who was always said to have delivered the county for the Tories, as if “Basildon woman” (who also swung to Margaret Thatcher) was somehow too dim to get to grips with voting. The Essex girls Perry celebrates in her book are edgy and radical, from the 19th-century abolitionist Anne Knight to two suffragette sisters from Ingatestone, and the argument she constructs makes sense. But I gave up on the book halfway through in frustration, because my Essex isn't to be found in literary essays.

My Essex is a pancake-flat, dead ordinary hunk of East Anglia that has ingeniously vajazzled itself up into something much more interesting by leveraging the idea of Essex as a cheeky, sexy, loudly inappropriate cultural and economic phenomenon. That idea, much like Towie's heavily scripted idea of reality, treads an admittedly hazy line between truth and fiction. But my Essex makes the most of its assets without pretending to be what it isn't, and attempting to rebrand Brentwood as the historically significant birthplace of the [peasants' revolt](#) – rather than as the home of the beauty salon that introduced a goggle-eyed nation to the concept of sticking jewels on your bikini wax – is its antithesis. How do you reinvent a place that has already reinvented itself in ways no other county would dare? Try it, and the joke's on you.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
-

[Opinion](#)[Islamophobia](#)

Islamophobia isn't just a Tory problem – it runs right through British society

[Owen Jones](#)



Media coverage, political rhetoric and the failure of non-Muslims to speak out have made anti-Muslim racism mainstream



‘Sayeeda Warsi’s often lonely public campaign against Islamophobia has been rewarded with political exile.’ Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Thu 27 Jan 2022 13.30 EST

As the Tories’ most senior Muslim female politician, Sayeeda Warsi, puts it, to be accused of Islamophobia is “career enhancing”, but to be a [victim of Islamophobia](#) is “career destroying”. She should know: her often lonely public campaign against Islamophobia has been rewarded with political exile. What could be described as Warsi’s law [applies to Nusrat Ghani](#) too: a Tory politician who claims to have been sacked as a minister because her “Muslimness” was “making colleagues uncomfortable”.

Compare and contrast their experience with Zac Goldsmith’s: after a failed London mayoral campaign against Sadiq Khan that was accused of being riddled with [Islamophobia](#), Goldsmith was elevated to the House of Lords and made a minister. Or what of Nadine Dorries, who has [retweeted](#) far-right criminal Tommy Robinson, and [responded](#) to a video from Khan about tackling Islamophobic hate speech with: “How about, ‘it’s time to act on sex abusing grooming gangs’ instead?”

Islamophobia reaches down into the grassroots of the party. A [YouGov poll](#) uncovered that six out of 10 Tory members believe Islam “is generally a

threat to western civilisation”, that 45% believe the racist lie about “no go areas” for non-Muslims, and nearly half don’t want a Muslim prime minister.

However politically convenient it may be to pretend this is a Tory-specific problem, the Labour party cannot claim to be innocent. [Twenty-nine per cent](#) of its Muslim members report suffering Islamophobia in the party, over a third have witnessed it, and 44% didn’t believe the party took it seriously. During the Batley and Spen by-election, Labour officials [briefed](#) rightwing newspapers that they were losing Muslim support because of Keir Starmer’s efforts to tackle antisemitism, and welcomed losing “[the conservative Muslim vote](#)” over Labour’s position on gay rights and Palestine. This bigoted depiction of often lifelong Labour voters for cynical electoral benefit is Islamophobia, pure and simple. Witness, too, how Labour rescinded the suspension of Trevor Phillips after he described Muslims as “[a nation within a nation](#)”.

More widely, anti-Muslim racism is endemic in British society, with a new [study](#) finding that middle-class social groups are significantly more likely to admit to bigoted views about Islamic beliefs than their working-class counterparts. I have been inundated with examples of what should be described as anti-Muslim racism. Telecoms engineer Usman Chaudhary has had eggs thrown at him in Rochdale while strangers yelled “Bin Laden” and “terrorist” at him. Many others tell me of passersby hissing “Isis” and “suicide bomber” at them. One civil servant working for central government spoke of white colleagues saying, “he’s one of the good ones!”. Apologists for Islamophobia play semantic games – “Islam is not a race” is their go-to jibe – but, as Warsi tells me, “discrimination is not based on the actual practice of your faith, it’s about a racial identity of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness”.

No wonder there are no adverse political consequences for Islamophobia: anti-Muslim bigotry is condoned and perpetuated across the spectrum of the British press. While one study found that [78%](#) of the Mail on Sunday’s stories featuring Muslims were negative, the Times, our supposed paper of record, confers Islamophobia with respectability with headlines such as “Christian child forced into Muslim foster care”. A [correction](#) to this dishonest story eventually came, but the damage was done.

“If you look at the polling and survey evidence, there’s been no real progress in the last decade in how Muslims are seen in society,” Miqdaad Versi, director for media monitoring at the Muslim Council of Britain, tells me. Why? Partly because British Muslims – half of whom live in the poorest [10%](#) communities – lack power and an organised voice.

The rhetoric fanned by media outlets and politicians, particularly during the “war on terror”, has further normalised this racism. Like all forms of bigotry, it’s the voices of the victims that need to be heard the loudest. But that doesn’t mean non-Muslims shouldn’t speak out: the failure to do so is what makes anti-Muslim hate mainstream, and that is why to say nothing is to be complicit.

- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/27/islamophobia-tory-british-society-media-anti-muslim-racism>

The politics sketch**Politics**

Prime suspect Boris Johnson gives Sue Gray the slip in Wales

[John Crace](#)



The prime minister tries to shore up Tory support en route while talking rhubarb about animal rescues from Kabul



Boris Johnson does a runner to Wales. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA
Thu 27 Jan 2022 13.17 EST

Boris Johnson: Where are we off to?

Special adviser: [Wales](#).

Johnson: Why?

Special adviser: Why not? You haven't been there for a while and the diary is empty now that [the Sue Gray report](#) is taking longer than expected. Plus, it's far enough away from London for you to be unable to make a statement to parliament today even if the report was to be delivered.

Johnson: Makes sense. Maybe if I make myself scarce every day for the next week everyone will just forget about Sue Gray.

Special adviser: I don't think Sue Gray is going to forget about Sue Gray. Or the rest of the country. Plus, there's a limit to how obstructive we can be seen to have been. So try not to think about the report today and use the time while we're travelling to call Tory MPs to shore up support in case there's a no confidence vote.

Johnson: Is that Archie?

Tory MP: No, it's Andy.

Johnson: Of course you are. Good to speak to you Sandy. It's the Suspect here. I mean, the prime minister. I'm just calling to find out how you are ...

Tory MP: To be honest, I've had better months ...

Johnson: Me too.

Tory MP: Look, I'll admit when I first heard about all the parties inside No 10 I was a bit shocked. But now I've calmed down and had a bit of time to reflect, I can see you deserve to be cut a bit of slack ...

Johnson: That's very good of you. I was working tremendously hard and it can be so easy to walk into one's garden to find trestle tables full of food and dozens of people getting pissed and conclude you were still at a Covid test-and-trace briefing. Not to mention the shock of being ambushed by a cake in the cabinet room while my wife and the interior designer – among others – sang Happy Birthday.

Tory MP: That must have been terrifying. As I said, I have no problem with you lying. We all knew you were a pathological liar when we elected you party leader so it would be totally unreasonable of us to expect you to change. The trouble is that my inbox has been full of constituents who don't feel the same way. They are furious that you have obviously misled parliament and taken the country for granted.

Johnson: I can assure you I have done nothing wrong and that I'm the innocent victim in all this ...

Tory MP: Yes, yes. Save all this for the police. I believe you. But what are you going to do to put things right?

Johnson: What would you like me to do?

Tory MP: Well, you could get rid of that smirk for a start. And then you could try being a bit more Conservative ...

Johnson: What could be more Conservative than having brought the government to a complete standstill with a “one rule for us and another rule for the little people” scandal? It’s a classic of the genre.

Tory MP: Good point, well made. But maybe you could have another look at the national insurance increase in April?

Johnson: We are the party of low taxes except when we are raising them. Can I just say that it is all Rishi Sunak’s fault. He gave me bad advice and is to blame for making me do it ...

Tory MP: What does that mean exactly?

Johnson: I’m not entirely sure. I’m fully behind the rise until the moment when I find the whole party is about to dump me, at which point I will do a reverse ferret. Or maybe I won’t ...

01:24

Boris Johnson denies allegations he prioritised evacuation of animals out of Kabul – video

Tory MP: I see. Moving on. What are you going to do about Brexit?

Johnson: What would you like me to do?

Tory MP: Could we try diverging further from the EU?

Johnson: Even if it’s pointless and more expensive for British business?

Tory MP: Especially if it’s pointless and more expensive for British business. We need a futile gesture to show that we have really taken back control.

Johnson: OK, if you insist. It’s no skin off my nose if GDP tanks. Just so long as I’m still in a job.

Tory MP: That’s more like it. Now what else have you got planned?

Johnson: Well, in the short term, I'm planning on going to Australia in the February recess ...

Tory MP: What for?

Johnson: No reason, really. Just Liz Truss said [the private jet](#) was amazing.

Tory MP: That's just what voters need to see. You sunning yourself, while the rest of the country freezes its nuts off.

Johnson: Must go. I've just reached Wales. Just remember you're in line for a ministerial post at the next reshuffle. And that if you don't support me then funding to your constituency will be cut. Goodbye. Lovely to chat.

ITV: Could you explain why everyone in Whitehall seems to think [you personally intervened to prioritise the rescue of animals over people](#) from Afghanistan?

Johnson: I never did. [That's total rhubarb](#). Anyone who says different is a liar.

ITV: Mmm. But there are emails and a letter from Trudy Harrison, your PPS. And surely no one else but you could have organised such a flight at such short notice.

Harrison: You definitely did.

Johnson: I didn't. Just remember your place. Your job is – like everyone else who works for me – to lose your job when required. Everything is about me.

Harrison: You're right. You definitely did nothing wrong. I was acting in an entirely personal capacity on behalf of my constituents. Even though none of my constituents were involved.

Johnson: That's better. Now can I go home? I need to try to redact the Sue Gray report.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/27/prime-suspect-boris-johnson-gives-sue-gray-the-slip-in-wales>

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

2022.01.28 - Around the world

- [North Korea Regime confirms barrage of missile tests as Kim Jong-un visits arms factory](#)
- [South China Sea US stealth fighter crashes and sinks, sparking fears of salvage by China](#)
- [Southern Africa Dozens killed in Tropical Storm Ana with more wild weather to come](#)
- [Live Business: France's economy records fastest growth in 52 years](#)
- [Chris Brown Singer sued for allegedly drugging and raping woman on yacht](#)

North Korea

North Korea confirms barrage of missile tests as Kim Jong-un visits arms factory

Pyongyang's regime has carried out six tests in January 'confirming the power of conventional warhead'



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un visits a munitions factory producing what state media KCNA called a 'major weapon system'. Photograph: KCNA/Reuters

Agence France-Presse
Thu 27 Jan 2022 21.02 EST

North Korea has test-fired more long-range cruise missiles and short-range ballistic missiles, state media says, part of a record-breaking streak of launches this year.

Pyongyang has conducted six weapons tests since the start of the year, including hypersonic missiles, [one of the most intense barrages](#) in a calendar month on record, while ignoring US offers of talks.

On Friday, the official Korean central news agency said it “conducted the test-fire for updating long-range cruise missile system and the test-fire for confirming the power of conventional warhead for surface-to-surface tactical guided missile”.

KCNA said the test on Tuesday involved long-range cruise missiles flying over the East Sea – also known as the Sea of Japan – and hitting “the target island 1,800km away”.

Thursday’s launch then saw short-range ballistic missiles hit a “target island”, KCNA added, “proving that the explosive power of the conventional warhead complied with the design requirements”.

The flurry of sanctions-busting tests this month come after the country’s dictator, Kim Jong-un, re-avowed his commitment to military modernisation in a party speech in December.

Washington imposed new sanctions in response, prompting Pyongyang to double down on weapons testing and hint last week that it could abandon a years-long self-imposed moratorium on nuclear and long-range tests.

Kim also visited a munitions factory that produces “a major weapon system”, KCNA said.

In a photograph released by the news agency, a beaming Kim, wearing his usual long black-belted leather coat, is seen surrounded by uniformed officials.

Kim “highly appreciated the factory effecting collective innovation and leaping progress in producing major weapons”, KCNA reported.

The string of tests comes at a delicate time in the region, with Kim’s sole major ally, China, set to host the Winter Olympics next month and South Korea gearing up for a presidential election in March.

Domestically, North Korea is preparing to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the birth of late leader Kim Jong-il in February, as well as the 110th birthday of founder Kim Il-sung in April.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/28/north-korea-confirms-barrage-of-missile-tests-as-kim-jong-un-visits-arms-factory>.

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

South China Sea

Race to salvage US F-35C fighter jet that crashed in hostile South China Sea

Fears that subs from China, which claims the area, could be first to reach wreckage that plunged from deck of aircraft carrier



An F-35C stealth jet on deck of the USS Carl Vinson in the western Pacific, south of Japan, in November. Photograph: Tim Kelly/Reuters

[Julian Borger](#) in Washington

Thu 27 Jan 2022 23.56 EST

The US navy is racing to salvage an F-35C fighter jet from the bottom of the [South China Sea](#) after it crashed on an aircraft carrier and plunged overboard – taking with it highly classified technology that would be a coup if China retrieved it first.

The F-35C crashed-landed on the deck of the USS Carl Vinson during routine operations on Monday, the navy said, injuring six sailors and the pilot, who ejected from the plane before it fell into the sea.

The most advanced US fighter, a stealth plane costing over \$100m, is packed with highly classified technology and if found would represent an intelligence boon for [China](#), which claims almost all of the South China Sea as its own territory. The Vinson was on a patrol intended to challenge that territorial claim and defend international freedom of navigation.

The F-35C is a version of the plane specially designed to operate from aircraft carriers. Maritime experts have said it could take a US salvage ship more than 10 days to reach the site of the crash, potentially giving Chinese submarines the opportunity to find it first.

“We’re certainly mindful of the value of an F-35 in every respect of what value means,” said John Kirby, the Pentagon spokesman. “And as we continue to attempt recovery of the aircraft we’re going to do it obviously with safety foremost in mind, but clearly our own national security interests. And I think I will just leave it at that.”

In Beijing the foreign ministry spokesman, Zhao Lijian, said the Chinese government had no ambitions to find the crashed plane. “I noted relevant reports. This is not the first time that the US has an accident in the South China Sea,” he said.

“We have no interest in their aircraft. We urge the country concerned to do things that are conducive to regional peace and stability, rather than flex muscles in the region.”

In 2001, a heavily damaged American EP-3 surveillance plane made a daredevil [emergency landing on China’s Hainan island](#) after a collision with a pursuing Chinese fighter plane. The fighter crashed and its pilot was killed.

The 24 crew of the EP-3, who had been lucky to survive the collision, were detained and interrogated by Chinese authorities before their release 10 days later. Meanwhile, the Chinese military stripped and examined the EP-3’s

highly classified equipment and intelligence materials over several months – eventually giving back the plane in pieces.

It is the third time an F-35 has crashed into the sea and had to be salvaged. In November a British F-35B, the short takeoff and vertical landing version, crashed as it lost power taking off from the aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth in the Mediterranean. The pilot ejected and the plane was recovered from the seabed a few weeks later.

In April 2019 a Japanese F-35A, the conventional takeoff and landing version, crashed at over 1,000km/h into the Pacific, leaving the pilot dead and only debris to be recovered.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/28/f-35c-crash-leaves-us-fighter-jet-sunken-in-hostile-south-china-sea>

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

Madagascar

Dozens killed in Tropical Storm Ana as southern Africa braces for more wild weather

Madagascar, Mozambique and Malawi lashed by high winds and torrential rains, leaving nearly 80 people dead

01:28

Storm Ana: heavy floods hit southern Africa after week of torrential rain – video

Agence France-Presse

Thu 27 Jan 2022 19.33 EST

The death toll from a storm that struck three southern African countries has risen to 77 as emergency teams battled to repair damaged infrastructure and help tens of thousands of victims.

Tropical Storm Ana made landfall in Madagascar on Monday before ploughing into [Mozambique](#) and Malawi through the week, bringing torrential rains

Rescue workers and authorities across the three countries were assessing the full extent of the damage on Friday morning, even as another storm was forming in the Indian Ocean.

Madagascar on Thursday night declared a state of national disaster as the death toll rose to 48. Mozambique reported 18 killed while 11 had died in Malawi.



An overturned vehicle swept by flooding waters in Chikwawa, Malawi.
Photograph: AP

Remnants of the storm have passed over Zimbabwe, but no deaths have been reported.

In the three hardest-hit countries, tens of thousands of homes were damaged. Some collapsed under the heavy rain, trapping victims in the rubble.

Swollen rivers washed away bridges and submerged fields, drowning livestock and destroying the livelihoods of rural families.

In Madagascar, 130,000 people fled their homes. In the capital, Antananarivo, schools and gyms were turned into emergency shelters.

“We only brought our most important possessions,” Berthine Razafiarisoa, who sheltered in a gym with his family of 10, said.

In northern and central Mozambique, Ana destroyed 10,000 homes and dozens of schools and hospitals, while downing power lines.



A roof blown off a school building in Angoche, Mozambique. Photograph: IFRC/EPA

Mozambique and international weather services warned that another storm, named Batsirai, has formed over the Indian Ocean and was expected to make landfall over the weekend.

It “might evolve into a severe tropical storm in the next few days”, the United Nations said in a statement.

Up to six tropical cyclones are expected before the rainy season ends in March.

“The situation is of extreme concern” and “vulnerability is very, very high,” the UN’s resident coordinator in Mozambique, Myrta Kaulard, said.

“The challenge is titanic, the challenge is extreme,” she said, noting that the storms were hitting “an already extremely vulnerable” region still trying to recover from [cyclones Idai and Kenneth, which hit the region in 2019.](#)

“Mozambique is responding to a complex crisis in the north which has caused an additional enormous strain on the budget of the country, on the population,” Kaulard said. “In addition there is also Covid.”

In neighbouring [Malawi](#), the government declared a state of natural disaster.

Most of the country lost electricity early in the week, after floodwaters hit generating stations. Power was restored by Thursday in parts of the country, but parts of the electric grid were destroyed.

“Our priority now is restoring power to health establishments, water treatment distribution systems and schools,” the national power utility said in a statement.

