

# The Guardian

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## 2021.10.17 - Opinion

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## Facing chaos and needing a scapegoat, the Tories seek an endless fight with Europe

[Fintan O'Toole](#)





Illustration by Dominic McKenzie

Sun 17 Oct 2021 02.30 EDT

Last week, Boris Johnson, with his paintbrush and easel at his holiday [villa in Marbella](#), touched up his self-portrait as the reincarnation of Winston Churchill. Meanwhile, another bodysnatcher, Johnson's Brexit tsar, David Frost, was also in sunny Iberia. In Lisbon on Tuesday evening, he channelled the intellectual father of modern conservatism, the 18th-century Irish writer and politician Edmund Burke.

Frost demanded that the EU agree to rewrite completely the [Northern Ireland](#) protocol of the withdrawal treaty that Johnson hailed in October 2019 as a “fantastic deal for all of the UK”. His speech was entitled, in imitation of a famous Burke pamphlet, “Observations on the present state of the nation”.

In case his audience somehow failed to make the connection between the former chief executive of the Scotch Whisky Association and one of the greatest political thinkers these islands has produced, Frost reminded them – how could they have forgotten? – that he had previously given a speech entitled “Reflections on the Revolutions in Europe”. Geddit?

For those who did indeed get it, the first response was surely to sigh, like the ghost in Shakespeare's tragedy, "O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there". The second was the dizzying feeling that the "present state of the nation" is that of a skydiver, free-falling downwards from Burkean conservatism into pure Tory anarchism.

In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke wrote that "good order is the foundation of all good things". Somehow, when his soul was transmigrating to be born again in [Brexit](#) Britain, that bit got lost in translation.

Disorder is now the royal road to all the good things that will come to those who keep the Brexit faith. Tearing up international treaties is, like the mass culling of pigs and fruit rotting in the fields, merely a manifestation of the creative chaos from which the new universe of "Global Britain" will emerge.

It is rather unfortunate that the ground on which this big bang is set to explode, Northern Ireland, is a place that knows all about big bangs and the misery of chaos. And even more so that it is a place held together by one of those documents that Johnson and his government now hold in such contempt: an international treaty, the Belfast agreement of 1998.

Before Frost gave his speech on Tuesday, he knew full well that the EU was about to put forward a generous, sensible and very helpful set of proposals to deal with the difficulties in the practical implementation of the protocol. These proposals, unveiled on Wednesday, give civic and business leaders in Northern Ireland pretty much everything they have asked for to make the new arrangements work smoothly.

This is exactly the condition Edmund Burke warned against: an idea of 'freedom' unmoored from any commitment to order

Anticipating this EU move to calm everything down, however, Frost and Johnson chose to [pre-empt the solutions](#) by creating a new problem, one they know to be insoluble. They have hyped up an issue that no one in business or trade in Northern Ireland gives a damn about: the role of the European court of justice (ECJ) in any potential disputes about the

interpretation of EU law. Deprived of the movement of sausages as a *casus belli*, they grasped another dubious foodstuff – the red herring.

The role of the ECJ in relation to the protocol is so vital that Frost and Johnson apparently forgot about it for 21 months. Johnson agreed to – and hailed as a triumph – the withdrawal agreement in October 2019. The alleged concern about the ECJ emerged suddenly in the “[command paper](#)” published by Frost on 21 July this year. On Thursday, the Irish taoiseach, Micheál Martin, confirmed that Johnson had never once raised it in their discussions about the protocol. Yet we’re supposed to believe that this is a red line, a matter – unlike, say, keeping your word – of the highest principle. The UK government has developed a variant on Groucho Marx: these are our principles and if you don’t agree to fight us on them, we have others that we can provoke you with.

The only reason for dragging the ECJ into the arena now is that it is one issue on which the EU cannot ultimately yield. There are many layers of dispute resolution mechanisms already available within the withdrawal agreement and they can all be used intelligently if there is a will to do so. But the EU is held together by its laws – and [the ECJ is the institution that underpins them](#). That cannot change.

Frost is well aware of the futility of his demands – indeed, it is the whole point of his Lisbon performance. Instead of declaring victory, accepting the EU’s munificent offers and turning down the heat in Northern Ireland, he and Johnson prefer to make an impossible demand so that they can blame the EU for rejecting it.

They are, as the South Belfast MP, Claire Hanna, has put it, “mining for grievance”. Northern Ireland has a rich seam of this precious political ore. Frost and Johnson know that they can use it to mint the hard currency of complaint and self-pity. However badly it scars the social and political landscape of Northern Ireland, they are determined to keep digging.

The only consolation for Ireland and the rest of the EU is that they are not being singled out for high-handed contempt. When Johnson’s former chief adviser, Dominic Cummings, tweeted on Wednesday that the intention was always to dishonour the protocol because “cheating foreigners is a core part

of the job”, he was being uncharacteristically modest. Cheating Brits has been a core competency as well.

The whole ECJ issue is being whipped up as a matter of sovereignty. But who, for the Brexiters, is really sovereign? It is clearly not parliament, which voted overwhelmingly to ratify the withdrawal agreement they now want to tear up. It is not the people, who voted to give Johnson a whopping majority on the basis of this fabulous oven-ready deal. It is, rather, whatever it suits Johnson, or Frost, or Cummings when he was in power, to do or say at any given time.

This is exactly the political condition that Burke warned against: an idea of “freedom” that is unmoored from any countervailing commitment to order. Without an ordered structure of governance, he argued, freedom dissolves into anarchy and arbitrariness.

If there are any conservatives left in the Conservative party, they should reflect that this is indeed where the Brexit project has led them. In the name of “freedom” from the EU, it has undermined adherence to both national and international law and licensed a unilateral declaration of open mendacity.

It is all too obvious that Northern Ireland doesn’t count, except as a pressure point to be squeezed whenever Johnson feels like it. It is being used to try to solve the great political dilemma of Brexit: who do you blame when you’ve killed the scapegoat? The need for the scapegoat is becoming steadily more urgent, hence the political necromancy of revived conflict with the EU.

But if Northern Ireland doesn’t matter, what about Britain? Do conservatives now have such a low opinion of their own country that they are Are conservatives happy for it to be governed arbitrarily, by people who dishonour not just international treaties but their own parliament and electorate? And if you really are content to be governed by quirks and caprices rather than by laws, would you really want those whims to be Boris Johnson’s?

Fintan O’Toole’s new book is *We Don’t Know Ourselves: A Personal History of Ireland Since 1958*

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## The Observer view on the killing of Sir David Amess

[Observer editorial](#)



Tributes left near Belfairs Methodist church in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, where the Conservative MP Sir David Amess died after being stabbed several times at a constituency surgery. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

Sun 17 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

When he was fatally stabbed while holding a constituency surgery, Sir David Amess became the second MP to have been killed in the line of duty in just five years. A veteran parliamentarian who commanded immense respect and affection from colleagues of all parties, Amess's death serves as a tragic reminder of the unreasonable risks our elected representatives are expected to bear in the course of their public service.

Amess was killed while undertaking one of the aspects of his role he saw as most important: during a drop-in surgery at which his constituents could come and raise their concerns. Every Friday, MPs like Amess hold these sessions at libraries, church halls and constituency offices. They have none of the fortress-like protection that surrounds parliament; it is where they are most vulnerable to those who would do them harm. Yet parliamentarians did not abandon them even after Jo Cox MP was brutally murdered by a far-right terrorist in her Yorkshire constituency in 2016. Amess's relationships with his constituents informed his work as an MP; after meeting a woman with endometriosis, he spent years trying to raise awareness of the often-debilitating condition that affects women. Over the past 20 years, he has campaigned against [fuel poverty](#), after a constituent died of hypothermia.

We know little about the circumstances surrounding the fatal attack on Amess, beyond the fact that the police are treating it as a terrorist incident and are investigating a “potential motivation linked to [Islamist extremism](#)”. There will be those who seek to deploy these scant details in service of their political agendas; to politicise this tragedy in such a way is abhorrent.

But Amess's killing has rightly raised the same questions asked after Andrew Pennington was killed trying to protect the MP Nigel Jones in 2000, after [Stephen Timms was stabbed](#) during a constituency surgery in 2010, and after the murder of Jo Cox. Do we do enough to protect our MPs from harm given their profile, the fact that they can become a target for protracted hate and the threats they face as a result?

It is wrong that these questions only really get asked after someone has been killed or seriously wounded. In the five years since Jo Cox was assassinated, the Metropolitan police report that the number of threats against MPs [has been rising](#), with female MPs and those of colour [particularly targeted](#). Many have seen those who have made violent threats against them convicted and sent to prison: the man charged with sending Jess Phillips and Rosie Cooper [death threats](#) in 2019; the member of a neo-Nazi group found guilty of [plotting to kill Cooper](#) with a machete in 2018; the man found guilty of harassing [Luciana Berger](#) in 2016; the SNP member with a prior conviction of carrying a knife who was found guilty of threatening sexual violence against [Joanna Cherry](#) earlier this year; the man jailed last year for

threatening [Yvette Cooper](#). The black MP Diane Abbott has spoken of the hundreds of [racist messages](#) she has received every day; the Muslim mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has [24-hour police protection](#) as a result of the volume of death threats he receives because of his skin colour and faith; a Labour investigation found that the lesbian MP [Angela Eagle](#) received hundreds of “abusive, homophobic and frightening” messages from party members. The safety of those in public life may only pierce the public consciousness after someone has been killed. But this is something that will continuously weigh on the minds not just of MPs, but of their families and staff. It is too much to ask of any parent, partner or child.

The informality with which constituents can seek support from and petition their MPs in person is a prized aspect of British democracy. But Amess’s killing must prompt a reassessment of what can be done to reduce the risks of violence towards MPs in their own constituencies, whether through a greater police presence or advance security checks. It is extremely worrying that some MPs report that the threats they receive are [not taken seriously by the police](#): that must change.

But this goes beyond physical security. MPs have to put up with a shocking amount of social media abuse threatening violence, some of which comes from their own party members. The terrorism that motivated Jo Cox’s murderer is not just aimed at mortally wounding our elected representatives, it is about striking fear into them in a way that interferes with their ability to do their jobs and making citizens scared to put themselves forward for office in the first place. A lot of social media abuse will not tip over into real-world violence, but it can contribute to the online radicalisation of individuals with a propensity towards violence.

Our political discourse has coarsened. There are more who try to win debates by dehumanising opponents and launching ad hominem attacks rather than relying on the strength of their arguments. Social media platforms reward the adoption of ever-more radical and uncompromising positions; this level of polarisation does not reflect real-world public opinion yet it cannot but infect our politics as a result of the threats it produces and the activism it encourages. Individuals engaging in public debate have a responsibility to think about the consequences of behaviour that tips into the bullying and harassment of public figures; social media companies have a

duty to reconfigure their platforms so they do not incentivise spiteful speech and hateful sentiment.

Something that stands out from David Amess's obituaries this weekend was his embrace of civility in politics and the deep friendships he cultivated with politicians across the aisle. It would be a fitting legacy if his tragic, senseless killing prompted a re-evaluation of the immense sacrifice all MPs make in serving the public and a recalibration of our overly toxic political discourse.

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## The Observer view on a united approach by the EU and UK to the refugee crisis

[Observer editorial](#)



A chalk protest in solidarity with refugees in Krakow, Poland. Photograph: Beata Zawrzel/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Sun 17 Oct 2021 01.30 EDT

Imagine being trapped at night in a freezing forest between Poland and Belarus. There is no shelter, no food, no warmth. If you try to head west, the Polish army pushes you back. If you try to return the way you came, Belarussian border guards bar your path. And this happens again and again. You are stranded. There is no way out.

For untold numbers of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and other crisis zones, this Kafkaesque nightmare is playing out right now, with sometimes fatal consequences. Polish authorities report more than 15,000 attempts to cross the frontier into the EU since August, rising to above 500 a day [in recent weeks](#). The UN and human rights groups claim that Poland is breaking the law by refusing asylum to these migrants. The European commission is angry that the area has been closed to its officials and the media. But Warsaw is undaunted. Parliament voted last week to build a permanent €350m (£295m), Trump-style [Belarus border wall](#).

The Polish standoff appears to be partly the result of a deliberate effort by Alexander Lukashenko, Belarus's dictator, to entice would-be migrants into the country with free visas and cheap flights, then oblige them to travel west. This "hybrid war" of pressurising the EU is his supposed revenge for sanctions imposed by Brussels last year.

Uncontrolled migration, politically manipulated or not, poses an ever greater challenge for states all around Europe's periphery, not least the UK. But politicians' attempts to deal with it often appear chaotic, uncaring and illegal. Everywhere, or so it seems, sympathy for refugees is in desperately short supply.

Greece, [Italy](#) and Turkey have been repeatedly accused in recent months of violent "[pushbacks](#)" – forcibly repulsing irregular entrants while making no distinction between asylum seekers fleeing political persecution, refugees from wars, famine or climate change and economic migrants. All three deny the accusations.

The situation on the Iran-Turkey border is said to be particularly acute. The International Organization for Migration estimates that up to [30,000 refugees](#) have fled Afghanistan every week in recent months. Many who try to enter Turkey en route to Europe say they have been [beaten or abused](#) by border guards who refuse them sanctuary.

Immigration lawyers claim Patel's brutal border plans breach international and domestic law in at least 10 different ways

France, Greece, Italy and Spain are all struggling to deal with surges of migrants travelling north from Libya, Eritrea, the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa. This in turn feeds another, linked crisis: the [record numbers](#) trying to enter the UK who place their lives in the hands of heartless people smugglers and small craft ill-suited to the Channel.

The brutal approach adopted by Priti Patel, the home secretary, in her new borders bill reflects varying levels of hostility, indifference, incompetence and illegality similar to those shown towards migrants by some EU counterparts. Leading immigration lawyers claim Patel's plans [breach international and domestic law](#) in at least 10 ways.

It's not new to suggest Europe's deepening confusion over migration policy is distorting and damaging its politics, social cohesion and values, but it is fair to say the trauma is getting worse. Despite a [poor national election showing](#) last month, the anti-immigrant Alternative für Deutschland, which [grew fat](#) off the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, still wields significant influence in eastern Germany.

France's 2022 presidential election campaign has been dominated so far by issues of migration, Islam and identity. In Denmark, under pressure from the far right, the Social Democrat-led government of a famously tolerant, welcoming country is pursuing some of the [harshest anti-immigrant policies](#) seen anywhere in the EU.

Amid the mounting human misery around Europe's borders, the lack of cooperation between states struggling to overcome a shared problem stands out. The EU has tried and failed to forge a common approach. It must try again, urgently, and Britain should assist. A little more compassion would be good, too.

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[OpinionCop26](#)

## **The host of Cop26 needs to be a master of diplomacy. Unfortunately, it's Boris Johnson**

[Andrew Rawnsley](#)





‘A rotten outcome will inevitably reflect badly on Mr Johnson and make his rhetoric about ‘global Britain’ ring the more hollow.’ Photograph: Jeremy Selwyn/AFP via Getty Images

Sat 16 Oct 2021 14.12 EDT

The Queen is not amused. “We only know about people who are not coming,” the monarch was overheard saying. “It is very irritating when they talk, but they don’t do.”

It is not the turnout for a Buck House party that is exasperating her, but the unanswered invitations to the Cop26 climate summit that will meet in Glasgow in November. With just a fortnight to go, it is still not clear whether the leaders of China, India or Russia will even turn up, never mind agree to do anything meaningful to address the climate crisis.

There is still just about time for one or more of them to send in a last-gasp RSVP, but their reluctance to engage is one of many anxieties for a host who has previously raised expectations that this summit will be a world-saving triumph. When Boris Johnson addressed the UN general assembly in September, he exported to the global stage the boosterism that is so familiar

to his domestic audience. From the UN podium in New York, he declared that Cop26 would be “[the turning point for humanity](#)”.

That sounded like hyperbole unanchored from reality even as he said it. Someone with a better grasp of the geopolitics of the climate crisis and its fiendishly complex challenges would have used more tempered language. For many people, Cop26 is already doomed to let down the planet because no one ever had any serious expectation that this summit would agree to targets for cutting carbon emissions that are robust enough to prevent destructive levels of global warming. The more limited, but nevertheless critical, ambition for this gathering is to extract promises that would get the world closer to being on track to containing global warming to no more than 1.5C above pre-industrial levels. That was the goal set in the groundbreaking [Paris climate deal](#) in 2015.

Britain’s credibility and ability to persuade others depended on this country being an exemplar

In the run-up to the Glasgow summit, we have been told by Mr Johnson that the climate crisis is his number one priority. It is moot how much he is sincerely animated by the fate of the planet. In a previous incarnation as a rightwing newspaper columnist, he was noisily sceptical about the existence of climate change and [ridiculed wind power](#) as too feeble to knock the skin off a rice pudding. But in his own self-interest, if nothing else, he needs this summit to be seen as a success. Here is an opportunity to demonstrate that Brexit Britain has the capacity to provide international leadership on the most severe threat to the planet.

Success has always been contingent on Mr Johnson getting several things right. Britain’s credibility as the host and ability to persuade others to change their behaviour depended on this country being an exemplar. Yet the government’s full plan to show how Britain will reach net zero by 2050 has still not been published. That’s because there are ferocious rows within government about how to finance it and whether voters will tolerate the ways in which they will have to change their lives. As we reveal today, the Treasury is highly resistant to the costs of greening the economy.

Britain did the reverse of setting a good example when Liz Truss, now the foreign secretary, recently signed a draft trade deal with Australia that scrubbed out key pledges on climate action. The deep cuts to the international aid budget have undermined the UK's moral authority with developing countries. The effort to persuade others to wean themselves off fossil fuels hasn't been helped by decisions to go ahead with new oil and gas production in the North Sea, while not ruling out a new coal plant in Cumbria.

Making a success of this summit demanded a first-class talent for diplomacy. A key role of the host is to charm and cajole other governments to do dramatically better at cutting their output of greenhouse gases. In advance of Glasgow, all countries were expected to set out updated, detailed and stricter plans to reduce emissions. The G20 group of the largest economies is collectively responsible for more than 80% of annual global emissions. Only 11 of the G20 have submitted stronger targets to the UN, with just two weeks to go. China, Russia, Brazil and Australia are among the countries that have not. John Kerry, the US climate envoy, has rather depressingly suggested that the summit will be about finding out "who is doing their fair share and who isn't". This raises the spectre that it will be less about agreement-signing than finger-pointing.

Richer countries have acknowledged that, since they bear overwhelming responsibility for global warming, they owe a debt to poorer countries, many of whom will be the worst affected by a fried planet. More than a decade has passed since the wealthy world promised to provide \$100bn a year by 2020 to help developing countries alleviate and adapt to climate change. There are still no assurances that this pledge will be fully redeemed.

The mood music within government has turned gloomier in recent days. There is a rising fear that Glasgow will dismally underdeliver, like the previous Cop in Madrid in 2019. In that disastrous event, it will not be fair to assign all the culpability to Mr Johnson and his government. The UK is an upper middling country, not a superpower. London has some influence in the world, but not the clout to force behemoths such as China and the US to sign up to things they don't want to commit to. Yet a rotten outcome will inevitably reflect badly on Mr Johnson and make his rhetoric about "Global Britain" ring the more hollow.

Failure will also raise questions about whether Britain has made the most of its “convening power” as the host and maximised the use of what international influence it does possess. Experienced officials have long thought that the government has had a halfhearted approach to this summit and draw unflattering contrasts with the successful Paris Cop. That secured an unprecedented agreement because wealthy western countries made an alliance with poorer states to intensify pressure on the large emitters. There has been an absence of this kind of vital coalition-forging in the build up to Glasgow.

This outburst of public exhortation suggests a degree of desperation about the progress of the private diplomacy

The [Paris Cop](#) was co-ordinated by one of the heaviest hitters that France could muster. Laurent Fabius was a former foreign minister and prime minister of France. The role demands someone with international name recognition and a phone crammed with the numbers of lots of world leaders. Having tried and failed to recruit David Cameron or William Hague as the showrunner of Cop26, Mr Johnson handed the task to Alok Sharma, one of the more anonymous members of his government. Until quite recently, he did the job part time, combining it with the position of business secretary. This did not convey a real seriousness of intent to other players. In recent days, Mr Sharma has started lecturing the leaders of the world’s largest economies not to treat the gathering as “a photo-op or a talking shop” and warned that “if temperatures continue to rise we will step through a series of one-way doors, the end destination of which is climate catastrophe”. He’s completely right about that, but this outburst of public exhortation suggests a degree of desperation about the progress of the private diplomacy.

Summits are called such because they are supposed to represent international negotiation at its peak level. They do not succeed without intense amounts of application by the leader of the host country. In 2009, the G20 was convened in London amid the convulsions of the financial crisis. Before the event, Gordon Brown crisscrossed the globe on a mission to persuade his counterparts that it was imperative to take big measures to stabilise plunging financial markets. When it was proving difficult to get the 2005 meeting of the G8 in Gleneagles to sign up to international aid agreements, Tony Blair

went in search of Gerhard Schröder, the then German chancellor and one of the obstructionists. Finding him in the hotel bar having a nightcap with Vladimir Putin, Mr Blair put Mr Schröder up against a wall until he gave in.

Mr Johnson has poor relations with other European leaders, a cool one with the US president and a distant one with the leaders of China and India. That made it more, not less imperative, that he put in the hard yards of international diplomacy to try to make a success of this summit. Yet there's scant evidence that he has thrown himself at it with the all-out vigour demanded by the scale of the challenge and now there's very little time left. If the Cop is a flop, the host will cop a lot of the blame.

Andrew Rawnsley is Chief Political Commentator of the Observer

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**Observer comment cartoon**

**Politics**

## **David Amess's death, an assault on democracy – cartoon**

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## **Reginald Mobley is digging deep for forgotten musical treasures**

[Fiona Maddocks](#)



‘I’m ready to un-whitewash the classical music canon to show who we really were, and to show that the past is actually in full colour.’ Photograph: Tristram Kenton/The Guardian

Sat 16 Oct 2021 10.00 EDT

There’s a quote on the American countertenor Reginald Mobley’s [website](#) that sums him up: “One of the joys of seeing Mobley is hearing his beautiful alto come out of a big, tall man who looks more like a linebacker for the Miami Dolphins than the PG Wodehouse party guest his name might suggest.”

Mobley has been in the UK this month on a mission, foraging at the British Library, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge and the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, as well as archives in York and Leeds, with more to come. What’s the engaging Reggie up to?

Raised on gospel and jazz but trained classically, he excels in the baroque glories of Bach and Purcell, as well as scat. He is also a campaigner for diversity. Currently on a European opera tour, Mobley diverted here for his CounterTenor Project with the Arts and Humanities Research Council and Research Libraries UK, which is timely, in [Black History Month](#), as he points out. “I’m digging around for music by black musicians working in England in the past.”

He’s especially interested in [Ignatius Sancho](#) (c1729-80), born on a slave ship, a pioneer British abolitionist and the first black Briton to vote in a parliamentary election. Gainsborough painted him. He’s been a Google Doodle. He was also a composer, his music all but forgotten. Mobley is on his trail. “I’m ready to un-whitewash the classical music canon to show who we really were and to show that the past is actually in full colour.” Catch him singing exquisite Monteverdi in Vicenza, Italy, until 1 November, if you happen to be that way.

## Fear stalks the aisles

Being back at live performances is a joy. I’m uncomfortable, though, unless I’m at the end of a row or Covid checks are in place. Smaller venues seem

more vigilant than large. A friend asked to be moved at the Royal Opera House, nervous at the unmasked crush and a recalcitrant, maskless neighbour. With no alternative seat available, she watched the performance alone, on a screen, elsewhere in the building. Her top-price ticket had cost £225.

Beyond the middle-ground public who wear masks as needed, there are two extremes. Those who reject masks. And those who fear carrying Covid home to the vulnerable person they live with, as I do. So when you advance towards me in the interval with the words: “Let me take this blasted thing off” and see me shrink back beneath my FFP-2 mask, it’s not a reprimand, but bewildered terror.

## Time waits for no voice

Two boy choristers, styled as [Myron and Archie](#), have made an album to raise funds for Childhood Cancer Research. Myron’s [brother, Kasper](#), has a rare, aggressive form of the disease. Archie was a semi-finalist in BBC Chorister of the Year 2020. Entitled *Love Is*, the music spans 400 years. Simon Rattle has praised its quality, touched by “the idea of the race against time” before the boys’ voices break. An entire disc of treble duets? I get sent review copies of dozens of CDs but this is a repertoire first. Let’s support them and their big-hearted initiative.

## One note at a time

How do composers past the first flush of youth spur each other on? They send notes. Robin Holloway, 77, rang Harrison Birtwistle, 87, recently. “What’s your favourite note, Harry?” “E,” said Birtwistle, a man of few words, before nominating a couple more. Holloway scribbled them down, shaped them into a tiny composition and posted it. It’s now sitting on Birtwistle’s kitchen table in Wiltshire, willing him, or not, to think about his next endeavour.

Fiona Maddocks is an Observer columnist

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## Political debate has coarsened. We MPs can take the lead in restoring calm and respect

[Alison McGovern](#)



Police officers with floral tributes laid to David Amess in Parliament Square.  
Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

Sun 17 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

The feelings are so visceral. Sir David Amess's family are the first and last thought. I cannot imagine what this is like for them, but I feel devastating horror that again a family is without a beloved and needed member. I want to scream. Many of us have been thrown back five years, our heads full of gut-wrenching memories and the horrible reality of [an MP stolen from us](#) in the heart of the place they served.

There aren't many similarities between [Jo Cox](#) and David. She had served for just a year, he for the best part of 40 years – a lifetime of service. But the visceral feelings are the same. As Jo's husband, [Brendan, said](#), it is his family who matter now. Their deep love for David should be celebrated alongside the lifetime that he gave in the service of others.

I watched [an interview](#) David gave to Iain Dale. He talked about his love of the Commons and the truth of it shines through: doing politics won't always get you universal respect, but done well, it can make you a better person.

The journey many of us go on, from tribal party loyalist to enjoying the company of those we disagree with, to seeing their reasons and their values and actually understanding them, is one that is common to all sides. You'll rarely read about it. But politics, correctly practised, can be the best antidote to cynicism there is.

I started my life as an MP cynical about Westminster and I am all too aware of its failings now. But I have learned from David and his generation of MPs that making an argument in the [House of Commons](#) works best when there are people listening, when there are others around you to be persuaded, when there is agreement to be found and identified among the disagreement.

If I am still sceptical about political media of all forms – old and new, print, broadcast and social – it is not just because of the tone often taken, but because of this: how, in the current environment, can we show that we are listening to each other? How can we help others to feel heard?

What Jo understood so clearly, and what David talked about in that interview is how we make progress not just by rallying those who are in our tribe. How finding a few other people quite different from yourself, but with whom you have something in common is a powerful tool in changing the country for the better.

If I could say one thing to the politicians who will come after me, it would be this: Jo's words now written on the wall of the House of Commons – “[More in Common](#)” – are not there to remind you [what she said](#). They are an organising instruction. They are there to tell you how to move our country on.

I know many people will find it hard to understand how the bickering they see from us correlates with that instruction. Can it really be the case that the political world forever at war with itself could be any good at bringing people together? True, it is hard sometimes but the answer is not to give up, and David never did, on any of the many campaigns he ran. The answer is to listen more. Think hard about where others are coming from. Empathy, understanding, compassion. These are the skills that make our politics function.

The truth of it shines through: doing politics won't always get you universal respect, but done well, it can make you a better person

So, as we once again face the horrendous reality before us and turn to the many practical tasks ahead – whether that is the security consequences or the social media norms that have to change – my thoughts keep returning to the lessons of life.

The reason why we carry on meeting our constituents in person is that it is indispensable in creating the bond of empathy. I remember the first piece of casework I did as a local councillor as if it were yesterday. I could tell you the woman's name. I can see her face. And I could tell physically how the stress of her situation was weighing her down.

That human-to-human connection made me not just want to help, but to understand. I am sure it is the same for everyone in politics: what use are we unless we are of use to others? It is what makes it mean something. It is what makes politics mean anything at all. We must be able to help people safely and securely and, most especially, our staff must be safe.

Most importantly today, I'm thinking of the Conservatives and others who spoke up for Jo when she was killed and those friends who will be in an irreparable darkness today. I want them to know that they are loved and that David's killing will be hard to bear but that all of us in politics and in the country join them in sorrow.

And the crucial lesson is one learned through experience. Companionship, empathy and compassion are the unseen strengths of British politics. It has

carried me through the past five years and it will be the path for a better future for all of us.

*Alison McGovern is MP for Wirral South and shadow minister (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport)*

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Names in the newsBooks

## More power to Mark Billingham's book-hurling elbow. I might join in

Rebecca Nicholson



Mark Billingham: no shame in giving up on a book. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Observer

Sat 16 Oct 2021 12.00 EDT

Do you ditch a book if it does not immediately grab your attention or do you trudge through it joylessly, weighed down by some invisible obligation to complete it, no matter how arduous the task? The writer [Mark Billingham](#) got stuck into this endless debate at the Cheltenham literature festival last week, admitting that he gives up on five out of 10 books that he starts, because “life’s too short” and “there are so many great books out there”. If genre fiction, in particular, doesn’t grab you after 20 pages, he said, “then, for God’s sake, throw it across the room angrily”.

The thought of it! It is so bold, so cavalier. There are two books in particular that I went on to adore, after several abandoned attempts to read them. It quite literally took me years to get into both *Wolf Hall* and *The Luminaries* and it was only a combination of very lazy, pool-based holidays and dogged perseverance that finally got me to stick with them. I am very glad I did. They rewarded patience and in a culture of instant gratification this seems increasingly rare.