Southern Africa, and especially Mozambique, has suffered destructive storms repeatedly in recent years.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/28/dozens-killed-in-tropical-storm-ana-as-southern-africa-braces-for-more-wild-weather>

Business live

Business

France records fastest growth in 52 years; German economy shrinks; US consumer confidence sinks – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/jan/28/france-economy-eurozone-germany-gdp-growth-stock-markets-business-live>

Chris Brown

Chris Brown sued for allegedly drugging and raping woman on yacht

An unidentified plaintiff alleges the R&B singer assaulted her on a yacht docked at the Miami home of P Diddy



Chris Brown performing in December 2021. Photograph: John Salangsang for Power/REX/Shutterstock

[Laura Snapes](#)

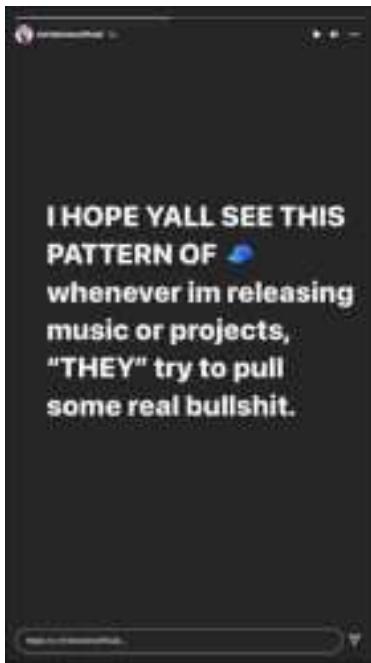
Fri 28 Jan 2022 04.55 EST

A woman is suing the R&B singer [Chris Brown](#) for \$20m for allegedly drugging and raping her on a yacht docked at a property in Miami owned by P Diddy, [Rolling Stone has reported](#).

The unidentified plaintiff – a professional choreographer, dancer, model and musician who is named Jane Doe in the lawsuit – and an unidentified friend

were invited to the yacht on 30 December 2021 by a male friend.

The lawsuit states that while the man was on the phone to Doe, Brown took it from him and told her “he had heard about her music and urged her to head over to Diddy’s home on Star Island as soon as possible”.



Chris Brown's apparent response to a new lawsuit accusing him of drugging and raping a woman. Photograph: Instagram

On the yacht, the lawsuit alleges, Brown offered Doe a cup containing a mixed drink. As he “offered her tips about starting a career in the music industry”, he allegedly refilled her cup, after which she became “disoriented, physically unstable, and started to fall in and out of sleep”, according to the suit.

It claims she was led to a bedroom where Brown closed the door and refused to let her leave. The complaint alleges that he undressed and raped her, and that after he ejaculated inside her, he announced “he was ‘done’”. It alleges that Brown demanded Doe take an emergency contraceptive the following day.

Brown responded on Instagram Stories: “I HOPE YALL SEE THIS PATTERN OF [redacted] whenever im releasing music or projects, ‘THEY’ try to pull some real bullshit.”

The Guardian has contacted representatives for Brown for comment.

Doe's lawyer Ariel E Mitchell told Rolling Stone that they wanted to "ensure all parties are held accountable so that we may begin to eradicate this behaviour from our society".

Brown has had several legal troubles since he was convicted of felony assault on his then girlfriend Rihanna in 2009.

He has previously been denied entry to the UK, Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand on grounds of character.

Brown, a major R&B figure of the 2000s, is due to release his 10th album, Breezy, later this year. He has said he wants the music to "talk to women's soul".

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/jan/28/chris-brown-sued-for-allegedly-drugging-and-raping-woman-on-yacht>

Headlines thursday 27 january 2022

- Live Boris Johnson ‘will not have to resign’ if police interview him under caution
- Boris Johnson Tory MPs poised to send letters of no confidence in PM after ‘partygate’ report
- No 10 parties Met to ask those named by inquiry if they are guilty
- Conservatives UK government being immobilised by Boris Johnson crisis, say sources

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

[**Politics**](#)

Boris Johnson yet to receive Sue Gray report and says it's 'total rhubarb' he authorised Kabul animal airlift – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2022/jan/27/boris-johnson-news-pm-partygate-sue-gray-report-covid-coronavirus-omicron-live-updates>

Boris Johnson

Tory MPs poised to send letters of no confidence in PM after ‘partygate’ report

Senior backbenchers to move as a collective to force no-confidence vote



A consensus is forming among Johnson’s allies that he cannot rely on the support of all his ministers, several of whom have expressed serious concerns to colleagues. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

[Jessica Elgot](#) and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)

Wed 26 Jan 2022 15.01 EST

A new raft of Conservative MPs are poised to send letters of no confidence in **Boris Johnson** when the long-awaited “partygate” report is published, as

the prime minister was pressured by his supporters to oversee a complete clearout of No 10.

The Guardian has learned that senior backbenchers are to move as a collective to force a no-confidence vote in Johnson once senior civil servant Sue Gray releases her findings, which on Tuesday helped trigger a criminal inquiry.

Newly elected MPs wounded by the publicising of the [so-called pork pie plot](#) are understood to have remonstrated with more senior colleagues for leaving them exposed. But a consensus has now formed among more experienced MPs that Johnson should face a no-confidence vote.

“It’s the white, middle-aged backbencher he has to watch,” one MP said. “People who feel strongly about their morals and to whom this prime minister can’t offer anything personally.”

Among those who are prepared to move against Johnson are more than two dozen former ministers – there are more than 70 in that category in total – according to the rebels’ latest calculations.

There will be no group statement from the One Nation group of centrist Tories, which has more than 100 members. Instead, MPs said letters were more likely to come from smaller groups of like-minded MPs moving together.

Q&A

How would a Conservative leadership contest to oust Boris Johnson work?

Show

Conservative MPs can trigger a leadership contest if 15% of them – 54 on current numbers in parliament – write a confidential letter of no confidence in the prime minister to Graham Brady, chair of the 1922 Committee, the parliamentary group of the Conservative party in the House of Commons. Only he knows the exact number of letters that have been submitted.

Once the threshold is reached, there is a vote of confidence in the party leader, involving all Conservative MPs. If the prime minister wins a majority – in this case 180 votes – he would remain in office, and no new no-confidence vote could be triggered for at least 12 months. If he loses, or chooses to resign, then a leadership contest takes place.

In a leadership election, Conservative MPs choose one candidate from those standing in a secret ballot. In the first round, any candidate who wins the support of fewer than 5% of MPs is eliminated. In the second round anybody winning less than 10% of the vote is eliminated. In subsequent rounds the bottom placed contender drops out until there are only two contenders left.

The choice of those two is then put to a postal ballot of Conservative party members around the country. The winner of that vote becomes the prime minister, with no obligation to call a general election to secure their position.

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

A consensus is also forming among Johnson's allies that he cannot rely on the support of all his ministers, several of whom have expressed serious concerns to colleagues.

While the prime minister's supporters were bullish that the "window has passed" for his critics to make their move, several frontbenchers told the Guardian they were privately concerned about [Scotland Yard launching its own investigation](#).

One said: "Some of us are still waiting to make up our mind." Another admitted: "If there's any evidence of criminal wrongdoing by the prime minister, he can't stay in post."

Gray's report was said to be close to completion on Tuesday night, but there has been no official explanation for why it has not yet been sent to Johnson.

On Wednesday night the business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, indicated on ITV's Peston that the report might not be out until next week.

A No 10 source denied Downing Street was pressuring Gray to publish a separate summary rather than the full findings. They said conversations were ongoing within the Cabinet Office over the Metropolitan police investigation and insisted there had not been an order made to delay the report's publication.

If Gray's report is published on Thursday or Friday, Johnson is prepared to go to the Commons with it – despite the potential disruption of MPs' plans in their constituencies.

Behind the scenes, Johnson's supporters are planning for how to avoid a no confidence vote once the report is released, or reduce the numbers who will vote against him if one is called.

Ideas are being discussed to convince backbenchers that genuine changes will be made to key parts of the government machine, including a clearout of some No 10 political advisers.

In a bid to restore discipline after a series of rebellions, the government whips office has also been tipped for an overhaul in the run up to the February recess.

The chief whip, Mark Spencer, could be given a new job as an environment minister, with Chris Pincher – one of the main five MPs running a shadow whipping operation to save Johnson's premiership – tipped as a potential replacement.

Johnson's allies hope the parliamentary recess beginning 10 February will act as a “firebreak” to calm colleagues down, with plans being drawn up for the prime minister to head away on trade trips to Australia and Japan.

The shadow whipping operation is meeting up to three times a day – twice in-person and once virtually. It is organising in a nearly 100-strong WhatsApp “support group”. However there are fears some “spies” have infiltrated, and are briefing those who would back the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, in a leadership contest.

Senior members of the operation were said to have been told that two people who had submitted no-confidence letters had withdrawn them. One minister said the message being given to colleagues was: “Unless you’re gonna kill the guy, back off – he’s going nowhere.”

Keir Starmer used prime minister’s questions on Wednesday to press Johnson to resign if he misled parliament by insisting no Covid rules were broken. He said: “Frankly, the public have made up their minds. They know the prime minister is not fit for the job.”

Johnson insisted he could not comment until Gray’s report was published, and was showered with helpful questions from Tory MPs about the vaccine rollout, jobs and Brexit.

Afterwards, he spoke to more MPs one-to-one in his Commons office. One said they had requested a meeting with the prime minister in summer 2020, which was suddenly granted on Wednesday.

But a long-serving MP said they had been appalled by Johnson’s attitude in their face-to-face conversations, which had enforced their position that the prime minister did not understand the seriousness of the situation.

Mark Logan, elected as a Tory MP in 2019 for Bolton North East, told Sky News he had spoken to Johnson recently and made clear “there has to be a huge change” of heart by the prime minister as well as the “approach and the infrastructure around him”.

Some Johnson critics have said there are circumstances where a no-confidence vote would have to be paused in a volatile political environment.

Representations would be made to Brady if tanks roll across the Ukrainian border that the vote of no confidence should be delayed for four weeks. “It’s not ideal timing for a leadership contest,” one of those who is considering putting a letter in admitted.

Meanwhile, senior civil servants fear the blame will be pinned on them for the more than a dozen social gatherings reported to have taken place in No 10 and across Whitehall.

Those civil servants who could be in the line of fire include the cabinet secretary, Simon Case, and the prime minister's principal private secretary, Martin Reynolds, who invited 100 Downing Street staff to a "bring your own booze" party in the first lockdown.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/26/tory-mps-poised-to-send-letters-of-no-confidence-in-pm-after-partygate-report>

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

Metropolitan police

Met to ask No 10 partygoers named by inquiry if they are guilty

Some could be questioned in writing and fined, while others will be interviewed under caution



The Met will take Sue Gray's evidence and ask those she finds have attended gatherings in Downing Street and Whitehall whether they have a reasonable excuse, sources say. Photograph: Alberto Pezzali/AP

[Vikram Dodd](#) Police and crime correspondent

Wed 26 Jan 2022 14.19 EST

Police will ask [aides of Boris Johnson](#) named in [Sue Gray's report](#) as having attended parties during lockdown if they are guilty and therefore accept a fine under regulations passed by the government they work for.

Some could be asked in writing to accept or dispute Gray's findings, while others will have to be interviewed under caution. The investigation is expected to take at least several weeks, with detectives prepared to expand their inquiry if further evidence emerges.

The [Metropolitan police](#) will take Gray's evidence and ask those she finds to have attended gatherings in Downing Street and Whitehall whether they have a reasonable excuse, sources say.

The sources add that, while the lockdown-breaking offences are relatively minor and do not result in a criminal record if paid promptly, any attempts to lie, or to get others to lie, could result in an escalation of Scotland Yard's inquiry, with perverting the course of justice investigations launched. Suspicion of committing such offences could lead to arrest, full criminal investigation and potentially time in jail if convicted.

One police source said: "Lying could lead to a charge of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice," and cited the example of drivers facing motoring fines whose lies amounted to more serious offences, such as the former MP Chris Huhne, who ended up in jail.

A second source said "conspiracy to pervert would seem to apply" if concerted attempts were made to thwart the police investigation.

The Met decided which of the alleged string of parties it would investigate on Tuesday, just before the commissioner, Cressida Dick, made her announcement. Gray's broad findings were passed to the Met special inquiries team, which matched them with the coronavirus laws at the time.

The Met has asked Gray for the underlying evidence supporting her conclusions, such as data showing which people attended parties from emails or security cards. One source said detectives were "waiting to get under the hood" of the evidence gathered by Gray, with the Met investigation at an early stage.

One police source with extensive knowledge of policing the Covid regulations said: "You do not need to show criminal intent ... simply

showing you are there is enough, so a photo, or email might be enough to issue a ticket.”

Met officers will trigger the fines process by sending paperwork to the criminal records office based in Hampshire, which technically issues the fine, which arrives by post with details of how to pay. The fines will vary according to which regulations were in place at the time, as the penalties changed. 118,963 fines were issued in England and Wales until 19 December 2021.

Some people may choose to take the fine, while anyone who denies their guilt could force a fuller police investigation taking more time and resources, as police then would have to get cases ready for a magistrates court hearing. A former Met detective, Simon Harding, commented: “You can’t force people to talk.”

The investigation will have to see what evidence from Gray would be admissible in the English court system, and therefore may have to redo some of her team’s work.

A source added other allegations would be looked at if evidence not found by Gray or new testimony emerged, amid claims some Johnson aides would not trust the civil servant’s inquiry, which was reporting to the prime minister, but may be more forthcoming with police officers independent of government.

The Met’s investigation was announced after weeks of the force declining to do so, saying it rarely investigated offences retrospectively. Dick said retrospective action had been taken against her own officers, and this includes 31 officers issued with £200 fines for having their hair cut by a barber visiting an east London police station.

It also includes nine officers photographed dining with each other in a cafe, with both events taking place in January 2021.

The Met investigation into the Downing Street and Whitehall parties will be overseen by the acting deputy assistant commissioner, Jane Connors, and

Cmdr Catherine Roper. The Met has not named the senior investigating officer in charge.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jan/26/met-to-ask-no-10-partygoers-named-by-inquiry-if-they-are-guilty>.

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

Conservatives

UK government being immobilised by Boris Johnson crisis, say sources

Instead of implementing policy, ministers are spending their time defending PM



‘Instead of getting on with their jobs, they’re wheeled out to save his,’ said the Labour leader, Keir Starmer, to Boris Johnson on Wednesday.
Photograph: Jessica Taylor/AFP/Getty Images

[Heather Stewart](#) and [Jessica Elgot](#)

Wed 26 Jan 2022 14.03 EST

Boris Johnson’s plight is leaving government in a state of near-paralysis, with key decisions delayed while No 10 focuses on defending the prime minister amid the Downing Street parties scandal, sources say.

“It’s not as easy to get policy through if it has to involve No 10 at the moment. I’m aware the civil servants feel it – feel the slowdown,” said one frustrated aide in a Whitehall department. “You just need to have things to carry on doing.”

Michael Gove’s [levelling-up white paper](#) was expected before Christmas but has been repeatedly delayed – though sources in his department insist that is as much to do with the Omicron Covid surge as “partygate”.

One MP who has been given a preview of the policy paper said they were underwhelmed and expressed concern that the government’s internal turmoil means strategic direction has been lacking.

Despite inflation hitting a 30-year high, and with energy prices set to jump sharply in April, the government is also yet to present a plan to alleviate the [cost of living crisis](#).

The Labour leader, [Keir Starmer](#), said to Boris Johnson on Wednesday: “What’s utterly damning, despite the huff and puff, is that this [the parties scandal] is all happening when petrol prices, the weekly shop, and energy bills are going through the roof.”

He said of government ministers, many of whom have spent recent media rounds explaining away the allegations of rule-breaking parties: “Instead of getting on with their jobs, they’re wheeled out to save his.”

Marking two years since Brexit, Johnson told his cabinet on Tuesday that “we must be bold to unleash growth and innovation, and show the British people, businesses and investors that things are changing for the better”.

Yet civil servants point to the relatively empty parliamentary timetable, with little heavyweight legislation under discussion, as evidence of the lack of direction from the centre of government. The House of Commons adjourned before 5pm on Wednesday.

Tim Durrant, associate director of Whitehall thinktank the Institute for Government, said of the partygate row: “It just sucks up everyone’s attention, that’s the problem … Whether or not they’re directly involved,

ministers are always being asked: ‘Do you support the prime minister?’ So they’re having to defend him. They’re not able to get on with other things.”

He pointed out that every hour spent by Johnson wooing backbenchers is time he cannot spend being briefed about the crisis in Ukraine, or other pressing concerns. “It’s not just about his time, it’s about the rest of government,” he added. “Ministers are paying attention to what’s going on, officials are following what’s going on; people will be thinking about, what are the various scenarios we need to be planning for, in case there are changes.”

With Johnson asking wavering MPs what policies they would like to see implemented, there are also concerns that policy decisions civil servants believed had been settled could now be reversed.

The prime minister has come under intense pressure, including from some members of his cabinet, to reconsider the increase in [national insurance contributions](#) due to take effect in April.

03:38

‘For God’s sake, resign!’: pressure mounts on Johnson at PMQs – video

Rishi Sunak, the chancellor, wrung the commitment to the tax rise from Johnson in exchange for signing off on a surge in spending on the NHS, and sees himself as the representative of the Tory tradition of sound money.

Sunak’s aides insist there have been no conversations between the pair about postponing or cancelling the increase, and Johnson’s spokesperson insisted on Tuesday there were “no plans” to do so.

But government insiders fear the government’s stance on this and other issues may now be in flux as Johnson bids to win over sceptics in his own party in advance of a potential no confidence vote.