In contemporary pop music, the flick-through catalogue style of streaming services means long intros are almost non-existent now. If a song doesn’t have an immediate hook, it is likely to be skipped and this is changing the way songs are written. If all novels had to have a poppy hook, so to speak, I am not sure the work would benefit.

On the other hand, I am seethingly envious of Billingham. The ability to chuck a book that doesn’t immediately appeal is a superpower, a recognition of the value of one’s time and something that shows great confidence in one’s own taste. There are far more brilliant stories than any one person could read in a lifetime and there are far more books I wish I had binned than ones I’m glad I did not.

It also puts novels in their place. Literature has a tendency to believe its own hype and Billingham’s approach reminds readers that novels are entertainment, too. The idea that great literature should be hard work is

ridiculous, one that only the snobbish gatekeepers who celebrate exclusivity wish to hold on to.

I did abandon one book recently, because it was full of horrible things being done to animals, and snot, which, it turns out, is more off-putting than hundreds of pages of terrible prose. I am not quite sure that the balance is correct or the payoff worth it. But this is a debate that will never anoint a winning side. Billingham admitted that his wife will persevere with any book, even if she is not enjoying it.

## William Shatner is back to Earth with a bump



William Shatner in space with the crew members of Blue Origin.  
Photograph: Blue Origin/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Prince William, Jeff Bezos and William Shatner met at the centre of a surreal Venn diagram last week. At the age of 90, former *Star Trek* star [Shatner made history by popping into space](#) for a few minutes, becoming the oldest person to do so. “I’m so filled with emotion about what just happened,” he said, tearfully, after he returned to Earth. “It’s extraordinary.”

Shatner was flown into space on Bezos’s Blue Origin rocket, but commercial space tourism, that gruesome folly of choice for the ultra-rich, has a

tendency to make joyful situations into joyless ones. Though he did not refer to Shatner, [Prince William](#) offered a withering critique of the billionaire space race when speaking to the BBC's *Newscast* on Thursday: "We need some of the world's greatest brains and minds fixed on trying to repair this planet, not trying to find the next place to go and live."

Bezos argues that building a road to space is crucial for the survival of humanity. Shatner reiterated this idea in his response to the prince, politely arguing that trips like his can show that space travel is possible, meaning new solutions to the climate crisis might be found away from Earth. But all these "coulds" and "mights" lack urgency and the idea that the solution to climate change is to simply try again somewhere else is inherently bleak. It implies a sense of resignation, as if Bezos knows that there is no point in attempting to fix what we have here. How strange, to feel so glum about the sight of a man fulfilling a lifelong dream at 90.

## **Megan Fox and Machine Gun Kelly: not a horror show after all**



'Fox told Kelly that he 'smelled like weed'. 'I am weed,' he replied.'

Photograph: Diggzy/Jesal/REX/Shutterstock

Though this year's Halloween costume of choice appears to be locked in – expect to see a parade of *Squid Game* tracksuits on a street near you – might I make a suggestion that the chilling spectacle of PDAs, or public displays of affection, is as horrifying as any skeleton, zombie or ghost?

If anyone wishes to pursue this line of inquiry, then celebrity couple Megan Fox and Machine Gun Kelly might make for a good moodboard. The pair discussed their relationship in a [lengthy profile](#) with *GQ Style* and it has already been much-memed. On meeting him for the first time, for example, Fox told Kelly that he “smelled like weed”. “I am weed,” he replied. Mr Darcy walked so that he could run.

I read the story in its entirety, expecting to feel queasy about the couple’s hot ‘n’ heavy romance; much like dreams, other people’s relationships are rarely as interesting to anyone else. Perhaps I am going soft, but it turned out to be rather sweet. Famous people are all bonkers, and there’s plenty of that, but it’s more goofy and less self-conscious than I expected it to be. It turns out I’ll be going for the tracksuit, after all.

Rebecca Nicolson is an Observer columnist

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[Opinion](#)[Social care](#)

## Letters: merging social care and the NHS would damage both organisations



The health secretary, Sajid Javid, is working on a plan to integrate social care with health. Photograph: James Veysey/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 17 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Merging the NHS and social care is a very bad idea (“[Sajid Javid working on radical plan to integrate social care with health](#)”, News). Better integration, yes, merger, no. Your article says that the plan “would amount to one of the most far-reaching reforms since the NHS was founded in 1948”. It would – with devastating impacts on social care and on the NHS. Social care is means tested; if the two are merged, the NHS will come under pressure to explore means testing for its own services.

We don’t want the sickness model and transactional aspects of medicine imposed on social care. [Social care](#) and support is not some cheap version of

healthcare. Disabled people need support to live free and independent lives and the NHS is not great at providing this. Integrated care has been in place in Northern Ireland for decades, yet people there still face inadequate support and institutionalised care.

Social care has always been the weaker sister. The [NHS](#) attracts and keeps funding in a way that social care never has. In the merger of two grossly underfunded services, social care would lose out further. Our campaign argues for close working between health and care, enabling people to take as much control over their lives as they choose. We fight for a National Care, Support and Independent Living Service.

**Dr Brian Fisher**, on behalf of NACSILS  
London SE14

## Facing up to the ‘B’ word

Anand Menon is right to point out that, while both the main parties choose to avoid Brexit, the “B” word is all around us (“[Seldom mentioned but influencing everything... why are so many afraid of the ‘B’ word?](#)”, Comment). More of us should have realised that the spurious promise of “getting Brexit done” avoided the blooming obvious, that Brexit will not be done with us for years. What should Labour do – move on or, more responsibly, recognise that it has to offer a route back, to at least rejoining the single market? That may well be a viable way to power and it is assuredly the only answer to the chaos that will continue to unfold in a nation that has been soundly duped.

**Ian Richardson**  
Beverley, East Yorkshire

## Love in an academic climate

Torsten Bell might be on to something when highlighting the link between university course and long-term romantic happiness, though not necessarily limited to heterosexual marriage (“[Pick the wrong degree and even wedding bells are less likely](#)”, Comment). The definition needs to embrace same-sex couples who have better opportunities to meet significant others on courses dominated by their gender. Who could deny that the quest for our significant

other is high on the agenda – and not only when entering higher education? I vividly remember discussions with other candidates for a teaching role in Milton Keynes: most of us concluded that we would be better placed in a university town in our quest for long-term relationships.

Perhaps universities' and schools' recruitment and marketing departments could get in on the act. Publishing data to show how many recruits found their life partners while working or studying within the institutions could well draw in good candidates. And perhaps there could be a new column in the *Guardian* best university tables published every year.

**Yvonne Williams**  
Ryde, Isle of Wight

## **Eat plants and save the world**

The growth of veganism was initially due to concerns about the appalling ways in which animals are treated, particularly on factory farms (“[From fringe to mainstream: why millions got a taste for going vegan](#)”, Focus). The recent growth is also due to increasing awareness of climate change and rainforest destruction, both of which are linked to animal farming. And last year's recommendation of a plant-based diet by the World Health Organization, which you mention, will have helped too. However, there are other reasons.

Farming animals is a very inefficient way of feeding people, using far more land, water and energy than is needed for a vegan diet. If we are to feed the world's growing population, we need to move away from animal farming. Also, intensive animal farming (which means most animal farming) is one of the main causes of water pollution in many countries, including the UK.

**Iain Green**, director, Animal Aid  
Tonbridge, Kent

## **Men, porn can be dangerous**

Why do articles about the dangers of pornography to children have to be written by women (“[How do we talk to our teens about sex in a world of](#)

[porn?](#)”, Focus)? Much of today’s pornography contains aggression and violence towards women and girls.

Where is the outrage from men? Where are the male journalists writing about this and showing their concern for their sons having a healthy sex education?

**Jane Tooby**

Cardiff

## Unions are fighting back

Kenan Malik (“[Blame the erosion of union power, not migrants, for poor wages](#)”, Comment) rightly highlights what Boris Johnson conveniently ignores in his perverse narrative of a “low-wage, low-skill economy”: the systematic assault on workers’ collective organisations by Tory governments over the last 40 years. Western Europe’s most restrictive laws on industrial action, barely altered under New Labour and strengthened during David Cameron’s premiership, have undoubtedly contributed to the erosion of real pay. Malik could also have pointed to the allied push to privatise tens of thousands of ancillary jobs.

This transfer of already low-paid jobs in cleaning, catering, facility management and social care has invariably led to worse pay and conditions. Private employers have frequently bought out previous contractual rights, not least in social care. New recruits can be hired on contracts that offer no more than statutory minimums, so excluding occupational sick pay.

Arguably, the tide has begun to turn, with local authorities such as Hackney insourcing some 300 jobs and £12m in outsourced contracts since 2018.

**George Binette**, Hackney North & Stoke Newington Labour party trade union liaison officer

London N16

## Don’t spurn my help, Britain

It is no wonder there is a nursing crisis when the Nursing and Midwifery Council still lives in prehistoric times (“[Nursing crisis sweeps wards as NHS](#)

battles to find recruits”, News). I am an Australian-educated registered nurse living in the UK after returning last year. I have more than 20 years’ experience in nursing, some at management level. I contacted the council on numerous occasions to see if I could help out with the nursing crisis and Covid vaccination. I was told that this could take three to six months, at a cost of £1,200. In short, they have made it far too difficult and expensive to even bother.

I also have an Australian HGV licence and when I contacted the DVLA regarding the driver shortage, I was told that this is not recognised in the UK. It astounds me that Australia is not recognised as an equal in both these circumstances. The UK is crying out for help.

**Ron Hastings**

Talkin, Cumbria

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

# For the record

Sun 17 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

A feature on Angela Merkel incorrectly said that the outgoing German chancellor had “abstained in the parliamentary vote on same-sex marriage”. She actually voted against the legislation ([Farewell Mutti... but what did you do for us?](#), 26 September, page 40).

An article referred to a police officer recently dismissed for an inappropriate relationship with a woman he met through his duties; he was from Dorset police, not Dover police, as we said ([Police forces inundated with sex crime claims against officers](#), 10 October, page 6).

A reference to Andy Street as the “Birmingham mayor” may have caused confusion. He is mayor of the West Midlands, a combined authority area that includes Birmingham. The city itself has a lord mayor, currently Muhammad Afzal ([It's Festival 22 time! Welcome to an orgy of pride, pageantry and, er, levelling up](#), 11 October, page 43).

Owing to an error introduced in the editing process, we rendered Thandiwe Newton’s first name as “Thandie”. The actor reverted to its Zulu-derived spelling earlier this year ([Why millions got a taste for going vegan](#), 10 October, page 34).

A column said that trade union membership fell to a record low of 6.2m “in 2106”. This was not a dispatch from the future; the intended reference was to 2016 ([Blame the erosion of union power, not migrants, for poor wages](#), 10 October, page 47).

Other recently amended articles include:

[Sadiq Khan's 24/7 security challenges our notions of non-racist London](#)

[Sebastian Kurz to quit as Austrian chancellor due to corruption inquiry](#)

[World Cup roundup: Denmark thrash Moldova to keep up perfect record](#)

[Bobby Gillespie: ‘For the first 10 years of my life, I lived in a Glasgow tenement ... that stuff stays with you’](#)

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

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[Opinion](#)[Insulate Britain](#)

## Insulate Britain might be floundering but eco extremism is here to stay

[Nick Cohen](#)



Insulate Britain protesters block the A20 in Kent on 24 September.  
Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

Sat 16 Oct 2021 14.00 EDT

Insulate Britain's use of civil disobedience to fight the climate catastrophe was a catastrophe in itself. Search for the pressure group on YouTube and you see clips of delighted rightwing journalists taking apart its leaders. Sympathisers will say that a right wing that has barely recovered from its climate change denial was always going to lay into the activists. But [Insulate Britain](#) did not have to make life so easy for its foes.

The physical courage of demonstrators who walked into the speeding traffic on motorways counted for no more than the urgency of their cause. They targeted ordinary people, who were just trying to get to work or take their sick relatives to hospital, rather than fossil fuel companies and the finance industry that supports them. Their tactical stupidity left them wide open to attack.

Their failure ought to teach us that civil disobedience is not as easy as Prof Erica Chenoweth's "[3.5% rule](#)" once made it sound. The rule held that no government could withstand a determined challenge from a tiny minority. As military regimes from Belarus to Burma have shown, dictatorships can withstand challenges from considerably more than 3.5% of the population by setting the army on them. In democracies, leaders of direct action movements cannot just mobilise a required percentage of the population. They have to be smarter than the mainstream politicians they are challenging. They have to use street theatre, argument, wit and controlled anger to convince the watching electorate to rethink its assumptions. Extinction Rebellion was creative and [more popular](#) than many Conservatives realised.

Insulate Britain, by contrast, put forward a spokesman, who [stormed off a TV show](#) after its hosts accused him of being a hypocrite. (He was demanding the insulation of homes but had failed to insulate his own.) The protest was over and the campaign accepted its inevitable defeat on Friday.

I wouldn't be too quick though to dismiss the "[doomist](#)" extremists, however. There will be many more where they came from. As the Earth heats, you can expect everything from furious, but rational protests to apocalyptic, quasi-religious movements. Nor will all the uprisings be to liberal tastes. From Mussolini's march on Rome to today's [anti-vax riots](#), civil disobedience can just as easily be used by liberalism's enemies. James Murray, one of the best environmental journalists around, points out that you can trace eco-fascist movements back to the Nazis. Desertification and wars brought by heat and drought will push refugees towards safer countries. Their flow could turn today's small groups on the eco-right into popular xenophobic movements that want the military to use lethal force to stop the desperate reaching cooler countries. This is not such a fanciful idea. The current Conservative government is already considering [using the navy to turn back migrants](#) in the Channel.

Nor is the "doomism" of today's activists as eccentric as it might seem. Environmentalists popularised the term after the most successful unpublished paper in academic history appeared in 2018. Prof Jem Bendell, of Cumbria University, argued that [societal collapse was inevitable](#) and it was too late to prevent it. No reputable journal would publish him. Thoughtful green activists said Bendell's imagined apocalypse was [sci-fi rather than science](#). They warned his fatalism undermined demands for change from the environmental movement. Bendell didn't care. He put his paper on his blog and hundreds of thousands downloaded it, including the men and women who were to inspire Extinction UK and Insulate Britain.

It targeted drivers going about their business. It put the lives of its supporters and everyone else on the road in danger

Their belief that we have only a tiny amount of time left to make revolutionary change is not too far from Bendell's deep doomism. More surprisingly, it is not too far from the arguments of global institutions that seem to operate on a different planet to ragged protesters.

The International Energy Authority's [review](#) of the benefits and risks as the world prepares for clean energy transitions did not say there was no time or next to no time left. It looked forward to nations honouring their

commitment to reach the net-zero target by 2050. But pessimism gnawed at the agency. Plans to cut global carbon emissions will fall 60% short of the target, [it said last week](#). There needs to be \$4tn (£2.94tn) in investment over the next decade to bridge the gap and rich countries must do what they have failed to do with the distribution of Covid vaccines and show generosity to the poor world.

Against such hopelessness stands the global change in the thinking of governments, businesses and hundreds of millions people. Insulate Britain's failure to mobilise their concern exemplified the movement's failure. It targeted drivers going about their business. It put the lives of its supporters and everyone else on the road in danger. Terrible tactics allowed its enemies to portray the protesters as middle-class snobs, who cared nothing for the men and women struggling to get through life, rather than campaigners for a better future.

They might have said we live in a country that pays exorbitant prices and rents for substandard housing. Never have so many billions been given for such shoddy goods. Yet such was the incompetence of Insulate Britain, it turned a campaign to help everyone staring at their fuel bills in terror this winter into an elitist cause.

The UK could still be insulated. Indeed, the government is promising to do just that. We switched from town gas to natural gas. Why can't we switch from natural gas to heat pumps and from draughty to warm homes? Yet as soon as you start believing that change is possible, pessimism creeps over you like a chill. Countries all over the world have net-zero pledges but no routes to get there. Governments have not prepared their public for the changes to come. The details are not there. The hard work has not been done.

Stay with the image of men and women darting on to a motorway as the fumes rise and traffic thunders. Now picture Johnson, Biden, Macron and the other [Cop26](#) leaders linking arms across the carriageway. They are taking a stand, just as the Insulate Britain protesters did. But like the doomist demonstrators, they have no idea how to win the battle they say they want to fight.

# Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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## Headlines tuesday 12 october 2021

- [Coronavirus Pandemic response ‘one of UK’s worst ever public health failures’](#)
- [Live UK politics: Tory ministers try to defend government’s Covid response after critical report](#)
- [Stephen Barclay Cabinet minister refuses to apologise after report on UK Covid response](#)
- ['I shook hands with everybody' The weeks leading up to first UK lockdown](#)

## Health policy

# Covid response ‘one of UK’s worst ever public health failures’



A doctor in Cambridge last year. Policy failings have been blamed for pushing the NHS to the limit. Photograph: Neil Hall/AFP/Getty Images

*[Ian Sample](#) and [Peter Walker](#)*

Mon 11 Oct 2021 19.01 EDT

Britain’s early handling of the coronavirus pandemic was one of the worst public health failures in UK history, with ministers and scientists taking a “fatalistic” approach that exacerbated the death toll, a landmark inquiry has found.

“Groupthink”, evidence of British exceptionalism and a deliberately “slow and gradualist” approach meant the UK fared “significantly worse” than other countries, according to the 151-page “Coronavirus: lessons learned to date” report led by two former Conservative ministers.

The crisis exposed “major deficiencies in the machinery of government”, with public bodies unable to share vital information and scientific advice impaired by a lack of transparency, input from international experts and meaningful challenge.

Despite being one of the first countries to develop a test for Covid in January 2020, the UK “squandered” its lead and “converted it into one of permanent crisis”. The consequences were profound, the report says. “For a country with a world-class expertise in data analysis, to face the biggest health crisis in 100 years with virtually no data to analyse was an almost unimaginable setback.”

### [deaths and lockdowns](#)

Boris Johnson did not order a complete lockdown until 23 March 2020, two months after the government’s Sage committee of scientific advisers first met to discuss the crisis. “This slow and gradualist approach was not inadvertent, nor did it reflect bureaucratic delay or disagreement between ministers and their advisers. It was a deliberate policy – proposed by official scientific advisers and adopted by the governments of all of the nations of the UK,” the report says.

“It is now clear that this was the wrong policy, and that it led to a higher initial death toll than would have resulted from a more emphatic early policy. In a pandemic spreading rapidly and exponentially, every week counted.”

Decisions on lockdowns and social distancing during the early weeks of the pandemic – and the advice that led to them – “rank as one of the most important public health failures the United Kingdom has ever experienced”, the report concludes, stressing: “This happened despite the UK counting on some of the best expertise available anywhere in the world, and despite having an open, democratic system that allowed plentiful challenge.”

06:42

How the UK government sidestepped the data on coronavirus – video explainer

The report from the Commons science and technology committee and the health and social care committee draws on evidence from more than 50 witnesses, including the former health secretary Matt Hancock, the government's chief scientific and medical advisers, and leading figures from the vaccine taskforce and NHS Test and Trace.

It celebrates some aspects of the UK's Covid response, in particular the rapid development, approval and delivery of vaccines, and the world-leading Recovery trial that identified life-saving treatments, but is highly critical of other areas.

Some of the most serious early failings, the report suggests, resulted from apparent groupthink among scientists and ministers which led to "fatalism". Greg Clark, the chair of the science and technology committee, said he dismissed the [allegation](#) that government policy sought to reach "herd immunity" through infection but the outcome came to be seen as the only viable option.

"It was more a reflection of fatalism," Clark said. "That if you don't have the prospect of a vaccine being developed, if you think people won't obey instructions to lockdown for very long, and have a wholly inadequate ability to test, trace and isolate people, that is what you are left with."



Government preparations for a pandemic focused on influenza, ‘the wrong type of disease’ MPs said. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

The “impossibility” of suppressing the virus was only challenged, the MPs say, when it became clear the NHS could be overwhelmed.

The report questions why international experts were not part of the UK scientific advisory process and why measures that worked in other countries were not brought in as a precaution, as a response was hammered out.

While Public Health England told the MPs it had formally studied and rejected the [South Korean approach](#), no evidence was provided despite repeated requests.

“We must conclude that no formal evaluation took place, which amounts to an extraordinary and negligent omission given Korea’s success in containing the pandemic, which was well publicised at the time,” the report says.

The MPs said the government’s [decision to halt mass testing](#) in March 2020 – days after the World Health Organization called for “painstaking contact tracing and rigorous quarantine of close contacts” – was a “serious mistake”.

When the test, trace and isolate system was rolled out it was “slow, uncertain and often chaotic”, “ultimately failed in its stated objective to prevent future lockdowns”, and “severely hampered the UK’s response to the pandemic”. The problem was compounded, the report adds, by the failure of public bodies to share data, including between national and local government.

Further criticism is levelled at poor protection in care homes, for black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and for people with learning disabilities.

### Timeline

Prof Trish Greenhalgh, of the University of Oxford, said the report hinted at a “less than healthy relationship” between government and its scientific advisory bodies. “It would appear that even senior government ministers were reluctant to push back on scientific advice that seemed to go against commonsense interpretations of the unfolding crisis,” she said.

“It would appear that Sage, Cobra, Public Health England and other bodies repeatedly dismissed the precautionary principle in favour of not taking decisive action until definitive evidence emerged and could be signed off as the truth.”

Jonathan Ashworth, the shadow health secretary, said the report was damning. Hannah Brady, of the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice group, said the report found the deaths of 150,000 people were “redeemed” by the success of the vaccine rollout.

“The report … is laughable and more interested in political arguments about whether you can bring laptops to Cobra meetings than it is in the experiences of those who tragically lost parents, partners or children to Covid-19. This is an attempt to ignore and gaslight bereaved families, who will see it as a slap in the face,” she said.

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

[\*\*Brexit\*\*](#)

# **Brexit: Labour accuses government of immaturity after Lord Frost demands Northern Ireland protocol changes – as it happened**

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## Coronavirus

# Cabinet minister refuses to apologise after report on UK Covid response

01:43

Barclay refuses to apologise for government's Covid handling – video

*[Alexandra Topping](#)*

Tue 12 Oct 2021 04.30 EDT

A cabinet minister has refused to apologise to the families who lost loved ones during the coronavirus pandemic after a damning report from MPs on the UK government's response found that tens of thousands of lives were lost because of a delay to the first lockdown.

Stephen Barclay, the minister for the Cabinet Office, insisted the government “did take decisions to move quickly” despite the inquiry finding Britain’s early handling of the coronavirus pandemic was one of the worst public health failures in UK history, with ministers and scientists taking a “fatalistic” approach that exacerbated the death toll.

On Sky News on Tuesday, Barclay was asked repeatedly to apologise to the families who lost loved ones, but pointedly refused to do so. Asked about the inquiry, he said he had “not had a chance to read it”.

Barclay said: “Of course there are going to be lessons to learn, that’s why we’ve committed to an inquiry, but the government took decisions at the time based on the scientific advice it received, but those scientists themselves were operating in a very new environment.”

He added: “We protected the NHS, we got the vaccine deployed at pace, but we accept where there are lessons to be learned, we’re keen to do so.”

According to the 151-page Coronavirus: lessons learned to date report, led by two former Conservative ministers, the crisis exposed “major deficiencies in the machinery of government”.

### cases

It concluded that the UK “squandered” its lead despite being one of the first countries to develop a test for Covid in January 2020, and “converted it into one of permanent crisis”.

Barclay, the chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster, said the decisions were taken on the evidence and the scientific advice at the time. A future inquiry would look at the lessons to take forward, he said.

“I think a question for the inquiry will be what information did the government have on something that was unprecedented. Were the decisions informed by the science at the time and do we now know different things about the pandemic to what we knew in February in 2020?”

The report did praise elements of Britain’s pandemic response, including the decision to pre-order vaccines even before trials had been completed. “[Of] course we’ve learned a huge amount, but we did take decisions to move quickly, that is why the vaccine was deployed at pace, that was a success that the report recognises,” said Barclay.

Asked about Boris Johnson’s decision to go on holiday to Spain as the report was released, Barclay said he believed the public would not begrudge the prime minister taking a holiday.

Pushed again on LBC Radio for an apology to the public, he said: “Well, I recognise it’s devastating and my heart goes out to any family, any of your listeners where they lost a loved one.”

Asked about the Northern Ireland protocol of the Brexit agreement, Barclay said the government wanted changes so it was accepted by both communities and said it must be “sustainable in the long term”.

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## Coronavirus

# Covid timeline: the weeks leading up to first UK lockdown



A sign on the gate of a closed children's playground in Barnes on 23 April 2020. Photograph: Chris Jackson/Getty Images

*[Ian Sample](#) Science editor*

*[@iansample](#)*

Mon 11 Oct 2021 19.00 EDT

**31 December 2019:** China alerts the World [Health](#) Organization (WHO) to dozens of cases of “viral pneumonia” in the central city of Wuhan.

**11 January 2020:** China reports its first death, a 61-year-old man in Wuhan, from the mysterious new disease. At least seven more patients are in a critical condition.

**23 January:** China orders a lockdown for millions of people in Wuhan and Hubei province as the death toll in the country reaches 18.



A man crosses an empty highway road on 3 February in Wuhan, Hubei province. Photograph: Stringer/Getty Images

**24 January:** The UK health secretary, Matt Hancock, chairs the first Cobra meeting on Covid. England's chief medical officer, Prof Chris Whitty, says the risk to the UK public is low.

**30 January:** A Chinese couple from Wuhan fall ill on a trip to Italy and are confirmed as the country's first two cases. The risk level from the virus in the UK is raised from low to moderate as the WHO declares a global health emergency.

**31 January:** Two Covid cases are confirmed in the UK.

**2 February:** The UK government recommends regular handwashing, but the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) advises against restricting mass gatherings

**10 February:** Public Health England rolls out coronavirus tests to 12 UK labs.

**22 February:** Cases surge in Italy, prompting lockdowns in the northern regions of Lombardy and Veneto.

01:44

Coronavirus: quarantined Italians sing from balconies to lift spirits – video

**25 February:** Sage advises that social distancing and school closures can cut transmission by 50 to 60%.

**28 February:** A man being quarantined onboard the Diamond Princess cruise ship in Japan becomes the first confirmed British death from Covid.

**3 March:** Boris Johnson boasts of having shaken hands “with everybody” on a recent visit to a hospital. The same day, Sage cautions “against greetings such as shaking hands and hugging, given existing evidence about the importance of hand hygiene”.

00:41

'I shook hands with everybody,' says Boris Johnson weeks before coronavirus diagnosis – video

**4 March:** A woman in her 70s with underlying health issues becomes the first person to die with Covid in the UK. Cases rise above 100.

**11 March:** The WHO declares Covid-19 a pandemic.

**17 March:** Sir Patrick Vallance, the UK government’s chief scientific adviser, tells MPs that keeping the total number of Covid-19 deaths under 20,000 [would be “a good outcome”](#).

**18 March:** Boris Johnson announces the [indefinite closure of schools](#), with A-levels and GCSEs cancelled, to curb the spread of coronavirus.



An information board displays a message asking people to 'stay home' in Manchester, on 27 March 2020. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP via Getty Images

**19 March:** Johnson says the UK can “turn the tide” of the disease in 12 weeks and “send coronavirus packing”.

02:17

Coronavirus: Boris Johnson says UK can 'turn the tide' within 12 weeks – video

In the following days and weeks, pictures show thousands of tourists waiting to board flights to their home countries as lockdowns are announced.



Thousands of tourists wait to board their flights to return to their home countries at Lanzarote airport in Spain's Canary Islands. Photograph: Javier Fuentes/EPA

**23 March:** Boris Johnson announces the UK's first national lockdown. People may only leave their homes for [strictly limited reasons](#) and the police are given powers to enforce the rules. The furlough scheme introduced by Rishi Sunak is broadly welcomed as an important intervention to protect jobs during lockdown.

**26 March:** Dr Jenny Harries, the chief executive of the UK Health and Security Agency, says testing and contact-tracing are no longer “appropriate”. She adds that the WHO’s plea to “test, test, test” is directed at less developed nations.



A pigeon walks through a closed and empty Greenwich Market in London on 28 April 2020. Photograph: Chris J Ratcliffe/Getty Images

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## 2021.10.12 - Spotlight

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Interview

## **Rob Beckett: ‘You have to suppress your working-class rage to operate in comedy’**

[Zoe Williams](#)



‘I’d read every comedian’s page on Wikipedia and judge myself against them’ ... Rob Beckett at the Electric Cafe in West Norwood, south London. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian



[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Tue 12 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

[Rob Beckett](#) is one of those comedians without whom many TV formats would collapse. He is an accomplished standup who made his debut in 2009, at 23, performing anywhere that would have him, often not even for petrol money. He has a rare combination of warmth and edge. He can present [Wedding Day Winners](#) with Lorraine Kelly without making her seem square; do a pitch-perfect double-act with Romesh Ranganathan that makes the audience feel as though they are included in the friendship; pack out the Hammersmith Apollo with a solo show for which his notes amount to 10 words; and hold his own on *Mock the Week*, famous for its bear-pit atmosphere and comic-eat-comic sensibility.

We meet in a cafe in south-east London, a greasy spoon that the owner says has been there since 1932 (they dated it from the fly-posted film billboards in an old photo). Strangers open up with Beckett in the room; I have never had a conversation so intently eavesdropped. It is partly that he has natural charisma, partly because he has a celebrity gloss – slightly exaggerated

features, not classically handsome so much as screen-ready – and partly because what he is saying is novel and his delivery is vivacious and so incredibly fast.

He has written a book, [A Class Act: Life As a Working-Class Man in a Middle-Class World](#). Lockdown was the catalyst, although he had wanted to write it since before the pandemic. Like his act, it is pacy, witty and affectionate, a fish-out-of-water story of arriving at the Edinburgh festival fringe, for instance, “a desperate full-kit wanker wanting to be a comedian, but with no guidance or advice on how to go about it”. He mocks himself and lampoons his mum, his dad and his four brothers. Didn’t they mind? “Oh no, they’ve got off lightly. There is another book knocking about and they won’t be happy.” He holds up a mirror to the middle classes, their stupid foods (“I don’t trust couscous. It’s fat sand”) and weird conventions.



‘Everyone was funny, growing up’ ... Rob Beckett at home in the 80s.

Early on in his life story, he gets under the skin of the class divide, the bit that isn’t funny. In 2010, despite feeling like an outsider in Edinburgh, baffled by the mindless whimsy of the sketch improv that seemed to bring down the house, he won a newcomer award that included a return trip to Adelaide, plus accommodation, for its month-long comedy festival.

The problem was, he didn't have any money: not enough to get to and from the venue, not enough to eat anything except cereal, not enough for sunscreen; definitely not enough to socialise, or explore, or go to the doctor when he got a chest infection (and sunburn). "I am talking proper skint. Zero pounds in the bank skint," he writes. The story zigzags between the knockabout comradeship of kind strangers and the desolation and panic of being penniless.

"I was writing that in tears," he says now. "It was almost like opening a door that I'd locked. Everything else is just Bulletproof Beckett: boom, do that, bang, bang, bang. Funny, funny, funny. Write a book now. And then I felt a little door creaking open."

He says that, in many ways, he is at a peak now – he is as healthy as he has ever been, he is happily married to Lou, a teacher, and he has two daughters at primary school. (They are also about to get a whippet.) Even so, he is sometimes overwhelmed by dread, the feeling that he may have surpassed his "wildest dreams". The book "goes a bit darker", he says, "because I thought: I do need to put this out. I've lost a lot of friends to suicide. A lot of working-class men struggle with mental health and I think I can't go out there and be Mr Jack the Lad, constantly on the telly, and not tell the truth of how I'm feeling."

His default mode remains puckish exuberance – even when he describes the pervasive snobbery he has had to dodge like a Mario character throughout his career. We talk about the photoshoot for the cover image of his book, which features him in a pie and mash shop, wearing a suit and drinking a martini. "I'm not saying working-class people don't wear suits, but you would never wear that outfit in that environment," he says. The day of the shoot, people were spitballing ideas. Someone said to him: "Do you wanna pose in that outfit by a bin?"

He says: "That's when that working-class rage comes out, where you want to go: 'You fucking ... you fucking *what?*' The person wasn't being mean, they were just thinking: working class equals poor, working class equals bins. Like I'm trash. But if you don't suppress that rage, you can't operate in my industry."

Some people's first thought isn't trying to be funny ... What a waste of your life

Beckett segues into an anecdote about why working-class rage is funny, while middle-class microaggression is poisonous. One day in his youth, Beckett and his then girlfriend were fined by a train ticket inspector. When his dad, whom he calls "Super Dave", came to pick them up from the station, his dad said: "Do you want me to go and hit him?"

Beckett's dad has worked behind the wheel for most of his life: as a van driver, then an oil-tanker driver, then a black-cab driver. He was a doting father; he used to pick up Beckett from comedy gigs if he finished late (although he would happily kick him out of his cab if a big-money airport job came along). His mother, whom he calls "Big Suze", looked after him and his brothers until they left school, then worked in a shop.

Beckett speaks about his academic struggles at school in a way I have rarely heard in middle-class conversations. "My GCSEs were shit. I worked so hard. I'd go to after-school clubs, I'd get up at 8am on a Sunday. I was obsessed; this constant perfectionism. Even then, I got all Ds and Es."

Later, we talk about what made him want to be a comedian in the first place. The book is vivid with detail about what it took to make the leap from an office job to the standup circuit, and from there to stardom, but details of his early life are scant. "Everyone was funny, growing up: my brothers, my mum, my dad, my cousin, everyone," he says. "My parents are like that with their friends: if they're not funny, why would you invite them round? So I never felt like I was particularly funny."

Ever since [Little Britain](#), British TV viewers have been more likely to encounter a sketch about the working classes and what is wrong with them than a working-class comedian. It makes me wonder why Beckett isn't more political.

He answers carefully. "When you're in the storm of it all ... 'victim' is a strong word, but when you're part of that mess – I was near the top of that mess, I was never in poverty – you're oblivious that you're in the shit. It is

only when you get out that you realise you're covered in shit. It is such a relief when you're out, you don't really want to go back through it. That's why there aren't many working-class voices in politics.”



‘A lot of working-class men struggle with mental health’ ... with Romesh Ranganathan in their TV show Rob & Romesh Vs. Photograph: Justin Downing/Sky

Beckett wrote his book for a couple of reasons. One was an act of resolution for himself: his daughters are growing up in a very different environment to the one in which he grew up and he wants to express that – to them, to himself – in a lasting way. The second was for “the bloke that works at Sainsbury’s or the flower market and they go: ‘I don’t read books.’ I want to say: ‘Well, read this one.’”

He goes into great detail about why he didn’t enlist a ghostwriter. “All my heroes, sports stars mainly, would get ghostwriters, and normally it’s a very middle-class voice, imagining what a working-class person’s life is. Or, when a working-class person *does* write the book, they’ve been under so much pressure to fit in, academically, it’s almost like a peacocking exercise: ‘I am intelligent, I am clever in the academic way that you believe is intelligence, look at all these big words.’”

Beckett struggles with self-doubt, which he locates in very early childhood, when teachers looked at him and saw “a stupid little fat kid from a working-class family in south-east London”. Then he shows me his notes for 90 minutes of live material: a single sheet of paper with six bullet points ([Tiger King](#), Phillip Schofield, sanitiser, Wembley, Mary Poppins, elbow-spit). “I hate the bumping elbows instead of shaking hands,” he elaborates. “I’d rather someone just spat in my mouth. If that gets a laugh, I’ll just carry on talking.”

He talks in the book about “loose-neck” and “stiff-neck” comedians, the freeform, unscripted show versus a tightly plotted and memorised routine. He is a loose-neck – never writes down anything more detailed than “elbow-spit” – but clearly has a photographic memory, pin-sharp recall not just for that evening’s show, but for every show he has done. “Well, if you made 500 people laugh, you’d remember what you said,” he argues. I don’t think I ever have, I say. “OK, what’s the most embarrassing thing you’ve ever done, in front of a lot of people?” He is not going to drop it until he has made me admit that I, too, have a photographic memory. But I really don’t – and I have no recall for my own mortification. I wonder if this is another point of class divide.

Since the nascent days of the pandemic, Beckett has hosted a podcast called [Lockdown Parenting Hell](#), with the comedian Josh Widdicombe. It is a sweet and exceptionally timely exploration of the trauma of being at home, all the time, with kids under the age of 10. Sometimes, they have a guest on to confirm that, yes, it is a nightmare for everyone.

The book is for the bloke that works at Sainsbury’s or the flower market and goes: ‘I don’t read books’

You wouldn’t think he would be a radio natural, because so much of what makes him funny is the way emotions erupt across his face. But he is a compelling interviewer; his curiosity is audible and he is surprised by the weirdest things. “We had [Jessie Ware](#) on, and she was talking about singing to her kids. I realised that she would just beautifully sing to her kids. I’ve only ever sung to mine for laughs. And I thought: ‘God, some people’s first

thought isn't trying to be funny.' That's a different way to go about it, wandering about being pleasant and nice. What a waste of your life."

He says he felt liberated by Covid, from the constant pressure he was putting on himself to say yes to everything, to always be playing a bigger venue. But his ambition is palpable. It is no surprise at all to hear that, when he was starting out, he was "an animal. I'd read every comedian's page on Wikipedia and I would judge myself against them. So, [Russell Howard](#) won that competition at the age of 25, after three years; I would think: 'Brilliant, I am 24 and I won that after two years.' Honestly, it was a complete obsession."

At 35, he is finally prepared to admit that comedy isn't "just a hobby that got out of hand. That was true at the beginning, but I carried on saying it to sound humble and normal. As soon as I knew I was good at it, I was laser-focused."

*In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or by emailing [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) or [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie). In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-8255. In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at [befrienders.org](http://befrienders.org)*

*A Class Act by Rob Beckett (HarperCollins, £20) is published on 14 October. To support the Guardian and the Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](http://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply*

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## Investigative journalism

# Obsessive, illuminating, high-stakes: why investigative journalism matters - video

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## Time millionaires: meet the people pursuing the pleasure of leisure



‘I just want to do what I’m doing for now. Live a lot more presently.’  
Illustration: Mark Long/The Guardian



### Sirin Kale

Tue 12 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

In every job he has ever had, Gavin has shirked. When he worked in a call centre, he would mute the phone, rather than answer it. When he worked in a pub, he would sneak out of the building and go to another pub nearby, for a pint. His best-ever job was as a civil servant. He would take an hour for breakfast, and two for lunch. No one ever said anything. All his colleagues were at it, too.

When the pandemic began, Gavin, now working as a software engineer, realised, to his inexhaustible joy, that he could get away with doing less work than he had ever dreamed of, from the comfort of his home. He would start at 8.30am and clock off about 11am. To stop his laptop from going into sleep mode – lest his employers check it for activity – Gavin played a 10-hour YouTube video of [a black screen](#).

One might reasonably describe Gavin (not his real name) as a deadbeat. In economic terms, he is a unit of negative output. In moral terms, he is to be despised; there are antonyms for the word “grafter”, and none of them are good. In religious terms – well, few gods would smile on such indolence. But that is not how Gavin views things. “I work to pay my bills and keep a

roof over my head,” he says. “I don’t see any value or purpose in work. Zero. None whatsoever.”

Gavin’s job is an unfortunate expediency that facilitates his enjoyment of the one thing that does matter to him in life: his time. “Life is short,” Gavin tells me. “I want to enjoy the time I have. We are not here for a long time. We are here for a *good* time.” And for now, Gavin is living the good life. He’s a time millionaire. “I am delighted,” Gavin tells me. “I could not be happier.” He is practically singing.

And his boss? “My boss is happy with the work I’m doing,” he says. “Or more accurately, the work he thinks I’m doing.”

First named [by the writer](#) Nilanjana Roy in [a 2016 column in the Financial Times](#), time millionaires measure their worth not in terms of financial capital, but according to the seconds, minutes and hours they claw back from employment for leisure and recreation. “Wealth can bring comfort and security in its wake,” says Roy. “But I wish we were taught to place as high a value on our time as we do on our bank accounts – because how you spend your hours and your days is how you spend your life.”

And the pandemic has created a new cohort of time millionaires. The UK and the US are currently in the grip of a workforce crisis. [One recent survey](#) found that more than 56% of unemployed people were not actively looking for a new job. Data from the Office for National Statistics shows that many people are [not returning to their pre-pandemic jobs](#), or if they are, they are requesting to [work from home](#), clawing back all those hours previously lost to commuting.

“We’re seeing this great resignation,” says Charlie Warzel, the author of the [Galaxy Brain](#) newsletter and co-author of the forthcoming book [Out of Office: The Big Problem and Bigger Promise of Working from Home](#). “People are quitting their jobs and not returning to work, even if their unemployment benefits are running out.”

The people actively embracing a less work-focused life are, generally speaking, childless members of the professional classes, but Roy argues that this shouldn’t have to be the case. “If society was truly progressive,” she

says, “it would not work people to the bone in the first place, or make the assumption that leisure, time to rest, time to be with your family, is only for the wealthy.”

The enforced downtime of the pandemic caused many of us to reassess our attitudes to work, and whether we might be able to lead less lucrative but more fulfilling lives. “I got on a train last week at 7am,” says Samuel Binstead, a 29-year-old [coffee shop owner](#) from Sheffield. “And some guys next to me sat down and the first thing they did was get out a laptop and a stack of papers. All I could think was: ‘You are not in the office yet, and you’re already trying to get a head start on work, because it must be the most important thing to you.’ I felt sorry for them.”

Binstead is a recovering workaholic. Pre-pandemic, he ran a 50-cover wine bar in central Sheffield. He would start work at 10am and leave at 1am, five days a week. On his days off, he would do paperwork. “I don’t think I realised how close I was to complete burnout,” he says. “I was using work to cope with work. Being there seemed to be my only option.” His mother didn’t bother inviting him to her 50th birthday, because she knew he would be busy. “She was probably right,” he says. “I wouldn’t have been able to get the time off.”

When the pandemic hit, the sensation of relief was overwhelming. “It completely changed my relationship with money,” he says. “Having the time at home was so much more valuable to me.” In September 2020, Binstead closed his wine bar and moved his business to a smaller unit. He sells coffee in the morning, and closes for the day at lunchtime. Turnover is down 75%. In the afternoons, Binstead practises photography, or sees friends. He has no career goals. “I just want to do what I’m doing for now,” he says. “Live a lot more presently.” He estimates that he is “100 times happier” than he was before.

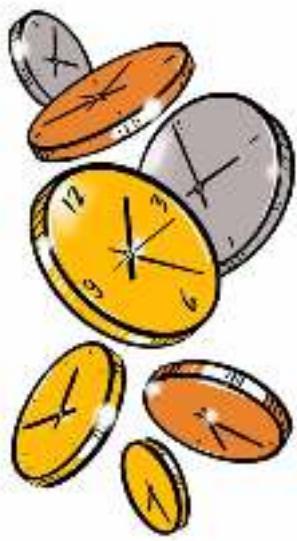
He also started from a better place than many would-be time millionaires. As things stand, working less is not an option for minimum-wage workers facing a [spiralling cost-of-living crisis](#), or parents struggling to pay [exorbitant childcare costs](#). “I want to be very clear,” says Isaac Fitzgerald, [a New York-based writer](#). “I am very lucky. I am 38. I don’t have children. I

understand what a luxury it is to be able to take three-and-a-half hours out of my day to go for a walk.”

In a [New York magazine profile](#) last month, Fitzgerald, a former BuzzFeed books editor and author of a [popular newsletter about walking](#), [Walk it Off](#), cheerfully described himself as a time millionaire. He began what he calls the Walk Off project after realising that he had “been living in New York for seven years and barely knew the city”. The enforced ellipsis of the pandemic opened new vistas for Fitzgerald to explore on foot. “I realised that I wanted to walk,” he says.

Pre-Covid, Fitzgerald regularly worked 80-hour weeks. “My calendar was meetings upon meetings upon meetings,” he says. “I had this feeling there was never enough time, and that added to my anxiety. That ‘tick tick tick’.” Fitzgerald has now reduced his hours to 30 a week, and his income by 50%. Time is his greatest asset, and one he guards jealously. Time away from his desk is a walk in the [Catskill mountains](#) beside waterfalls; it is [finding shipwrecks](#) on Long Island beaches. “It’s almost like I am doing my best to protect my time now,” Fitzgerald says. “That comes with being a time millionaire. Just as one would want to protect one’s investment, I protect my time.”

“There’s a movement here that feels pretty organic,” says Warzel. “The pandemic was this massive controlled experiment in forcing people to embrace a different way of working. And what we saw was the opposite of what executives had been telling employees for decades: [productivity](#) and profits [rose]. Now, people are wondering what else employers were wrong about. What other ways of working have gotten out of sync?”



‘Just as one would want to protect one’s investment, I protect my time.’  
Illustration: Mark Long/The Guardian

The UK workforce is stressed out, overworked and underpaid. British people [work the longest hours in Europe](#), the equivalent of an extra two-and-a-half weeks of unpaid overtime a year. Wages have not kept up with inflation, meaning that in real terms, [earnings are lower](#) than before the 2008 financial crisis. “Isn’t it time to question a system of productivity that pushes so many people into jobs and industries that are unsafe, that pay low wages for long hours of work?” asks Roy.

But decoupling our self-worth from the credits flowing into our bank accounts and the titles on our business cards is not always easy. Many people’s self-esteem is bound up in their work. “There is that niggling doubt,” Binstead admits. “Do people think I’m lazy?” Our society celebrates overwork as a symptom of great moral probity. “It creeps into every part of our society, this hustle culture,” Binstead says. “If you’re not busy or trying your hardest, you’re a lesser person somehow.”

It was not always this way. In pre-industrial Britain, the wealthy elite were defined by their ability to *not* work, but live off land rents and capital investments. With the advent of industrialisation, and the emergence of an

upwardly mobile middle class, industry replaced leisure as a marker of respectability.

The contemporary iteration of this values system emanates from Silicon Valley. Elon Musk is known to work 120-hour weeks, scheduled into five-minute meetings. In her autobiography Lean In, Sheryl Sandberg writes about answering emails from her hospital room, the day after giving birth. “Silicon Valley is a place filled with workaholics,” says Alex Pang, the author of [Shorter: How Working Less Will Revolutionise the Way You Get Things Done](#). “The default is to talk about how many hours you are working. Managers count how many cars are parked in the parking lot on Sunday nights.” Not content with exporting its brutalising work culture, Silicon Valley has also innovated devices to tether us to our offices. “The fact that we carry our offices around in our pockets has made being always ‘on’ a moral imperative,” says Pang.

As a result, leisure has become a dirty word. Any time we scrounge away from work is to be filled with efficient blasts of high-intensity exercise, or other improving activities, such as meditation or prepping nutritionally balanced meals. Our hobbies are monetised side hustles; our homes informal hotels; our cars are repurposed for ride-sharing apps. We holiday with the solemn purpose of returning recharged, ready for ever-more punishing overwork. Doing *nothing* – simply savouring the miracle of our existence in this world – is a luxury afforded only to the respectably retired, or children.

“In a situation where every waking moment has become the time in which we make our living,” writes Jenny Odell [in her anti-productivity tract How to Do Nothing](#), “and when we submit even our leisure for numerical evaluation via likes on Facebook … time becomes an economic resource that we can no longer justify spending on ‘nothing’. It provides no return on investment; it is simply too expensive.” Odell exhorts readers to recognise that “the present time and place, and the people who are here with us, are … enough”.

The calls to end the fetishisation of overwork, and its concomitant self-optimisation culture, are gaining traction: both the UK and US have [prominent campaigns](#) for a four-day week. Futurists such as Pang advocate a world in which technology is not a straitjacket but a force for liberation,

enabling “us to be more productive in ways that allow us to reclaim more of our time”. Pang quotes approvingly from Bertrand Russell’s 1932 essay In Praise of Idleness. “Modern methods of production have given us the possibility of ease and security for all [but] we have continued to be as energetic as we were before there were machines,” Russell wrote. “In this we have been foolish, but there is no reason to go on being foolish for ever.”

Until that changes, a more radical approach to our fetid working culture might be to unstick time entirely from notions of capitalist value. “I like the underlying concept of being a time millionaire,” says Pang. “But I’m not sure I like the name. It sounds economical and transactional. What I do like is the idea of placing a greater value on time, and recognising its scarcity, and importance.” After all, we cannot accrue time, or invest it and watch it grow. It runs away from us; we slip and slide in its wake. Perhaps time isn’t a bank account, but a field. We can grow productive crops, or things of beauty; roses for the pruning and topiary hedges to be trimmed. Or we can simply do nothing, and let the wildflowers grow. Everything is of beauty, everything is of equal value.

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The Monument to the Discoveries in Lisbon, Portugal. Photograph: Image Broker/Rex

[The long read](#)

## Built on the bodies of slaves: how Africa was erased from the history of the modern world

The Monument to the Discoveries in Lisbon, Portugal. Photograph: Image Broker/Rex

by [Howard W French](#)

Tue 12 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

It would be unusual for a story that begins in the wrong place to arrive at the right conclusions. And so it is with the history of how the modern world was made. Traditional accounts have accorded a primacy to Europe's 15th-century Age of Discovery, and to the maritime connection it established

between west and east. Paired with this historic feat is the momentous, if accidental, discovery of what came to be known as the New World.

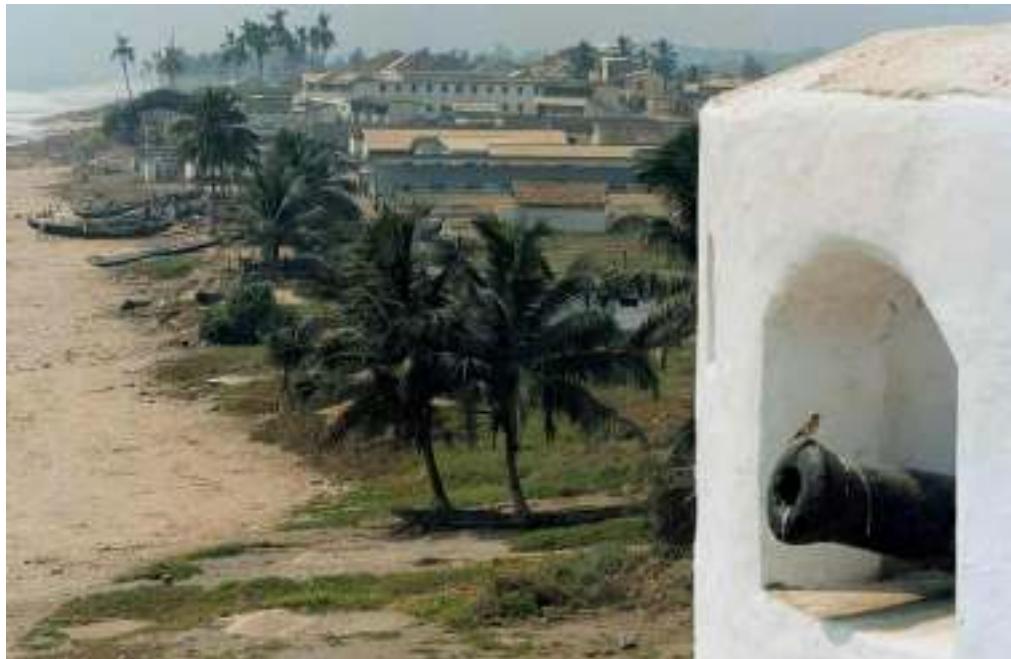
Other explanations for the emergence of the modern world reside in the ethics and temperament that some associate with Judeo-Christian beliefs, or with the development and spread of the scientific method, or, more chauvinistically still, with Europeans' often-professed belief in their unique ingenuity and inventiveness. In the popular imagination, these ideas have become associated with the work ethic, individualism and entrepreneurial drive that supposedly flowed from the Protestant Reformation in places such as England and Holland.

Of course, there is no denying the significance of the voyages of mariners such as Vasco da Gama, who reached India via the Indian Ocean in 1498, Ferdinand Magellan, who travelled west to Asia, skirting the southern tip of South America, and Christopher Columbus. As the author Marie Arana has elegantly said of Columbus, when he sailed west, "he had been a medieval man from a medieval world, surrounded by medieval notions about Cyclops, pygmies, Amazons, dog-faced natives, antipodeans who walk on their heads and think with their feet – about dark-skinned, giant-eared races who inhabit the lands where gold and precious gems grow. When he stepped on to American soil, however, he did more than enter a new world: he stepped into a new age."

Although these famous feats of discovery dominate the popular imagination, they obscure the true beginnings of the story of how the globe became permanently stitched together and thus became "modern". If we look more closely at the evidence, it will become clear that [Africa](#) played a central role in this history. By miscasting the role of Africa, generations have been taught a profoundly misleading story about the origins of modernity.

The first impetus for the Age of Discovery was not Europe's yearning for ties with Asia, as so many of us learned in school, but rather its centuries-old desire to forge trading ties with legendarily rich Black societies hidden away in the heart of "darkest" west Africa. Iberia's most famous sailors cut their teeth not seeking routes to Asia, but rather plying the west African coastline. This is where they perfected techniques of mapmaking and navigation, where Spain and [Portugal](#) experimented with improved ship designs, and

where Columbus came to understand the Atlantic Ocean winds and currents well enough that he would later reach the western limits of the sea with a confidence that no European had previously had before him, of being able to return home.



A fort in Elmina, Ghana, built by 15th-century European gold and slave traders. Photograph: David Guttenfelder/Associated Press

Well before he mounted his expeditions on behalf of Spain, Columbus, an Italian from Genoa, had sailed to Europe's first large, fortified overseas outpost, which was located in the tropics at Elmina, in modern-day Ghana. European expeditions to west Africa in the mid-15th century were bound up in a search for gold. It was the trade in this precious metal, discovered in what is now Ghana by the Portuguese in 1471, and secured by the building of the fort at Elmina in 1482, that helped fund Vasco da Gama's later mission of discovery to Asia. This robust new supply of gold helped make it possible for Lisbon, until then the seat of a small and impecunious European crown, to steal a march on its neighbours and radically alter the course of world history.

Bartolomeu Dias, another Portuguese explorer who knew Elmina well, rounded Africa's Cape of Good Hope in 1488, proving the existence of a sea route to what would become known as the Indian Ocean. But no onward

voyage to Asia would even be attempted for nearly a decade after that, when Da Gama finally sailed to Calicut (now known as Kozhikode in India). The teaching of history about this era of iconic discoveries is confoundingly silent not only on that decade, but on the nearly three decades between the Portuguese arrival at Elmina in 1471 and their landing in India in 1498.

It was this moment, when Europe and what is nowadays styled sub-Saharan Africa came into permanent deep contact, that laid the foundations of the modern age.

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The elision of these three pivotal decades is merely one example of a centuries-long process of diminishment, trivialisation and erasure of Africans and people of African descent from the story of the modern world. It is not that the basic facts are unknown; it is that they have been siloed, overlooked or swept into dark corners. It is essential to restore key chapters such as these to their proper place of prominence in our common narrative of modernity.

Starting in the 15th century, encounters between Africans and Europeans set the most Atlantic-oriented Europeans on a path that would eventually propel their continent past the great civilisational centres of Asia and the Islamic world in wealth and power. The rise of Europe was not founded on any innate or permanent characteristics that produced superiority. To a degree that remains unrecognised, it was built on Europe's economic and political relations with Africa. The heart of the matter here, of course, was the massive, centuries-long transatlantic trade in enslaved people who were put to work growing sugar, tobacco, cotton and other cash crops on the plantations of the New World.



The Monument to the Discoveries in Lisbon, Portugal. Photograph: Renato Granieri/Alamy

The long thread that leads us to the present began in those three decades at the end of the 15th century, when commerce blossomed between Portugal and Africa, sending a newfound prosperity washing over what had previously been a marginal European country. It drove urbanisation in Portugal on an unprecedented scale, and created new identities that gradually freed many people from feudal ties to the land. One of these novel identities was nationhood, whose origins were bound up in questing for wealth in faraway lands, and soon thereafter in emigration and colonisation in the tropics.

As Portugal started to venture out into the world in the 1400s – and for nearly a century this meant almost exclusively to Africa – its people were among the first to make another conceptual leap. They began to think of discovery not merely as the simple act of stumbling upon assorted novelties or arriving wide-eyed in never-before-visited places, but rather as something new and more abstract. Discovery became a mindset, and this would become another cornerstone of modernity. It meant understanding that the world was infinite in its social complexity, and this required a broadening of consciousness, even amid the colossal violence and horror that accompanied this process, and an ever more systematic unmooring from provincialism.

The fateful engagement between Europe and sub-Saharan Africa produced civilisational transformations in both regions, as well as in the wider world – ones that, looking back today, produced an exceptionally crisp division between “before” and “after”.

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Back then, Europeans were mindful of this reality. As late as the 1530s, well after the start of Portugal’s more famous spice trade with Asia, Lisbon still recognised Africa as the leading driver of all that was new. João de Barros, a counsellor to that country’s crown, wrote: “I do not know in this Kingdom a yoke of land, toll, tithe, excise or any other Royal tax more reliable ... than the profits of commerce in Guinea.”

But as remarkable as Barros’s acknowledgment of African vitality was, his omission of slavery as a pillar of the relationship was equally notable. It may have been the first time that the centrality of Black bondage was simply passed over in an informed account of modernity in the west. It would not be the last. When Barros wrote, Portugal overwhelmingly dominated Europe’s trade in Africans, and slavery was beginning to rival gold as Portugal’s most lucrative source of African bounty. By then, it was already on its way to becoming the foundation of a new economic system based on plantation agriculture. Over time, that system would generate far more wealth for Europe than African gold or Asian silks and spices.

Sounding like an updated Barros, Malachy Postlethwayt, a leading 18th-century British expert on commerce, called the rents and revenues of plantation slave labour “the fundamental prop and support” of his country’s prosperity. He described the British empire as “a magnificent superstructure of American commerce and naval power [built] on an African foundation”. Around the same time, an equally prominent French thinker, Guillaume-Thomas-François de Raynal, described Europe’s plantations worked by African enslaved people as “the principal cause of the rapid motion which now agitates the universe”. Daniel Defoe, the English author of [Robinson Crusoe](#), but also a trader, pamphleteer and spy, bested both when he wrote: “No African trade, no negroes; no negroes, no sugars, gingers, indicoes [sic] etc; no sugar etc, no islands, no continent; no continent, no trade.”

Postlethwayt, Raynal and Defoe were surely right, even if they did not comprehend all of the reasons why. More than any other part of the world, Africa has been the linchpin of the machine of modernity. Without African peoples trafficked from its shores, the Americas would have counted for little in the ascendance of the west. African labour, in the form of enslaved people, was what made the very development of the Americas possible. Without it, Europe's colonial projects in the New World are unimaginable.