Those policies that have been announced recently – including the freeze on the BBC licence fee, and the enhanced involvement of the military in tackling small boat Channel crossings – appear to be aimed at placating rightwing backbenchers.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/26/uk-government-being-immobilised-by-boris-johnson-crisis-say-insiders>

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

2022.01.27 - Spotlight

- ['£10m is a pittance' Meet Britain's most successful estate agent](#)
- [Sex How Covid killed the one-night stand – and made us all kinkier](#)
- [Partygate Fibbing is part of Boris Johnson's toolkit but could be his undoing](#)
- [The politics sketch Labour had Boris Johnson over a barrel, but he could still scrape the bottom of it](#)
- ['Godfather of alternative comedy' Eddie Izzard, Paul Merton and more on Spike Milligan](#)



Gary Hershaw Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian/Guardian Design

[The long read](#)

Super-prime mover: Britain's most successful estate agent

Gary Hershaw Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian/Guardian Design

Gary Hershaw has been selling houses to the very rich for decades. At first, £1m was a big deal. Now he sells for £50m, £100m, even £200m. What does it take to stay on top in this cut-throat business?

by [Sophie Elmhirst](#)

Thu 27 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Ring ring. Gary Hershaw's phone was going, as usual. The super-prime [London](#) estate agent blew through the Mayfair office of his company, Beauchamp Estates, scattering employees behind him. As he climbed into the passenger seat of the company car, a Volkswagen Golf rather than his

personal BMW, I asked where we were going. “I don’t know!” he said. He found a postcode, and announced it to the driver. Ring ring. Hersham’s mobile has the high-pitched jangle of an old-fashioned telephone at fire-alarm volume. “I didn’t ask you for that,” he roared down the phone as we sat stationary outside his office. “What makes you assume that’s what I was doing? Could I speak to Emily please?” Emily, his *fantastic* secretary. Ring ring. Someone else was calling. “We’ve got to wait for Marcus!”

Enter, at a trot, Marcus O’Brien, Hersham’s protege: tall, slicked hair, suited and groomed, just 30. (Hersham is 68.) O’Brien had been out for a big dinner the night before, knowable only from his stating the fact: there was no sickly pallor, despite being crammed into the back seat of the Golf, which was now winding its way through Mayfair, past the members’ clubs and hedge funds and townhouses, a neighbourhood in which Hersham has been selling property for 43 years. His agency has sold houses for quantities of money that seem increasingly conceptual as they rise: Belgrave Square (£50m), Caroline Terrace (£60m), Grosvenor Crescent (£100m). Then the ultimate, a career peak in an already elevated range, the most expensive house ever sold in Britain: 2-8a Rutland Gate in Knightsbridge, sold in early 2020 for £215m.

Get the Guardian’s award-winning long reads sent direct to you every Saturday morning

As we drove, I asked Hersham what skills were required to do his job. “May I suggest,” he replied, “that you listen to my telephone conversations and see what goes on.” Well, this is what goes on. His phone rings constantly. He is usually having at least three conversations at once: two on the phone (there is typically someone on hold) and one in real life. He talks with the frenetic urgency of someone whose conversations contain the potential for expensive failure. He is often finding numbers, asking people for numbers, giving out numbers. Hersham has the kind of deep, multigenerational well of contacts that means he now sells not just to individuals, but entire dynasties. “He knows *everyone*,” a former colleague of his told me. And not just everyone in London. He shuttles between representatives of New York financiers, Middle Eastern royal families, the now-almost-quaint Russian oligarchs. “It’s probably third-generation wealth that he’s seeing now,” O’Brien told me. “They’re closer to my age than to his.”

As he swerved from conversation to conversation, Hersham modulated his tone accordingly: from soothing compliments to bawling out an underling. He did this instinctively, it seemed, his personality as volatile as the job required, and indivisible from it. The work *was* the conversation. “Was it a good price or not?! Just a simple yes or no!” Next call: “Believe you me, I *know* it was the best apartment I’ve ever seen.” Next call: “You’ve got us into serious trouble because you left a door open!”

Hersham would not leave a door open. He is fastidious, and arranges his stamp collection, which contains every stamp from the Queen’s coronation to the present day, in precise blocks of four. In an industry famed for its lack of scruple, he is a firm believer in probity. “Life is always to do with kindness,” he told me. “It doesn’t mean you can’t negotiate hard, but you’ve got to negotiate fairly, that’s my motto.” In other words, he shouts at people a lot, but what he shouts is true.

We were going, it emerged, to a country house not far from London. The journey out of town allowed Hersham and O’Brien to exchange information on properties we were passing.

“What’s going on over there, Gary?” asked O’Brien, of a grand edifice near Hyde Park.

“Well, it was renovated about 10 years ago,” said Hersham. “A *very* strange house.” He knew its owner, its previous owner, its interior design, probably its future. He knows every building of note in the city: their provenance, square footage, basement depths and ceiling heights. He knows which would suit one of his buyers: the new-build penthouse for the Indian billionaire; a stuccoed hunk of Knightsbridge for the Chinese industrialist.

London was soon behind us. Prime central London, or PCL as it’s known in the real estate industry, had given way to the kind of areas that tend not to cross Hersham’s desk. Acton, Ealing, Hillingdon, Hayes. Then the motorway, fields, lanes, villages.

“One second,” shouted Hersham. “I’ve got no signal, this is a disaster! I’ve got no signal! You need to turn the car around. I need signal.” Ring ring. “Hi, how are you? I’m seeing a house in the country, I lost signal.” Pause.

“Reverse the car, reverse the car, reverse the car! Every conversation I have I lose the fucking signal! Just stop the car!”

Through a pretty village, down a narrow lane, the car stopped outside a large, gated redbrick manor.

“Is this the house?” asked Hersham.

“Yes, this is the house,” said O’Brien.

“You sure?”

“Positive.”

“There’s no driveway!”

Middlemen. They say the right things, know the right people, take a cut. Sometimes, it’s not obvious what they actually *do*. But then you try to do something without them and it falls apart, because there’s no interpreter, no buffer, no oil. An agent, as their name implies, makes things happen. The world moves through them. Without them, you’re writing a book that no one reads, selling a house that nobody sees.

Hersham is one of an older generation of estate agents in London – mostly men – who have been selling the city’s most lavish homes since the 60s. Among them, Andrew Langton of Aylesford (patch: Chelsea); Peter Wetherell of Wetherell (Mayfair); Trevor Abrahamsohn of Glentree (“the north-west London corridor”); Jonathan Hewlett (central London) and David Forbes of Savills (the entire rich world). These are names known to everyone in the industry, the “old school”, according to Anthony Payne, founder of LonRes, a digital network for prime London agents. They are agents from a pre-corporate age, who agent the old-fashioned way, through contacts, lunches and charm, who care less about [KPIs](#) than the unquantifiable skills of inspiring a client’s fidelity and always making them feel as if they’ve won.

They all have their particular styles. Langton is frank and humorous – he was “drunk for about a week” after his first sale of a house in Fulham for

£4,000 in 1968 – with a telephone patter that spans the problems with Barnes Bridge (“no one wants to repair the bloody thing”) and the woes of the job (“it’s not all beer and skittles, I can tell you”). Forbes, an ex-Gurkha, who started out in Knightsbridge with an A to Z and a battered old car, is gracefully self-deprecating: “I think people bought from me out of sympathy, I didn’t know a thing.” Wetherell is more stately, with the air of an old English hymn. (“I like selling history,” he told me.) Abrahmsohn, meanwhile, is more of a talk-your-head-off kind of guy, “a big Brexiteer”, full of stories of negotiating deals through a limo window, proud of his “vines and networks” that spread across the world. “I work on psychology, and a lot of chutzpah.”

And then there’s Hersham, the character-in-chief, famous in the industry for his hair (flamboyant), his company’s impressive sales record (“100 units a year”) and his personality (so dominant and capricious that it can make the inside of a Volkswagen Golf feel like it’s laced with explosives). One fellow agent characterised Hersham’s selling style as, “lock them in the car and don’t let them out until they’ve bought something”. “Shout at someone and play hard until you get the price you want,” suggested another. Hersham does not trade in self-effacement. “Can I have an offer now, please,” I once heard him brusquely instruct a buyer on the phone, as if purchasing a multimillion-pound house was no longer the buyer’s choice. “As I’ve said to his face many times,” said Payne, who used to work with Hersham, “he’s a lunatic, but he’s a phenomenal operator.” (Hersham’s self-assessment of his industry reputation was less kind. “Some hate me, some think I’m not straightforward. Abrasive. Difficult to work with.”)

Abrahmsohn, the self-described “parable of Thatcherite enterprise”, told me that he made a point of wearing Marks & Spencer suits – his way of saying that even if he’s showing a £50m marbled mansion on The Bishops Avenue, he’s still Trevor, who started out in the 70s with a £10,000 bank loan and a bright green Alfa Romeo Alfasud. Hersham takes a different approach. His suits are tailor-made in Italy and his shirts come from a Milanese atelier. He collects art, reads widely, loves film. His professional mode, meanwhile, is “bullish”, according to O’Brien. “Bombastic?” interjected Hersham. “Bombastic is maybe the word,” conceded O’Brien.



The Grosvenor Crescent in Belgravia, central London, one of the UK's most expensive streets. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty

Hershaw grew up in a large white house on a fine strip of super-prime, Avenue Road in St John's Wood. He was the son of a successful businessman, Bill Hershaw, who ran three public companies, working in textiles, banking and insurance. The family were what he describes as “modern Orthodox”, and Hershaw remains devout (he prays every day). He speaks Hebrew, Yiddish, Italian, Spanish, French, German, “bad Arabic and bad Russian”. Education was prized, and Hershaw got a lot of it: after school, he spent two years at a yeshiva in Israel, then studied zoology, biochemistry and applied entomology at Imperial College, before starting a PhD at the Royal School of Medicine. Hershaw then went to work for his father, who was “a bit of a tyrant, probably like me”.

Hershaw decided to escape the family business and joined a friend who had just set up an estate agency – Scott Gilroy on Beauchamp Place in Knightsbridge. They changed the name to Beauchamp Estates, and in 1977, Hershaw bought out his friend and began his dogged professional ascent. The name was key: a reference to the agency’s old-money address, but also a name that hints of French elegance and English aristocracy (William de Beauchamp, ninth Earl of Warwick, 1237-1298) and comes wired with

potential humiliation by requiring you to know before opening your mouth that it's not said how it's written. (It's pronounced "Beecham".)

Back then, London was a different place. "There were very few estate agents," said Andrew Langton, who had started out a decade earlier, in the mid-60s. Most of the larger agencies were still only interested in commercial sales or farm management, rather than houses. There wasn't even a property market in the way we understand it now. "You bought a house to live in, as opposed to make any money out of it," said Langton. For two decades, from the early 50s to early 70s, house prices had barely risen. But then, as the Bank of England eased credit conditions, mortgages became more readily available, housebuilding slowed and supply became limited, house prices rapidly rose. At the start of the 70s, the average house price in Britain had been a little over £4,000. By the end of the decade, it was just short of £20,000.

At the top end of the market, London experienced its first injection of overseas cash. The price of oil doubled in 1973 and had quadrupled by early 1974. "The Middle East got hold of their money," as Langton put it, "and we witnessed this extraordinary buying spree." That spree was replicated in the next few decades by buyers from Russia, after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, and China, after its rapid economic growth in the 2000s. An ongoing buy-to-let boom helped fuel the merciless climb in house prices, and all the while, the very nature of wealth was changing. "You have to understand, in the 70s and 80s, somebody worth £10m or £20m was phenomenally rich," said Hersham. "Today, it's a pittance, absolutely nothing."

O'Brien told me about a client he first met in 2019, then worth £1.2bn. By the time they were showing him properties the following summer, he was worth more than £25bn. "Wealth has grown exponentially," said Hersham, and its effects have distorted the city's property market. Whole neighbourhoods are now the preserve of the super-rich – not that you see them. "It's not for me to be bothered about somebody keeping their house empty," Hersham told me. "It's not my position to be worried about things like that. The truth is, lots of people don't occupy expensive houses all year round. Most have a second or third or fourth home. You can't expect them, if they have that many homes, to occupy them all year round."

The Beauchamp Estates head office, with its gold-tipped black railings and ice-blue external up-lighting system – oddly reminiscent of Elsa’s palace in Frozen the Musical – occupies an entire townhouse on Curzon Street in Mayfair, but Hersham sells across central London, rural England, Monaco, the French Riviera, Greece, Israel and New York. The walls of the reception area are covered with silver-framed photographs of sold properties, with captions that contain detectable Hersham flourishes. La Belle Epoque, Monaco, 16,000 sq ft, €250m: “Undoubtedly one of the finest and most expensive apartments sold anywhere in the world.”

Beauchamp Estates employs 80 agents worldwide, and will often team up on a sale with an agency such as Knight Frank or Savills to extend the limited pool of buyers who can afford such properties. They then share the 2% commission, which is low compared to the European rate. “They’re on 3-5%,” Langton told me. “America, 6%. We’re scrambling around like chickens in a farmyard trying to get 1% or more.” At this end of the market, the aim is not volume of sales, but the value of those properties. As Nigel Lewis, an editor at The Negotiator, put it: “There are a lot of posh agencies fighting over a very small number of sales.”

The British prime market has had a strange couple of years. During peak Covid, when overseas buyers couldn’t travel, it turned purely domestic, and the rich who were already here wanted out of the city. “You’d try to find a nice four-bed near Newbury with a tennis court and a swimming pool and it’s gone by the time you’ve got down the motorway,” said Langton. But then the buyers realised that Newbury was a solid 90 minutes down a congested M4, and London prime sales began to rise again. In January this year, Beauchamp Estates revealed that they’d doubled their number of super-prime sales in 2021, from 17 sales over £15m in 2020, to 32 in 2021. They predicted the figure would double again in 2022. Savills, meanwhile, reported that prime London property prices were now rising at their fastest pace since 2014, and predicted an 8% growth in prices this year as “pent-up demand from international buyers” flowed back into town.



Trevor Abrahmsohn of Glentree International in a house on The Bishops Avenue. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

The international buyers want the same things they've always wanted: a safe place for their cash, rule of law, no corruption (ha!), and an expensive British education for their children. "One of the key things is schools," said Edwin Smith of Spear's, a magazine for ultra-high-net-worth individuals. (Eton, Wycombe Abbey, Wellington College, Charterhouse, Millfield and Milton Abbey are the most viewed by readers on the Spear's online Schools index.) A buyer from China or Russia "might relocate their whole family when they put their child into one of the top schools".

For these kinds of buyers, London's prime agents have a "bottom drawer" of the best properties for sale that never go anywhere near the open market. "We let them into the inner sanctum," Abrahmsohn told me, referring to the small group of buyers who are shown the most exclusive properties. "That's called a placing. It's not to do with boards and advertising, or internet nonsense." Full transparency about how the actual process unfolds is neither required, nor desirable. "Confidentiality is an important part of our business," he added.

The agency itself, then, is a kind of mirage. The biggest sales are quietly negotiated by a small group of extremely well-connected agents concealed

behind company names invented to imply upper-class British discretion. “It’s why Foxtons is called Foxtons,” said Nigel Lewis. “It’s just a name they picked because it sounds posh.”

This is Britain as brand: a commodification of a fractional way of life that required a townhouse, acreage, staff – and died between the wars. Never mind that there’s almost no one in this country who can remember or afford such an existence. Extremely rich people from other places adore it and want to recreate it, and the prime estate agents know how to sell it. You hear it in their language, the lexicon of heritage filling the Beauchamp Estates brochure: “Steeped in history”; “one of London’s finest addresses”; “the heart of old Chelsea”. A slice of fictional England, a portal to aristocracy, yours for £10,000 a square foot.

Back at the driveway-less country house, Hersham strode through some light rain to the front door. “Just need to warm up for a second,” he announced. Tea was served by the housekeeper, who beamed as Hersham complimented the unusual blend of tea-leaves in the pot. Warmed, Hersham coursed with new energy. The bleak country lanes were forgotten now that he was back in his natural habitat of beautiful rooms. As the housekeeper led him round, he gave a virtuoso performance, accurately guessing when the house was built, praising the handmade wallpaper, which covered even the light switches, and leaping upon a set of delightful hinges that enabled some double doors to fold back completely. O’Brien, meanwhile, deftly handled the plastic covers of the golf carts that whisked us round the outbuildings in the rain.

Hersham doesn’t need long in a place to get the measure of it. He can estimate square footage by sight, commit a floorplan to memory and offer a sensible valuation. He is not a believer in overstating the price. “There’s a lot of people out there in my profession who have the ability to be straight-faced and to say one thing one day and one thing on another day. This is *not* what I want to be,” he said. “This is more the younger generation,” he added, darkly. “*Not* the older generation.”

There is much talk, in London prime real estate circles, of this new generation, perhaps because they pose a challenge to the old guard. They’ve found new ways of doing the work. Younger prime agents fill Instagram

with videos of themselves giving tours of London mansions, a style pioneered by a man whose name suggests he was always destined to become a personal brand: Daniel Daggers. “Along with Gary Hersham, he’s the other really interesting person in this market,” said Edwin Smith of Spear’s.

Daggers – “AKA #MrSuperPrime”, according to his Instagram profile – grew up in local authority housing in west London, began working at a small agency in his late teens, then moved to Knight Frank where, in the early days of Facebook Live, he streamed himself wandering round [432 Park Avenue](#), more than 80 storeys of latticed white concrete containing some of New York’s most expensive new apartments. “I walked around this apartment like a novice, shifting the camera back and forth,” Daggers told me. But it worked: the video picked up thousands of views thanks to an early version of what would become his trademark style: relaxed, chummy, with a warm to-camera gaze.



Daniel Daggers, real estate agent. Photograph: Alex Natt

Daggers realised he was on to something – people liked the chance to snoop inside luxury properties, and the videos were essentially free marketing. “I got back to London and said: we need to professionalise this; this is the future of our industry,” he said. Daggers’ approach caused him some problems, however, when he was reported to have posted photos of a client’s

house on Instagram without their permission and was obliged to leave Knight Frank. “All of the posh agents mention him as an example of why you should never use social media,” said Nigel Lewis. “But it’s been the making of him.” In early 2020, Daggers launched his own company, Daniel Daggers Real Estate. The website boasts that Daggers has sold more than \$4bn worth of property, and carries a large portrait of him on the front page, smiling into the distance, a slice of expensive watch poking out from under his jacket sleeve. Seven years after his Facebook Live breakthrough, his selling strategy still involves committed use of social media. “Exactly the kind of space you want to live in,” he said in a recent Instagram tour of a shining white marble kitchen-breakfast room, “because you *will* end up living here, no doubt.” But Daggers emphasises that he’s not going to plaster your toilet all over his Instagram stories if you don’t want it there. “I can do super-discreet and I can do super-loud,” he told me. His self-promotional mode follows the American style, where realtors have long planted pictures of their faces on sticks in front lawns and Netflix’s [Selling Sunset](#) has made stars of its Los Angeles agents.

Daggers’ own celebrity complements that of his clients. His insight, according to Lewis, is that “there’s a new type of wealth coming out: a wealth built on fame”. For this kind of buyer, a house is the ultimate avatar: the easiest way to demonstrate financial and domestic success, sexier than a balance sheet and far more effective in photographs. “That’s why Daggers has got it right,” said Lewis, “because that’s the way it’s going.” “He’s creating brand Danny Daggers,” said Anthony Payne. Or, as Daggers put it, “I digitised me as a human being.”