Through the development of plantation agriculture and a succession of history-altering commercial crops – tobacco, coffee, cacao, indigo, rice and, above all, sugar – Europe's deep and often brutal ties with Africa drove the birth of a truly global capitalist economy. Slave-grown sugar hastened the coming together of the processes we call industrialisation. It radically transformed diets, making possible much higher worker productivity. And in doing so, sugar revolutionised European society.



A monument to slavery at a museum in Porto-Novo, Benin. Photograph: Afolabi Sotunde/Reuters

In sugar's wake, cotton grown by enslaved people in the American south helped launch formal industrialisation, along with a second wave of consumerism. Abundant and varied clothing for the masses became a reality for the first time in human history. The scale of the American antebellum

cotton boom, which made this possible, was nothing short of astonishing. The value derived from the trade and ownership of enslaved people in the US alone – as distinct from the cotton and other products they produced – was greater than that of all of the country’s factories, railroads and canals combined.

Now-forgotten European contests over control of the African bounty partly built the modern world, by strengthening fixed national allegiances. Spain and Portugal waged fierce naval battles in west Africa over access to gold. Holland and Portugal, then unified with Spain, fought something little short of a world war in the 17th century in present-day Congo and Angola, vying for control of trade in the richest sources of enslaved people in Africa. On the far side of the Atlantic, Brazil – the biggest producer of slave-grown sugar in the early 17th century – was caught up in this same struggle, and repeatedly changed hands. Later in that same century, England fought Spain over control of the [Caribbean](#).

Why did faraway powers contend so fiercely over such things? Tiny [Barbados](#) provides an answer. By the mid-1660s, just three decades or so after England initiated an African slave-labour model for its plantations there – one that was first implemented in the Portuguese colony of São Tomé little more than a century earlier – sugar from Barbados was worth more than the metal exports of all of Spanish America.

Amid this story of military struggles for control of land and slaves, and of the economic miracles they produced, another kind of conflict is visible: a war on Black people themselves. This involved the consistent pursuit of strategies for beating Africans into submission, for making them enslave one another, and for recruiting Black people as proxies and auxiliaries, whether to secure territories from native populations of the New World or joust with European rivals in the Americas.

To say this is not to deprive Africans of agency. The impact of this warfare on Africa’s subsequent development, however, has been immeasurable. Nowadays, the consensus estimate on the numbers of Africans brought to the Americas hovers about 12 million. Lost in this atrocious but far too neat accounting is the likelihood that another 6 million Africans were killed in or near their homelands during the hunt for slaves, before they could be placed

in chains. Estimates vary, but between 5% and 40% perished during brutal overland treks to the coast, or while being held, often for months, in barracoons, or holding pens, as they awaited embarkation on slave ships. And another 10% of those who were taken aboard died at sea during an Atlantic transit that constituted an extreme physical and psychological test for all those who were subjected to it. When one considers that Africa's total population in the mid-19th century was probably about 100 million, one begins to gauge the enormity of the demographic assault that the slave trade represented.

This war on Black people raged just as fiercely on the western shores of the Atlantic, as did the resistance. Societies of runaways bent on freedom came together in many places, from Brazil and Jamaica to Florida. It is often remarked that Africans themselves sold enslaved people to Europeans. What is less well known is that in many parts of Africa, such as the Kingdom of Kongo and Benin, Africans fought to end the trade in human beings once they understood its full impact on their own societies. Enslaved people resisted in numerous shipboard revolts, or by simply taking their own lives at sea rather than submit to bondage.

In most of the New World plantation societies, the average remaining lifespan of trafficked Black people was reckoned at seven years or less. In 1751, an English planter on Antigua summed up the prevailing slaveowner sentiment this way: "It was cheaper to work slaves to the utmost, and by the little fare and hard usage, to wear them out before they become useless, and unable to do service; and then to buy new ones to fill up their places."

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I was lucky to be introduced to Africa while still a university student, first as an enthralled visitor during college breaks, and later living there for six years after graduation. I cut my teeth as a journalist writing about Africa and travelling widely, and I married a woman who had grown up in Ivory Coast, but whose family was from a nearby part of Ghana. I wasn't at all aware of it at the time, but it was within a few miles of her ancestral village that Europeans first stumbled upon the abundant sources of west African gold that they had been searching for feverishly for several decades in the 15th century. It was a discovery that changed the world.

I left west Africa to join the New York Times in 1986. Three years later, my first assignment as a foreign correspondent was to cover the Caribbean basin. Here were gathered some of the most important staging areas for subsequent global transformations. Specialists aside, few imagine that islands like Barbados and Jamaica were far more important in their day than were the English colonies that would become the United States. The nation now known as Haiti most of all. In the 18th century it became the richest colony in history, and in the 19th, by dint of its [slave population's successful revolution](#), Haiti rivalled the US in terms of its influence on the world, notably in helping fulfil the most fundamental Enlightenment value of all: ending slavery.

Now and then during my time in the Caribbean, I could see glimmers of this region's extraordinary role in our global narrative. One occasion, in the Dominican Republic, I stood knee-deep in seawater witnessing an archaeological dig that sought to identify a wreck from Columbus's first voyage. Another time, I hiked a verdant peak in northern Haiti where Henri Christophe, that country's early Black leader, built a formidable fortress, the [Citadelle Laferrière](#), arming it with 365 cannon to defend the country's hard-won independence from France. Other hints came when I wandered into the mountains and rainforests of Jamaica and Suriname, respectively, and was thrilled to be able to make myself understood speaking bits of Twi (the lingua franca of Ghana, which I had learned while courting my wife) as I spoke with the descendants of proud runaway slave communities known as [maroons](#). But back then, I still had no big picture in mind; like most correspondents, I was too busy following the news to pursue sweeping historical connections very far.



The Citadelle Laferrière in Haiti, built by the former slave and revolutionary leader Henri Christophe. Photograph: National Geographic/Getty Images

Even knowing the silence and enforced ignorance that surround the central contribution of Africa and Africans to the making of the modern world, I have often been surprised by just how difficult it can be to access some of the physical traces of this history, or to find local forms of remembrance that raise this African role to its proper dimension. I have seen this in many places that have shaped our common history, such as Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the publicly established sites of Atlantic memory are few. I saw it in [São Tomé](#), the island where the slave-plantation-complex model that would drive wealth creation in the North Atlantic for four centuries appeared for the first time, fully formed – a fact for which there is nary a plaque or commemoration.

My biggest surprise came in Barbados, whose slave-produced sugar, arguably more than any other place on earth, helped seal England's ascension in the 17th century. I visited the island not long ago, determined to find as many traces of this legacy as possible, only to discover how thoroughly they had been hidden or effaced. Among my top priorities was to visit one of the largest slave cemeteries anywhere in the hemisphere, which included the excavated remains of nearly 600 people. It took me several attempts just to find the cemetery, which had no signage from any public

road. Few local residents seemed aware of its historical importance, or even of its existence.

All I discovered when I drove down a bumpy dirt road, proceeding as far as I could until instinct told me to get out and walk, was a modest clearing alongside an active plantation whose cane had grown as tall as I am. There was a faded sign attached to a rusty iron post. It proclaimed the site to be part of something called “The Slave Route”, but it provided no further information. With the sun racing downward in the western sky, I paced about, snapped a few photographs, and then finally collected myself as the wind whistled through the cane. I tried mightily to conjure some sense of the horrors that had transpired nearby, and of the abundant wealth and pleasure that the sweat of the dead had procured for others.

But the most egregious forms of historical erasure do not involve an assortment of mostly small, former slave-trading or plantation societies scattered around the Atlantic Rim. The most important site of erasure, by far, has been the minds of people in the rich world. As I write these words, the US and some other North Atlantic communities, from Richmond, Virginia, to Bristol, England, have recently experienced extraordinary moments of iconoclasm. We have seen the [pulling down of statues](#) of people who were long perceived to be heroes of imperial and economic systems built on the violent exploitation of people extracted from Africa.

For these gestures to have more lasting meaning, an even bigger and more challenging task remains for us. It requires that we transform how we understand the history of the last six centuries and, specifically, of Africa’s central role in making possible nearly everything that is today familiar to us. This will involve rewriting school lessons about history just as much as it will require the reinvention of university curricula. It will challenge journalists to rethink the way we describe and explain the world we all inhabit. It will require all of us to re-examine what we know or think we know about how the present-day world was built, and to begin incorporating this new understanding into our everyday discussions.

In this task, we can no longer hide behind ignorance. Nearly a century ago, [WEB Du Bois](#) had already affirmed much of what we needed to know on

this topic. “It was black labour that established the modern world commerce, which began first as a commerce in the bodies of the slaves themselves,” he wrote. Now is the time to finally acknowledge this.

*Adapted from Born in Blackness: Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World, 1471 to the Second World War, by Howard W French, published by WW Norton & Co and available at [guardianbookshop.com](https://guardianbookshop.com)*

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## ‘A bit annoying’: Sydney businesses praise customers but admit vaccine checks can be trying



Sydney retail workers say some customers are producing physical copies of their vaccination certificate, but most have it on their phone and can access it easily. Photograph: Bianca de Marchi/AAP

[Mostafa Rachwani](#)

[@Rachwani91](#)

Tue 12 Oct 2021 03.30 EDT

The logistical challenges of having to check vaccine certificates for customers was dawning on businesses in [Sydney](#) as they experienced their second day out of lockdown.

In the western Sydney suburb of Parramatta, one of the 12 LGAs of concern during the peak of the latest outbreak, retailers were using a combination of

carefully placed barriers, security and rotating staff to check on customers before they enter.

“It’s an annoying add-on,” admitted Sheida, a manager at a fashion retailer in Parramatta, who did not want her full name used.

“I feel worse for the customers than the businesses, it’s such a hassle having to pull out your certificate in each store, as well as checking in.”

Sheida is one of the thousands of workers who have seen their job description change since greater Sydney emerged from lockdown on Monday for the vaccinated.

Shops, cafes, restaurants, pubs, gyms, hairdressers and stadiums now require people to show their vaccine certificates before entry, to confirm they are fully vaccinated.

Residents over 16 who are unvaccinated or cannot produce proof of their status are legally banned from those venues.

The New South Wales police commissioner, Mick Fuller, warned that officers would be on patrol across greater Sydney, enforcing the rules, and issuing \$1,000 fines for any breaches.

“If people think that we are not enforcing the health orders this week, they are mistaken. We want to be out there, particularly to help those small shops, the pubs, clubs and shopping centres,” he told Sunrise on Monday.

“I would ask that the premises owner or the person behind the counter call the police and make sure the police force respond to those calls..”

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Business owners and managers told the Guardian a majority of customers were following the rules, but said it had already become a hassle to ensure certificates were checked before entry.

“Most of the time, I have to ask each customer who enters myself,” Sheida said. She manages her store alone, meaning the responsibility comes down on her to ensure all customers are fully vaccinated.

“The customers have been nice about it, it’s just a bit of a hassle, for both sides. I always feel a bit guilty asking people, it’s so personal.

“I do it out of fear of a fine to be honest.”

George, a store manager at a men’s fashion retailer, told the Guardian it was “annoying” having to check on each customer and to ask them to produce a certificate.

“It is a bit annoying, but what can we do? This is a disease. But, I mean, is it my job to really ask people to show me their certificate?”

George manages the shop along with his coworker, and they alternate in checking on customers, but said he remained nervous about missing anyone.

“What if I’m in the fitting room, and someone walked in and we were busy? Some people walk in and walk out in half a minute, what do I do then?”

George said he had not had to deny anyone entry, but was anxious about having to do so.

Other retail workers in Parramatta revealed they had been forced to deny people entry, and it had been a difficult part of the job.

The staff, who asked to remain anonymous, said those denied entry cursed or tried to argue their way in, but eventually gave up and left.

Some customers were producing physical copies of their certificates, but most had it on their phones and could easily access it.

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Photograph: Tim Robberts/Stone RF

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Most retailers in Parramatta had also barricaded their entry in one way or another, with only some major retailers lacking someone checking the certificates at entry.

Roula Kantarakias, a manager at Michael Hill Jeweller, said she'd had to barricade the entire entry to the shop, and had instructed her staff to deal with each customer as they arrived.

"It just requires more resources to deal with," she said. "We closed up the entry so it's easier for us, rather than letting them all in, and potentially having to ask someone to leave.

"It's just easier for us to control the flow."

When asked if the new rules were affecting the business, Kantarakias said not yet, but the impact may be felt once the excitement at opening up died down.

"Obviously this time of year, people want to go out and spend. But yes, I do think it'll affect us a bit."

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## Coronavirus

# Explainer: why has the UK's vaccination rate slowed down?



Figures suggest the drop in vaccinations is largely due to slow uptake among younger people. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

*[Niamh McIntyre](#) and [Ashley Kirk](#)*

Tue 12 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

The UK has lost its place as Europe's vaccine leader in recent months as countries such as France, Italy and Spain have leap-frogged it in terms of the share of people who are fully vaccinated.

Throughout September, the UK was vaccinating an average of 1,461 people per million a day, much lower than the 3,925 being jabbed in Italy, 3,694 in France, 3,280 in Spain and 2,305 in Germany.

The UK's rate of vaccination was the fastest in Europe until the end of April, according to data from [Our World in Data](#). At that point, the UK had fully vaccinated more than one in five people (22.5%), compared with a maximum of 10.3% among Germany, France, Italy and Spain.

But the subsequent slow down in the UK's vaccine rollout meant it lost its place as Europe's leader in vaccination coverage in July.

Ten months after [the first coronavirus jab in the UK](#) was administered to 90-year-old Margaret Keenan at University hospital Coventry, the UK's vaccine coverage has stalled in recent weeks and stands at about 86% of those who are eligible for a jab.

Figures suggest this is largely due to slow uptake among younger people. There are still significant numbers of people under 40 unvaccinated, according to the latest data from Public [Health](#) England. Just 64% of those aged 18-29 were fully vaccinated as of 9 October compared with 96% of those in their 70s. For those aged 30-39, coverage was higher but still a long way off targets, with 77% second-dose uptake.

The increase in uptake among 18 to 29-year-olds has also slowed in recent weeks, PHE data shows. In the month to 9 September the second-dose rate increased by 26 percentage points, while in the most recent month the dial has only been shifted by 8 percentage points.

### [Chart showing vaccine coverage by age over time](#)

Increase in uptake was even slower among those aged 30 to 39, with coverage rising by just four percentage points from 77% in the month to 9 October.

Dr Kit Yates, senior lecturer in Mathematical Sciences at the University of Bath, said: "It's a common misconception that the UK's vaccination programme has allowed us to open up more successfully than other similar nations.

"By the beginning of October England had fully vaccinated about two-thirds of its population, which is much lower than countries like Portugal, Spain,

Denmark and Ireland. Part of the reason is that many other European countries vaccinated teenagers during the summer in time for the return to school, while the UK dithered over making the decision.”

After weeks of mounting political pressure, the UK’s chief medical officers agreed to extend jabs to children aged 12-15 in September, going against advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, which recommended such a move was unnecessary.

Martin McKee, professor of European public health at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said: “The delay in extending [the vaccine] to 12 to 15-year-olds was a serious mistake and contributed to mixed messaging. So [did] the failure to expose and confront the networks promoting anti-vaccine messaging, some regrettably with links to certain politicians.”

“As winter approaches there is an urgent need to reinvigorate the push to vaccinate as many people as possible.”

[A study for the ONS recently found](#) those aged 16-29 were the most vaccine-hesitant age group, with 8% reporting vaccine hesitancy compared with 5% and 2% in those aged 30 to 49 years, and over-50s respectively.

The data also shows less than one in five 16 and 17-year-olds have been fully vaccinated, however this age group has only been eligible to receive a vaccine since August. Nearly two-thirds of 16 and 17-year-olds have received their first dose.

More than 330,000 younger children – or 12% of 12-15-year-olds – have now received their first jabs. The government has recently begun publishing data for this age group after the education secretary, Nadhim Zahawi, [came under fire](#) for admitting he did not know how many younger children had been vaccinated.

Uptake also varies widely by geography, with those in deprived parts of England much less likely to be vaccinated. While a number of areas have fully vaccinated all those aged 16+, in Harehills South in Leeds just 40% of adults have had both jabs.

Harehills South is among the most deprived 10% of areas in England, according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation, which measures relative poverty. Of the 10 areas with the lowest coverage, seven were also categorised as the most deprived in England.

### [A chart showing vaccine coverage by Indices of Multiple Deprivation deciles](#)

Several deprived parts of Birmingham were also among areas with the lowest second-dose rates, including Ladywood-Summer Hill, Hockley & Jewellery Quarter and Winson Green & Gib Heath, which all had around half of their 16+ population fully jabbed.

Looking at the whole country, nine in 10 adults in the most affluent 10th of areas are fully vaccinated, compared with just 71% in the poorest 10th.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/12/explainer-why-has-the-uks-vaccination-rate-slowed-down>

[Texas](#)

## **Texas governor bars vaccine mandates in state as deaths approach 70,000**



Greg Abbott, who was previously vaccinated and also later tested positive for Covid-19, said in his order that ‘vaccines are strongly encouraged for those eligible to receive one, but must always be voluntary for Texans’.  
Photograph: Bob Daemmrich/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

*Associated Press*

Mon 11 Oct 2021 20.13 EDT

The Texas governor, [Greg Abbott](#), issued an executive order Monday to prohibit any entity, including private business, from enforcing a Covid-19 vaccine mandate on workers and called on state lawmakers to pass a similar ban into law.

The move comes as the Biden administration is to issue rules requiring employers with more than 100 workers to be vaccinated or test weekly for

the coronavirus. Several major companies, including Texas-based American Airlines and Southwest Airlines, have said they would abide by the federal mandate.

“No entity in Texas can compel receipt of a Covid-19 vaccine by any individual, including an employee or a consumer, who objects to such vaccination for any reason of personal conscience, based on a religious belief, or for medical reasons, including prior recovery from Covid-19,” Abbott wrote in his order.

Abbott, who was previously vaccinated and also later tested positive for Covid-19, said in his order that “vaccines are strongly encouraged for those eligible to receive one, but must always be voluntary for Texans”.

Abbott previously barred vaccine mandates by state and local government agencies, but until now had let private companies make their own rules for their workers. It was not immediately clear if Abbott’s latest executive order would face a quick court challenge.

Abbott’s new order also carries political implications. The two-term Republican is facing pressure from two candidates in next year’s GOP primary, former state senator Don Huffines and former Florida congressman and Texas state party chairman Allen West, have attacked Abbott’s Coovid-19 policies and have strongly opposed vaccine mandates.

“He knows which the way the wind is blowing. He knows conservative Republican voters are tired of the vaccine mandates and tired of him being a failed leader,” Huffines tweeted.

West announced this week he tested positive for Covid-19 and has been hospitalized, but also tweeted he remains opposed to vaccine mandates.

Texas has seen a recent decrease in new Covid-19 cases and hospitalizations. But a rising death toll from the recent surge caused by the delta variant has the state rapidly approaching 67,000 total fatalities since the pandemic began in 2020.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/oct/11/texas-covid-vaccine-mandates-greg-abott>

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## 2021.10.12 - Opinion

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- Don't blame women for our low birthrate – we need to fix our precarious society
- Individuals cannot solve vaccine inequality. If you're offered a booster, take it
- As Britain descends into chaos, the government has put its out-of-office on

[\*\*OpinionConservatives\*\*](#)

# **Britain is learning the hard way that migration can't be turned on or off like a tap**

[Daniel Trilling](#)



European lorries parked in Dover, last month. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

Tue 12 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

The Conservatives are trying to draw a new dividing line in British politics: wages versus immigration. Boris Johnson used his speech at last week's conference to position the Tories as the [party of higher wages](#), promising a departure from the UK's old economic model, which he claimed used "uncontrolled" immigration as "an excuse for failure to invest in people, in skills and in the equipment or machinery they need to do their jobs".

The logic is brutal but simple. Johnson is attempting to recast a supply chain crisis caused partly by shortages of [HGV drivers](#) and [agricultural workers](#) as temporary pain in the service of long-term gain. In this new telling, the shortages will wean the UK off low-skilled immigrant labour that once came via EU freedom of movement, thus fulfilling one of the key promises of Brexit.

By contrast, Johnson suggests, his Labour opponents are stuck in the past. Lighting on Keir Starmer's [recent suggestion](#) that the government's temporary visa scheme for HGV drivers should be expanded to 100,000 places, the Conservatives have formulated a new attack line. "Vote Tory to get a pay rise, vote Labour to see mass immigration drive your wages down," as one government source [recently put it](#).

Yet to frame the debate in this way gives the false impression that migration is something that can be turned on and off like a tap. For the Conservatives, this framing may well be convenient, but in the absence of a wider economic strategy, it is unlikely to provide any lasting solution to the problem of UK wages, which are [largely flat](#) since the global financial crisis of 2008. For Labour, it risks trapping the party in political territory where only the right's arguments are likely to succeed.

Britain is currently discovering that immigration is as much a question of human relationships as it is of economic need. Over the past few weeks, lorry drivers from EU countries have been patiently explaining to journalists why they find the government's new three-month visa scheme, intended to keep shelves stocked and petrol pumps full in the runup to Christmas, unattractive. "No thank you, Mr Prime Minister," said Jakub Pajka, a Polish driver, [to Reuters in Warsaw](#). "No drivers want to move for only three months just to make it easier for the British to organise their holidays."

EU workers' [lack of enthusiasm](#) for the new visa scheme – there are currently 5,000 places for HGV drivers, and another 5,500 for poultry workers – was greeted with a fair deal of surprise in the Westminster bubble, but it really shouldn't have been. As Yva Alexandrova – an expert on migration policy and author of [Here to Stay](#), a forthcoming book on the experiences of eastern European immigrants in the UK – told me: "It was

quite insulting in a way. It's like, we've kicked you out [but] now we need you for three months and then we're going to kick you out again."

In British debates about immigration, it is often assumed that people from less wealthy countries would jump at the chance to come to the UK, but this isn't always the case. EU citizens, for instance, may prefer to look for work in member states where they enjoy greater rights – and beyond that, demographic changes mean that countries in central and eastern Europe that once provided a source of westward migration are themselves now looking for workers. (Romania, for instance, is facing its own [shortage of fruit pickers](#).)

To some, this would suggest that migration policy needs to be carefully and sensitively planned. The government's response, however, has been to display the same sink-or-swim attitude to the country at large that it shows to recipients of universal credit. Just as cutting £20 a week from people's benefits is supposed to force them back into work – or, if they are in work, into higher paying jobs – the government is now telling us that this autumn's disruption is a necessary step on the way to a higher-wage economy, no matter the misery it causes. Yet even on its own terms, the plan is unlikely to work.

Lower immigration does not automatically result in higher wages, any more than growth and productivity can be raised without a serious plan for investment in education and skills. Johnson's government has a poor track record in understanding these issues. It has largely been forgotten in the wake of the pandemic, but when the issue of labour shortages previously dominated the news, in February 2020, home secretary Priti Patel [attracted derision](#) for claiming that the UK's 8.5 million "economically inactive" people could fill staff shortages – even though many of them are students, carers, sick or retired.

The UK's post-Brexit immigration system has been sold to us as one in which the country can cherrypick the world's "[brightest and best](#)" (a euphemism for the rich and highly educated), and dispense with the services of the less affluent. In reality, immigration will continue to play a significant role in sustaining those occupations deemed "low-skilled", but which in fact are essential to the functioning of the country. Through political choice, as

the past few weeks have shown, this will be done in a haphazard way, and under conditions – such as visas that tie workers to a particular employer – that make it more likely people will be exploited.

Already, a seasonal visa scheme for agricultural workers [has been expanded](#) from 2,500 places in 2019 to 30,000 this year, mostly recruiting people from Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Moldova and elsewhere. A report [published in March this year](#) by the charity Focus on Labour Exploitation warns that the scheme carries risks of human trafficking and forced labour. The petty cruelty of the UK's immigration system – making it hard for many immigrants to access healthcare or benefits – further limits the options of people at risk.

Regardless, Johnson's new stance is a potentially powerful campaigning tool. With some senior Tories [reportedly tiring](#) of the right's "war on woke", the promise of higher wages as a reward for Brexit may be an effective way to hold together the coalition of voters the Conservatives were able to rally in 2019.

If Labour wants to escape the trap laid for it, then it needs to come up with a response that rejects playing different groups of workers off against one another. It has recently endorsed [sectoral collective bargaining](#) – industry-wide agreements between trade unions and employers which are used in countries such as the Netherlands to set minimum standards on pay and conditions. A policy like this has a genuine chance of improving things for workers, but it needs to be part of a wider conversation about power: what would give people genuine control over their working lives, no matter their immigration status?

- Daniel Trilling is the author of *Lights in the Distance: Exile and Refuge at the Borders of Europe* and *Bloody Nasty People: the Rise of Britain's Far Right*

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# Don't blame women for our low birthrate – we need to fix our precarious society

[Zoe Williams](#)





‘The birthrate last year was 1.53 for each woman, down from 2 in 2000.’  
(Posed by a model.) Photograph: skaman306/Getty Images

Tue 12 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

Dorothy Byrne, the president of Murray Edwards College at the University of Cambridge, has warned students [not to leave it too late to have a baby](#). It is an all-female college, of course, otherwise this would make no sense: no one would ever tell a man when to sire young, because it would be considered intrusive and unnecessary. Also, [Charlie Chaplin](#), huh? Remember how old he was when he had his youngest? What a top dog.

This was a huge preoccupation in the 90s – that women were going to forget about having kids until it was too late. Then, as now, it was rooted in fears about the birthrate and the average age of first-time mothers. (The birthrate last year was 1.53 for each woman, down from 2 in 2000, which is striking.) It used to drive me mad, partly because it is the most incredible pain to be a fertile woman. People are constantly in your grill, telling you what decisions you should make and when, what to eat and drink, whom to shag. It is completely draining.

Mainly, though, I divined a broad-brush conservative agenda underneath it all – a message that emancipation was all very well, but it should have hard

limits. When it came to the societally useful bits of a woman – her reproductive apparatus – those should remain in the control of doctors, clerics and freelancing moralisers.

Then things went quiet for a couple of decades. Perhaps it was felt that the message had landed, that most women knew their fertility window wasn't infinite and so didn't need to be told every single morning. Or perhaps it merely became apparent that people would make their own decisions and the thundering “well-meant” advice wasn't cutting through.

Seeing it resurface, I can't help thinking how different the context is. Last century, we were putting off parenthood in order to smash glass ceilings and whatnot. Now, for at least five – if not 10 – years, the evidence has been that young people are delaying starting a family until they can afford it. This precariousness, driven in large part by housing insecurity, is only getting worse. Their elders should think twice before they deliver family planning tips; they are more likely to create young radicals than young mothers.

Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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

## Individuals cannot solve vaccine inequality. If you're offered a booster, take it

[Andrew Pollard](#)



‘More than 95% of people in low-income countries are yet to receive even their first dose.’ A nurse prepares a Covid vaccine in Kampala, Uganda, September 2021. Photograph: Luke Dray/Getty Images

Tue 12 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

Looking back to spring last year, many people were predicting that we wouldn't have any vaccines available by now, and even the most optimistic didn't predict that [6.5bn doses](#) of highly effective Covid-19 vaccines would have been administered globally. Indeed, it is truly amazing that, within the next month, 50% of the world's population will have received at least one dose of a vaccine to protect them against Covid-19, with 20-30 million more

doses being given globally every day. To make and deliver so many doses in 2021 reflects astonishing global endeavours by manufacturing facility staff, those involved in the logistics of getting the vaccines to clinics, and an army of healthcare workers and vaccinators.

But this remarkable progress is tempered by an uncomfortable moral and ethical predicament: simply put, the doses still aren't shared fairly. That global 50% vaccinated figure hides gross inequity. More than 95% of people in low-income countries are yet to receive even their first dose, compared with over 60% in high income countries who have received at least one dose. We are protected, but they are not. To effect change in global mortality this year, it isn't enough to promise to share doses – [1bn doses in total](#) were pledged in June by the G7 – we have to actually give the doses to those at risk of dying, and stick the needles in before they meet the virus. Tragically, [a million deaths](#) have occurred since that G7 pledge according to Our World in Data.

Supply is constrained still, though the substantial increase in Covax distribution (340m doses so far) over the past few months is a reason for hope that the situation [is improving](#). There are more donations and supply is going up. It will get better. But for many hundreds of thousands of people, it won't be soon enough.

To make matters worse, many countries have announced or have started booster programmes, adding to the moral jeopardy the risk that first doses will be further delayed. While the case for boosters is [not yet agreed](#) by all scientists, it is possible that boosters may bring some additional gain for some people, even though the potential benefit for most individuals is small. Most double-jabbed people are so highly protected against severe disease that a booster dose won't improve protection much.

But there is a much stronger case, and there is no doubt among scientists, that first doses are lifesaving for the unvaccinated. Unvaccinated people should be prioritised wherever they live. With this in mind, the director general of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, called for a [moratorium on boosters](#) till next year as booster doses will take

away from the global supply and deepen the equity problem. For equity, the case is not so focused on whether to boost, but when. It is all about timing.

The “to boost or not to boost” moral dilemma is not in the purview of individual citizens who ponder whether to roll up their sleeve when offered a booster by a vaccine clinic this week. A dose that is in the vaccine clinic fridge (or freezer) cannot be redirected to someone else in another country, because the regulatory hurdles and shelf-life simply make redistribution of this dose not practical. Redistribution has to happen prior to the release of vaccine doses to the national health system. A protest against vaccination at individual level will be misdirected and risks wasting these precious doses. If you are asked to roll up your sleeve, then you should do so.