Many of the older agents remain unconvinced. Instagram offers cost-effective marketing, said Abrahamsohn, but “it’s not going to help you do the deal”. Buyers who wanted privacy would still turn to the traditional agents. Hersham’s objections were more fundamental. “Let me put it this way,” he told me. “I’ve never been on Instagram. I’ve never looked at it. My children use Instagram. I don’t even know how to use it, nor do I want to know how to use it.” (Beauchamp Estates employs a social media manager.) For Hersham, it wasn’t just technological discomfort, but a sense of decorum, of how things should be done. “There’s one chap whose name I don’t want to mention,” he told me. “I’m a joint agent with him on a £110m property and I was on a call with him today.” The other agent suggested to the client they

remove a rug in the hallway to better show off the space, and “I wanted to say, ‘Fuck off!’ Excuse my language. You can’t afford a £110m house, how do you *dare* turn round to the client and say take that away?”



Hershaw at his desk in the Beauchamp Estates office. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

To Hershaw, such behaviour was an unconscionable failure of etiquette. The client is king; you compliment their taste even if you think it’s awful. You certainly don’t tell them how to decorate. In this case, the interior was “impeccable” anyway, which suggested the younger agent didn’t know good taste when he saw it. The next generation could post any number of adrenalised house tours on social media, but they couldn’t summon four decades of deep expertise, nor could they be trusted to know the quality or correct positioning of a rug.

The job, to Hershaw’s eye, has little to do with self-promotion. (Although, always contrary, Hershaw frames and hangs his press interviews in the Beauchamp Estates lobby.) Instead, it requires a more complicated performance: simultaneously powerful and deferential, an insatiable desire to sell combined with a refined discretion. At times, his commitment to propriety leans into absurdity. I once heard Hershaw reprimand a junior employee about a pair of shoes being left in the office reception area, as if

their presence constituted a grave moral transgression. Another time, he bellowed at a buyer on the phone, warning them not to go with a rival agent. His tone was so extreme, I presumed he must be joking. “Absolutely not,” he told me. “Because I’ve put so much work in – my work has to be respected. There is an obligation on people to be loyal.” His expectation of appropriate behaviour often seemed to result, paradoxically, in questionable behaviour. No one could possibly meet his standards, least of all himself.

Early summer, and Hersham was at his desk in the Mayfair office, punching out emails with one finger. Ring ring. “For God’s sakes!” Ring Ring. “Big kiss. Love you.” Ring ring. “They can’t go! They’re going to be in quarantine!”

A breath, the briefest of pauses.

“It’s quite quiet at the moment,” he told me. We’re about to do a deal at just under £100m. Don’t ask where; I wouldn’t tell you. I wouldn’t dream of telling you.”

He’d been in the office until 2am the previous night. Often, Hersham will go home to his flat in Knightsbridge, have dinner with his wife, then come back. The billionaires can call him any time, day or night. (“If you think he’s intense now, he’s calmed down quite a bit,” Anthony Payne told me.) Today, the conversations were operating on multiple platforms, a situation with which Hersham was struggling given his generational preference for the telephone. “What with all these applications – WhatsUp, emails, SMS, LinkedIn – I never finish,” he said.

WhatsUp?

“What should one say?”

WhatsApp?

“Oh! I *always* call it WhatsUp.” As if the app had got it wrong.

A three-way Zoom was due to start with two representatives of an anonymous buyer, but the technology was defeating him. Emily, his fantastic

secretary, was summoned. Finally, there they were, boxed on his screen: two other middlemen on the hunt.

“Hello, I don’t know what we’re talking about. Do you want to tell me?” Hershaw barked.

“I think you have a few hotels? We’ve got a few buyers, looking for hotels.” Hotels to buy, that is.

Hershaw confirmed he had hotels. They wanted details. “Absolutely not! Please let’s do things the correct way. You need to tell me who you’re acting for, and are these people capable of spending £165m?”

The men, so recently bullish, began to crumple. Hershaw wanted everything on email. One of the men promptly sent over his email address on WhatsApp. Mistake. “Don’t do it by WhatsUp *please*. Send me an email properly. I can’t get all this nonsense. The idea of sending me to WhatsUp so I’ve got to email is madness.”

Ring ring. Hershaw took the call, chatted in Italian, ended the call, “Grazie, ciao.” An assistant placed a pile of files on his desk. He’d lost interest in the Zoom call, wanted to move on. The men asked if they could talk to any of the hotel investors. Another mistake. “No! I made it quite clear. You can’t speak to anybody. You can’t, you can’t, I’m sorry!” More crumpling. “Boys, I have to go!”

He shook his head. Dodgy business. I wondered how he knew. “You get a feeling,” he said. Suspicious people cross his path all the time. A few years ago, he’d shown a flat on Wilton Crescent to a man obviously faking a Russian accent. Hershaw man-marked him round the building, then reported him to the police. Turned out, he was one of the gang who had stolen Tamara Ecclestone’s jewellery from her Kensington mansion in 2019.

The Zoom call raised Hershaw’s suspicions because of the men’s unwillingness to say who they were working for. “I know how I like to work,” he said. “And if somebody has a buyer, they need to name their buyer to me.” This wasn’t just Hershaw’s propriety talking. Until 2017, an overseas buyer could hide a purchase beneath “three or four layers and park

up £20m over here with no one blinking an eye”, as one agent put it. Or in other words, use a massive London house to launder a lot of cash. (In 2015, the magazine Private Eye [discovered](#) that over the previous decade, £170bn of property in England and Wales had been acquired by offshore companies registered in tax havens.)

Now, however, there are stricter requirements, introduced under the 2017 Money Laundering Regulations and recently upgraded. Estate agents have to obtain more detailed information on buyers before they can proceed with a sale. They can’t just be palmed off with a company name, but must have a proof of ID and address for the “ultimate beneficial owner” of the property. Some agents bemoan the increased paperwork, and some, according to Nigel Lewis, still “turn a blind eye to money-laundering”. But most I spoke to welcomed the tightened rules, tired of being blamed for the [tide of murky wealth](#) that swept into London over the decades (from which they were quite happy to take their cut). “If you go back two or three years, a lot of agents had to stop and look at themselves,” said John Ennis, head of Foxtons private office, who told me of deals now falling through if buyers tried to sidestep the correct process. “People think it makes life harder,” Hersham told me, “but it makes things easier, because you know who you’re dealing with.”

But the new rules don’t stop billionaires from buying up chunks of London and leaving houses empty for years. Take 2-8a Rutland Gate, Beauchamp’s triumph, previously owned by Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia, and bought by the Chinese billionaire property developer Cheung Chung-kiu, who also owns the “cheesegrater” skyscraper in the City. After the sale went through in early 2020, Cheung’s team launched a [website](#) on which they published planning applications and design schemes. Once finished, the house could be worth between £500m and £600m, making it the world’s most expensive individual home.



2-8 Rutland Gate in Knightsbridge, central London, bought for £215m in 2020 in a sale facilitated by Hersham. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

One winter afternoon, I went to look at it, walking there from Green Park, the Ritz glinting at my back, along Knightsbridge, past One Hyde Park, the Candy brothers' luxury development in which the penthouse was marketed for £175m last year, and past a yellow Ferrari parked outside the Harvey Nichols Christmas display of men lounging in skiwear. Finally, there it was, six storeys of 19th-century white stucco, 12 filthy windows across. The property looked run-down, unlovely and unloved. The only sign of life was a row of hi-vis vests hanging on a coat rail in a basement room. (The place will be a building site for years.) Like other parts of prime central London, the only people out on the street round here were its private workforce: builders, cleaners, gardeners, housekeepers.

Seeing this lifeless husk of real estate prompted all the obvious furies: the waste of space in a city where most people lack it, where many have none at all; the pointlessness of that kind of wealth; the ways it could be better distributed. But there was something else, too – the particular atmosphere around a property whose owners can afford not to use its 45 bedrooms. Uninhabited, it was simply an asset with none of the qualities you might associate with a home. Lights, people, sounds. It's the same in so many

prime London neighbourhoods where the houses [sit empty](#). The buildings reek of loneliness; a kind of great, oppressive vacancy. Nothing moves.

November, a central London townhouse. Carpets like fresh snow, so deep and soft we left footprints. Hersham noted the backlit onyx, the neat en suite attached to the staff bedroom, the dumb waiter that came up from the stainless-steel professional kitchen in the basement. (The family kitchen was an overwhelming marble creation upstairs.) In the sub-sub-basement, inside the tiled cubicle by the pool, there was a shower head the size of a Sky dish. We climbed the marble stairs to the hallway. Ring Ring. “Fabulous,” Hersham told someone on the phone. He turned to me. “What do you think?” My face must have betrayed me. “It’s not about *taste*,” he admonished. The house was perfect for a certain kind of buyer. A voicemail to O’Brien, itemising the particulars.

Back in the car, we drove to Hersham’s apartment in Knightsbridge. Two other deals were playing out as we climbed the stairs to the first floor. After a quiet summer, the market had revived and business was frenzied again. Ding ding ding. The messages chimed relentlessly. “Fuck-a-duck,” said Hersham, putting someone on hold. Inside the flat were all its original features, huge windows, extravagantly high ceilings. The living room contained an unexpected disco ball in one corner, alongside contemporary light sculptures and modernist paintings. “Do you notice a *single* painting that isn’t straight?”

A multiplicity of taste was on display, as if to reflect the contradictory impulses of Hersham’s character – overspilling excess combined with obsessive order. “Imagine the light pouring in in the daytime,” he boomed. “Imagine the disco ball with the sunlight shining on it around the room.” Intricate frieze decorations were picked out in gold leaf at eye level and gold paint higher up. There were Chinese urns, art books, mantelpieces crammed with so many pictures of his family that you couldn’t see most of their faces. “Family is everything. Everything.” Unlike the apparently untouched homes in the Beauchamp Estates brochure, full of rooms that have the distinctive air of having been designed remotely by a professional with too large a budget, this seemed to be a place where people actually lived. The sofa

looked much sat upon. The books had been read. At the kitchen table there was a little high chair for his grandson.

For the first time in our meetings, Hersham sat down on an armchair and did not look at his phone for 20 minutes. He looked physically distressed by the experience, as if trying to suppress a bout of indigestion. Ding, ding, ding. “You don’t understand how stressful agency is,” he said. The kind of stress that is addictive, adrenalin-rich. “Do you have a picture of me?” he suddenly asked. “Do you understand who I am?” As if there might only be one answer.

The night before, he’d been invited to a grand dinner by some business colossus. He was seated next to the host, which surprised Hersham, as he’d only met him for the first time a few weeks ago. “I asked,” – as only Hersham would – ““Why have you invited me? And why am I sitting next to you?”” The host told him that they had found him easy to talk to and – evidently to Hersham’s delight – knowledgable. That is, he was more than just an estate agent. Most agents, he told me, were limited characters who could talk about nothing but property. “You wonder to yourself, would they be good company at supper?” Hersham, by logical extension, was good company at supper. All those languages. All that learning. An ability to transform himself into whatever was the most beguiling version of his character, a chameleon gift that appeared instinctive, but was in fact, as he put it, “honed”.

Ring ring. An overseas buyer, looking in London. “You’re not to go to any other agent! You’re not to go to any other agent! If I find you going to another agent, I’ll be *really* upset with you!” There was a pleading tone on the other end of the line: would Hersham look after her? Hersham made a signature tonal switch, suddenly all softness. “Of course I will.”

After the call, Hersham lapsed into self-reflection. “I don’t want to be painted as anything other than the way I am,” he said. “I’m as black and white as you can get. Either people like me or they don’t like me. I just say what I have to say. No, I say what I *want* to say.” He paused, realising something. “The funny thing is sometimes words come out of my mouth that actually my head hasn’t told me to say. I can’t quite explain it. I *feel* it. How

did I say that? I'm not talking about saying things rudely, or impolitely. Just the content. 'Ooh, that's rather clever, or ooh, that's rather stupid.'"

He looked amused, a little perplexed, as if trying to fathom how the performance of being himself, a performance he'd been refining all his working life, could remain a mystery to his own intelligence. Ding ding ding. You could see the cortisol thrill through his body. "I need to check my messages." Out came the phone. Ring ring.

Follow the Long Read on Twitter at [@gdnlongread](#), listen to our podcasts [here](#) and sign up to the long read weekly email [here](#).

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2022/jan/27/britain-most-successful-estate-agent>

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

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Sex](#)

How Covid killed the one-night stand – and made us all kinkier



‘A lot of people describe sex in one-night stands as “vanilla”; it is hard to ask for anything out of the ordinary with someone you don’t yet know or trust.’ Photograph: Barry Diomede/Alamy

There has been a sharp drop in one-off encounters, researchers say, but more people are enjoying friends with benefits and getting experimental in bed



[Zoe Williams](#)

[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Thu 27 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

A one-night stand, people used to say, is like a short story: if it is any good, you want it to go on for longer; if it isn't, you could have done with 15 minutes' more sleep. To which the retort is: sure – but a lot of people really like short stories.

A lot of people, in the pre-pandemic days, used to really like one-night stands, too. The sex therapist Jenny Keane hosts a wide-ranging sex chat through her Instagram account. On it, one woman wrote appreciatively: “The sex is purely focused on pleasure. You’re not thinking about your relationship dynamics, them not doing the dishes. It’s about being served and cared for physically. It can be a very empowering and beautiful thing.”

But not any more. While it is difficult to separate the immediate pandemic effects from long-term trends, the one-night stand has been replaced by

encounters that may still be casual, but aren't total one-offs: the friendship with benefits, if you like, or the "situationship".

The National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal) is a huge-sample longitudinal study that has taken place every 10 years since 1990. In 2020, the usual face-to-face fieldwork was interrupted by Covid, but [the web-based study](#) that replaced it found a precipitous drop in the number of sexually active people reporting a new sexual partner over the previous four weeks, down by half (from 8% to 4%). Fair enough: it was the start of lockdown and no one was meant to be doing anything with anyone they didn't live with.

The researchers then divided the responses into four groups: those not in a relationship and not having sex; those not in a relationship but having sex; those in a relationship and living apart; and those in a cohabiting relationship. When they drilled down into these, they discovered patterns that would certainly have surprised and discomfited the health secretary (unless that health secretary was Matt Hancock, who has [not been a model of sexual restraint](#)).

A survey found that 25% of single people felt 'out of practice' after so many months of social distancing

Those most likely to have had any physical contact in the four months since lockdown – most likely to have had penetrative sex, most likely to have had sex several times a week or every day, most likely to have sex toys, and most likely to report an improved sex life during the pandemic – were those in the "casual" bracket (having sex but not in a settled relationship). In sum, there has been no shortage of sexual activity among single people; there is just less churn, which is to say the pace of relationships has changed from a mayfly's to a caterpillar's.

This has been the experience of Marie, 48, who is recently divorced. "In your 20s, you'd go into a bar and you'd lock eyes with the one you wanted a one-night stand with, and you'd go home with him," she says. Now, however, she is having two casual "ongoing encounters", which are

“absolutely perfect”, she says. “Obviously, I’m nearly 50; I didn’t think I could do that kind of thing again.”

Where does someone look if they *do* want a one-stand? Not in bars, apparently. “Until now, I don’t think I’d ever been out for an evening and ended up just with the people I went out with,” says Jess, 27, from Edinburgh. “Someone would know someone else from another group, the two groups would merge – that used to happen all the time. You can sleep with someone you’ve just met, knowing you don’t want to take it any further, in a way you wouldn’t with a friend.”

“It’s very rare to get hit on in real life these days,” adds a female foot soldier in Keane’s Instagram army. “And dating apps don’t facilitate one-night stands like mums think.”

We think of apps as opening up a world in which more people can connect more easily, with less risk of humiliation, which therefore results in vastly increased numbers of one-off sexual encounters. When you can make the first move on your phone and experience any rejection at one remove, what is to stop you making moves all the time?



‘In your 20s, you’d go into a bar, lock eyes with the one you wanted a one-night stand with and go home with him.’ Photograph: Image Source/Getty

Images

But perhaps the more important impact is that online dating has ushered in structured communication about what people actually want from sex: whether they want something long-term or no-strings. From memory, one-night stands are often rooted in pre-emptive face-saving: you don't revisit in case the other person thinks you are more serious than they are. These minuscule considerations of pride and humiliation are obviated when everyone states their intentions in their profile.

Last year, we were supposed to have a [hot girl/boy summer](#): an explosion of promiscuity and random, meaningless, one-off sexual encounters. But not everyone thought this was likely. "Everyone in the sex toy industry, when people were talking about the summer of love, was going: 'No, that's not what's going to happen,'" says Julia Margo. She is one of the founders of [Hot Octopuss](#), a high-end sex toy company. "If you're making sex toys, you have to understand how people are using them and how they're having sex, because that determines what people are going to buy," she says.

At the start of the pandemic, "you could trace the spread of lockdowns by buying behaviours across the world. Once the US went into lockdown, we saw crazy sales, and those were mainly masturbatory aids." This was in 2020; as we moved into summer, people started buying couples' toys, then, as we entered 2021, people tended towards the interactive; things you could control by an app and use with a partner long-distance. People were trying hard to keep intimacy alive, in the face of hopelessly insurmountable barriers. "It was similar to what you saw with comms platforms at work: first people set up their home offices, then it was Zoom," she says.

Many people experienced devastating losses during Covid, while those who didn't had a pressing and unfamiliar awareness of mortality. While the sex toy industry focused on what this meant for physical intimacy, it meant a lot emotionally, too. A *carpe diem* approach to love is not yet visible in marriage statistics, which lag restrictions and are hard to read, not least because lots of couples who wanted to wed before the pandemic still haven't had a chance to rebook.

However, the ground is thick with anecdotes. As the actor [Riz Ahmed said](#) in a recent interview, he got married with this in mind: “Work out what matters to you, stand by it and just don’t fuck about. Get on with it!” [A joint survey](#) by the counselling charity Relate and the dating site eHarmony identified the “turbo relationship”; one piquant response was that, during lockdown, “two months felt more like two years of commitment”. Lockdown rules acted as an accelerant, forcing a choice between never seeing each other and moving in together. All this added up to fewer people on the one-night-stand market, whether or not it had been temporarily shut down.