The equity issues of the pandemic have brought into sharp relief the conflict between national expediency and noble foreign policy. There is no easy answer. Governments must take an uncomfortable look at the human, political and financial cost of inequity in this pandemic, and develop principles for future pandemic preparedness that embrace a set of values that include a spotlight on moral and ethical integrity.

There is clear evidence of a failure by governments to serve the world’s poor. But, for now, individuals must make the most of the vaccines that their healthcare systems make available to them.

- Professor Sir Andrew Pollard is chief investigator of the Oxford Covid-19 vaccine trials, and is director of the Oxford Vaccine Group

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[\*\*Opinion\*\*](#)[\*\*Supply chain crisis\*\*](#)

## **As Britain descends into chaos, the government has put its out-of-office on**

[\*\*Rachel Reeves\*\*](#)



Business secretary Kwasi Kwarteng, seen being interviewed by Andrew Marr for the BBC, has been accused of lying by the Treasury. Photograph: Jeff Overs/BBC/PA

Tue 12 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

Every day there is new disruption, and working people are paying the price.

Problems with labour shortages – created by Conservative failures to plan ahead and invest in skills – have left queues at petrol stations and gaps on supermarket shelves. Prices are going up, universal credit has been cut, energy bills will rise again, and soon people will feel another hit from the Tories' [national insurance increase](#) and the [inevitable council tax hikes](#) down the line.

Businesses are starting to feel the hit, too. Farmers are being forced to incinerate thousands of pigs due to a national shortage of skilled butchers, while a huge shortfall of HGV drivers is taking workers from other sectors. All of this could have been foreseen by a competent government. And this chaos won't magically sort itself out. But what is the Conservative response? To raise taxes for working people, and endlessly campaign instead of seriously govern – they're more bothered about their image than solutions to the issues facing the country.

Boris Johnson knows he got it wrong, and now he's bluffing. He stuck his head in the sand for weeks, saying supply-chain problems didn't exist. As working people started to feel the hit of soaring prices, he came to the table not with a solution, but a fantasy that this was [his grand strategy all along](#). If Johnson and Rishi Sunak want people to believe they sat down together and planned for fuel shortages and sparser supermarket shelves, they are confessing responsibility for economic sabotage.

The truth is that the [Conservatives](#) know that their claim that this is all part of a plan to raise wages is a sham. Shortages are leading to higher prices in the shops, so any pay rises are immediately cancelled out, even if you are lucky enough to have one. The government even admitted it themselves, saying current wage figures are a "statistical anomaly" and are not a "real-life" basis for whether people will feel better off.

And they're not just out of touch with the public – they're also out of touch with each other. Over the weekend we saw the business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, say, "I'm working very closely with Rishi Sunak, the chancellor," on talking to companies about tackling the energy crisis. This was followed by a scathing [slap-down from Sunak's Treasury](#): "This is not the first time the BEIS secretary has made things up in interviews," it said. "To be crystal clear the Treasury are not involved in any talks."

This is as surprising as it is short-sighted: why *isn't* the Treasury in talks with BEIS to help vital industries during this chaos? Such is the level of industry alarm at the state of Britain's supply chains, there are even reports of plans to ration certain supermarket goods in coming months.

Rather than get a grip, the prime minister has gone on holiday again, the chancellor is missing in action and the business secretary is playing fast and loose with the truth. How on earth are those people who are nervously watching their bills tick up meant to feel? In the teeth of a crisis of its own making, the government has put its out-of-office on – it so clearly has not got a plan. No fuel? Blame the public. Empty supermarket shelves? Blame businesses. [Labour](#) shortages? Blame the workers. It's always someone else's fault.

The government is learning that it is not enough to “get Brexit done”. You need a plan to make Brexit work. Despite having more than five years since the referendum, the Conservatives have not bothered to tackle skills shortages that were inevitably going to occur post-Brexit.

Now, the idea that the party of shortages – the Conservative party – will somehow improve working people’s living standards is desperately deluded. If the Conservatives wanted to lift people’s wages and living standards, they’d do as Labour has committed to, and raise the minimum wage to at least £10 an hour and end its discriminatory age rates this month. Instead, they have chosen to hit businesses and workers again and again.

It doesn’t have to be this way. They didn’t need to bring in a jobs tax or cut the uplift in universal credit at the worst possible time, two moves Labour has strongly fought against. Labour would keep the wheels of our economy turning by getting enough HGV drivers on the roads – driving up standards and urgently training up people here in Britain, and in the meantime drawing on short-term help from overseas workers to ensure shelves remained stocked and fuel flowed.

We’d grow our economy. With apprentice places historically low under this government, Labour would boost investment in skills and the jobs of the future through our plan to buy, make and sell more in Britain. We’d improve work immediately with fair pay agreements to lift wages and conditions, and make disgraceful practices such as [fire and rehire](#) illegal.

We should be using our recovery to get ahead – to show global leadership on climate, to get rocket boosters on our economy, to spend our money wisely and on the everyday things that matter to people’s lives. And we would back

our British businesses when they need it – not abandon them and resort to a blame-game between government departments. Labour has a plan to do all that.

As the Tories sit back with their fingers in their ears, we'll continue to offer solutions that show how we will make our economy more secure and create the jobs of the future we need.

- Rachel Reeves is shadow chancellor of the exchequer
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## 2021.10.12 - Around the world

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## [Construction industry](#)

# Cement makers across world pledge large cut in emissions by 2030



Bags of cement are loaded on a barge at a dock on the Red River in Hanoi, Vietnam. Photograph: Nhac Nguyen/AFP/Getty Images

*[Fiona Harvey](#) Environment correspondent*

Tue 12 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

Cement makers around the world have pledged to cut their greenhouse gas emissions by up to a quarter this decade and reach net zero by 2050, in a move they said would make a major difference to the prospects for the [Cop26 climate summit](#).

The [industry](#) is responsible for about 7%-8% of global carbon dioxide emissions, the equivalent of more than any individual country except China and the US. Cutting emissions from cement production is difficult, because the chemical processes used to make it and concrete release CO<sub>2</sub>.

The Global Cement and Concrete Association (GCCA), which represents 40 of the world's biggest producers and about 80% of the industry outside China, made the pledge on Tuesday. Several major Chinese cement and concrete companies, which account for about 20% of China's market, have also joined.

Companies have been working for more than a decade on ways to change the chemical processes and use different materials, as well as becoming more energy efficient. Tuesday's pledge marks the first time that major producers have made a public commitment on the climate.

Thomas Guillot, the chief executive of the GCCA, said: "This is an important milestone – it's a big thing. Concrete is the second most used material in the world after water. We are the first sector to do this as a joint commitment, but I hope there will be many more and that will inspire many more others to do the same."

Guillot said the pledge was not dependent on actions from government, though the industry would prefer countries to set a carbon price and to develop policies to accelerate the process. The companies have pledged to reach net zero without offsetting emissions, a controversial practice that some in other industries plan to rely on to meet net zero targets.

The cuts in emissions this decade would be made using existing technologies, but the industry's roadmap for 2030 to 2050 would require about one-third of the reductions to come from the use of carbon capture and storage technology, which is not yet in widespread commercial use.

Adair Turner, the chair of the Energy Transitions Commission thinktank, said the move was a "huge step forward" given the nature of the industry. "Everybody recognises cement and concrete production is one of the hardest economic activities to decarbonise. Achieving that will require better building design and construction, multiple forms of efficiency improvement, and carbon capture and storage," said the peer.

Mike Childs, head of science at Friends of the Earth, said companies should also be trying to use alternatives to concrete. "Switching to cleaner fuels such as electricity or hydrogen produced by renewable energy can cut

carbon [from cement], and innovation may one day help address process emissions. So, while these measures are good, they are not the whole answer. We need to reduce cement usage as well as make the process cleaner. One way of doing that is by switching to timber,” he said.

Cutting emissions from cement and concrete production by up to 25% by 2030 is estimated to avoid about 5bn tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. Emissions from the industry would be expected to rise over this period, as the market for both materials is forecast to nearly double from \$333bn (£245bn) in 2020 to about \$645bn in 2030.

Nick Molho, the executive director of the [Aldersgate Group](#) of companies with an interest in sustainability, said the announcement was significant. “Coming from an industry that is energy intensive and complex to decarbonise, today’s commitment shows there is growing momentum across the global business community to deliver on the 1.5C target in the Paris agreement,” he said.

Molho called for the UK government to do more to encourage emissions cuts from industry. “The government’s net zero strategy must grow the market for green cement through the introduction of product standards and public procurement criteria that mandate greater resource efficiency and lower embodied emissions.

“As cement plants often operate away from large industrial clusters, government policy should also support cement plants to connect to the carbon capture and hydrogen infrastructure that will be developed in these clusters.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from [https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/oct/12/cement-makers-across-world-pledge-large-cut-in-emissions-by-2030-co2-netzero-2050](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/oct/12/cement-makers-across-world-pledge-large-cut-in-emissions-by-2030-co2-net-zero-2050)

[Brazil](#)

## **Bolsonaro must be held criminally responsible for assault on the Amazon, say activists**



Bolsonaro is a former paratrooper who has presided over what critics call a historic onslaught against the Amazon and its indigenous inhabitants.  
Photograph: Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters

*[Tom Phillips](#) in Rio de Janeiro*

Tue 12 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

The Brazilian president [Jair Bolsonaro](#) must be held criminally responsible for a “ruthless” [assault on the Amazon](#) that has exacerbated the climate emergency and imperilled humanity’s very survival, activists have argued in a petition to the [international criminal court](#).

In a [submission to The Hague-based tribunal](#) on Tuesday, legal and scientific experts said the “mass deforestation” unfolding under the rightwing

nationalist posed a clear and present danger to Brazil, and to the world.

“There is a substantial body of evidence demonstrating the commission of ongoing crimes against humanity within [Brazil](#) which requires immediate investigation and prosecution,” the 284-page petition said, pointing to soaring Amazon devastation under Bolsonaro.

“However, the impact … extends far beyond the widespread, ongoing loss of life and deep suffering inflicted upon local communities. State-of-the-art climate science demonstrates that consequent fatalities, devastation and insecurity will occur on a far greater scale regionally and globally, long into the future, through the attributable links between the rapid acceleration in deforestation, its contribution to climate change, and the frequency and intensification of extreme weather events,” it went on.

“Given the multilateral breadth and depth of its impact, the nature of the attack … constitutes criminality of the very highest order,” the plaintiffs said, adding: “The ICC now has the opportunity – indeed the ICC has the duty – to act.”

Bolsonaro, a former paratrooper who has presided over what critics call a historic onslaught against the Amazon and its indigenous inhabitants, has been the subject of [three previous ICC complaints](#) since he took office in early 2019.

In August, campaigners asked the court to investigate Brazil’s president for the alleged genocide of its indigenous people, partly as a result of [Bolsonaro’s anti-scientific response to the Covid pandemic](#). “He needs to pay for all the violence and destruction he is leading,” the indigenous leader Sônia Guajajara [said](#) at the time.

Johannes Wesemann, the founder of AllRise, the Vienna-based environmental litigation group behind the latest ICC complaint – the fourth against Brazil’s president – said it sought to add an international dimension to Bolsonaro’s alleged offences by exposing their impact on global heating.

Wesemann said: “The government under Bolsonaro directly and indirectly facilitates and thus accelerates the destruction of the Brazilian Amazon. This obviously in turn leads to deliberate and uncontrolled environmental destruction of the ecosystem with catastrophic consequences at a local level ... but also with a serious consequence on a global scale.”

“Today, we know emissions attributed to the Bolsonaro administration will cause over 180,000 deaths globally until 2100,” Wesemann said, citing a submission from climatologists including Dr Friederike Otto, one of the lead authors of [the recent IPCC report](#) on the climate emergency.

“Our sole purpose ... is to ensure that state, private sector and political actors such as [Jair Bolsonaro](#), and past and present members of his government, who intentionally enable such destruction are held legally accountable,” Wesemann said, noting how mass deforestation had a “serious and scientifically proven impact on the global climate – and thus on our long-term survival.”

The Brazilian presidency did not respond to a request for comment on the accusations against Bolsonaro. In recent months Brazil’s government has launched [a crackdown on environmental criminals in the Amazon](#), which critics suspect is designed to convince the international community it is cleaning up its environmental act ahead of the [Cop26 climate summit](#).

Last week Bolsonaro’s recently appointed environment minister, Joaquim Leite, told reporters their country wanted to use the Glasgow meeting to show the world Brazil could be “part of the solution” to the climate crisis and was committed to cutting emissions.

But environmentalists are unconvinced by the pre-Cop rhetorical softening.

“What’s the solution?,” Suely Araújo, the former head of Brazil’s environmental agency Ibama, asked in a recent interview. “Change the president.”

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## Animals

### **Elk with car tyre stuck around its neck for two years is free at last**



The first sighting of the elk in 2019. Colorado wildlife officers removed the tyre that had been stuck around a bull elk's neck for over two years.  
Photograph: CPW NE Region

*Staff and agencies*

Mon 11 Oct 2021 20.44 EDT

Wildlife officials in Colorado say an elusive elk that wandered the hills with a car tyre around his neck for at least two years has at last been freed.

The four-and-a-half-year-old, 270kg (600lb) bull elk was spotted near Pine Junction, south-west of Denver, on Saturday evening and tranquillised, according to [Colorado](#) Parks and Wildlife. It was the fourth attempt wildlife officers had made in the past week to try to capture and help him.

Officers with the agency had to cut off the elk's five-point antlers to remove the object because they couldn't slice through the steel in the bead of the tyre.

"We would have preferred to cut the tyre and leave the antlers for his rutting activity, but the situation was dynamic and we had to just get the tyre off in any way possible," officer Scott Murdoch said.

The saga of the bull elk with a tire around its neck is over. Thanks to the residents just south of Pine Junction on CR 126 for reporting its location, wildlife officers were able to free it of that tire Saturday.

Story: <https://t.co/WHfkfPuAck>

□'s courtesy of Pat Hemstreet <pic.twitter.com/OcnceuZrpk>

— CPW NE Region (@CPW\_NE) [October 11, 2021](#)

Murdoch and fellow officer Dawson Swanson estimated the elk was freed of about 16kg (35lb) with the removal of the tire, the antlers and debris inside the tyre.

"I am just grateful to be able to work in a community that values our state's wildlife resource," Swanson said. "I was able to quickly respond to a report from a local resident regarding a recent sighting of this bull elk in their neighbourhood. I was able to locate the bull in question along with a herd of about 40 other elk."

Swanson and Murdoch were surprised to see its neck was in good condition after two years of chafing. "The hair was rubbed off a little bit, there was one small open wound maybe the size of a nickel or quarter, but other than that it looked really good," Murdoch said. "I was actually quite shocked to see how good it looked."

The rutting season played a role in helping officers find him. Murdoch said: "The rut definitely made him more visible. There was a bigger bull in the group he was with on Saturday, but he is getting to be a decent size bull."

Wildlife officers first spotted the elk in July 2019 while conducting a population survey for Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep and mountain goats in the Mount Evans Wilderness. He has since spent the past couple of years travelling back and forth between Park and Jefferson counties.

They say they have seen deer, elk, moose, bears and other wildlife become entangled in a number of items, including swing sets, hammocks, clotheslines, decorative or holiday lighting, furniture, tomato cages, chicken feeders, laundry baskets, soccer goals and volleyball nets.

*With Associated Press*

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/12/elk-with-car-tyre-stuck-around-its-neck-for-two-years-is-free-at-last>

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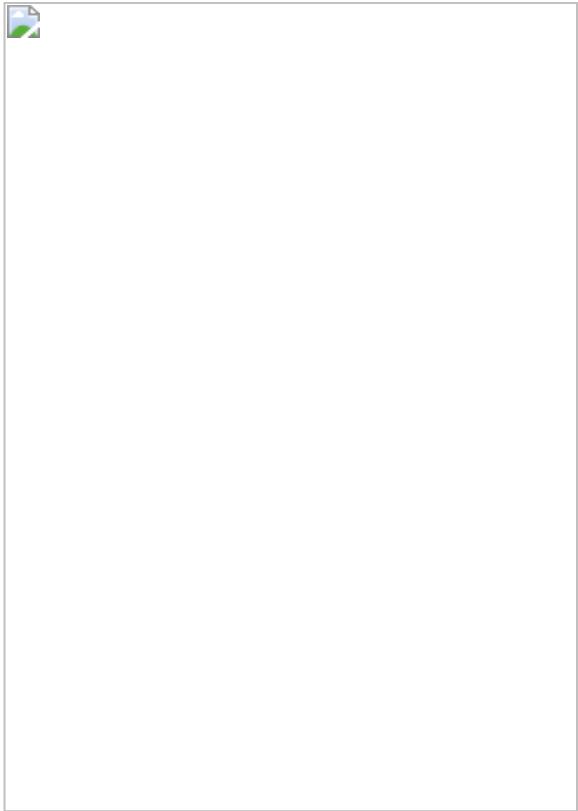
[America's dirty divideMichigan](#)

## Michigan tells majority-Black city not to drink tap water amid lead crisis



A volunteer prepares gallons of water to be distributed to residents at the Harbor Harvest Urban Ministries in Benton Harbor, Michigan. Photograph: Jim Vondruska/The Guardian

Supported by



### About this content

*Eric Lutz and Erin McCormick*

Tue 12 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

Residents of a majority-Black city in [Michigan](#) have been advised by the state not to use tap water for drinking, bathing, or cooking “out of an abundance of caution” owing to lead contamination.

For at least three years, residents of Benton Harbor, Michigan, have been suffering from lead-contaminated water with what experts describe as insufficient intervention from state and local officials.

This month, the state promised to expand free water distribution in the city and reaffirmed its commitment to comply with federal lead regulations. Activists, who say Benton Harbor's poor water quality is a sign of environmental injustice and have been calling on the state to take action for years, say these are steps in the right direction, but more remains to be done.

In 2018, Benton Harbor was found to have lead contamination of 22 parts per billion (ppb) in its tap water – far higher than the federal action level of 15 ppb and higher, even, than nearby Flint at the height of its water crisis. No level of lead exposure is considered safe; the federal action level is a national standard set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to determine which water systems must take action to lower its lead levels.

Local activists welcome these steps after three years of questioning whether the city's water was safe, and organizing bottled water drives for the community themselves.

"I believe the action ... shows they're ready to do something," said the Rev Edward Pinkney, head of the Benton Harbor Community [Water](#) Council, a significant step in the right direction. "That's a good thing."



A volunteer prepares gallons of water to be distributed to residents at the Harbor Harvest Urban Ministries in Benton Harbor. Photograph: Jim

Vondruska/The Guardian

But Pinkney said far more was needed to address the crisis in full, and called on Governor Gretchen Whitmer to declare a state of emergency – both as a means to accelerate the timeline to replace the city’s water lines and to make clearer to those residents unaware of the emergency that the water is unsafe to use.

“You need to call for a state of emergency right now,” Pinkney said. “That will get the attention of the people in Benton Harbor.” He also believed the phrasing of the state’s latest measures failed to capture the scale of the crisis. “Tell the people that the water is unsafe,” Pinkney said. “Just tell them.”

The Natural Resources Defense Council, along with Pinkney’s group and several other organizations, filed an [emergency appeal](#) to the EPA on 9 September demanding federal action. In a 5 October response, the EPA told the petitioners that it was now working with the state, county, and city to “ensure there is prompt action to address the community’s public health needs”.

The federal involvement has triggered a more assertive response from the state, according to Cyndi Roper, Michigan senior policy advocate for the NRDC.

“It is clear that EPA’s involvement is driving this forward,” Roper said. “The state has not responded to this for three years in a way that protected residents. It wasn’t until EPA headquarters got involved that we have begun to see an urgent response.”

Following the petition in September, the Michigan department of environment, Great Lakes and energy (EGLE) said it would work with other agencies at the state, county and municipal level to bring water filters to every home in Benton Harbor and to provide bottled water to residents – measures that were previously spearheaded by Pinkney’s group and volunteers. Whitmer, meanwhile, signed a budget allotting \$10m to replace lead lines in the city.

Last week, EGLE and the Michigan department of health and human services (HHS) announced an expanded water distribution program and a filter effectiveness study, and discouraged residents from using their tap water. “Protecting the health and safety of Benton Harbor residents is a top priority,” Elizabeth Hertel, director of the Michigan HHS, said in a statement. “We’ve listened to the community’s concerns and out of an abundance of caution, we are recommending that residents use bottled water for cooking, drinking and brushing teeth.”

Lynn Sutfin, public relations officer at the state HHS, said in a statement that “many efforts have been taking place since 2018” from the state and Berrien county, and that the recent actions have been “part of an accelerated, across-the-board effort” to reduce the risk to residents while lead service lines are replaced by the city.

Roper, of the NRDC, said that the recent moves were encouraging, but that officials should follow residents’ lead and speed up the timetable for replacing the city’s 6,000 service lines.

“We definitely think it’s a step in the right direction,” Roper told the Guardian. “But we still have a long way to go.”



Residents line up to receive clean drinking water at Harbor Harvest Urban Ministries in Benton Harbor. Photograph: Jim Vondruska/The Guardian

Replacing the lead lines will be a challenge.

Under a proposal from Whitmer, the pipes would be removed over the course of five years. But it's unclear how the project will be funded: the Republican-controlled Michigan legislature agreed to only half of the \$20m she said it would cost, and Joe Biden's infrastructure bills that put \$45bn in federal dollars toward replacing the nation's aging lead lines are currently stuck in a legislative impasse on Capitol Hill. Erik Olson, senior strategic director for health at the NRDC, expressed concern in a previous interview with the Guardian that any cuts to pipe removal funding in the final bills could come at the expense of disadvantaged communities like Benton Harbor.

Meanwhile, residents and their advocates say that the five-year timetable proposed by Whitmer is too long, and have been pushing for an accelerated pace, citing the speed with which the far-larger city of Newark, New Jersey, has moved to replace its lead pipes; since early 2019, it has removed [more than 20,000 service lines](#). Pinkney has called for the Benton Harbor lines to be replaced in one to two years. "We can't wait no longer," Pinkney said.

But only about 100 are [slated](#) to be removed by next spring. That means residents will probably have to rely on stopgap measures for the foreseeable future, unless something changes.

"Just think about if your children were living in Benton Harbor – would you allow this?" Pinkney said. "Look at Benton Harbor, and do the right thing."

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[Oil](#)

## Rotting Red Sea oil tanker could leave 8m people without water



Houthi rebels have prevented the UN from inspecting the ship and three-way talks with the Yemeni government have stalled. Photograph: AP

*[Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic editor*

Mon 11 Oct 2021 11.16 EDT

The impact of an oil spill in the Red Sea from a tanker that is rotting in the water could be far wider than anticipated, with 8 million people losing access to running water and Yemen's Red Sea fishing stock destroyed within three weeks.

Negotiations are under way to offload the estimated 1.1m barrels of crude oil that remains onboard the FSO Safer, which has been deteriorating by the month since it was abandoned in 2017. The vessel contains four times the

amount of oil released by the [Exxon Valdez](#) in the Gulf of Alaska in 1989, and a spill is considered increasingly probable.

The oil will spread well beyond Yemen and cause environmental havoc affecting Saudi Arabia, Eritrea and Djibouti, according to the latest modelling, which is unlike previous studies because it examines the impact more than a week after the spill.

Three-way talks between the Houthi rebels, the UN-recognised government of Yemen and the UN have foundered, despite repeated warnings, including at the UN security council, of the impact if the tanker explodes, breaks up or starts leaking. UN officials have been unable to secure guarantees to maintain the vessel, including its rotting hull, which is now overseen by a crew of just seven.

The modelling is published in the journal Nature Sustainability on Monday and showed the spill was likely to lead to the closure of the Red Sea ports of Hodeidah and Salif within two weeks, threatening delivery of 200,000 tonnes of fuel for Yemen, the equivalent to 38% of the national fuel requirement. Fuel prices are likely to rise by as much as 80%, and the absence of fuel for water pumps will result in 8 million Yemenis being deprived of running water. As many as 2 million will lose access to water if desalination plants in the region become polluted.

### [locator](#)

Although half of the oil is anticipated to evaporate on the sea within 24 hours, the rest will within six to 10 days reach Yemen's western coastline, and ports further south in three weeks.

The numbers in need of food assistance vary from 5.7 million to 8.4 million people, depending on whether the spill reaches ports in the south, such as Aden. The estimates depend on the season when the the spill occurs and the extent of the oil loss.

The spill will threaten 66.5%-85.2% of Yemen's Red Sea fisheries within one week, and 93.5%-100% of those fisheries within three weeks, depending

on the season.

The effects of air pollution from a spill, including increased risk of cardiovascular and respiratory hospitalisations, range across 11.3m person-days for a slow-release winter spill to 19.5m person-days for a fast-release summer spill.

Red Sea coral reefs, which have been studied for their unique resilience to seawater warming, would also be threatened.

The report in Nature Sustainability warns: “The spill could hinder global trade through the vital Bab el-Mandeb strait, 29 km wide at its narrowest point, through which 10% of the global shipping trade passes. Exclusion zones created for clean-up could reroute traffic, and shipments will be delayed as ships potentially exposed to oil will require cleaning”

It adds: “The possibility of a spill is increasingly likely. The visibly dilapidated Safer is single-hulled, meaning a breach will cause the onboard oil to spill directly into the sea. Water entered the engine room in May 2020 through a seawater-pipe leak, and the vessel’s fire extinguishing system is non-operational. A spill could occur due to a leak or combustion.

“A leak could arise through continued deterioration of the vessel’s hull or by breach of the hull due to inclement weather; combustion could occur through build-up of volatile gases aboard the vessel or direct attack on the vessel.”

The UN has been seeking Houthi permission to inspect the ship, but the Houthis want undertakings that the vessel will also be repaired, an exercise that requires money the UN does not have available.

## Headlines thursday 14 october 2021

- [Norway bow and arrow attack Suspect showed signs of radicalisation, say police](#)
- [Kongsberg killings What we know so far](#)
- [Brexit Boris Johnson promised to tear up NI protocol, says DUP MP Ian Paisley](#)
- [Live NHS faces ‘exceptionally difficult’ winter even without Covid spikes, says Chris Whitty](#)
- [Sajid Javid Health secretary sorry for Covid losses but says he has not read Commons report in detail](#)

[Norway](#)

## **Norway bow-and-arrow attack ‘appears to be act of terror’**

01:07

'I saw a man walking with an arrow in his back': witnesses recall Norway attack – video

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

Thu 14 Oct 2021 13.52 EDT

A bow-and-arrow attack [that left five people dead](#) in Norway appears to have been an “act of terror”, but the motives of the Danish suspect will only be firmly established after a full investigation, the Norwegian security service has said.

Police said the suspect, who they identified as 37-year-old Espen Andersen Bråthen, was a Muslim convert with previous criminal convictions who had previously been flagged as a possible Islamic extremist. Andersen Bråthen would be undergoing a psychiatric evaluation, police said.

Four women and one man aged between 50 and 70 were killed and three other people, including an off-duty police officer, were injured in the attack on Wednesday evening in the town of Kongsberg, 41 miles (66km) southwest of Oslo.

[Graphic](#)

“The events in Kongsberg currently appear to be an act of terror, but the investigation ... will determine in closer detail what the acts were motivated by,” the intelligence service PST [said in a statement](#). Andersen Bråthen was “known to PST from before”, the agency added, but did not provide further details.

The Norwegian police chief Ole Bredrup Sæverud said the suspect was a convert to Islam and there were “previously fears linked to his radicalisation”, but added that establishing motive would be “complicated … and will take time”.

Norway’s public broadcaster NRK [reported](#) that Andersen Bråthen had several previous convictions for robbery and drugs offences, and was sentenced last year to a six-month restraining order banning him from approaching two close family members after he threatened to kill one of them.

As an unnamed relative described him to the Danish newspaper Ekstra Bladet as mentally ill, adding that the family had been receiving threats for several years, Norwegian authorities were facing mounting questions about how the attack was allowed to happen given the suspect’s history.

Sæverud said Andersen Bråthen had confessed to the attack, the deadliest in [Norway](#) in a decade, during overnight questioning. “We are investigating among other things to determine whether this was a terrorist attack,” he said.

Several of the victims were fired on in a Coop supermarket, and police said the attacker used other weapons as well as a bow and arrows. Two of the wounded survivors were in intensive care, officials said, while a third sought medical help independently.

## [Map](#)

Andersen Bråthen is being held on preliminary charges, one step short of being formally charged, and is believed to have acted alone. Police had previously followed up on reports of his possible radicalisation but had no reports this year, Sæverud said.

Jonas Gahr Støre, who took office as Norway’s prime minister on Thursday, called the attack “horrific”. Responding to the PST’s statement, he said: “If that is the conclusion, it underlines how serious the challenge and the threat is, and how important it is that society is prepared to be able to handle this.”

Støre's centre-left government includes two survivors from Norway's deadliest attack, the killing of 77 people by the far-right extremist Anders Behring Breivik [in 2011](#). Tonje Brenna, 33, the new education minister, and Jan Christian Vestre, 35, the trade and industry minister, survived Breivik's rampage on the island of Utøya.

"Now that these talented young politicians are carrying this past with them, I feel that we have taken another important step and I am very proud of that," Støre said.

Since Breivik's massacre, Norway has experienced one other far-right attack, carried out by Philip Manshaus, a self-proclaimed neo-Nazi, who after murdering his stepsister [opened fire into a mosque](#) outside Oslo in 2019 before being overpowered by worshippers. No one was seriously injured at the mosque.

Norway's royal family expressed their sympathies after Wednesday's attack. King Harald said in a letter to the Kongsberg mayor: "The rest of the nation stands with you."



Police officers cordon off the scene in Kongsberg. Photograph: Hakon Mosvold Larsen/NTB/AFP/Getty Images

Sæverud said the killings happened after an initial contact between police and the shooter shortly after 6.15pm on Wednesday. “The officers were shot at with arrows and lost contact with the perpetrator, who escaped,” he told [NRK](#). “After that there were several reports at various addresses that were followed up, and police launched a major search operation across a large area. We subsequently came across several injured people, and the man was arrested at 6.47pm.”

Local media reported that Andersen Bråthen was eventually detained on the town’s Gamlebrua Bridge, and quoted witnesses as saying that the main square near the Coop was sealed off and a house in the neighbourhood searched for more than two hours. One witness said they saw a woman being stabbed.



An arrow left in a wall after the attack in Kongsberg, Norway. Photograph: Hakon Mosvold Larsen/AP

Andersen Bråthen is being held in a police cell in the nearby town of Drammen and is due to go before a judge on Friday for a custody hearing, his lawyer said.

“He is cooperating and is giving detailed statements regarding this event,” the lawyer, Fredrik Neumann, told NRK, adding that his client was “deeply

affected”. He declined to comment further beyond saying the suspect’s mother was Danish, but it was not known whether he had ever lived in [Denmark](#).

A woman who witnessed some of the attack, Hansine, told Norway’s TV2 she heard a disturbance, then saw a woman taking cover and “a man standing on the corner with arrows in a quiver on his shoulder and a bow in his hand”.

“Afterwards, I saw people running for their lives. One of them was a woman holding a child by the hand,” she said. Pictures in Norwegian media showed a black arrow sticking out of a wall and what appeared to be competition-grade arrows lying on the ground.

Another witness, Thomas Nilsen, [told NRK](#) he “thought it was war, it was so intense”. After what he at first thought was a “loud quarrel”, he said he heard “a scream I have never heard before. It was a scream that burned into the soul. I will never forget that. I perceived it as a death cry,” he said.

This article was amended on 15 October 2021 to add further detail about the crimes committed by Philip Manshaus.

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## Norway

# Norway bow and arrow attack: what we know so far about Kongsberg killings



Police officers investigate at the scene after a bow and arrow attack killed five people in Norway. Photograph: NTB/Reuters

*Guardian staff with agencies*

Thu 14 Oct 2021 09.04 EDT

## What we know:

- A Danish man in his 30s is in custody after [five people were killed and two others injured](#) in a series of assaults using a bow and arrows in Norway on Wednesday evening.
- The country's intelligence service [said](#) the attack appeared to be an "act of terror".

- The suspect is a Muslim convert who had previously been flagged as having been radicalised, [according to police](#), but establishing motive would be “complicated … and will take time”.
- The suspect, who police say has confessed, is being held on preliminary charges, one step short of being formally charged. He is believed to have acted alone.
- The attack took place at around 6.15pm local time in the suspect’s home town of Kongsberg, about 50 miles (80km) south-west of the capital, Oslo.
- Several of the victims were fired on in a Coop supermarket in the town, and the attacker used other weapons as well as a bow and arrows.
- The suspect was arrested after what police called a “confrontation” about 20 minutes after the attack began.
- Police said there were several crime scenes spread across a large area of the town.
- Norway’s national police directorate said it had ordered officers nationwide to carry firearms.
- The acting prime minister, Erna Solberg, described reports of the attack as “horrifying”. The prime minister-designate, Jonas Gahr Støre, who is expected to take office on Thursday, called the assault “a cruel and brutal act”.
- The death toll was the worst of any attack in Norway since 2011, when the far-right extremist [Anders Behring Breivik](#) killed 77 people, most of them teenagers at a youth camp.

## [Norway map](#)

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**Brexit**

## Boris Johnson promised to tear up NI protocol, says DUP MP Ian Paisley



Ian Paisley told Newsnight he believed that ‘the government didn’t really want this to happen to Northern Ireland and they took a short-term bet’.  
Photograph: Liam McBurney/PA

*Lisa O'Carroll Brexit correspondent  
@lisaocarroll*

Thu 14 Oct 2021 09.40 EDT

Boris Johnson gave personal assurances to the [Northern Ireland](#) MP Ian Paisley that he would commit to “tearing up” the Brexit protocol that is now the centre of a major row between the UK and the EU, it has been claimed.

The Democratic Unionist party MP made the comments on BBC’s Newsnight just hours after the prime minister’s former adviser Dominic

Cummings claimed it was always the intention to sign the withdrawal agreement in January 2020 but “ditch bits” they did not like in the protocol.

“Boris Johnson did tell me personally that he would, after agreeing to the protocol, he would sign up to changing that protocol and indeed tearing it up, that this was just for the semantics,” Paisley said.

Referring to Cummings’ claims that they needed to go to the country with a flawed deal to help with “whacking [Jeremy] Corbyn” in the election of 2019, Paisley added: “That comment has been verified by another source much closer to Boris Johnson within his own government.

“So, the fact of the matter is, I do believe, that the government didn’t really want this to happen to Northern Ireland and they took a short-term bet.”

The shadow international trade secretary, Emily Thornberry, said it was “shameful” for the UK to start playing “fast and loose” with other countries in regard to international law.

## Quick Guide

### **What is the Northern Ireland protocol?**

Show

Within the UK’s Brexit withdrawal agreement with the EU, the Northern Ireland protocol lays out arrangements that effectively keep Northern Ireland in the single market, drawing a customs border between it and the rest of the UK, with checks on goods passing from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

That means there is no requirement for checks across the UK's land border with Ireland. The 1998 Northern Ireland peace deal requires keeping the land border open and that there be no new infrastructure such as cameras and border posts.

However, both the British government and the European Union recognise that the implementation of this deal has triggered the disruption of supply

chains, increased costs and reduced choice for consumers in Northern Ireland.

The rules means that goods such as milk and eggs have to be inspected when they arrive in Northern Ireland from mainland Britain, while some produce, such as chilled meats, cannot be imported at all. This is because the EU does not want to risk them entering the single market over the land border and then being transported on.

## What is article 16?

Article 16 is an emergency brake in the Irish protocol, that allows either side to take unilateral action if the protocol is causing “serious economic, societal or environmental difficulties that are liable to persist”, or diversion of trade. Serious difficulties are not defined, giving both sides leeway for interpretation.

This would launch a process defined in the treaty as “consultations … with a view to finding a commonly acceptable solution”. Article 16 is meant to be a temporary timeout, not an escape hatch.

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

“I think we step down as a country, we don’t have the same international reputation, if our word isn’t our bond,” she told Sky News.

“I think it’s appalling that people would even think of representing our country as signing up to an agreement knowing that they weren’t going to implement it – I think it’s appalling.”

“Boris Johnson did tell me personally… after agreeing to the protocol, he would sign up to changing that protocol and indeed tearing it up”

DUP MP Ian Paisley Jr tells [#Newsnight](#) that before the 2019 election the PM wanted to change the NI protocol [@nicholaswatt](#) reports □ [pic.twitter.com/QyCqEdY2ea](https://pic.twitter.com/QyCqEdY2ea)

— BBC Newsnight (@BBCNewsnight) [October 13, 2021](#)

Newsnight reported that the reputed exchange between Johnson and Paisley was said to have happened before a key vote on [Brexit](#) on 22 October 2019.

At the time, Downing Street felt democracy in the country was being subverted by a proposed law to stop a no-deal Brexit happening. That law, labelled “[the surrender act](#)” by Brexiters, was recently cited by the Brexit minister, David Frost, in a speech to the Conservative party conference.

“Of course we wanted to negotiate something better. If it had not been for the madness of the surrender act we could have done so. We worried right from the start, the protocol could not take the strain,” said Lord Frost, although at no stage did he say the government entered into the deal with the intention of renegotiating it soon after.

The row over whether the government acted in good faith or not when it signed up to the protocol has caused “alarm” in Dublin but comes on the eve of a potential breakthrough on the issue.

On Wednesday the EU unveiled proposals to do away with [more than 80% of the checks](#) on goods and food, something Paisley said looked like a “significant” climbdown but did not go far enough as it did not also offer to scrap the role of the European court of justice.

One possible compromise emerging on the ECJ is to adopt the same dispute mechanism as in the EU-Swiss treaty.

Anton Spisak, a trade expert at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, said: “Under the Swiss treaty, the independent arbitration panel resolves all disputes as a default arbiter. But when questions about EU rules are asked, the ECJ has to offer its view. The independent panel is the one making the ultimate decision, but it has to take the views of the ECJ into account,” he said.

Spisak believes this would be a “credible landing zone” and would make the protocol look more like a “standard international treaty”.

After being briefed on the EU proposals by Maroš Šefčovič, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, the DUP leader, said its “persistent pressing” of the case for changes to the protocol had “paid dividends” but that the planned changes fell short of his complete demands.

The Sinn Féin president, [Mary Lou McDonald](#), told RTÉ’s News at One the DUP did not represent the majority opinion in Northern Ireland and the protocol was needed to protect the interests of people across the island of Ireland.

She added: “People have to decide do they want a stable environment ... or do they want a dog’s dinner and chaos?”

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

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

# **Javid's GP rescue plan will fail to 'turn the tide', says former Tory health secretary Jeremy Hunt – as it happened**

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**Sajid Javid**

## **Javid sorry for Covid losses but says he has not read Commons report in detail**



Sajid Javid said he was ‘not in a position to look back at every decision made’, and that this was best left to the upcoming public inquiry.  
Photograph: Matt Dunham/AP

*[Rachel Hall](#)*

*[@rachela\\_hall](#)*

Thu 14 Oct 2021 04.55 EDT

The health secretary has said he is sorry for the losses that have occurred due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but fell short of apologising for the government’s decision to delay lockdown last March.

Sajid Javid’s comments came in response to the publication on Tuesday of a damning health select committee report on lessons learned from the

pandemic, which found the government's management of the outbreak was [one of the worst public health failures](#) in British history.

Asked on BBC Radio 4's Today programme whether he regretted pressuring the government to prioritise the economy over introducing lockdown, Javid said: "I don't think I got it wrong based on the information I had at the time, but ... I was out of the government when decisions were made."

Javid, who was a backbencher at the time of the first lockdown, added: "I do think when governments make decisions should they be thinking beyond a single department and thinking about the wider interests of society and the public."

He said he had not read the report in detail, but accepted "there are lessons to learn from this period for the UK government and for governments across the world".

He welcomed the report as an important means of providing parliamentary scrutiny, but said he was "not in a position to look back at every decision made", and that this was best left to the upcoming public inquiry.

While he would not apologise for the government's handling of the pandemic, he said: "I am sorry for anyone that's been hurt throughout this pandemic and especially those people who lost loved ones, brothers, sisters, their mum and dad, close friends, and also those people who're still suffering with long Covid."

Javid's appearance coincided with the publication of a new government and NHS action plan, which will [give GPs in England £250m](#) to improve their services but only if they increase the number of patients being seen face-to-face.

Javid said he did not expect all surgeries to apply for the additional funding, if they feel they can cope with their patient load and do not feel the need to increase their opening hours.

He acknowledged there were unlikely to be enough locum [GPs](#) available to meet demand, but that clinics could instead hire additional physiotherapists

or nurses to free up time for GPs.

“This is about the here and now, especially over the winter. This funding will buy more capacity, not just from GPs,” he said.

“We’ve had feedback from a number of GPs both directly to my department and to the [NHS](#) that if they have more funding they can buy in more hours and support, and that will increase capacity.”

The plan also outlines new monthly data starting next spring, which will show what proportion of each surgery’s appointments occurred in person or virtually, a move GPs have described as a “name and shame” exercise.

Javid defended the publication of data as a way to provide “more transparency and accountability”. He added that it was a crucial component of plans for “levelling up healthcare”, which would address disparities in health outcomes between regions. “We need information to find out what’s working,” he said.

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## 2021.10.14 - Spotlight

- [Environment The climate disaster is here](#)
- ['Insufficient and very defensive' How Nick Clegg became the fall guy for Facebook's failures](#)
- [Isn't it good, Swedish plywood The miraculous eco-town with a 20-storey wooden skyscraper](#)
- [How to expose corruption, vice and incompetence By those who have](#)

# The climate disaster is here

Earth is already becoming unlivable. Will governments act to stop this disaster from getting worse?

by [Oliver Milman](#), [Andrew Witherspoon](#), [Rita Liu](#), and [Alvin Chang](#)

by [Oliver Milman](#), [Andrew Witherspoon](#), [Rita Liu](#), and [Alvin Chang](#)

Thu 14 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

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The enormous, unprecedented pain and turmoil caused by the climate crisis is often discussed alongside what can seem like surprisingly small temperature increases – 1.5C or 2C hotter than it was in the era just before the car replaced the horse and cart.

These temperature thresholds will again be the focus of upcoming UN climate talks at the COP26 summit in Scotland as countries variously dawdle or scramble to avert climate catastrophe. But the single digit numbers obscure huge ramifications at stake. “We have built a civilization based on a world that doesn’t exist anymore,” as Katharine Hayhoe, a climate scientist at Texas Tech University and chief scientist at the Nature Conservancy, puts it.

The world has already heated up by around 1.2C, on average, since the preindustrial era, pushing humanity beyond almost all historical boundaries. Cranking up the temperature of the entire globe this much within little more than a century is, in fact, extraordinary, with the oceans alone absorbing the [heat equivalent](#) of five Hiroshima atomic bombs dropping into the water every second.

## **When global temperatures are projected to hit key benchmarks this century**

### **Average global surface temperature relative to a 1850-1900 baseline**

Worst-case scenario

An unlikely pathway where emissions  
are not mitigated

Intermediate

A pathway where emissions start declining  
around 2040

Best-case

An unlikely pathway where emissions start  
declining now and global temperatures  
peak at +1.8C

Projected  
to increase  
by +1.5C  
+2.7F

2021

2050

2080

11 years

9 years

In 6

+2.0C

+3.6F

In 20

to 31 years

+2.5C

+4.5F

In 32

to 58

years

+3.0C

+5.4F

In 43 years

at the earliest

Worst-case scenario

An unlikely pathway where emissions are not mitigated

Intermediate

A pathway where emissions start declining around 2040

Best-case

An unlikely pathway where emissions start declining now

and global temperatures peak at +1.8C

Projected

to increase

by +1. 5C

+2.7F

2021

2050

2080

11 years

In 6

to 9 years

+2.0C

+3.6F

In 20

to 31 years

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at the earliest

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+4.5F

In 32

to 58

years

+3.0C

+5.4F

In 43 years

at the earliest

Guardian graphic. Source: IPCC, 2021: Summary for Policymakers. Note: The IPCC scenarios used for best-case, intermediate and worst-case scenarios are SSP1-2.6, SSP2-4.5 and SSP5-8.5.

Until now, human civilization has operated within a narrow, stable band of temperature. Through the burning of fossil fuels, we have now unmoored ourselves from our past, as if we have transplanted ourselves onto another planet. The last time it was hotter than now was at least 125,000 years ago, while the atmosphere has more heat-trapping carbon dioxide in it than any time in the past two million years, perhaps more.

Since 1970, the Earth's temperature has raced upwards faster than in any comparable period. The oceans have heated up at a rate not seen in at least 11,000 years. "We are conducting an unprecedented experiment with our planet," said Hayhoe. "The temperature has only moved a few tenths of a degree for us until now, just small wiggles in the road. But now we are hitting a curve we've never seen before."

No one is entirely sure how this horrifying experiment will end but humans like defined goals and so, in the 2015 Paris climate agreement, nearly 200 countries agreed to limit the global temperature rise to "well below" 2C, with an aspirational goal to keep it to 1.5C. The latter target was fought for by smaller, poorer nations, aware that an existential threat of unlivable heatwaves, floods and drought hinged upon this ostensibly small increment. "The difference between 1.5C and 2C is a death sentence for the Maldives," said Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, president of the country, to world leaders at the United Nations in September.

There is no huge chasm after a 1.49C rise, we are tumbling down a painful, worsening rocky slope rather than about to suddenly hit a sheer cliff edge – but by most standards the world's governments are currently failing to avert a grim fate. "We are on a catastrophic path," said António Guterres, secretary general of the UN. "We can either save our world or condemn humanity to a hellish future."

## Heatwaves

Earth's atmosphere, now saturated with emissions from human activity, is trapping warmth and leading to more frequent periods of extreme heat

- Oregon, US  
June 2021: A cooling shelter
- Yokohama, Japan  
July 2021: Staff sprinkles water to cool down patrons
- Seville, Spain  
August 2021: A billboard shows 47C (117F)
- Karachi, Pakistan  
September 2021: A zookeeper bathes an elephant

Photographs: Clockwise from top-left, Maranie Staab/Reuters, Yuichi Yamazaki/Getty Images, Rizwan Tabassum/AFP via Getty Images, Cristina Quicler/AFP via Getty Images

This year has provided bitter evidence that even current levels of warming are disastrous, with astounding floods in [Germany](#) and [China](#), Hades-like fires from [Canada](#) to [California](#) to [Greece](#) and rain, rather than snow, [falling for the first time](#) at the summit of a rapidly melting Greenland. “No amount of global warming can be considered safe and people are already dying from climate change,” said Amanda Maycock, an expert in climate dynamics at the University of Leeds.

A “heat dome” that pulverized previous temperature records in the US’s Pacific northwest in June, [killing](#) hundreds of people as well as a billion sea creatures [roasted alive in their shells off the coast](#), would’ve been “virtually impossible” if human activity hadn’t heated the planet, scientists have calculated, while the German floods were made [nine times more likely](#) by the climate crisis. “The fingerprint of climate change on recent extreme weather is quite clear,” said Michael Wehner, who specializes in climate attribution at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. “But even I am surprised by the number and scale of weather disasters in 2021.”

## Frequency and intensity of once-a-decade heatwave events

Global  
warming  
level

Increase in  
heatwave  
temperature

Heatwave  
frequency

Historical  
1850-1900

A once-a-decade event ...

-

... now happens  
2.8x a decade

+1.0C

Present

+1.2C

+1.5C

In 6-11 years

4.1x

+1.9C

+2.0C

About 30 years

5.6x

+2.6C

+4.0C

Unlikely this

century

9.4x

+5.1C

Global

warming

level

Increase in  
heatwave  
temperature

Heatwave  
frequency

Historical  
1850-1900

A once-a-decade event ...

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Global

warming

level

Increase in

heatwave

temperature

Heatwave

frequency

Historical

1850-1900

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Global  
warming  
level

Increase in  
heatwave  
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Heatwave  
frequency

Historical  
1850-1900

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+2.0C

About 30 years

5.6x

+2.6C

+4.0C

Unlikely this century

9.4x

+5.1C

Guardian graphic. Source: IPCC, 2021: Summary for Policymakers. Note: The projected year ranges for +1.5C scenario is using the mean projections for SSP12.6 and SSP5-8.5. The +2C and +4C scenarios use the mean projection for SSP2-4.5.

After a Covid-induced blip last year, greenhouse gas emissions have roared back in 2021, further dampening slim hopes that the world will keep within the 1.5C limit. “There’s a high chance we will get to 1.5C in the next decade,” said Joeri Rogelj, a climate scientist at Imperial College London.

For humans, a comfortably livable planet starts to spiral away the more it heats up. At 1.5C, about 14% of the world’s population will be hit by severe heatwaves [once every five years](#), with this number jumping to more than a third of the global population at 2C.

Beyond 1.5C, the heat in tropical regions of the world will [push societies to the limits](#), with stifling humidity preventing sweat from evaporating and making it difficult for people to cool down. Extreme heatwaves could make [parts of the Middle East](#) too hot for humans to endure, scientists have found, with rising temperatures also posing enormous risks for [China](#) and [India](#).

A severe heatwave historically expected once a decade will happen every other year [at 2C](#). “Something our great-grandparents maybe experienced once a lifetime will become a regular event,” said Rogelj. Globally, an extra 4.9 million people will die each year from extreme heat should the average temperature race beyond this point, [scientists have estimated](#).

At 2C warming, 99% of the world's coral reefs also start to dissolve away, essentially ending warm-water corals. Nearly one in 10 vertebrate animals and almost one in five plants will lose half of their habitat. Ecosystems spanning corals, wetlands, alpine areas and the Arctic “are set to die off” at this level of heating, according to Rogelj.

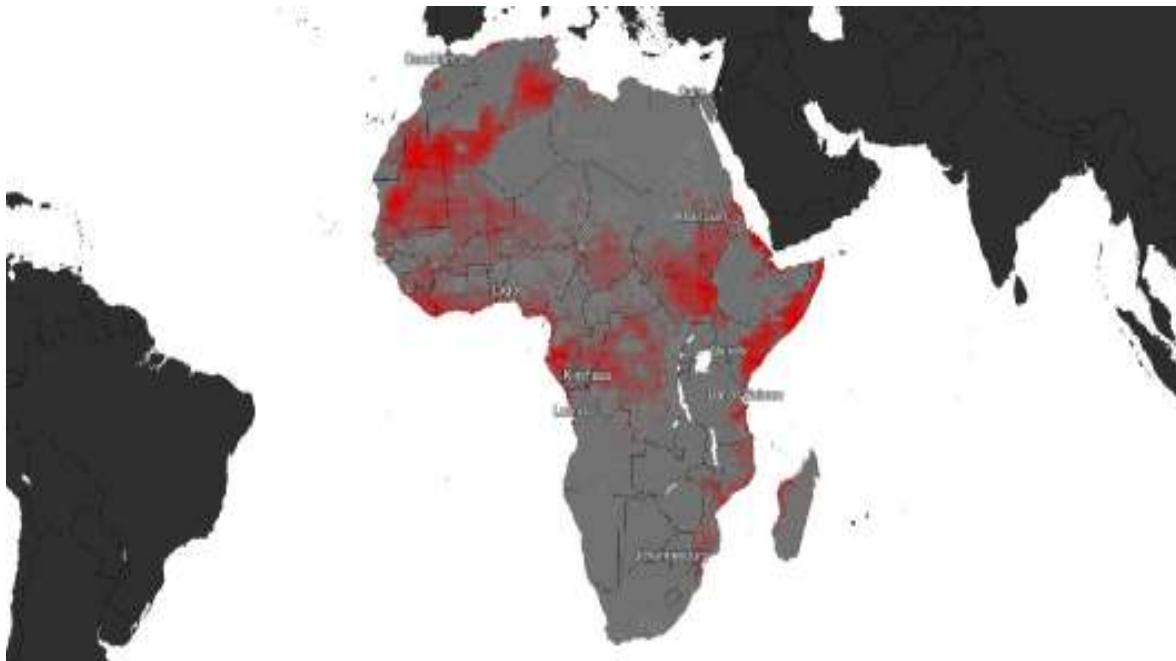
**Change in fraction of land annually exposed to heatwaves:**  
**Selected continent Globally Africa Asia Europe North America  
Oceania South America**

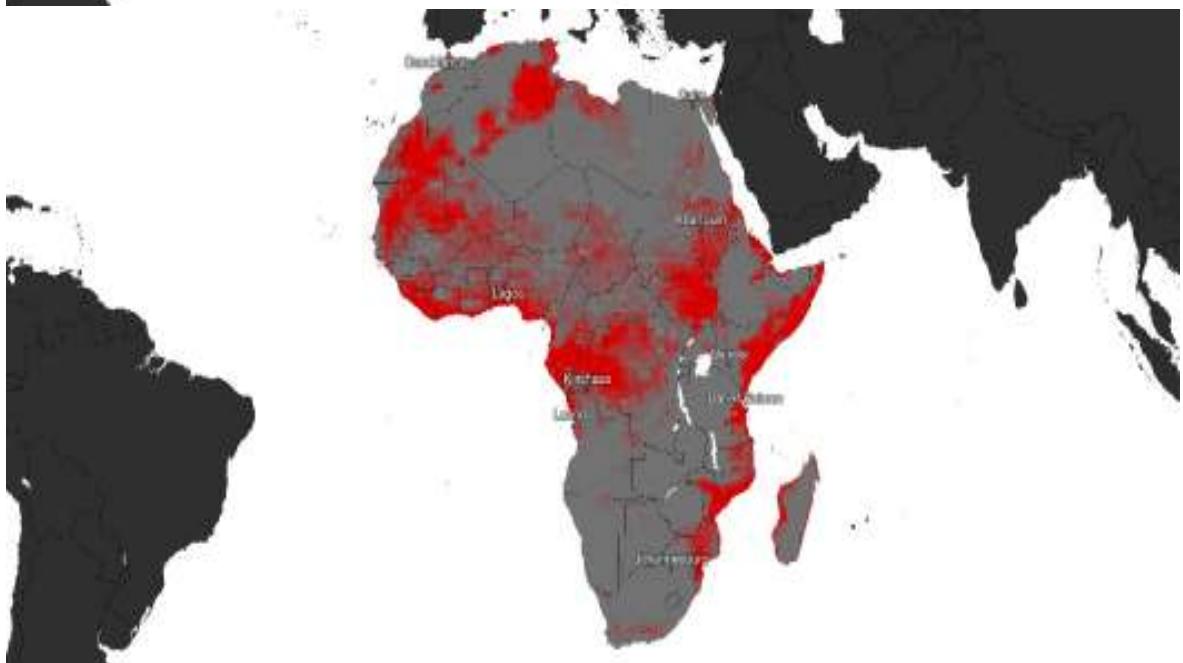
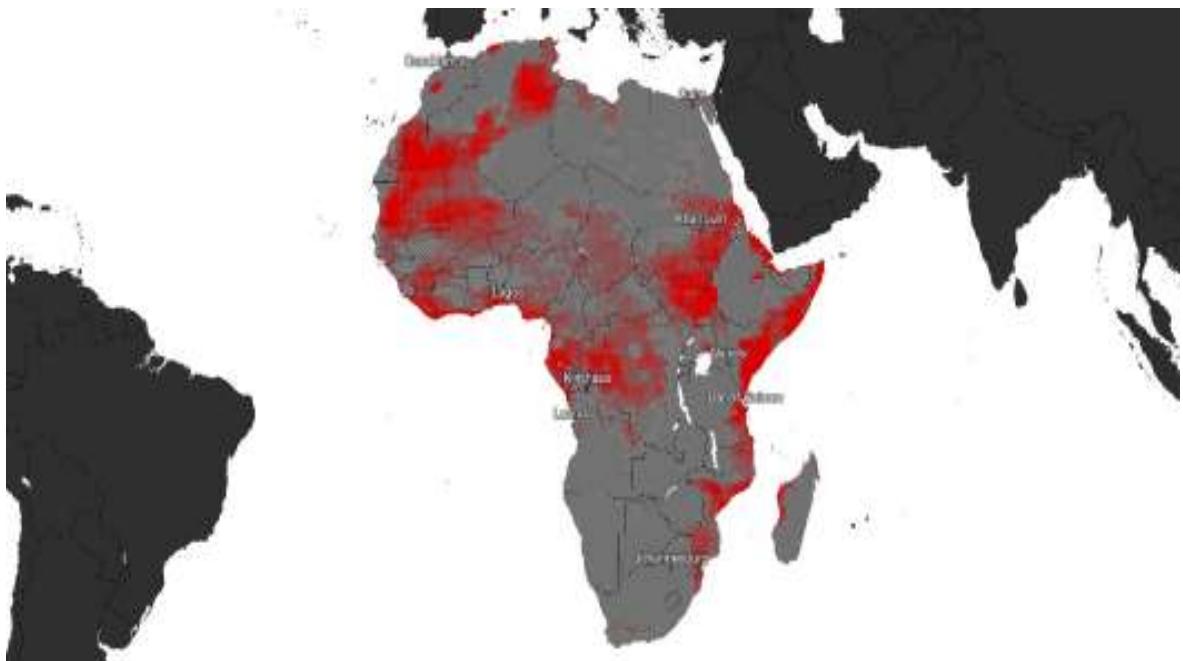
+1.5C

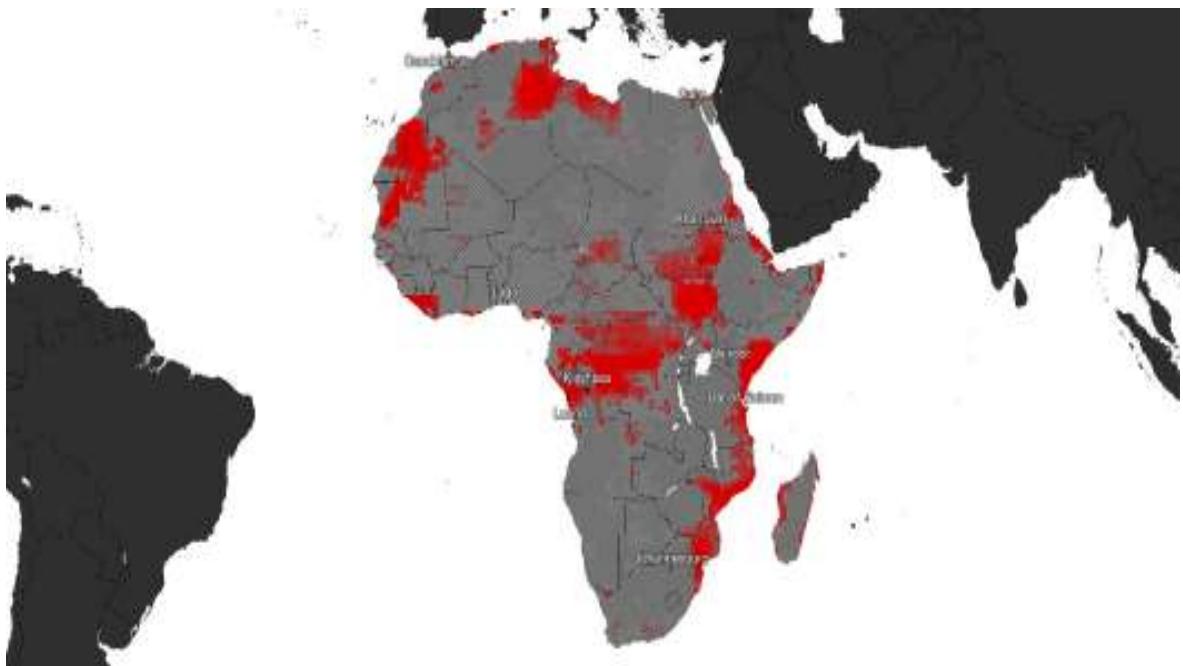
+2.7F

With our current policies

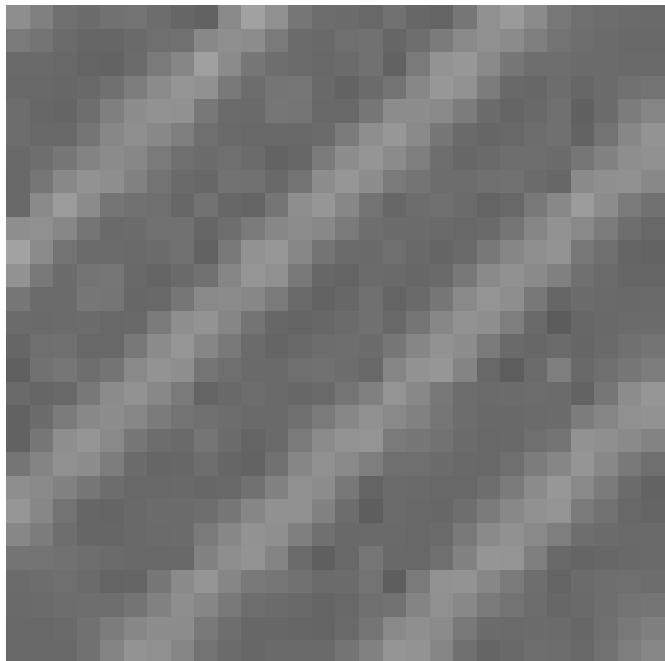
Around 2030s







Change from 1986-2006



Insufficient model agreement

Guardian graphic. Source: Climate Impact Explorer by Climate Analytics.  
Note: In the data, a heatwave is when a relative indicator based on air temperature and an absolute indicator based on the air temperature and relative humidity are projected to exceed exceptionally high values, according to an analysis of four climate models. When the two of the four

models don't agree, they are not visualized. The projected year ranges are the Climate Action Tracker current policies scenario.