It could be because people are less inhibited that they want the intimacy and depth it takes to experiment

As we have been forced into greater intimacy, we have become more open to new experiences. “Unquestionably, people have become more experimental in their interests, forming more couple partnerships [exclusive relationships] and becoming more adventurous within that partnership,” says Margo. A lot of people describe sex in one-night stands as “vanilla”; it is hard to ask for anything out of the ordinary with someone you don’t yet know or trust. There is a theory that a decline in random sexual encounters might indicate a new age of inhibition or sexual moralising, but it looks as if the opposite is true. It could be precisely because people are less inhibited that, even if they don’t want a traditional, monogamous relationship, they want the intimacy and depth it takes to experiment.

“You used to be able to categorise people. I could say: this is a BDSM-type person – they’re going to go to a specialist site,” Margo says. She would never have thought of stocking up on stocking gags and dog leads, she says. “To me, these were really niche products. But they are so popular – and it’s the same people who are buying normal vibrators.” Before Covid, it would have been unusual for 55-plus consumers to buy BDSM sex furniture, she says. “But there’s huge experimenting in this age bracket – and they’re spending real money on their sex lives.”

For people who have been sexually active during the pandemic, there has been a constellation of effects. Many have had more time to explore latent

desires. **Sex** has offered comfort amid external anxieties. There has been more loaded on to sex lives as other social identities have been pared down. Ultimately, if physical contact is going to be fraught with danger, sex needs to be good. You don't want to waste it on a one-night stand, which is to libido as a pasty at a service-station is to appetite.

Yet, according to the latest Natsal study, one-quarter of people haven't been sexually active at all in the past two years. They are part of what is driving down the number of one-night stands. The Relate/eHarmony survey found that 39% of single people emerged from the pandemic looking to meet "the one", while 24% did not want "to waste any more time". Counterbalancing that determination and certainty, though, was a sense of insecurity, with 25% feeling "out of practice" and 13% "not ready to be intimate" after so many months of social distancing.



'There's huge experimenting among 55-plus consumers – and they're spending real money on their sex lives.' Photograph: Getty Images/iStockphoto

Even while this skews slightly towards women in the survey, men also describe a sense of trepidation, self-doubt and futility. Andrew, 55, was newly divorced at the start of lockdown and hasn't had sex since. "I don't think I am attractive," he says, matter-of-factly. "I weigh too much.

Someone would look at me and think: ‘Oh no. He’s a fatty.’ It’s mainly in my own head, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t real.”

Will Nutland, a researcher at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and a co-founder of the not-for-profit sexual health organisation [The Love Tank](#), has observations from STI rates and clinic referrals that echo Margo’s. “The expectation that we’d all say: ‘Let’s pull our knickers off and throw them in the air and shag anyone around us’ – that’s not happening and was probably never going to happen,” he says. He points out that a number of opportunities simply didn’t arise during lockdown. Large events – the best hunting ground for one-night stands – have been the first things to close down and the last things to restart. Festivals were poleaxed by last year’s poor weather, while freshers’ week was conducted remotely in 2020.

But by 2021, something else had happened: “People of all generations were scared about getting too close to other people,” Nutland says. “They’re not necessarily scared of Covid; they’ve just forgotten how to be intimate. We’ve lost some of those social skills and some of those sexual skills.” Without casual social intimacy, there is less impetus to initiate physical intimacy; we lose our body confidence, which makes us more withdrawn. Also, no one has had to question or confront their new hermit habits, because Covid looms over everything, receding for a while and then returning with a vengeance.

The predicament of sexually inactive people is fascinating: have they been living under such harsh restrictions, and in such solitude, that they have started to internalise the rules to create a profound sexual inhibition? Or has the virus provided cover for a level of asexuality that was previously taboo? But these questions don’t tally with the behaviours of sexually active people, which have changed, but not necessarily for the worse: just as much sex, fewer partners, more experimentation.

It is unsurprising when you consider the external context – more time in the private sphere, a new and pressing awareness of mortality, far fewer chance encounters with strangers. “It all makes sense – except a lot of these scenes, this experimentation, it all takes time,” says Margo. “It’s not a Wednesday date night thing you can do after the kids are in bed. Maybe that’s why we

mainly saw it in the 40-pluses and under-30s.” In other words, parents of young kids are the ones we should be worrying about. If, for others, one-night stands have turned into 15-night stands, the post-pandemic reality may be more sexual fulfilment.

Some names have been changed

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/jan/27/how-covid-killed-the-one-night-stand-and-made-us-all-kinkier>

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

Boris Johnson

Fibbing is part of Boris Johnson's toolkit but could be his undoing

Analysis: PM's assertions that there were no lockdown parties are increasingly hard to believe



Even ministers who have backed Johnson stress the sanctity of the ministerial code, which says 'ministers who knowingly mislead parliament will be expected to offer their resignation'. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

[Heather Stewart](#) Politics editor

Thu 27 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

If Boris Johnson's premiership is brought to a humiliating close in the coming days, it will not only be because he allowed Downing Street's boozy lockdown parties to happen on his watch – but because he lied about them.

When allegations of parties first emerged, Johnson told MPs in the House of Commons that Covid guidance "was followed completely in No 10", and on

another occasion – vehemently – that he had been “repeatedly assured” there were no parties.

Both of those assertions now seem increasingly hard to believe, as has been evident in Johnson [supporters’ tortuous efforts to defend him](#). Slavish loyalist Conor Burns plumbed new depths of absurdity this week by saying the prime minister was [“ambushed by a cake”](#).

On Wednesday Labour claimed there was further evidence of lies when newly released [Foreign Office emails appeared to contradict Downing Street’s insistence](#) that Johnson did not personally authorise the controversial rescue of cats and dogs from a British animal charity in Afghanistan.

Even those cabinet ministers who have backed him in recent days have stressed the sanctity of the ministerial code, which says bluntly that “ministers who knowingly mislead parliament will be expected to offer their resignation”.

Citing that rule on Wednesday, Labour leader Keir Starmer called on Johnson to resign immediately. But judging by the prime minister’s half-apology for attending the [“bring.your own booze” party](#) in May 2020, which he insisted he believed was a “work event”, he appears likely to argue that if he did mislead parliament, he did so unwittingly.

Amber Rudd resigned as home secretary in 2018 when she discovered she had “inadvertently misled” the home affairs select committee but Johnson appears unlikely to take the same approach. His allies have insisted he will fight any vote of no confidence.

Those who have worked closely with Johnson over the years say fibbing is an entrenched part of his psychological makeup – and his political toolkit. His first instinct, when backed into a political corner, is to tell a wilful untruth, they say. Indeed, they suggest that, over time, Johnson comes to believe the version of reality he weaves for himself as he fibs his way out of trouble.

“It’s almost a superpower in a way,” one former colleague said with something approaching awe.

He has twice been sacked in the past for lying. In 1988, the Times got rid of him after he made up quotes in a news story. He later conceded that he had “mildly sandpapered something somebody said”.

As an MP in 2004, he was dispatched from the Tory frontbench, not for having an affair but for failing to come clean about it. He had described the claims of a long-running relationship with Spectator colleague Petronella Wyatt as “complete balderdash”.

During the 2019 Tory leadership contest, Conservative MPs who compared notes afterwards found he had made completely contradictory promises to them about what stance he would take on particular policies.

None of that appeared to matter too much when the odd fib was part of the devil-may-care persona his own MPs believed made Johnson the “Heineken politician”, reaching groups of voters the Tories had previously struggled to win over.

And it was of a piece with the ruthless approach he and his band of Vote Leave veterans took to bulldozing Brexit through – even when that meant proroguing parliament, or taking the whip away from senior and long-serving MPs.

Little more than two years after Johnson secured a thumping parliamentary majority and did indeed “get Brexit done”, he may be felled by the very maverick qualities that helped him into Downing Street – not least his seeming inability to stick to the truth.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/27/fibbing-is-part-of-boris-johnsons-toolkit-but-could-be-his-undoing>.

[The politics sketch](#)[Politics](#)

Labour had Boris Johnson over a barrel, but he could still scrape the bottom of it

[John Crace](#)



PMQs was in limbo in the absence of Sue Gray's report, so we were subjected to more absurd excuses

03:38

'For God's sake, resign!': pressure mounts on Johnson at PMQs – video

Wed 26 Jan 2022 13.39 EST

n

That noise? The sound of the bottom of the barrel being scraped. [Boris Johnson](#) not only degrades himself but the Tory backbenchers falling over

themselves to defend him. Not so long ago, Conservative MPs could just about kid themselves there were no parties in Downing Street and that Big Dog's integrity was intact. Now the game is long since up and no one even bothers to defend the lies. Apart from Chris Philp. He'll repeat any nonsense he's been told to say.

Instead we get ever more improbable lines from Tory MPs, who seem to have forgotten The Suspect made the laws, The Suspect broke the laws and The Suspect lied about it. Mostly along the lines of "it was only a small bit of cake", "it wasn't really a party", "it was a surprise so he couldn't be expected to remember it" and "he's done such a brilliant job we shouldn't be too bothered if a little bit of law breaking went on inside No 10".

The advocates of this last excuse have been excelling themselves. We've had Jacob Rees-Mogg as good as admitting he couldn't think of anything Johnson might do that would cause him to reconsider his support. Conor Burns said The Suspect had been "ambushed with a cake". That Colin the Caterpillar can be a right bastard. Then there was Andrew Rosindell telling Sky's Kay Burley that "it wasn't as if he had robbed a bank or anything". Phew.

It can't be long before someone says "he hasn't killed anyone, as far as I know". In the end, this kind of feeble moral relativism drags everyone down to the bottom.

But we are where we are. And come Wednesday lunchtime, MPs of all parties appeared to be in limbo as they waited for the Sue Gray report to land on No 10's doorstep. So prime minister's questions had the feel of the Phoney War as both leaders seemed to pull their punches, as if they were testing each other out for weaknesses before the real battle when the two went head to head in the Commons statement in the coming hours or days.

Keir Starmer kept it simple at the start. Did the prime minister think the ministerial code – especially the section on knowingly misleading parliament – applied to him? The Suspect mumbled a quick, rather uncertain, "yes" before going on to say that he couldn't possibly comment on matters that were the matter of a police investigation. Except he could if he wanted to. There was nothing stopping him giving a long and detailed

explanation of how he was completely innocent of everything that had been alleged against him. Other than, of course, that it would have been yet another lie. Then who was counting?

In which case, said the Labour leader, why didn't The Suspect do everyone – Sue Gray and the police in particular – a favour and just resign now? In December he had said all guidance had been followed and that no parties had taken place. Now he wasn't even bothering to pretend there had not been parties, nor that he had attended them. So unless he was now pleading he had been in a fugue state for 18 months and had had no recollection of anything until Gray had reminded him, then clearly he had knowingly misled parliament. All that was missing as a coup de grace, was for Starmer to pass him a slice of cake.

The Suspect smirked and toyed with his toddler haircut, determined to appear upbeat. As much for himself as the MPs on his backbenches on whom he was depending to prolong what was left of his career. He wanted at least to go down with a semblance of fight. All hope of going with dignity had long since passed. If he had had a conscience, he would have been up to his neck in shame. For him it was still all a big joke that the police were [conducting a criminal investigation into the prime minister of the UK](#).

What followed was a stream of unconsciousness. He rattled on about trying to stop Putin invade Ukraine, while Labour just focused on his unfortunate habit of lying about everything. Why was everyone making such a fuss about something so trivial? I wouldn't be at all surprised if Big Dog believes he only lies because other people make him do it. It didn't seem to have occurred to The Suspect that it was him and his government that had spent virtually every waking hour for the past two months trying to protect his own job.

Nor was there any greater self-awareness as he went on to say he was cutting taxes – they were going up in April – and fixing the cost of living. Just as food and fuel prices were rising. He ended by declaring Starmer was "a lawyer not a leader". In time he might come to realise that wasn't such a killer line as he imagined. Not least because he might be needing the services of a top lawyer in the coming weeks. It's also probable most voters

would settle for a good lawyer running the country rather than a pathological fraud. The only thing he can be trusted with is to be untrustworthy.

The Tory benches were rather louder in their support than they had been in the past two weeks. Though this was more for show than sincerity. Most would happily knife The Suspect in the front if they thought it would play to their advantage. The loyalty is barely even skin deep. Only Sheryll Murray delivered a full on love bomb to her leader. Which was as pathetic as it was touching. Johnson ended by claiming the difference between the Tories and Labour was that he had a vision. If he does, it's a drug-induced one. The main difference between the two parties is that the Tories are knee-deep in their own shit. And still have no real idea how to get out of it.

This article was amended on 27 January 2022. An earlier version said the prime minister “wasn’t even bothering to pretend there had been parties”; it meant to say, “there had not been parties”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/26/labour-had-boris-johnson-over-a-barrel-but-he-could-still-scrape-the-bottom-of-it>

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Stage](#)

‘The godfather of alternative comedy’: Eddie Izzard, Paul Merton and more on Spike Milligan



‘As human as the rest of us’ ... Spike Milligan in the 1950s. Photograph: Alamy

He was the shellshocked genius who channelled his anarchic brilliance into The Goon Show. Ian Hislop and Nick Newman explain why they've written a play about Spike Milligan – while comedians remember a legend



[Brian Logan](#)

Thu 27 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

The tortured lives of comedians form a biographical genre all of their own; there's always an audience for the tears of a clown. No wonder Nick Newman and [Ian Hislop](#) chose [Spike Milligan](#) as the subject of their new play. Milligan, who died 20 years ago next month, is the troubled comedy genius to end them all. Shellshocked in the second world war, repeatedly admitted to hospital for mental ill health, subjected to electroconvulsive therapy, and increasingly embittered as his career failed to deliver on early promise – the Spike Milligan sad-clown drama writes itself.

“But we didn’t want to do that,” says Newman. “We wanted to ask: how did he come to create these brilliant things?” Their play – a cheerful act of ancestor-worship by Private Eye’s editor and its eminent cartoonist – is about the first three years (1951-54) of [The Goon Show](#), as its chief writer Milligan battles the BBC to get his vision on air. “It’s: will he survive the fallout from the war?,” says Newman, “and will he crack radio?” And,

“spoiler alert!,” chimes in Hislop. “Milligan wins! We just wanted to have a play where he wins.”

Spike sustains a rich collaboration between the duo and the Watermill theatre in Berkshire, which produced their 2016 first world war play [The Wipers Times](#), about a satirical newspaper published in the Flanders trenches. Talking at the venue while their play rehearses next door, Newman classifies Spike as “a sort of sequel” to the earlier play – because, they argue, Milligan’s comic sensibility sprang from his wartime experiences.



‘It’s their wartime experiences put into joke form’ ... Harry Secombe, Michael Bentine, Spike Milligan and Peter Sellers, AKA the Goons.
Photograph: Allstar Picture Library Ltd/Alamy

“When you think of the Goons,” says Hislop, “you think: how many jokes about the Naafi are there, how many reruns of war films, how many explosions and references to [fictional military stuffed-shirt] Major Bloodnok? It’s riddled with it. It’s their wartime experiences put into joke form” – and abstracted into wild sound effects, silly voices and surrealism, too. (“Shellshock on radio,” some called it.) But the BBC didn’t welcome “their finest hour” being held up to ridicule – nor Milligan’s anti-establishment airs in general. After the Goons’ coronation special, when [Peter Sellers](#) – horror of horrors! – impersonated Churchill and the Queen,

“about 30 BBC managers demanded Spike be sacked for this appalling attack on the monarchy”.

That is the conflict the play dramatises: anarchy versus deference, the 60s satire boom in embryo. “What the Goons did,” says Hislop, “was channel the khaki election” that swept the 1945 Labour government to power. But it didn’t happen, at least for Spike, without a fight. “He moved from a world where people were saying: ‘Get on with it, Milligan, and stop messing about’,” says Hislop, “to another world where people said exactly the same thing.” And so, Newman joins in, “he basically carried on fighting the war, but this time against the [BBC](#).”



A rich collaboration ... rehearsals for Spike at the Watermill theatre in Berkshire. Photograph: Pamela Raith

The play was first conceived for television, commissioned by that same BBC to mark the 2018 centenary of Milligan’s birth. The corporation made available an archive of internal memos relating to the Goons, and all Milligan’s correspondence with the broadcaster. [As many published volumes have revealed](#), Spike’s letters were often hilarious. But they also disclose the strain on his mental health of producing so many episodes, and the everyday peevishness of his relationship with the BBC. “You might think ‘I wonder what amazing things Spike wrote to the BBC?’” says Hislop. “But it’s

always: ‘Why haven’t I got a repeat on a Sunday? And: ‘No one listens to us in this slot!’ But that *is* what drives humans, and he was as human as the rest of us.”

Both Hislop and Newman can identify with Milligan’s experiences smuggling hot-potato material on air. Long before Hislop’s Have I Got News for You gig, the pair worked on [ITV’s Spitting Image](#) in the 1980s, where Hislop remembers “one election night watching the entire ITV management hugging themselves at their own bravery for broadcasting this programme – a programme that all along they’d been trying to take off the air!” He also recalls, as a rookie journalist, interviewing Milligan on Radio 4’s Midweek. “In those days, there was a bottle of champagne for the guest. I opened the bottle for Spike, very badly, and it went all over my notes. Which I’d written in felt pen.”

“Spike, who hadn’t wanted to be interviewed, suddenly warmed up and thought this was the funniest thing ever. It was anarchy, I had no questions – and so he started asking himself questions, far better than the ones I’d planned.” With their play, the pair want to introduce this wild comic sensibility to a new generation – stung by the fact that “my kids didn’t know who Spike was”, as Newman says. “Nor mine,” says Hislop. “Not a clue.”

“For a younger generation,” he goes on, “we wanted to banish the image of some very old men, one of whom was on Songs of Praise [Harry Secombe], and another who made really terrible films [Sellers].” They’re less interested, too, in the other side of Spike’s reputation – as a misanthrope, and an artist whose work (including the racist sitcom [Curry and Chips](#)) has not always worn well. Instead, Spike tells the story of a moment in time, when the artist’s creativity, his trauma and the spirit of the age came together and made sparks.



A cheerful act of ancestor-worship ... Nick Newman and Ian Hislop.
Photograph: David M Benett/Getty Images

“Spike wrote 250 episodes of The Goon Show in a 10-year period,” says Newman. “In every series, there are many, many references to the war. Pretty much after that, he stops – and in his later work, hardly mentions it again.”

“Can we recreate a period,” asks Hislop, “when these people were incredibly young, fresh out of the army, all working-class, all come up through the ranks? Can we depict this show that started off with lots of people harrumphing, and within a couple of years had audiences that television would now die for? Who thought this was the funniest programme there has ever been?” He beams. “It feels like an amazing thing to try and reignite.”