+1.5C

+3.0C

## Floods

Earth's hotter climate is causing the atmosphere to hold more water, then releasing the water in the form of extreme precipitation events

- Kolkata, India  
September 2021: A woman exits a bus onto a flooded street
- Agen, France  
September 2021: Firefighters inspect a flooded street
- Al Khaburah, Oman  
October 2021: Flooded streets after Cyclone Shaheen
- Ayutthaya, Thailand  
October 2021: A boy walks through floodwaters

Photographs: Clockwise from top-left, Indranil Aditya/NurPhoto via Getty Images, Philippe Lopez/AFP via Getty Images, Jack Taylor/AFP via Getty Images, Oman News Agency via AP

Across the planet, people are set to be strafed by cascading storms, heatwaves, flooding and drought. Around 216 million people, mostly from developing countries, will be forced to flee these impacts by 2050 unless radical action is taken, the World Bank has estimated. As much as \$23tn is on track to be wiped from the global economy, potentially upending many more.

Some of the most dire impacts revolve around water – both the lack of it and inundation by it. Enormous floods, often fueled by abnormally heavy rainfall, have become a regular occurrence recently, not only in Germany and China but also from the US, where the Mississippi River spent most of 2019 in a state of flood, to the UK, which was hit by floods in 2020 after storms delivered the equivalent of one month of rain in 48 hours, to Sudan, where flooding wiped out more than 110,000 homes last year.

## **Frequency and intensity of once-a-decade heavy precipitation events**

Global

warming

level

Heavy

precipitation

frequency

Increase in

wetness

Historical

1850-1900

A once-a-decade event ...

-

... now happens

1.3x a decade

+1.0C

Present

+6.7%

+1.5C

In 6-11 years

1.5x

+10.5%

+2.0C

About

30 years

1.7x

14.0%

+4.0C

Unlikely this

century

2.7x

+30.2%

Global

warming

level

Heavy precipitation

frequency

Increase in

wetness

Historical

1850-1900

A once-a-decade event ...

-

+1.0C

Present

... now happens 1.3x a decade

+6.7%

+1.5C

In 6-11 years

1.5x

+10.5%

+2.0C

About 30 years

1.7x

14.0%

+4.0C

Unlikely this

century

2.7x

+30.2%

Global

warming

level

Heavy precipitation

frequency

Increase in

wetness

Historical

1850-1900

A once-a-decade event ...

-

+1.0C

Present

... now happens 1.3x a decade

+6.7%

+1.5C

In 6-11 years

1.5x

+10.5%

+2.0C

About 30 years

1.7x

14.0%

+4.0C

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Heavy precipitation

frequency

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wetness

Historical

1850-1900

A once-a-decade event ...

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+1.0C

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... now happens 1.3x a decade

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In 6-11 years

1.5x

+10.5%

+2.0C

About 30 years

1.7x

14.0%

+4.0C

Unlikely this

century

2.7x

+30.2%

Guardian graphic. Source: IPCC, 2021: Summary for Policymakers. Note: The projected year ranges for +1.5C scenario is using the mean projections for SSP1.2.6 and SSP5-8.5. The +2C and +4C scenarios use the mean projection for SSP2-4.5.

Meanwhile, in the past 20 years the aggregated level of terrestrial water available to humanity has dropped at a rate of 1cm per year, with more than five billion people [expected to have an inadequate water supply within the next three decades.](#)

At 3C of warming, sea level rise from melting glaciers and ocean heat will also provide torrents of unwelcome water to coastal cities, with places such as Miami, Shanghai and Bangladesh in danger of [becoming](#) largely marine environments. The frequency of heavy precipitation events, the sort that

soaked Germany and China, will start to climb, nearly doubling the historical norm once it heats up by 2C.

### **Change in the mass of precipitation:**

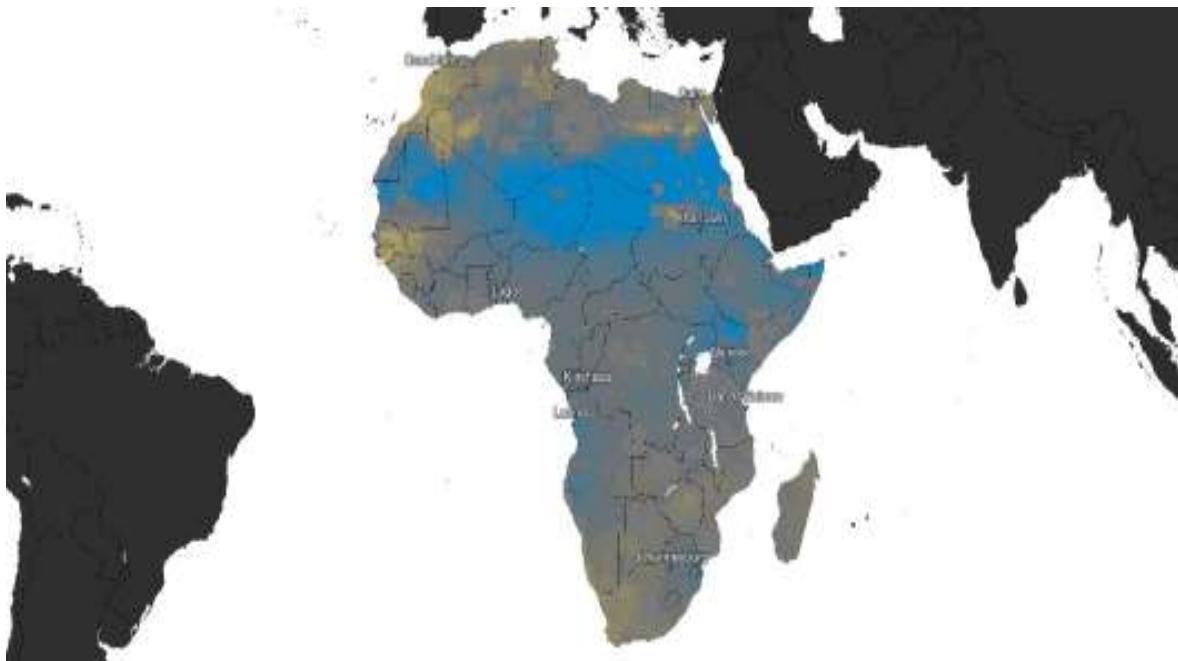
**Selected continent** Globally Africa Asia Europe North America  
Oceania South America

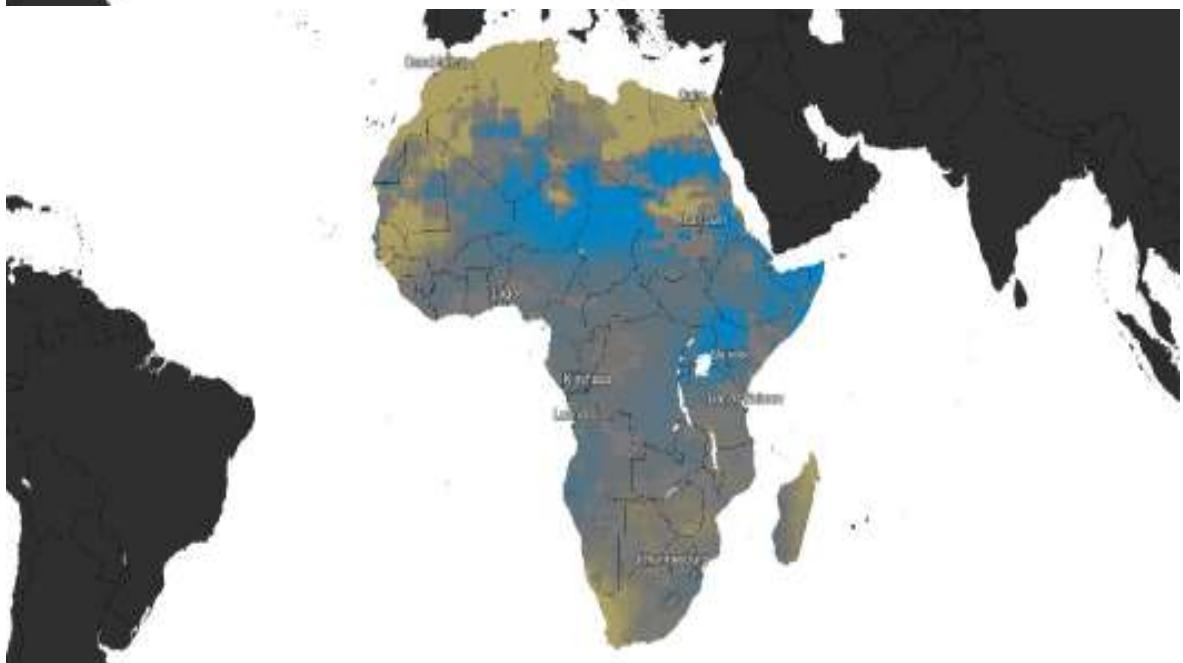
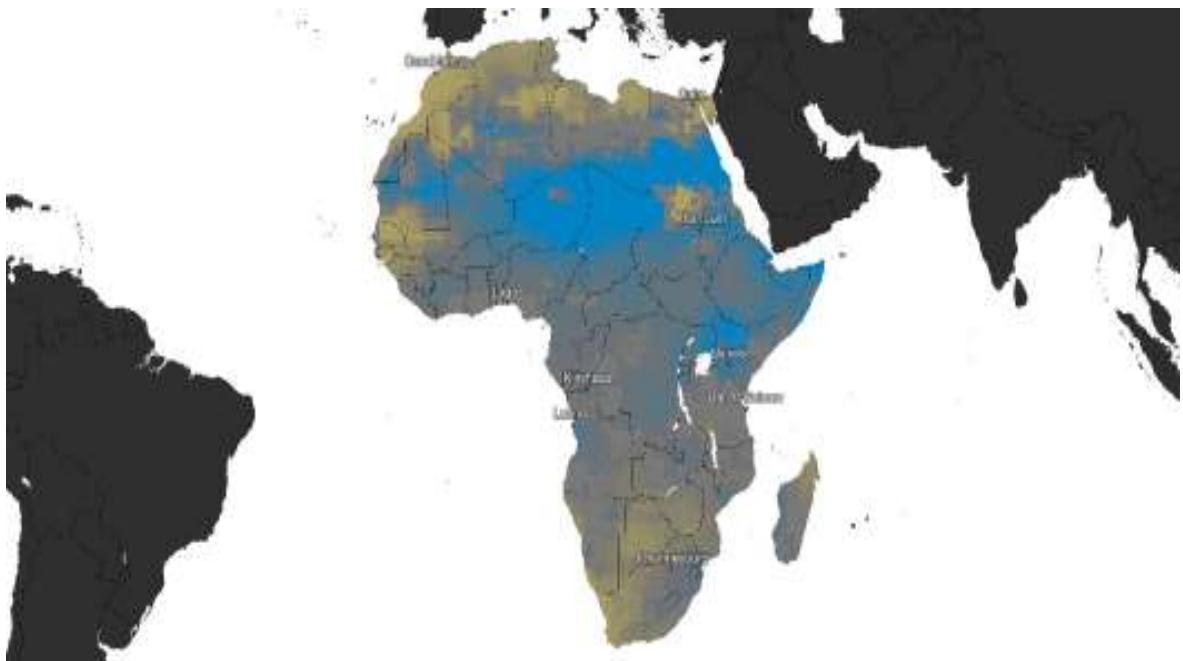
+1.5C

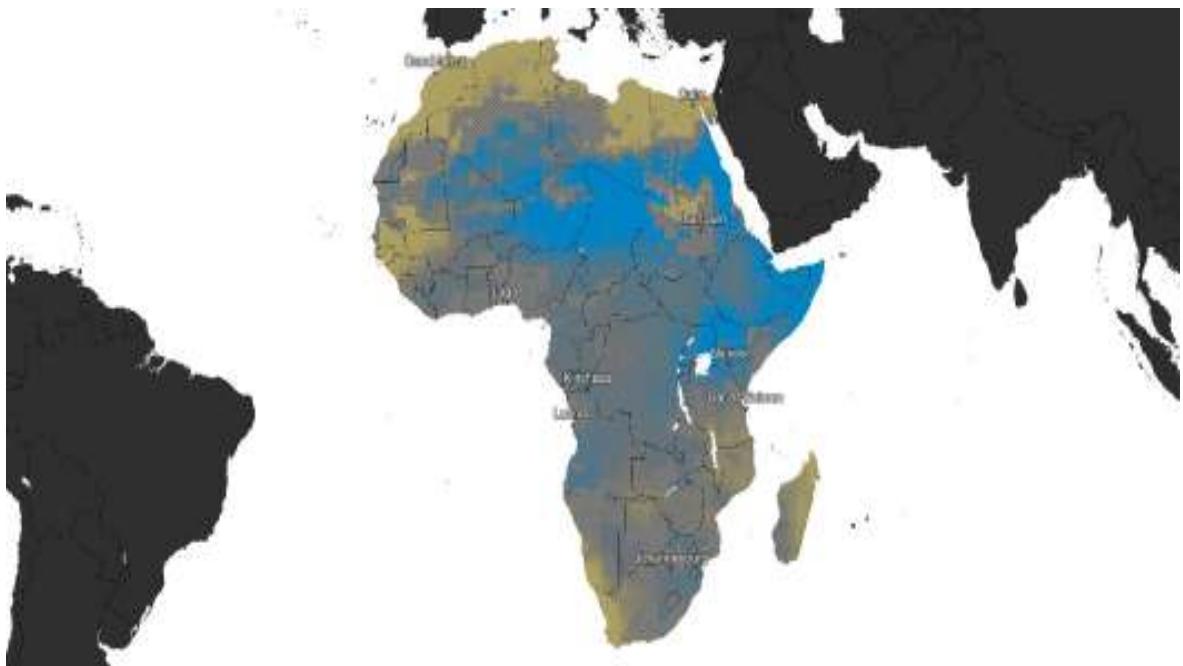
+2.7F

With our current policies

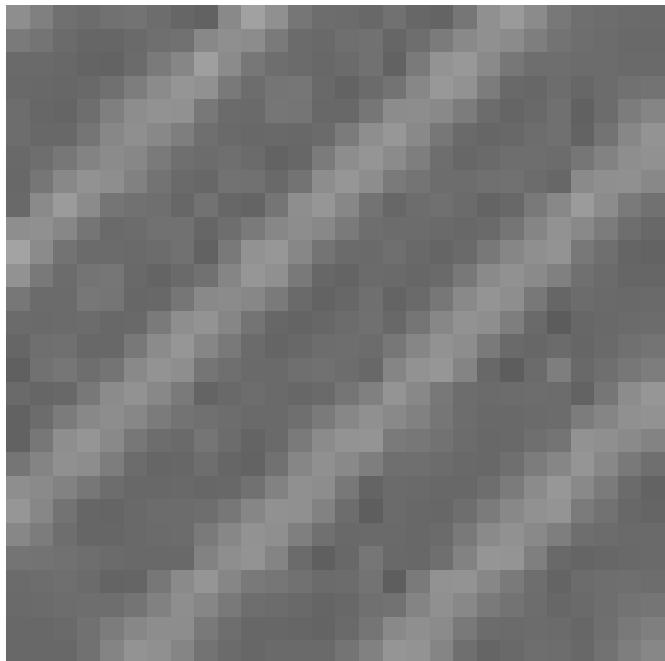
Around 2030s







Change from 1986-2006



Insufficient model agreement

Guardian graphic. Source: Climate Impact Explorer by Climate Analytics.  
Note: The data shows where rainfall and snowfall are projected to change compared to the 1986-2006 average, according to an analysis of four climate models. When the two of the four models don't agree, they are not

visualized. The projected year ranges are the Climate Action Tracker current policies scenario.

+1.5C

+3.0C

## Wildfires

Earth's hotter atmosphere soaks up water from the earth, drying out trees and tinder that amplify the severity of wildfires

- Wooroloo, Australia  
February 2021: A wildfire destroyed over 30 homes
- Ogan Ilir, Indonesia  
August 2021: Indonesian firefighters try to extinguish a peatland fire
- Chefchaouen, Morocco  
August 2021: A woman looks at wildfires tearing through a forest
- California, US  
September 2021: Flames consume a house in the Fawn Fire

Photographs: Clockwise from top-left, Greg Bell/DFES via AP, Muhammad A.F/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images, Ethan Swope/AP, Fadel Senna/AFP via Getty Images

Virtually all of North America and Europe will be at heightened risk of wildfires at 3C of heating, with places like California already stuck in a debilitating cycle of “heat, drought and fire”, [according](#) to scientists. The magnitude of the disastrous “Black Summer” bushfire season in Australia in 2019-20 will be four times more likely to reoccur [at 2C of heating](#), and will be fairly [commonplace](#) at 3C.

A disquieting unknown for climate scientists is the knock-on impacts as epochal norms continue to fall. Record wildfires in California last year, for example, resulted in a million children missing a significant amount of time in school. What if permafrost melting or flooding cuts off critical roads used by supply chains? What if storms knock out the world's leading computer chip factory? What happens once half of the world is exposed to disease-carrying mosquitos?

"We've never seen the climate change this fast so we don't understand the non-linear effects," said Hayhoe. "There are tipping points in our human-built systems that we don't think about enough. More carbon means worse impacts which means more unpleasant surprises."

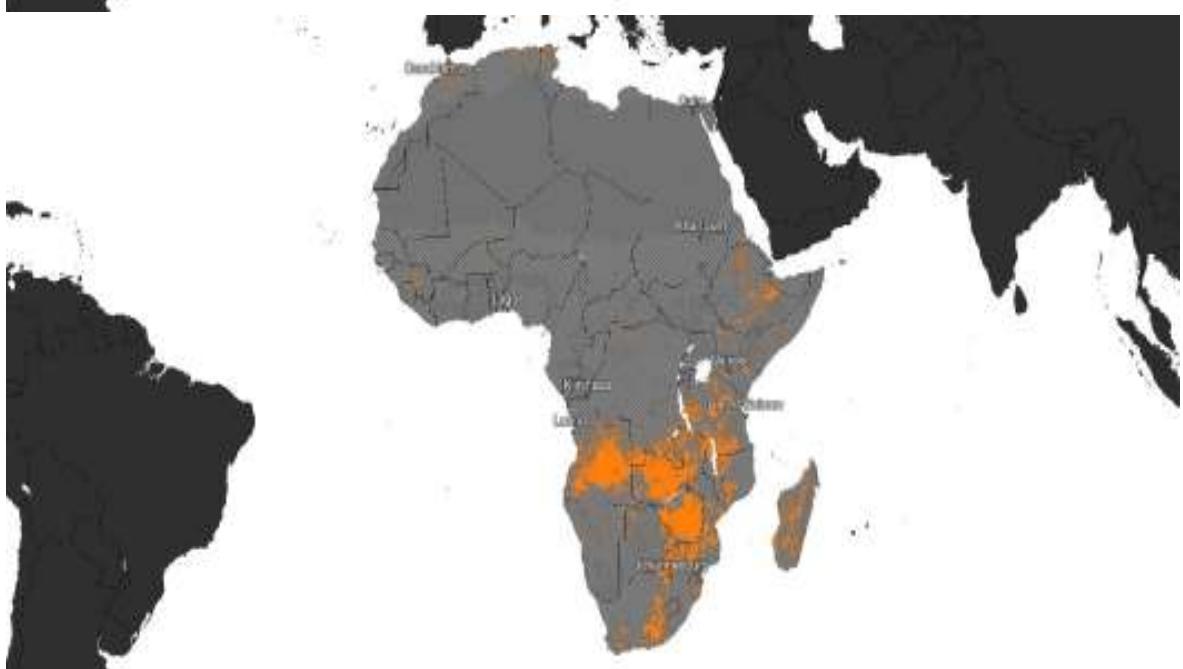
**Change in fraction of land annually exposed to wildfires:**  
**Selected continent Globally Africa Asia Europe North America**  
**Oceania South America**

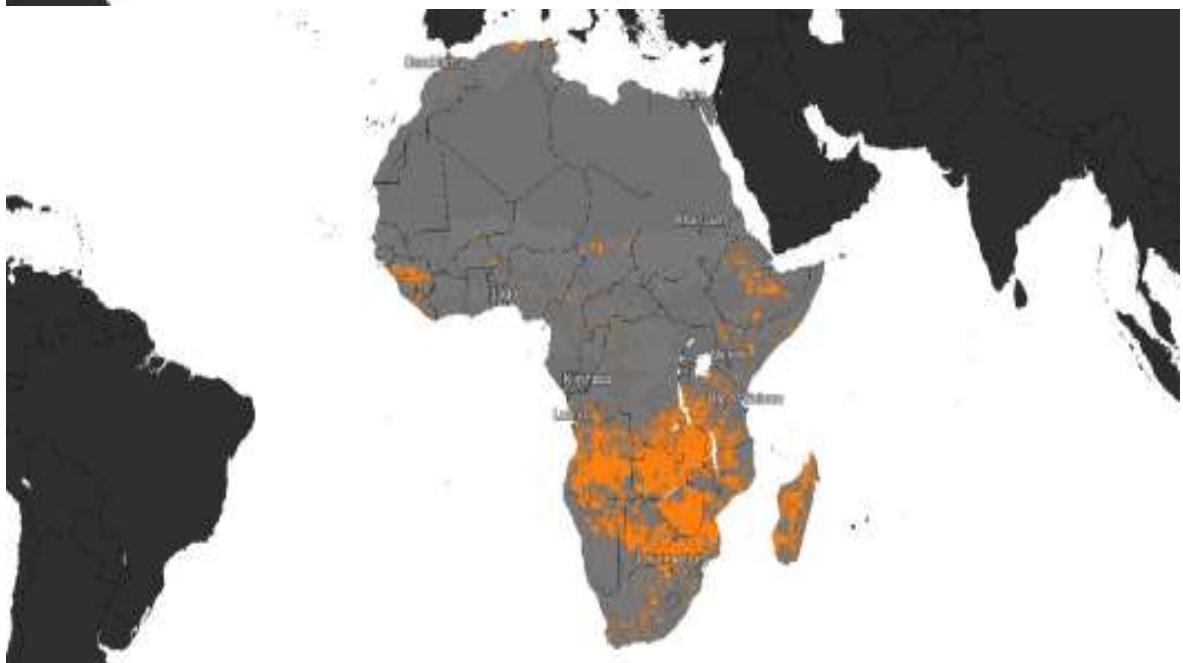
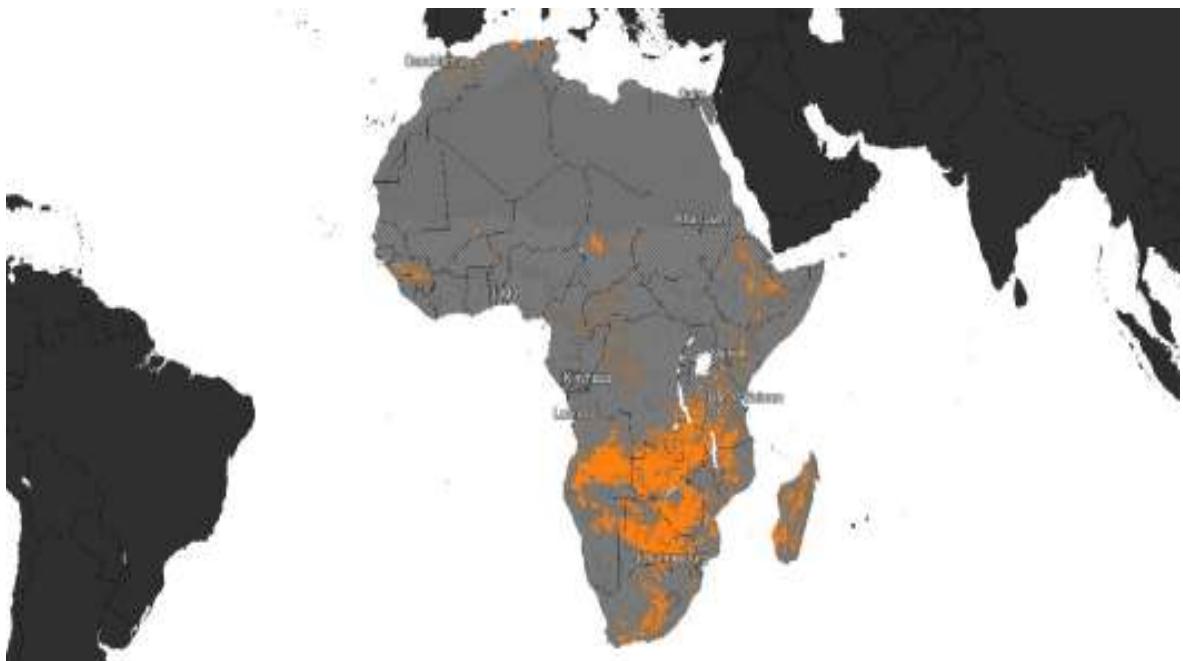
+1.5C

+2.7F

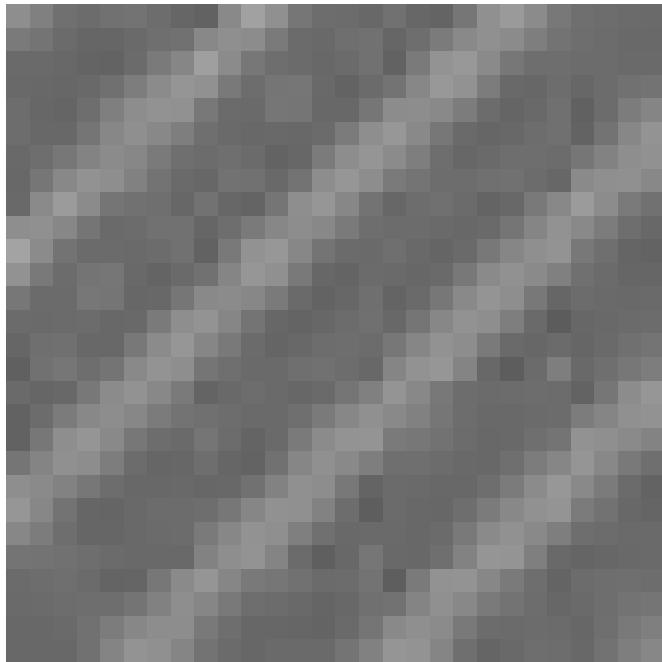
With our current policies

Around 2030s





Change from 1986-2006



Insufficient model agreement

Guardian graphic. Source: Climate Impact Explorer by Climate Analytics.  
Note: The data shows where the annual aggregated of areas burned by wildfires is projected to change, according to an analysis of four climate models. When the two of the four models don't agree, they are not visualized. The projected year ranges are the Climate Action Tracker current policies scenario.