‘He was extraordinary’ – comedians on Spike Milligan

Michael Palin

It was such a liberating discovery to listen to The Goon Show. I was about 10 when a friend told me about the show. And once I listened, I was hooked. It was so unlike the rest of comedy at the time. There were no roots to what

Spike did: it just took off, and went anywhere. In a half hour, he could be all over the place: that was the thrill. And as well as this wonderful, imaginative comedy, you got to hear all the chuckles, things going wrong and performers having a great time. That was new, at a time when broadcasting was very respectable. There was no one like Spike, really. No one wrote in quite the same way. And what he did gave me a sense of what I could do. I'd think: what I'm writing may be a bit odd, but it's not nearly as odd as what I'm hearing here!

Paul Merton

There was a short-lived show called the Telegoons, in the early 60s. It had puppets performing to recorded editions of the radio show. That was my introduction to Milligan, and I was immediately struck by the surreal humour and the strangeness. He was a huge influence on me and seeing him on a chatshow was always funny. I remember one where he said “Now let me demonstrate a cheap but noisy way to travel” – then he just walked across the stage screaming his head off. When he didn’t have to worry about costume changes or rehearsal time, and just let himself be spontaneous, he was extraordinary.

AL Kennedy

I first encountered him when I was just four or five. He occupied this space that children could understand as well as adults. He was the kid at the side of the road going “yeah, but he’s not wearing any clothes!” But you could tell when he was having an off-day: he could get angry. And part of what upset him was that his productivity was *horrific*. When I actually looked at his output – Jesus, that would crush you! You have to write an episode of the Goons *every week*! It’s just: “be good at being funny, every week, any way you want. Three hundred and sixty degrees of possibility.” That would break most people. But if you can do it, and Milligan could, it’s magnificent.

Eddie Izzard

It was 1974, my dad was working for BP in Abu Dhabi, and he used to record the Goons on Radio Dubai and send it back to us. John Cleese once talked about how each episode was broadcast twice, and he would listen to the second one with the radio to one ear and a pillow to the other, to hear any jokes he had missed. I totally identified with that. Spike’s creativity was beautiful. All these weird sound effects of chickens and motor engines. He

was the godfather of alternative comedy. His timing was perfect and his imagination was limitless. I absolutely recommend young comedians listen to as much of Spike's stuff as they can.

[Spike is at the Watermill Theatre](#), Newbury, 27 January until 5 March.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2022/jan/27/godfather-alternative-comedy-eddie-izzard-paul-merton-ian-hislop-spike-milligan>

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

2022.01.27 - Coronavirus

- [England Care home Covid rules to be relaxed to allow more visitors](#)
- [Pollution Air quality in lockdown may have saved hundreds of lives](#)
- [Vaccines US donated over 400m doses to 112 countries](#)
- [Germany Police crack down on Covid protesters wearing yellow stars](#)

Coronavirus

Care home Covid rules to be relaxed in England allowing more visitors

Easing of restrictions comes as legal requirements for masks and NHS passes are dropped

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



The easing of Covid restrictions in care homes has been given a cautious welcome by the sector. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

[Caroline Davies](#)

Thu 27 Jan 2022 04.13 EST

Care home residents in [England](#) will be able to receive unlimited visitors from Monday as the restrictions to tackle the Omicron variant are eased, the

Department of Health has said.

Self-isolation periods will be reduced from 14 days to 10 days for those residents who test positive, with further reductions if they test negative on days five and six.

Changes to the testing regime for care workers from 16 February will also see pre-shift lateral flow tests replacing the current system involving weekly asymptomatic PCR tests, while care homes will now have to follow outbreak management rules for 14 rather than 28 days.

The relaxation comes as legal measures requiring masks and Covid passes in England are dropped, although shoppers and commuters in some settings will still be asked to wear face coverings.

From Thursday, face coverings are not required by law in any setting, while a legal requirement for [NHS Covid passes for entry to venues such as nightclubs has been scrapped](#).

The easing of care home restrictions comes as 86.5% of care home residents have now had their booster jab, the DoH said, which provides maximum protection against Omicron, with the latest data from the UK [Health](#) Security Agency showing it is 92% effective in preventing hospitalisation two weeks after it is administered.

The safety of care home residents will continue to be the priority and the new measures will ensure there are still robust protections in place to protect them while case rates in the community remain high, the DoH said.

The health and social care secretary, Sajid Javid, said: “I know how vital companionship is to those living in care homes and the positive difference visits make, which is why we continued to allow three named visitors and an essential care giver under plan B measures.

“Thanks to the progress we have made, I am delighted that care home restrictions can now be eased further allowing residents to see more of their loved ones.”

Nadra Ahmed, chair of the National Care Association, said there were still challenges ahead for providers, who were experiencing staff shortages as well as “testing fatigue”.

“This will come with some challenges because the virus is still out there and we also know that up to 50% of services are in outbreak at this moment in time,” she told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme.

“As long as we can do things safely we should be able to do all of the above, with the visiting. I mean nothing should compromise the well being of the individuals mentally or physically. But it is about that safety and the responsibility that is on the provider to make it all happen and keep everybody safe. Those are the worries that we would have.”

The latest rolling back of restrictions follows the dropping of the work from home guidance last week, and advice for face coverings in classrooms for both staff and pupils ended.

While the scrapping of measures have been welcomed by some, others have urged people to “be considerate to those around them” when it comes to choosing to wear a face covering, and to “be respectful” of policies in certain settings.

Both Sainsbury’s and John Lewis said their customers will be asked to wear masks, although the latter acknowledged it will ultimately come down to “personal choice”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/27/shoppers-and-commuters-in-england-asked-to-wear-masks-despite-lifting-of-plan-b>

[Air pollution](#)

Better air in lockdown may have saved hundreds of lives in Europe, study finds

London and Paris among cities with highest number of avoided deaths thanks to lower pollution in first lockdown

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



A cyclist rides in the empty streets of Paris during lockdown. Photograph: Christophe Petit-Tesson/EPA

PA Media

Wed 26 Jan 2022 05.52 EST

More than 800 lives may have been saved across Europe thanks to better air quality in the first phase of Covid lockdowns, research suggests.

Measures brought in to stem the rise in infections resulted in far fewer cars and lorries on roads, which had the biggest impact on reducing deaths, according to the study led by experts from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM).

Analysis of 47 European cities found Paris, London, Barcelona and Milan were among the top six with the highest number of avoided deaths. The study noted that closing workplaces and schools in European cities reduced levels of air pollution through less traffic and movement, while public events were cancelled and people stayed at home.

This led to less nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) polluting the air, with Spanish, French and Italian cities experiencing the biggest decreases in NO_2 of 50% to 60% during the period.

Although strong decreases in NO_2 were found, there was a smaller drop in levels of fine particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10), which are also produced by natural sources – such as wildfires and dust – and other emissions.

Antonio Gasparrini, a professor of biostatistics and epidemiology at LSHTM and senior author of the study, said: “The lockdown during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic created immense health and social costs. However, it has offered unique conditions to investigate potential effects of strict policies to reduce pollution levels in urban areas.

“This ‘natural experiment’ has given us a glimpse of how air quality can be improved by drastic public health measures that would be difficult to implement in normal times. The information can be important to design effective policies to tackle the problem of pollution in our cities.”

The research, published in Nature’s Scientific Reports journal, was funded by the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts on behalf of the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service. It compared government policies from the 47 European cities from February to July 2020 and estimated the changes in pollution levels and number of deaths.

Rochelle Schneider, an honorary assistant professor in geospatial data science at LSHTM and first author of the study, said: “This, and other

similar studies, can help drive the message that we definitely need to improve urban air quality for human health, and for the environment.

“Government policies decided during the spring and early summer of 2020 gave us a unique opportunity to study a ‘real-life’ scenario with lower air pollution levels.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jan/26/improved-air-quality-first-lockdown-saved-800-lives-europe>

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

Coronavirus

US donated over 400m Covid-19 vaccine doses to 112 countries, says White House

The donation is largest in the world and marks a major milestone for the White House's goal of donating 1.2bn vaccine doses worldwide



Half of all eligible adults in the US are boosted, the White House Covid-19 response coordinator revealed. Photograph: Artur Widak/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Maya Yang](#)

Wed 26 Jan 2022 15.28 EST

The United States has donated more than 400m vaccine doses to 112 countries, marking a major milestone in the White House's goal of donating 1.2bn vaccine doses under Joe Biden's direction.

In a press briefing on Wednesday, the White House Covid-19 response coordinator, Jeff Zients, said the donation is four times larger than that of any other country.

Zients also revealed that the country hit another major milestone this week, with 70% of eligible seniors in the US having now received their booster shot. Half of all eligible adults in the country are now boosted.

“This is significant progress, as the doctors and data have made crystal clear. Vaccinations and boosters provide the best protection,” Zients said.

The daily averages of cases and hospital admissions have fallen over the past week, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The current seven-day average of Covid-19 cases is approximately 692,400 cases a day, a 6% decrease from the previous week, while the seven-day average of hospital admissions is about 19,800 a day, an 8% decrease.

However, the figure for seven-day average daily deaths is about 2,200 a day, an increase of 21%.

“These data demonstrate that Covid-19 disease severity appears to be lower with the Omicron variant than with prior variants,” said Dr Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC. “Although it’s encouraging that Omicron appears to be causing less severe disease, it is important to remember that we are still facing a high overall burden of disease.”

“Milder does not mean mild,” the director added. “Now is the time to do what we know works: wear a mask, get vaccinated and get boosted.”

Speaking at the press briefing, Dr [Anthony Fauci](#), director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, said that scientists have been working on developing a “pan-coronavirus” vaccine, in order to induce “broad and durable protection against coronaviruses that are known, and some that are even at this point, unknown”.

Nevertheless, those vaccines would take years to develop, he said. “I don’t want anyone to think that pan-coronavirus vaccines are literally around the corner in a month or two.”

Zients also told reporters that approximately 85% of the Covid-19 antiviral pills that the US has purchased has been directly distributed to states. This has been done “the same way we distribute vaccines – for them to then put the pills in the most important places within their states, at local hospitals and health systems and other caregivers”, Zients said.

The remaining 15% will be distributed directly to community health centers around the country, he added.

Earlier this month, Biden announced that the US would purchase 20m of Pfizer’s Covid-19 antiviral pill Paxlovid, doubling its previous order of 10m. In data released by Pfizer last December, the pill was estimated to have reduced the risk of hospitalization or death due to Covid by 89% in high-risk adults.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/26/us-covid-vaccine-donation-400-million-white-house>

Germany

Germany to crack down on Covid protesters in yellow star badges

Police told to detain activists trivialising the Holocaust in acts to be classified as ‘secondary antisemitism’

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



Police officers detain a woman wearing a banner reading ‘stop this genocide’ at a protest in front of the Reichstag building in Berlin, Germany.
Photograph: Christian Mang/Reuters

[*Philip Oltermann* in Berlin](#)

[*@philipoltermann*](#)

Wed 26 Jan 2022 12.38 EST

Police in Berlin have been authorised to crack down on protesters wearing badges resembling the yellow “Judenstern” (Jews’ star) and other symbols associated with the Nazi era at demonstrations against vaccine mandates or other pandemic restrictions.

According to an internal update by the Berlin police antisemitism commissioner, first reported by the newspaper BZ Berlin, “the use of adapted ‘Jewish stars’ at gatherings can now be assumed to be a fundamental disturbance of public peace”.

Police in the German capital have been instructed to document, remove and confiscate the yellow star badges, which some German vaccine sceptics have taken to wearing with the superimposed words “ungeimpft” (“unvaccinated”) in order to draw a parallel between modern governments’ treatment of those who decline to take a jab against Covid-19 and the systematic stigmatisation of Jewish citizens in the Nazi era.

The police’s internal memo clarifies that wearing the blue and white Star of David, classified as a purely religious symbol, remains legal at demonstrations.

[German cases](#)

In addition, police are also instructed to take action against other analogies that trivialise the [Holocaust](#), which are to be classified as forms of “secondary antisemitism”.

The guidelines follow a ruling by a Berlin district court that came into effect last October, when a 56-year-old man was sentenced to “incitement to hatred” over a Facebook post that showed the yellow star imprinted with the words “ungeimpft”.

In a possible sign that Berlin is already acting on the guidelines, a woman wearing a placard with the words “stop this genocide” was filmed being detained by police at a rally against Covid-19 vaccine mandates outside the Bundestag on Wednesday afternoon.

Berlin police said its officers had briefly detained a woman and taken her details on suspicion of incitement to hatred, the concept in German criminal law that also relates to Holocaust denial.

The woman's placard also referenced Vera Sharav, a US-based Holocaust survivor who has campaigned against some practices of the biomedical industry, including vaccines for children.

Inside the German parliament, delegates were for the first time on Wednesday debating a universal vaccine mandate, which some politicians argue will be a necessary tool to stop further resurgences of the virus. About 73% of Germany's population is considered fully vaccinated against Covid-19.

While the government has positioned itself in favour of a mandate, some parliamentarians from the three governing parties are opposed, while others, including Germany's justice minister, Marco Buschmann, argued in favour of following Italy's path in requiring only those aged over 50 to take the jab.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/26/germany-to-crack-down-on-covid-protesters-in-yellow-star-badges>

2022.01.27 - Opinion

- What's plan B if the government can't attract investors willing to fund Sizewell C?
- In this debate over 'missing words', it's marginalised people who are most at risk
- Britain's cost of living crisis means that for some, 'getting by' will become a luxury
- Let's not say 'pip pip' to our most poetic expressions!

Nils Pratley on financeBusiness

What's plan B if the government can't attract investors willing to fund Sizewell C?

[Nils Pratley](#)



Development money for nuclear power station is an attempt to draw in investors that could replace China's CGN



Award of £100m of public money to Sizewell C shows a new determination to get it built. Photograph: Michael Brooks/Alamy

Wed 26 Jan 2022 19.01 EST

A sum of £100m is peanuts in the expensive world of nuclear power stations, so regard the business secretary Kwasi Kwarteng's funding for a round of development work on Sizewell C as a form of advertising. The cash is intended to send a message that the government is serious about getting the plant built in Suffolk. And it is an appeal for outside investors to volunteer to sit alongside developer EDF, the French state-backed group.

There was also a definition of a desirable investor: "British pension funds, insurers and other institutional investors from like-minded countries". Note the nationality test. It is the closest we have come to official confirmation that China General Nuclear (CGN), originally slated for a 20% stake in Sizewell, [will be kicked off the project](#). It remains to be seen how, legally, the government will rip up the 2015 deal with CGN signed by David Cameron's government, but the intention is clear.

So, too, is the intended funding mechanism. It will be a regulated asset base (RAB) model, a version of the formula used at Heathrow Terminal 5 and the Thames Tideway giant sewer. The key point for investors is that they will

see some income before Sizewell is built, unlike at Hinkley Point C where EDF and CGN earn their princely cashflows only when the electricity starts to flow.

The switch will lower Sizewell's lifetime costs by "more than £30bn" versus Hinkley's contracts-for-difference model, says the government, being economical with the economics. What it doesn't mention is that any cost overrun (a real risk given nuclear's reliable record of never hitting its construction budgets) will be shoved on to consumers, who will in any case see £10 a year added to household energy bills during the build phase. But, yes, Kwarteng is correct that the RAB model is the only one with a chance of attracting new investors.

What, though, if those British and like-minded institutions still refuse to play? Nuclear represents unknown territory for most of them. What if competition to invest, which is meant to be the other way in which RAB lowers financing costs, doesn't materialise? What's the government's plan B?

The only possible solution is for the state to invest directly. If that is so, wouldn't it be better to run an upfront benchmarking exercise at the outset to compare the numbers? Sizewell, unfortunately, is probably inevitable given the current panic over high gas prices and long-term energy security. But taxpayers, on the hook anyway via household bills, deserve to know that the odd billion or three isn't being diverted unnecessarily to intermediaries.

By the time Sizewell's sums become enormous, transparency will be essential. The government has just thrown £1.7bn at Bulb, the failed energy supplier, to keep it on life support and it will be a miracle if all the cash comes back in full. In that context, using public money to invest in a productive energy asset doesn't seem such an awful prospect.

Agnew resignation turns spotlight on UK counter-fraud strategy

Theodore Agnew's [dramatic resignation as counter-fraud minister](#) this week has stung Rishi Sunak. So it should. "A combination of arrogance, indolence

and ignorance freezes the government machine” in dealing with Covid fraud, said the outgoing minister, which is a heavy charge. Cue a series of tweets from the chancellor on Wednesday about how he is not ignoring or “writing off” the problem.

In one respect, one can sympathise with Sunak. In the early stage of the pandemic, it was indeed important to get money out of the door quickly to small businesses. Some level of fraud was inevitable. Perfection was impossible.

The question posed by Lord Agnew, though, is different. Is the government chasing the fraudsters as hard as it could? It was also the challenge set by the National Audit Office last month when it reviewed the £47bn bounceback loan scheme, which is estimated by the business department to have generated £4.9bn of fraudulent loans.

The NAO’s advice was clear: the government should produce a formal strategy for managing bounceback loan fraud; it should set targets for success; it should report on the performance of each counter-fraud measure; it should assess resources regularly. In short, inject professionalism and accountability into the process.

Is the £100m that Sunak said has been invested into the taxpayer protection taskforce enough? It is hard to tell until the government sets public targets for how much could be recouped. Until then, the suspicion will remain that fraud levels are, as Agnew put it, “a multiple of what should be happening”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/nils-pratley-on-finance/2022/jan/27/whats-plan-b-if-the-government-can-t-attract-investors-willing-to-fund-sizewell-c>

[Opinion](#)[LGBT rights](#)

In this debate over ‘missing words’, it’s marginalised people who are most at risk

[Finn Mackay](#)

There is no campaign to remove terms like ‘breastfeeding’. Same-sex parents never had our own words to start with



Illustration: Eva Bee/The Guardian

Thu 27 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

Some of our words are missing. Have you noticed? The Labour shadow health secretary, Wes Streeting, has, and he’s angry about it. Earlier this month he gave an impassioned interview for the BBC on Radio 4’s [Political Thinking](#), raising the alarm about missing terms such as “breastfeeding” and “mother”, despite the fact that there is no campaign to remove these terms.

[Pope Francis](#) has joined the chorus of discontent, warning of attacks on freedom of expression in the name of “cancel culture” and ideological colonisation.

Of course, some of us never had our own words to start with. We’ve had to create our own or reclaim terms that have been used against us; we’ve had to find alternatives to the dehumanising language of state and medical institutions. Those of us who are lesbian or gay parents, mothers or fathers, have found new words to help others understand us and make our lives visible and valid: othermothers, gaybies, co-parents, daddy and pappa, MaPa, mummies and mummas. Not bad, considering we weren’t even allowed to exist a few years ago.

The erasure of identities and roles is something that LGBTQ+ parents and families are intimately acquainted with. Until [section 28](#) of the Local Government Act was repealed, lesbian and gay families were defined legally as “[pretended](#)” families that must never be promoted. Lesbians were often found to be “unfit mothers”, and some had their children removed by the courts. Gay men were regularly branded in the national press as inherent predators and child abusers.

Although section 28 was finally repealed in 2003 in England and Wales (2000 in Scotland), some of these attitudes still remain. In 2019, the then Labour MP [Roger Godsiff](#) said children of five years old shouldn’t be learning about gay parents. (By this logic, I would need to make sure my own children didn’t know about their parents’ existence until they were at least five years old.)

As a non-biological parent, I regularly have to deal with misconceptions and assumptions about what my role is in relation to my children, and how these children came into existence. I’ve sometimes even been asked whether I should have children at all. My wife and I are married and have two children, most recently a new baby. As the law stands, if two women in a same-sex marriage are married when one of them conceives a child via a private sperm donor, at a clinic or using IVF, [both women are legally parents](#) to the child, and the child’s birth certificate lists mother and parent.

Few people know what to call us, how to refer to our partners, how to invite us to functions, how to talk to us about our children, or how even to start conversation. I've been asked whether I mind that my wife presumably had to have sex with a man to get pregnant (she didn't). We've had the awkward looks and conversations with health visitors and midwives about contraception, although this has been a lot easier and more informed with our second child than with our first. Professionals have phoned to congratulate the mother, as if I was completely unrelated to the child. I know health workers are just doing their best in an underfunded and overstretched context.

I know fathers are often left out of such conversations too, or services just don't have time to check in with anyone but the biological mother. It's an obvious feminist issue that so much pressure and expectation is put on biological mothers, many of whom are left alone and isolated, presumed to naturally know how to care for a newborn, without that same presumption extending to their partner. Partly this is a result of the scant parental leave that co-parents and fathers are entitled to (still only a statutory two weeks).

Shared parental leave, first introduced by the coalition government, means parents can take longer leave, yet [less than 2% of eligible new parents](#) are using this provision. Less than a third of eligible men now [take any paternity leave](#). Gender stereotypes, macho workplace cultures, poverty pay, precarious work and the gender pay gap are all factors here. It is quite understandable, in the context of a heterosexual couple, why it may be an economic no-brainer for the father to go back to work first.

For co-parents, it can be even more confusing. My own workplace is highly inclusive, but the only option I have for listing my leave on my employee record and wage slips is still "paternity leave". With my first child, I attended numerous social events while on parental leave. At baby groups, my difference stood out. I was usually not included in coffee pre-meets or chats. People looked at me awkwardly and avoided starting conversations altogether, perhaps because they didn't know what my role was, what to call me, or how to address me or my baby. Women would talk over and around me about night feeding, nappy rash or spare wipes. Once I was asked if I was my baby's big brother. I've even been asked whether the baby is mine.

This is what the erasure of words really looks like. It's weird, embarrassed looks; it's the feeling of marginalisation, whispers, bigoted remarks just loud enough to be heard. In this case it stems from the erasure of identities and families who fall outside the heterosexual norm. Those of us who were previously denied names and roles, who were imprisoned, medicated or institutionalised for daring to stick out, who were labelled as freaks or perverts – we are now making visible the lives, families and communities we have always built, and always been part of.

- Finn Mackay is the author of [Female Masculinities and the Gender Wars](#) and is a senior lecturer in sociology at the University of the West of England in Bristol
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/27/debate-words-marginalised-people-same-sex-parents>

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

OpinionPoverty

Britain's cost of living crisis means that for some, 'getting by' will become a luxury

[Frances Ryan](#)



A different Tory leader will not save a failing social security system. We need a new welfare state from the bottom up



‘More attention is paid to what wine No 10 staff put in a suitcase than the fact many parents can’t afford to put food in the cupboard.’ Photograph: Nathan Stirk/Getty Images

Wed 26 Jan 2022 09.00 EST

The thing about governments in crisis is that they have little time for governing. Boris Johnson – once king of the world, now lame duck – is a prime minister consumed with his own survival. Insiders say Johnson is motivated to [hang on to power](#) not to deliver a pressing policy agenda but to beat former Bullingdon Club chum, David Cameron: “He won’t accept the last Etonian PM having survived longer than him.” Meanwhile, in the real world, British families are about to endure the [worst cost of living crisis](#) for 30 years, and are left waiting for anyone in power to notice.

For many, the money going out is about to soar, causing that coming in to shrink in real terms. Inflation [rose to 5.4%](#) last month, driven by pricier food and clothes. Energy tariffs are escalating and tax bills are set to go up too. At the same time, the £20 universal credit uplift has been cut and unemployment benefits are about to hit their lowest real value in more than three decades, a rate that [experts call](#) “only slightly more than destitution”. Ministers can claim work is the solution but it is good jobs, not any job, that is a reprieve; the majority of people living in poverty in the UK last year

were in [working households](#). The official line may be that the pandemic is over, but this too is still hitting personal finances – just ask the clinically vulnerable pensioner shielding in a cold home. The result of all this is clear enough: simply getting by is increasingly going to become a luxury.

The release of today's [report by the commission on social security](#) – the result of a two-year initiative to outline proposals for a better benefits system led by claimants themselves – outlines the sort of ideas that could make a real difference right now. After a decade of pernicious and reduced welfare support, the report makes some useful proposals. It suggests scrapping universal credit and replacing it with a “guaranteed decent income for all”, set at 50% of the minimum wage (£163.50 a week); the end of benefit sanctions; and an end to using social security as a sticking plaster for failures elsewhere by abolishing zero-hour contracts and introducing free early child education and care.

The concern here is not that Boris Johnson would never introduce such solutions – that's hardly a surprise – but that his government is barely even engaged with the problem. Ask a minister what is the [most pressing issue](#) facing “families who are struggling to make ends meet”, and it's not a threadbare benefits system, energy bills, rising food prices, or insecure work – it's the [BBC licence fee](#). That those on low incomes will be spending on average [18% of that income](#) (after housing costs) on energy bills from April is seen by this government not as a looming threat, but an inconsequential sideshow.

The crisis facing British people right now is not only that millions can't afford the basics, it is that their leaders have no intention of helping them. Or even keeping up the pretence they will. This is a remarkable state of affairs once you really start to ponder it, though it is hardly new. People in this country have been skipping meals and wearing coats in their front rooms for some time, and no one has been paying attention to this either. The difference now, perhaps, is that such events will not be confined to the working class. Middle-class families who were previously managing could soon be tipped into financial hardship, while those who were already struggling will fall into abject poverty.

Politics is often viewed through the prism of Westminster drama, a spectacle never clearer than the latest Conservative jostle for power. We are led to believe this is all that is important, that it is normal to dedicate more attention to what wine No 10 staff put in a suitcase than the fact many parents can't afford to put food in the cupboard. Johnson clearly believes this himself to a large degree, seeing power as a game and the rest of us pawns. But politics – real politics – is not defined by the showy manoeuvres of a few at the top; it is defined by the ordinary matter of whether a teacher can afford to put the heating on in the winter.

It is these mundane issues that appear to simply bore Johnson and the public school alumni around him. That staples such as eggs, butter and milk are seeing price rises may not be glamorous facts to ponder, but they are going to be part of the single most important issue facing this country in the coming months. That neither the labour market nor the social security system are fit for purpose to weather the storm is not only a deep concern for the future but a stark lesson in mistakes of the past.

The way out of this will not be found through a different Tory sitting in Downing Street, nor perhaps even a change of party. What it requires above anything is a recognition that this country is crying out for dramatic change, and that playing by the same old economic rules will not get us there. This means shifting power out of Westminster and into communities, a rejuvenated modern welfare state, and a media willing to hold charlatans to account, rather than help them get elected. Until then, millions of people in Britain are going to find themselves falling below the breadline. The cost of living with Boris Johnson as prime minister is all too high.

- Frances Ryan is a Guardian columnist and author of *Crippled: Austerity and the Demonisation of Disabled People*

OpinionCulture

Let's not say 'pip pip' to our most poetic expressions!

[Adrian Chiles](#)



A survey revealed that certain idioms are falling out of use. But we may miss their playfulness



‘As wet as an otter’s pocket’ is a brilliant idiom. Photograph: James Warwick/Getty Images

Thu 27 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

I’ve never used the expression “casting pearls before swine”; in fact, I’ve just had to look up exactly what it means. I’m therefore neither surprised nor upset that it seems to be falling out of common use. Of the 2,000 people aged between 18 and 50 surveyed by the research agency Perspectus Global, 78%, like me, had never uttered it. Next on the list, disappointingly, is the, to my mind, rather useful “nailing one’s colours to a mast”, tied at 71% with “colder than a witch’s tit”, which I’ve neither liked nor found a use for – just like “pip pip”, in fourth place.

It is to be hoped that while these things will fall in and out of favour, our language will always be rich with them. At their best they’re poetic, at least in the sense that their meaning might need a moment’s thought.

Allow me to share some personal favourites. Only the other day, a friend of mine with a strong Swansea accent described something as “wet as an otter’s pocket”. Excellent. Another one I heard once and have used ever since relates to suddenly finding oneself in an environment where there are many people to whom you’re sexually attracted. In such circumstances you may or

may not resemble “a one-eyed cat in a fish factory” – but, my word, how fine a phrase this is.

Post-match football phone-ins on local radio are a rich source of these beauties. We had a full-back at West Brom who was great at going on marauding runs but struggled to keep the ball as he did so. He was, in the words of one caller, “like a dog with a balloon”. And I’m afraid he was.

Best – or worst – of all, though, was a goalkeeper we had who, in the view of one caller to BBC Radio WM, “couldn’t keep a clean sheet on his honeymoon”. Sorry for the coarseness there – but come on: what’s not to love?

- Adrian Chiles is a broadcaster, writer and Guardian columnist
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/27/lets-not-say-pip-pip-to-our-most-poetic-expressions>

2022.01.27 - Around the world

- [US supreme court Justice Stephen Breyer retires, giving Biden chance to pick liberal replacement](#)
- [History in the making Leading female contenders to be first black woman on bench](#)
- [Analysis Battered Biden gets opportunity to change political narrative as Breyer retires](#)

US supreme court

Stephen Breyer to retire from supreme court, giving Biden chance to pick liberal judge

Breyer, 83, had been under pressure from progressives eager to fill a seat on the supreme court while the Democrats hold power



Justice Stephen Breyer was nominated by Bill Clinton in 1994 and confirmed with strong bipartisan support in the Senate at the time.
Photograph: Erin Schaff/AP

[Joanna Walters](#) and [Ed Pilkington](#) in New York and agencies

Wed 26 Jan 2022 20.46 EST

Justice Stephen Breyer will retire from the supreme court, according to widespread media reporting on Wednesday, which, if confirmed by the

court, will provide Joe Biden with the opportunity to fulfill a [campaign pledge](#) by nominating the first Black woman judge to the bench.

Such a choice would be a milestone and bolster the liberal wing of the bench, even as it weathers a dominant conservative super-majority achieved under the Trump administration.

Breyer, 83, had been under pressure from progressives eager to give the new president the chance to fill a seat on the court while the Democrats hold power in the White House and Congress, including a wafer-thin margin in the Senate, which would have to confirm Biden's nominee.

00:50

Biden to 'stand by' pledge to nominate Black woman to supreme court, says Jen Psaki – video

Later in the year Biden would face the threat of any picks of his being blocked if the Republicans win back control of the US Senate in November's midterm elections.

California-born Breyer was nominated by Bill Clinton in 1994 and confirmed with strong bipartisan support in the Senate at the time.

As news of Breyer's retirement came in, the White House distanced itself from the development in an apparent attempt to signal that Biden had not pressured the justice.

Biden, meeting private sector CEOs at the White House to talk about his legislative agenda, declined to comment on the retirement per se, saying: "There have been no announcements from Justice Breyer."

"There have been no announcements from Justice Breyer," President Biden says. "Let him make whatever statement he's going to make, and I'll be happy to talk about it later." He jokes to a CEO in the meeting with him right now, "Do you want to go to the Supreme Court?"

— Kaitlan Collins (@kaitlancollins) [January 26, 2022](#)

But there were no denials from the White House or the court.

And on Wednesday evening, a CNN reporter [said that](#) Breyer and Biden were scheduled to make a public appearance on Thursday where the justice would formally announce his retirement, citing a source familiar with the matter.

At the White House daily briefing, the first question from the media to the press secretary, Jen Psaki, was whether Biden intends to follow through on his campaign promise to nominate a Black woman to the court, and she said: “The president has stated and reiterated his commitment to nominating a Black woman to the supreme court and certainly stands by that.”

Gabe Roth, executive director of Fix the Court, which advocates reform of the federal judiciary, told the Guardian that Breyer’s move was “a long time coming. The risk that an 83-year-old would hang on only to see himself replaced by a Republican president and Republican Senate was growing exponentially with every passing year.”

Roth added: “The supreme court is not an apolitical body, and if you care about protecting your legacy then you retire when a like-minded president is in office.”

Breyer is perhaps the least well-known of the current justices outside legal circles, chiefly because he is regarded as a pragmatist and has spent more than two decades at the moderate end of the liberal wing, actively eschewing partisanship.

He is the most senior member of the court’s liberal minority following [Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s death](#) in 2020 at 87.

Despite what had appeared to be [resistance](#) to pressure to retire quickly in the Biden administration, Breyer is calling it a day.

Among names being circulated, the frontrunner on Wednesday appeared to be Ketanji Brown Jackson, an appeals court judge in Washington DC. Other contenders for the seat are the California supreme court justice Leondra Kruger, US district court judge J Michelle Childs and several others. Despite

no explanation from Breyer when the news broke, there are clues to his possible thinking. In an [interview](#) with the New York Times last August he quoted his late peer on the bench, Antonin Scalia, who once told him: “I don’t want somebody appointed who will just reverse everything I’ve done for the last 25 years.”

Whatever his rationale, there is no doubt that he had [warnings](#) ringing in his ears from liberals, [building last summer](#), that he shouldn’t hang on to his seat and risk having Republicans dictate his replacement.

That happened with Ginsburg, who resisted years of such [hints](#), including from Barack Obama when he was president, and outright [lobbying](#).

She died in the last weeks of the 2020 election campaign, affording the Republican president Donald Trump his third supreme court pick. The Senate, led at the time by the GOP’s Mitch McConnell, rushed through Ginsburg’s [replacement](#), the ultra-conservative [Amy Coney Barrett](#), boosting conservatives to a 6-3 majority on the bench.

McConnell [said last June](#) that it was “highly unlikely” he would allow Biden to fill a vacancy if Republicans had regained Senate control.

But the court’s shift to the right began five years ago, when Scalia [died suddenly](#) and Senate Republicans refused to process Barack Obama’s nomination of Merrick Garland.

Had Garland, now Biden’s attorney general, been confirmed, it would have given the court a majority appointed by Democratic presidents for the first time in 50 years.

Instead, the seat remained empty, Trump unexpectedly won the presidency and his first of three picks, Neil Gorsuch, joined the court in April 2017.

A year later the court’s “swing vote”, Justice Anthony Kennedy, retired and Trump put Justice Brett Kavanaugh in his seat.

Kennedy’s retirement essentially put Chief Justice John Roberts at the ideological, though right-leaning, center of the court. He has tried to combat rising public perceptions of the court as merely a political institution.

Erwin Chemerinsky, dean of the University of California at Berkeley School of Law, had earlier this year written an [opinion piece](#) for the Washington Post calling on Breyer to retire sooner rather than later.

In the American Bar Association Journal, however, Chemerinsky also [paid tribute](#) to Breyer's "pragmatic approach to judging that looks more to real-world effects than abstract ideology".

And he pointed to important positions taken by Breyer.

These included a majority decision in Whole Woman's Health v Hellerstedt in June 2016 against severely restricting abortion in Texas.

And a dissent in 2015's Glossip v Gross case, where [Breyer said](#) it was "highly likely that the death penalty violates the eighth amendment" to the US constitution which prohibits cruel and unusual punishment.

Breyer was born in San Francisco and raised in a Jewish family. He studied at Stanford University, Magdalen College, Oxford and Harvard Law.

Hillary Clinton called Breyer's decision "admirable".

Thank you to Justice Breyer for 30 years of distinguished service on the bench, and for his admirable decision to retire now. We are grateful for your career dedicated to fairness and justice for all.

— Hillary Clinton (@HillaryClinton) [January 26, 2022](#)

The Senate majority leader, Chuck Schumer, voiced optimism that Biden's pick will swiftly win confirmation.

SCHUMER in a statement: "President Biden's nominee will receive a prompt hearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee, and will be considered and confirmed by the full United States Senate with all deliberate speed."

— Daniella Diaz (@DaniellaMicaela) [January 26, 2022](#)

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2022/jan/26/stephen-breyer-retires-supreme-court-biden-pick-justice>

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

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[US supreme court](#)

The leading female contenders to succeed Breyer on supreme court



The US supreme court building. Photograph: Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

Justice Stephen Breyer's retirement allows Biden to make history by appointing its first Black woman

[Maya Yang](#)

Thu 27 Jan 2022 13.43 EST

The liberal supreme court justice Stephen Breyer is retiring and [Joe Biden](#) has said he will stand by a previous promise to nominate a Black woman to America's highest legal body.

At 83 years old, Breyer is the oldest justice of the court and his retirement will give Biden his first seat to fill on the supreme court, which is currently conservative-leaning by six to three. Replacing Breyer won't allow Biden to change that dynamic but it does allow him to ensure the liberal contingent is not reduced further and make history by appointing its first Black woman.

Here are some of the women considered leading contenders for the seat:

Ketanji Brown Jackson



Photograph: Getty Images

Born in Washington DC and raised in Miami, Florida, Jackson has been a judge of the US court of appeals for the DC circuit since June 2021 after the

51-year-old Harvard graduate replaced the attorney general, Merrick Garland.

The DC circuit has historically been seen as a stepping stone to the supreme court. From 2010 to 2014, Jackson served as vice-chair of the United States sentencing commission, during which the commission significantly reduced sentences for numerous drug offenders.

Leondra Kruger



Photograph: S Todd Rogers/AP

Kruger, a native of Los Angeles, is an associate justice of the supreme court of California. The 45-year-old was previously the acting principal deputy solicitor general under the Barack Obama administration.

Supreme court justice Elena Kagan once called Kruger “one of the best advocates in the Department of Justice”. Kruger has argued 12 cases in front of the supreme court. She has previously described her approach to the law as one that “reflects that fact that we operate in a system of precedent”.

J Michelle Childs



Photograph: Charles Dharapak/AP

Childs is currently serving as a district judge of the US district court for the district of South Carolina. Appointed by Obama in 2009, the 55-year-old Detroit native has also been nominated by Biden for a seat on the DC circuit court of appeals. Childs was also the first Black woman to become a partner at Nexsen Pruet, LLC, one of South Carolina's major law firms.

She has served as the deputy director in the labor division at South Carolina's department of labor, licensing and regulation. Congressman Jim Clyburn, a close ally of Biden, is fiercely supports Childs and has previously pushed the Biden administration to nominate her as the supreme court's next liberal justice. "She is the kind of person who has the sort of experiences that would make her a good addition to the supreme court," Clyburn said.

Wilhelmina Wright



Photograph: Star Tribune/Getty Images

Wright is a district judge of the US district court for the district of Minnesota. A [favorite](#) of Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota, the 58-year-old is also Minnesota's first female African American justice. Wright has previously [said](#) that fairness, impartiality and respect for the rule of law have been her "lodestar", adding that she "give[s] no consideration to whether I agree or disagree with a party". She has also emphasized the importance of diversity in the judicial system, at one point [writing](#): "I believe it would undermine the public's trust and confidence in the judiciary if there were no judges who are women or judges of color."

Eunice Lee



Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Since August 2021, Lee, 52, has been a judge of the US court of appeals for the second circuit after being nominated by Biden. Lee has worked at the office of the appellate defender in New York City from 1998 to 2019. In addition, from 2019 until her bench appointment, Lee was an assistant federal defender in the appeals bureau of the federal defenders of New York.

Candace Jackson-Akiwumi



Photograph: Getty Images

Jackson-Akiwumi is currently a US circuit judge of the US court of appeals for the seventh circuit since July 2021. Jackson-Akiwumi is the first judge appointed to the seventh circuit who has a background as a federal public defender.

Nominated by Biden in April 2021, Jackson-Akiwumi was also a staff attorney at the federal defender program in the northern district of Illinois from 2010 to 2020 where she represented indigent people who were accused of federal crimes. From 2020 to 2021, Jackson-Akiwumi served as a partner at Zuckerman Spaeder, a DC-based law firm where she focused on civil litigations and white-collar criminal defense.

Sherrilyn Ifill



Photograph: The Washington Post/Getty Images

Ifill is the president and director-counsel of the Legal Defense and Educational Fund at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Before joining LDF as an assistant council in 1988, the 59-year-old New York native was a fellow at the American Civil Liberties Union.

Ifill taught civil procedure and constitutional law for over two decades and pioneered numerous law clinics, including one of the first in the country that focused on challenging legal obstacles to the re-entry of ex-offenders. In 2021, Time named her one of the world's 100 most influential people.

- This article was amended on 27 January 2022 because an earlier version said that Wilhelmina Wright was the first African American justice on the Minnesota supreme court. Wright was the first female African American justice appointed to that court.

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

[Joe Biden](#)

Battered Biden gets opportunity to change political narrative as Breyer retires

Analysis: president faces high expectations as he prepares make one of his most consequential decisions



Joe Biden has pledged to nominate a Black woman to the supreme court.
Photograph: Kevin Lamarque/Reuters

[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Wed 26 Jan 2022 20.45 EST

In his spare time, Justice Stephen Breyer enjoyed taking the bench at humorous “[mock trials](#)” of characters such as Macbeth and Richard III for

Washington's Shakespeare Theatre Company. The case usually turned on epic battles over succession.

Now Washington is about to be consumed by the question of who will inherit Breyer's crown following his [reported decision to retire](#) from the US supreme court. At 83, he is its oldest member, one of three liberals outnumbered by six conservatives.

This is a perfectly timed political gift for [Joe Biden](#), aware that choosing a supreme court justice is one of the most consequential decisions that any president can make.

After a year in the White House, [Biden was limping](#) with a stalled legislative agenda, a tenacious pandemic and Vladimir Putin threatening Ukraine. He was a tired brand in desperate need of a relaunch, a tough ask at the age of 79.

Breyer has provided it, instantly changing the conversation. "This has to feel like a political elixir right now," observed [Chuck Todd](#), host of MSNBC's Meet the Press Daily show.

A vacancy on the highest court enables Biden to rally the Democratic base and begin to cement a legacy that, despite early ambitions, had recently looked to be in jeopardy. Although the ideological balance of the court will not change, Biden could choose a young liberal who will serve for decades.

The Senate, which must approve his choice, is divided between 50 Democrats and 50 [Republicans](#) with Vice-President Kamala Harris casting the tiebreaker vote. Breyer has given it enough time to confirm the president's pick before the midterm elections could shift the balance of power.

Democratic divisions have been on display of late but a supreme court vacancy typically unites a party like nothing else. Even senators [Joe Manchin](#) and [Kyrsten Sinema](#), who broke ranks over the Build Back Better plan and voting rights, have voted for every Biden nominee to the lower

courts so far. Both will presumably regard this confirmation as an easy way to win back some favour with angry liberals.

Not for the first time, however, Biden has raised expectations. At a debate in the 2020 Democratic primary, [he declared](#): “I’m looking forward to making sure there’s a Black woman on the supreme court, to make sure we, in fact, get every representation.” His judicial appointments so far have been historically diverse, and Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, told reporters after the news of Breyer’s imminent retirement broke that Biden [certainly stands by](#) his promise.

The upshot is that if he now nominates anyone other than a Black woman, there will be disappointment on the left. Sean Eldridge, founder and president of the progressive group [Stand Up America](#), said on Wednesday: “President Biden promised to appoint the country’s first-ever Black woman supreme court justice, and he must make good on that promise.

“The president and vice-president’s voters are watching eagerly to see that he follows through and makes history with his first supreme court nomination.”

Potential candidates include the US circuit judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, California supreme court justice Leondra Kruger, civil rights lawyer Sherrilyn Ifill and US district judge Michelle Childs, a favourite of the South Carolina congressman James Clyburn, a Biden ally.

Notably, [when Jackson was confirmed](#) last year to the influential US court of appeals for the DC circuit, often seen as a springboard to supreme court, the Republican senators Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska voted with Democrats in favour.



Ketanji Brown Jackson is among the top candidates for the supreme court nomination. Photograph: Kevin Lamarque/Reuters

[Carl Tobias](#), Williams chair in law at the University of Richmond, said: “I expect that the Democrats will remain united, as they have so far, because all Democratic members, including Senators Manchin and Sinema, have voted for all of Biden’s lower court nominees.

“Most GOP senators have voted against many Biden lower court nominees. The major exception is Lindsey Graham, who has voted for many Biden lower court nominees in committee and on the floor. Senators Collins and Murkowski have also voted to confirm a number of Biden lower court nominees. If the [Democrats](#) vote together, they do not need GOP votes.”

It remains an open question whether a handful of Republicans might back Biden’s nominee given the politicisation of the court in recent years – from Republicans blocking Barack Obama’s pick Merrick Garland to the rancour that surrounded Donald Trump’s three appointments, and the court’s imminent decision on the [constitutional right to abortion](#).

In an ominous statement on Wednesday, Graham said: “If all Democrats hang together – which I expect they will – they have the power to replace Justice Breyer in 2022 without one Republican vote in support. Elections

have consequences, and that is most evident when it comes to fulfilling vacancies on the supreme court.”

Meanwhile, Carrie Severino, president of the conservative Judicial Crisis Network, fired the first shots of a partisan battle to come. “The left bullied Justice Breyer into retirement and now it will demand a justice who rubber-stamps its liberal political agenda,” she said. “And that’s what the Democrats will give them, because they’re beholden to the dark money supporters who helped elect them.”

Yet it is Republicans who [waged a multi-generational project](#) to tilt the court in their favour with the help of the Federalist Society, which created a pipeline of young, ideologically rightwing lawyers. Trump’s release during the 2016 election of a shortlist of judges for the court helped him secure the conservative base; his three justices are likely to be his most lasting legacy.

Democrats were criticised for being slow to wake up to the threat and lacking similar aggression. Now, thanks to Breyer’s retirement, they find themselves with the unaccustomed comfort of having political momentum on their side.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/26/joe-biden-stephen-breyer-retires-supreme-court>

Table of Contents

[The Guardian 2022.01.30 \[Sun, 30 Jan 2022\]](#)

[2022.01.30 - Opinion](#)

[Robert Pattinson: at three hours, is Batman outstaying his welcome?](#)

[The Observer view on Britain's energy crisis](#)

[The Observer view on the EHRC decision on Scotland's gender recognition reforms](#)

[Safe passage optional? Cruise industry heaps more misery on its passengers](#)

[Boris Johnson: waiting for Sue Gray – cartoon](#)

[Grilled by 'girly swots': what poetic justice for a man as misogynistic as Boris Johnson](#)

[Letters: take to the streets to defy police and crime bill](#)

[For the record](#)

[How many more Charlie Todds must there be before our prisons are reformed?](#)

[Headlines tuesday 25 january 2022](#)

[Boris Johnson Cake and singing on PM's birthday was not a party, says Grant Shapps](#)

[Live Shapps tells media he won't try to defend No 10 holding social event](#)

[Boris Johnson PM faces fresh outrage over lockdown birthday party](#)

['You can't have your birthday cake and eat it' What the papers say about the PM's party](#)

[2022.01.25 - Spotlight](#)

['It's a job I love - but some days I hate it' One frontline GP on anti-vax protests, angry patients and Omicron](#)

['Princess Anne is a rock star' Erin Doherty on stealing scenes in The Crown and creepy new drama Chloe](#)

[Behind the label How the US stitched up the Honduras garment industry](#)

[Apple AirPods 3 review Solid revamp with better fit and longer battery](#)

2022.01.25 - Coronavirus

[Live Covid: Netherlands expected to drop Omicron measures; Russia sets cases record for fifth consecutive day](#)
[Canada Trudeau says Conservatives stoking fear over trucker vaccine mandate](#)

[UK Covid testing after arrival to be scrapped for double-vaccinated travellers](#)

[US 400m free N95 masks to be distributed to health centres](#)

2022.01.25 - Opinion

[Paul Dacre's all for freedom of expression – except when he's a character in your play](#)

[The verdict is in: George Osborne's help-to-buy scheme has been an utter disaster](#)

[Reparations to the Caribbean could break the cycle of corruption – and China's grip](#)

[One of my kids has gone vegetarian. Now the rest of the family want meat with everything](#)

2022.01.25 - Around the world

[Coronavirus Governments around the world used Covid to erode human rights – report](#)

[Taylor Swift Singer criticises Damon Albarn for saying she doesn't write her own songs](#)

[Europe Snowstorm blankets eastern Mediterranean closing airports, schools and vaccination centres](#)

[Netherlands Dutch university gives up Chinese funding due to impartiality concerns](#)

['Time machine' James Webb space telescope takes up station a million miles from Earth](#)

Headlines saturday 29 january 2022

[Sue Gray report Redacted version is imminent, say government sources](#)

[Analysis PM's agenda gripped by paralysis as he fights to survive](#)

[Partygate Met's request for redactions muddies the picture](#)

['Nobody's above the law' Theresa May wades into row over parties](#)

2022.01.29 - Spotlight

Golden years What was the greatest 12 months for pop culture?

Ben Whishaw ‘Sometimes, with straight actors playing gay parts, I think: I don’t believe you!’

From milk to crisps Why the price of basic food items is rising

Big Narstie ‘Describe myself in three words? Electrifying, orgasmic and charismatic’

2022.01.29 - Coronavirus

Live Lung abnormalities in long Covid patients; 36 new Winter Olympics cases

‘People want to put Covid behind them’ Pubs hopeful as drinkers return

NHS Group of medics launch legal bid against compulsory jabs

Diego Verdaguer, Popular Mexican-Argentinian singer, dies from Covid

2022.01.29 - Opinion

We don’t need Sue Gray’s report to tell us that Britain is run by a liar

My Spotify playlists tell the story of my life – can I really quit now?

The Joe Rogan v Neil Young furore reveals Spotify’s new priority: naked capitalism

Why it’s the right time to lift plan B restrictions in England

2022.01.29 - Around the world

‘I didn’t know who I was any more’: How CIA torture pushed me to the edge of death

Ed Pilkington How CIA lied to justify torturing one prisoner after 9/11

‘Our culture has changed’ Young Thais boycott graduation ceremonies

Pittsburgh Bridge collapses hours before Biden’s infrastructure speech in city

Headlines monday 24 january 2022

Conservatives Johnson orders inquiry into Nusrat Ghani ‘Muslimness’ sacking claims

[Live UK politics: Labour says PM's response to Nusrat Ghani's Islamophobia claims too limited](#)

[Ukraine UK pulls some embassy staff from country amid Russian threat](#)

[Ukraine US and UK withdraw families from embassies but EU to stay put](#)

[2022.01.24 - Spotlight](#)

[‘Warm, loving, generous – but he had demons’ Inside the life of Meat Loaf](#)

[‘I stayed at the party too long’ Jason Bateman on Ozark, smiling villains and his lost decade](#)

[Architecture Sou Fujimoto’s House of Hungarian Music: ‘We wanted to transform the forest into architecture’](#)

[Money How to speed up your broadband internet](#)

[2022.01.24 - Coronavirus](#)

[Live Covid: Beijing reports new cases for seventh consecutive day; WHO chief says pandemic ‘at a critical juncture’](#)

[England Long Covid: nearly 2m days lost in NHS staff absences](#)

[St Lucia Covid danger in tiny courts puts stop to murder trials](#)
[US Rising Covid cases in nursing homes prompts hospital warnings](#)

[2022.01.24 - Opinion](#)

[Distrust, disengagement and discord will be the disgraceful legacy of Boris Johnson](#)

[We can afford to reverse poverty and climate breakdown](#)

[What we can’t afford is the alternative](#)

[A measure of autonomy in eastern Ukraine is the only way out of this crisis](#)

[Waiting lists must not be a pretext for privatising the NHS](#)

[2022.01.24 - Around the world](#)

[Greece Government blamed for hunger crisis in refugee camps](#)

[Thierry Mugler French fashion designer dies aged 73](#)

[Australia Man admits abducting four-year-old Cleo Smith from campsite](#)

[US Sarah Palin takes on New York Times in defamation trial](#)
[Burkina Faso Government denies coup after army mutiny and gunfire near president's home](#)

[Headlines friday 28 january 2022](#)

[Sue Gray report Met asked for ‘minimal reference’ to No 10 investigation in report](#)

[Live Downing Street parties: Met asks for references to its investigation to be removed from Gray report](#)

[‘Time for the truth’ MPs call on Johnson to publish report](#)

[Sue Gray report Why is the report into No 10 parties taking so long?](#)

[2022.01.28 - Spotlight](#)

[Tom Tugendhat Tory centrist loathed by Boris Johnson could be ‘a relief’](#)

[‘She immediately saw herself’ How Encanto strikes a major chord in a diverse world](#)

[Road pricing Will it answer the UK’s net-zero car-tax conundrum?](#)

[Jethro Tull’s Ian Anderson ‘Dressing up was fun – but my codpiece was distinctly unfragrant’](#)

[2022.01.28 - Coronavirus](#)

[Live Covid: Russian daily cases approach 100,000 in new record; Philippines to reopen to vaccinated tourists](#)

[Coronavirus Lifting England rules while 3bn people unvaccinated reckless – experts](#)

[Analysis What are the new rules for care homes and are they safe?](#)

[Vaccines UK efforts should target unvaccinated, says expert](#)

[2022.01.28 - Opinion](#)

[Even Johnson’s own fraud minister couldn’t bear the stink of this government](#)

[Give me the cheeky, racket Essex I love over a snobby rebrand any day](#)

[Islamophobia isn’t just a Tory problem – it runs right through British society](#)

[Prime suspect Boris Johnson gives Sue Gray the slip in Wales](#)

[2022.01.28 - Around the world](#)

[North Korea Regime confirms barrage of missile tests as Kim Jong-un visits arms factory](#)

[South China Sea US stealth fighter crashes and sinks, sparking fears of salvage by China](#)

[Southern Africa Dozens killed in Tropical Storm Ana with more wild weather to come](#)

[Live Business: France's economy records fastest growth in 52 years](#)

[Chris Brown Singer sued for allegedly drugging and raping woman on yacht](#)

[Headlines thursday 27 january 2022](#)

[Live Boris Johnson 'will not have to resign' if police interview him under caution](#)

[Boris Johnson Tory MPs poised to send letters of no confidence in PM after 'partygate' report](#)

[No 10 parties Met to ask those named by inquiry if they are guilty](#)

[Conservatives UK government being immobilised by Boris Johnson crisis, say sources](#)

[2022.01.27 - Spotlight](#)

['£10m is a pittance' Meet Britain's most successful estate agent](#)

[Sex How Covid killed the one-night stand – and made us all kinkier](#)

[Partygate Fibbing is part of Boris Johnson's toolkit but could be his undoing](#)

[The politics sketch Labour had Boris Johnson over a barrel, but he could still scrape the bottom of it](#)

['Godfather of alternative comedy' Eddie Izzard, Paul Merton and more on Spike Milligan](#)

[2022.01.27 - Coronavirus](#)

[England Care home Covid rules to be relaxed to allow more visitors](#)

[Pollution Air quality in lockdown may have saved hundreds of lives](#)

[Vaccines US donated over 400m doses to 112 countries](#)

[Germany Police crack down on Covid protesters wearing yellow stars](#)

[2022.01.27 - Opinion](#)

[What's plan B if the government can't attract investors willing to fund Sizewell C?](#)

[In this debate over 'missing words', it's marginalised people who are most at risk](#)

[Britain's cost of living crisis means that for some, 'getting by' will become a luxury](#)

[Let's not say 'pip pip' to our most poetic expressions!](#)

[2022.01.27 - Around the world](#)

[US supreme court Justice Stephen Breyer retires, giving Biden chance to pick liberal replacement](#)

[History in the making Leading female contenders to be first black woman on bench](#)

[Analysis Battered Biden gets opportunity to change political narrative as Breyer retires](#)