+1.5C

+3.0C

## Crop failure

Unpredictable weather, like too much or too little rainfall, decreases the quantity and quality of crop yields

- La Ceiba Talquezal, Guatemala  
May 2017: Crops on a hillside damaged by deforestation, pests and prolonged droughts
- New South Wales, Australia  
October 2019: A farmer stands in a paddock of failed wheat crop
- Lusaka, Zambia  
January 2020: Poor crops after the lack of normal summer rainfall
- Badghis, Afghanistan  
September 2021: A farmer holds a handful of failed wheat from his crop

Photographs: Clockwise from top-left, Marvin Recinos/AFP via Getty Images, David Gray/Getty Images, String/EPA, World Food Program/Reuters

There are few less pleasant impacts in life than famine and the climate crisis is beginning to take a toll on food production. In August, the UN said that Madagascar was on the brink of the world's first "climate change famine", with tens of thousands of people at risk following four years with barely any rain. Globally, extreme crop drought events that previously occurred once a decade on average will more than double in their frequency at 2C of temperature rise.

Heat the world a bit more than this and a third of all the world's food production will be at risk by the end of the century as crops start to wilt and fail in the heat.

## **Frequency of once-a-decade crop drought events**

Global

warming

level

Crop drought

frequency

Historical

1850-1900

A once-a-decade event ...

+1.0C

Present

... now happens 1.7x a decade

+1.5C

In 6-11 years

2.0x

+2.0C

About 30 years

2.4x

+4.0C

Unlikely this  
century

4.1x

Global  
warming  
level

Crop drought  
frequency

Historical  
1850-1900

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warming  
level

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About 30 years

2.4x

+4.0C

Unlikely this

century

4.1x

Guardian graphic. Source: IPCC, 2021: Summary for Policymakers. Note: The projected year ranges for +1.5C scenario is using the mean projections for SSP1.2.6 and SSP5-8.5. The +2C and +4C scenarios use the mean projection for SSP2-4.5.p>

Many different aspects of the climate crisis will destabilize food production, such as dropping levels of groundwater and shrinking snowpacks, another critical source of irrigation, in places such as the Himalayas. Crop yields decline the hotter it gets, while more extreme floods and storms risk ruining vast tracts of farmland.

**Change in fraction of land annually exposed to crop failure:**  
**Selected continent Globally Africa Asia Europe North America**  
**Oceania South America**

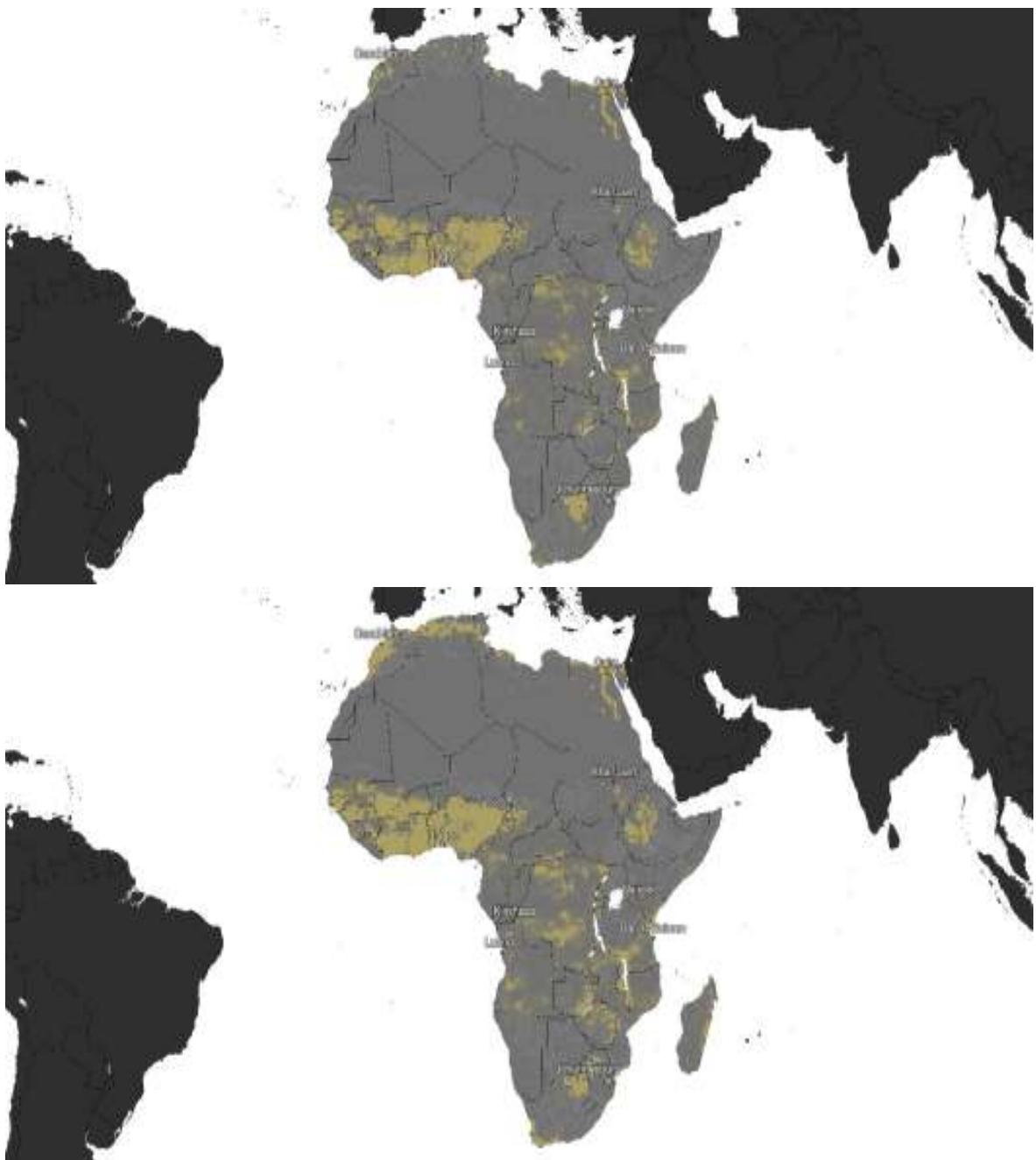
+1.5C

+2.7F

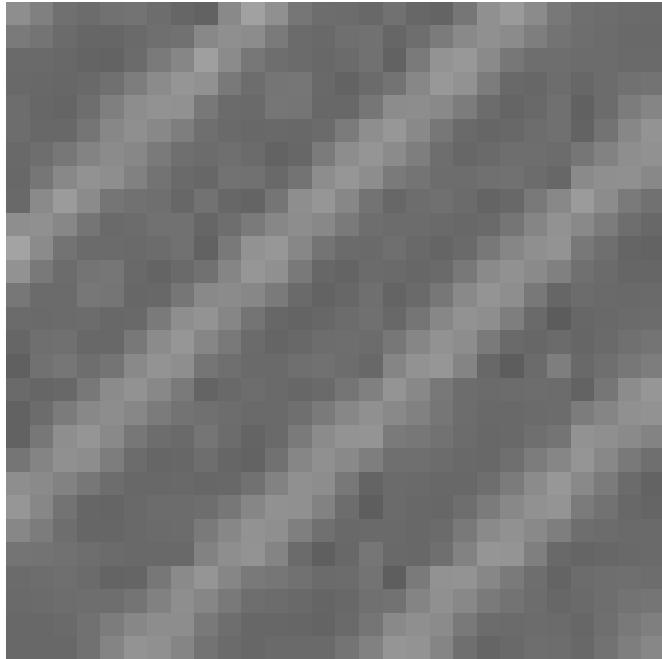
With our current policies

Around 2030s





Change from 1986-2006



Insufficient model agreement

Guardian graphic. Source: Climate Impact Explorer by Climate Analytics.  
Note: The data shows where the annual yield of four crops (maize, wheat, soybean, and rice) is projected to fall short of the 2.5th percentile of pre-industrial levels, according to an analysis of four climate models. When the two of the four models don't agree, they are not visualized. The projected year ranges are the Climate Action Tracker current policies scenario.

+1.5C

+3.0C

Despite the rapid advance of renewable energy and, more recently, electric vehicles, countries still remain umbilically connected to fossil fuels, subsidizing oil, coal and gas to the tune of around \$11m every single minute. The air pollution alone from burning these fuels kills nearly nine million people each year globally. Decades of time has been squandered – US president Lyndon Johnson was warned of the climate crisis by scientists when Joe Biden was still in college and yet industry denial and government

inertia means the world [is set](#) for a 2.7C increase in temperature this century, even if all emissions reduction pledges are met.

By the end of this year the world will have burned through 86% [of the carbon “budget”](#) that would allow us just a coin flip’s chance of staying below 1.5C. The Glasgow COP talks will somehow have to bridge this yawning gap, with scientists warning the world will have to cut emissions in half this decade before zeroing them out by 2050.

“2.7C would be very bad,” said Wehner, who explained that extreme rainfall would be up to a quarter heavier than now, and heatwaves potentially 6C hotter in many countries. Maycock added that much of the planet will become “uninhabitable” at this level of heating. “We would not want to live in that world,” she said.

A scenario approaching some sort of apocalypse would comfortably arrive should the world heat up by 4C or more, and although this is considered unlikely due to the belated action by governments, it should provide little comfort.

Every decision – every oil drilling lease, every acre of the Amazon rainforest torched for livestock pasture, every new gas-guzzling SUV that rolls onto the road – will decide how far we tumble down the hill. In Glasgow, governments will be challenged to show they will fight every fraction of temperature rise, or else, [in the words of Greta Thunberg](#), this pivotal gathering is at risk of being dismissed as “blah, blah, blah”.

“We’ve run down the clock but it’s never too late,” said Rogelj. “1.7C is better than 1.9C which is better than 3C. Cutting emissions tomorrow is better than the day after, because we can always avoid worse happening. The action is far too slow at the moment, but we can still act.”

This article was amended on 15 October 2021 with the correct IPCC projections for when global temperatures are expected to reach each threshold and to correct the spelling of Wooroloo. The time ranges in each map have also been amended to show time range projections from the Climate Action Tracker's current policies pathway.

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[Nick Clegg](#)

## **‘Insufficient and very defensive’: how Nick Clegg became the fall guy for Facebook’s failures**



Nick Clegg on stage in Munich in January 2020. Photograph: DPA Picture Alliance/Alamy



[John Harris](#)

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Thu 14 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

On Sunday, Nick Clegg did a succession of interviews with some of the US's biggest TV news shows. In his role as [Facebook's vice-president for global affairs and communications](#), he was defending his company after weeks of headlines about its latest crisis – this time involving Frances Haugen, a Facebook staffer turned whistleblower who had testified days earlier [before a committee of the US Senate](#). The story centred on a stash of company documents that Haugen had given to the Wall Street Journal. The central allegation, which Facebook vehemently denies, was that the company had ignored its own research into the harms caused by some of its products in favour of the pursuit of “astronomical profits”.

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Anyone au fait with the five grim years Clegg spent as the UK's deputy prime minister would have had the familiar impression of someone emphasising his good intentions in almost impossible circumstances. His facial expression regularly expressed a sort of righteous exasperation; his words seemed to imply that if only his critics could grasp the facts,

everything would quickly die down. Like any well-briefed politician, he emphasised a handful of statistics: the 40,000 content moderators Facebook employs, the \$13bn (£9.5bn) it says it has spent cracking down on misinformation and hate speech; the company's claim that the latter accounts for [only five of every 10,000 Facebook posts](#).

“With a third of the world’s population on our platforms, of course you’re going to see the good, the bad and the ugly of human nature,” Clegg told MSNBC’s Meet the Press. “Our job is to mitigate and reduce the bad and amplify the good.” He once said very similar things about his party’s approach to going into political partnership with George Osborne and David Cameron.



Frances Haugen testifies about Facebook before a US Senate committee on 5 October. Photograph: Lenin Nolly/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Of course, most people in the US know nothing of his history as a British politician: the brief burst of “Cleggmania” in 2010; his fate-sealing [U-turn on university tuition fees](#); and what the time he spent in coalition with the Conservatives did to the Liberal Democrats. In the US, Clegg is simply a very high-ranking Facebook executive, given the job of facing an increasingly hostile media in the absence of two more important players:

Facebook's founder and chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg, and its longstanding chief operating officer, [Sheryl Sandberg](#).

"When he appears on these Sunday shows, the question is: 'Who is he trying to convince?' says the American journalist and writer Steven Levy, the author of the definitive book Facebook: The Inside Story. "Clearly, the people who are critics of [Facebook](#) aren't going to be turned around by him saying: 'Most of what we do is good.' That argument doesn't get traction. But people who work at Facebook need *somebody* going in to defend the company, because Mark and Sheryl have indicated, at least at this moment, that they do not have a taste for publicly defending the company they built."

I'm critical of him for not doing enough ... But he's the best they've got

*David Fitzpatrick*

The to and fro between Facebook and its detractors looks like exactly the kind of polarised political battle the company is routinely accused of encouraging. Haugen says Facebook knew that Instagram, which it has owned and run since 2012, had a negative impact on the wellbeing of a large proportion of teenage girls, [but carried on downplaying its effects](#). Instagram insists that her material is "focused on a limited set of findings and casts them in a negative light", while Facebook maintains that correlation does not prove causation. In response to Haugen's insistence that changes to Facebook's News Feed algorithm in 2018 amplified divisive content and thereby contributed to political unrest, the company points to [a blog Clegg wrote in March](#), including lines such as: "Facebook's systems are not designed to reward provocative content. In fact, key parts of those systems are designed to do just the opposite."

Levy says: "Someone is now presenting a case backed up with a lot of documents. Facebook can quite accurately say: 'That's just a selection of documents – they're being cherrypicked.' But the larger question is: 'Is Facebook going to shift the core of its attitude?' It probably could stem the bleeding if the right words came out of Mark or Sheryl's mouth. But what I'm hearing from inside the company is they've had it with that. When Mark apologises, people just list all the other times he's apologised. So, at least for now, he's brazening it out."

So far, Zuckerberg has only published [a Facebook post](#) – which, among other points, insists that the idea “that we prioritize profit over safety and well-being” is “just not true”. Levy says: “Someone’s got to speak for Facebook. And it’s Nick Clegg. So my bottom line is – and this is just supposition – that this job isn’t as much fun as he thought it was going to be.”

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The story of how Clegg ended up at Facebook begins with Britain’s 2015 general election, when, after five years as deputy prime minister, [he led the Liberal Democrats to a catastrophic defeat](#). It looked like an existential crisis for the party.

The Lib Dems lost 49 of their 57 seats in the House of Commons, leaving them with only eight MPs. Clegg was one of them, having held on to the constituency of Sheffield Hallam, a largely middle-class corner of the city that nudges the Peak District. The year after, Clegg – a one-time MEP who speaks English, French, Dutch, German and Spanish – reacted with horror to the result of the Brexit referendum. In 2017, he lost his seat to the Labour newcomer Jared O’Mara.

Meanwhile, in the very different environs of Menlo Park, in the Bay Area of northern California, the world’s biggest social media company had hit trouble. After the 2016 US election and the arrival in the White House of Donald Trump, the company was the focus of huge questions about misinformation, polarisation and online political meddling perpetrated by Russia. In the spring of 2018, Facebook was hit by a scandal surrounding [the political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica](#), which had harvested millions of Facebook profiles of US voters. At around the same time, outrage exploded about [the role apparently played by Facebook](#) in the persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar.



Clegg with Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, and Sheryl Sandberg, its chief operating officer, after joining the company. Photograph: Sheryl Sandberg/Facebook

The EU was making increasingly loud noises about the power of so-called big tech – and its avoidance of taxes. When the then prime minister, Theresa May, [visited the World Economic Forum](#) in Davos in January 2018, she got most of the way to accusing the bosses of the big social media companies of standing by while their platforms were used “to facilitate child abuse, modern slavery or the spreading of terrorist and extremist content”. For Facebook, all this noise meant it had to change its approach to the policies that governed its content, as well as its public relations. It also had to prepare for an international wave of government regulation that was, sooner or later, going to break.

In the summer of 2018, Facebook’s then vice-president of communications and public policy, Elliot Schrage (“a bit of a Silicon Valley dinosaur,” according to one tech insider), announced that he was leaving the company. Sandberg and Zuckerberg quickly decided that his ideal replacement would be an experienced politician from Europe. They soon convinced a somewhat reluctant Clegg to fly to California for a conversation with Zuckerberg and his wife, Priscilla Chan. In Levy’s account, Clegg’s opening gambit was

blunt: “Your fundamental problem is that people think you’re too powerful and you don’t care.”

One important human element in the story of Clegg’s recruitment is Richard Allan, AKA Lord Allan of Hallam, the former Liberal Democrat politician. Thanks to one of those coincidences that seem to tie together politics and business, he had held Clegg’s former Westminster seat until 2005, before joining Facebook in 2009 and becoming its director of European policy. He says he emphasised Clegg’s suitability for a senior role in conversations with Sandberg and Zuckerberg, and also encouraged his old friend (they have known each other since about 1997) to take the job.

He must know that the mission is not a desirable one – not one where he’s going to change people’s minds

*Steven Levy*

Allan, who left Facebook in 2019 and spends part of his working life developing electric cars, says that being ejected from government left Clegg at a loose end. “He had a little thinktank going and he wrote a book. But I think he was always thinking: ‘I’d like to get my teeth into something.’ He was looking for a job where you make big and important decisions that affect a lot of people.”

Clegg’s appeal to Facebook, he says, centred on one fact: that he would come to Silicon Valley as an outsider. “It was really important to have somebody who could say: ‘That thing you’re doing may seem like a good thing, but when people in Europe hear about it, they’re going to think it’s terrible and slam you for it.’ Nick brings them that outsider’s voice. He’s not a tech utopian: ‘We just build this great stuff and the world’s going to be lovely.’ Nick comes from a much more typical position for European politicians: they’re rather sceptical about technology.”

Clegg is reportedly paid £2.7m a year and [lives in a £7m house](#) – complete with a pool, “outdoor fireplace” and hot tub – in the Atherton neighbourhood of the San Francisco Bay Area, often reckoned to have the highest property prices in the US. His wife, Miriam González Durántez, has

talked about northern California as a paradise of second chances, saying: “People praise failure here in a way we don’t. It’s so healthy.”

Clegg was approached to be interviewed for this article, but Facebook’s PR team said participating in such coverage was not his policy. Instead, the company sent a set of bullet points for “background”, about why Clegg took the job and how he sees the role.



Clegg and Zuckerberg in Dublin in April 2019. Photograph: Niall Carson/PA

That email emphasised Clegg’s work in setting up [the Facebook oversight board](#), a group of 20 high-powered people – including lawyers, academics and Alan Rusbridger, a former editor of the Guardian – that hears cases about the moderation of content referred to it by Facebook users and makes binding, precedent-setting decisions about them. (Interestingly, the board has just announced that it intends [to hear testimony from Haugen](#).) The company’s spokesperson highlighted Clegg’s work at Facebook around the 2020 US elections, when he “steered [the] company-wide response and public comms on election integrity” and led the decision to [pause the running of new political advertising](#) in the week leading up to the election.

This brings us to another of Haugen’s allegations. She says that crucial safeguards that had been put in place to suppress political misinformation

and the possibility of violence were quickly removed once voting had finished. “As soon as the election was over, they turned them back off, or they changed the settings back to what they were before, to prioritise growth over safety,” she told the CBS current affairs programme 60 Minutes. As she sees it, this change contributed to the [riotous events in Washington DC on 6 January](#).

A little more than a week ago, Clegg appeared on the CNN programme Reliable Sources and denied – despite evidence to the contrary – that activity on Facebook had been at least partly responsible for what happened in and around the Capitol building. Any such suggestion, he said, was “ludicrous”. He went on: “The responsibility for the violence of January 6 lies squarely with the people who inflicted the violence and those who encouraged them, including President Trump.”

A few moments before, his interviewer had said something that has been endlessly quoted since: “A part of me feels like I’m interviewing the head of a tobacco company right now.”

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‘I feel that, in the last two weeks, Nick Clegg’s standing has fallen, in terms of being a credible voice,’ says Levy. ‘In a debating society, his arguments might have some traction, but given this situation where people are seeing this very compelling figure and calling her a hero, to say that this statistic or that statistic presents an alternative point of view to what she’s saying – it’s not compelling. People aren’t buying it.

“My impression of him is that he’s a super-smart guy and he must know that the mission he’s sent out on is not a desirable one – not one where he’s going to change people’s minds.”

Other voices are more sanguine. David Kirkpatrick, the author of [The Facebook Effect](#), an acclaimed 2010 book about the company, says he would have liked to see “a more senior global leader” doing Clegg’s job; just before he was recruited, Kirkpatrick suggested Facebook might do its best to hire Barack Obama. But he says Clegg deserves at least qualified praise. “I feel he’s had a positive effect. I’m critical of him for not doing enough, and I think his interviews recently have been insufficient and very defensive, in a

classic Facebook fashion. But he's the best they've got, in terms of having good judgment about Facebook's relationship to the world. If he weren't there, my strong suspicion is that it would be even worse."

It feels as if Clegg is in a similar position to the one he endured between 2010 and 2015 – facing derision and hostility, but doggedly assuring anyone who will listen that things are not nearly as bad as they think. The gargantuan salary and hot tub must help; so too the sense that, whatever he has to explain to the media, he has left Westminster behind and opened up a new chapter. "He's in a tough position," says Levy. "But he's going to come out of this OK. I'm not worried about Nick Clegg. How long's he been at Facebook now? Three years. His international profile and his profile within are up. Whatever happens, the Facebook experience will have been good for him."

This article was amended on 15 October 2021. An earlier version said that Atherton was a neighbourhood of San Francisco; it is actually an incorporated town in the wider Bay Area.

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## **Isn't it good, Swedish plywood: the miraculous eco-town with a 20-storey wooden skyscraper**



Stronger than steel ... the Sara Cultural Centre topped with the Wood Hotel.  
Photograph: Jonas Westling



[Oliver Wainwright](#)

[@ollywainwright](#)

Thu 14 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

As you come in to land at Skellefteå airport in the far north of [Sweden](#), you are greeted by a wooden air traffic control tower poking up from an endless forest of pine and spruce. After boarding a biogas bus into town, you glide past wooden apartment blocks and wooden schools, cross a wooden road bridge and pass a wooden multistorey car park, before finally reaching the centre, now home to one of the tallest new wooden buildings in the world.

“We are not the wood Taliban,” says Bo Wikström, from Skellefteå’s tourism agency, as he leads a group of visitors on a “wood safari” of its buildings. “Other materials are allowed.” But why build in anything else – when you’re surrounded by 480,000 hectares of forest?

If you are wondering what a climate-conscious future looks like, small subarctic Skellefteå (pronounced similarly to “she left you”) has some of the answers. In a clearing on its outskirts, [Europe’s largest battery factory](#) is currently under construction. The next generation of electric vehicle batteries will not only be produced here, but recycled too. Electric helicopters will soon be able to shuttle visitors to [the gargantuan Northvolt](#)

[gigafactory](#), while longer-distance electric aeroplanes are being tested nearby.



Timber tour de force ... the auditorium. Photograph: Oliver Wainwright

Skellefteå runs on 100% renewable energy from hydropower and wind, and recycles 120,000 tonnes of electronic waste a year, with excess heat from the process fed back into the city-wide heating system. And now, nosing 20 storeys above the low-rise skyline, Skellefteå has a fitting monument to its carbon-cutting credentials. [The Sara Cultural Centre](#) and its towering [Wood Hotel](#) stand as beacons of what it is possible to do with timber – and store about 9,000 tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere in the process.

“When I saw the competition proposal, I didn’t think it would be possible to build,” says the mayor, Lorents Burman. “Twenty floors high in wood? In Skellefteå?” Thanks to three teams of structural engineers, and the region’s prefabrication expertise, the timber tower now stands as a blueprint for a new generation of [“plyscrapers”](#).

The people who built this would never go back to steel and concrete

The technology behind it is surprisingly simple. [The two main materials](#) are glued laminated timber (glulam) and cross-laminated timber (CLT). The

former is made from layers of lumber bonded together, with the grain running in the same direction, giving it a higher load-bearing capacity than both steel and concrete, relative to its weight. It is ideal for columns and beams, and forms the structural bones of the cultural centre, which is home to two theatres, a museum, an art gallery and a library.

CLT, meanwhile, is like super-sized plywood, with each layer stuck at right-angles to the next. This makes it strong in all directions, so it is perfect for walls and floor slabs. The lift cores at either end of the 20-storey tower are made from CLT, with prefabricated hotel room pods stacked between them, incorporating glulam columns in their corners for strength. Finally, the double-skin glass facade keeps the rooms insulated in winter and cool in summer, as the warmed air rises between the panes of glass.

The “self-finish” nature of structural mass timber, which can simply be left exposed, means that the tower was incredibly quick to build, doing away with the usual wet trades of plastering and decorating. A whole year was saved by using wood, compared with steel and concrete, with a storey completed every two days. The number of truck deliveries was also reduced by about 90%, with practically zero waste on site. Like bits of a giant balsa-wood model, the pieces came from factories ready to be bolted together, some in panels 27 metres long, while the trees were harvested from within a 60km radius of the site – and have all since been replenished. Just like [the region's forest-foraged restaurant menus](#), this is meaningful local sourcing rather than a green veneer.



Tree topped ... one of the hotel rooms. Photograph: Oliver Wainwright

The climate isn't the only beneficiary. Building in wood seems to have a positive effect on construction workers. While a normal building site is a noisy, toxic place of fumes and dust, a timber one is a picture of serenity. "The people building this would never go back to steel and concrete," says Jesper Åkerlund from contractor Holmen, which is analysing improvements to its workforce's mental health following the project. There's one downside, though, at least from the hotel perspective: "The raw wooden walls absorb stains like red wine much faster than a painted wall," says Sara Johansson, from the Elite hotel group, "so we have to be ready to clean much faster!"

With all these exposed timber walls, ceilings and floors, the place feels like a gigantic sauna – with the aroma to match. But look closely and you'll see it's not all wood. Big steel plates are bolted through the giant plywood walls on the fifth floor, revealing the presence of a big steel truss – used to transfer the weight of the tower to the walls of the cultural centre, making it possible to have a column-free space below. Concrete is also used on the top two floors, to stop the tower from swaying too much in the wind.

"We wanted the building to be legible," says [Oskar Norelius of White Arkitekter](#), the biggest architecture practice in Scandinavia, with years of experience building in wood, "so people can see how it goes together."

Accordingly, thin steel rods form a cat's cradle of bracings in the trusses above the main open level of the cultural centre, strung between chunky blocks of wood. The main auditorium, with seating for 1,200, is a tour de force of timber, with vast glulam beams leaping across the ceiling and faceted wooden wedges acting as acoustic diffusers around the walls. "There is a softness to the whole place," says Fransesca Quartey, director of the Västerbotten regional theatre. "It just makes you feel happy."

It's fire-safe, too. CLT is very slow to ignite, designed here with an additional 4cm sacrificial layer on each side that would char in the event of a fire, protecting the structure for 120 minutes. The surfaces have also been treated with fire retardant, and the complex is fully sprinklered, powered by batteries rather than the usual diesel engine.



'Many buildings now have a brain – but we have added ears' ... the centre and hotel from ground level. Photograph: Oliver Wainwright

In keeping with the city's advanced (and municipally owned) energy network, the building uses artificial intelligence to monitor energy use and predict heating needs, as well as communicate with surrounding buildings. Excess energy produced by the building's solar panels can be sent to the nearby travel centre, for example, or saved in batteries in the basement. If the cultural centre needs more heat, the surplus from a neighbouring

building being cooled can be transferred over. “Many buildings now have a brain,” says Patrik Sundberg of Skellefteå Kraft, the city’s energy company. “But we have added ears. It will be listening and learning all the time.”

This wooden wonder might seem like a novelty one-off, a trophy to showcase the local timber industry, only feasible because of the location. But the architects are keen to emphasise that the same process could be replicated anywhere, many hundreds of miles from a forest. “We are currently studying how far we could transport this building without undoing the carbon saving,” says White Arkitekter’s Robert Schmitz. “We think it could probably go twice around the world and still be carbon neutral.”

There remain plenty of barriers in the way: the lobbying power of concrete manufacturers, an insurance industry averse to innovation, retrograde building regulations and a construction culture reluctant to change. But as the only truly sustainable building material – with benefits in speed, health and wellness beyond the carbon saving – the future is wood.

This article was amended on 15 October 2021 to clarify that Skellefteå is pronounced similarly to the English words “she left you”, though they are not a perfect phonetic translation.

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## Inside the GuardianMembership

# How to expose corruption, vice and incompetence – by those who have

03:05

Obsessive, illuminating, high-stakes: why investigative journalism matters - video

*Guardian staff*

Thu 14 Oct 2021 02.29 EDT

Investigative journalism is costly, time-consuming, risky and difficult, and sometimes results in legal threats, personal abuse to our journalists – or no publishable story at all. So why do we do it? Six of our investigative journalists answer questions from editor [Mark Rice-Oxley](#).

## **Why does the Guardian feel it has to do this work – isn't investigation for the police, or parliament?**

**Paul Lewis:** We're the last defence that the public has when those other institutions – parliament, government or the criminal justice system – have failed somehow. Part of our job is holding those very institutions to account.

**Stephanie Kirchgaessner:** The Guardian is not aligned to institutions, and can relentlessly question institutions because we are not allied with them.

**Rob Evans:** It is important that the Guardian and the media fulfil one of their key tasks – to expose wrongdoing and hold those in positions of power to account. This is especially important when the police or others who are supposed to investigate misconduct fail to do so.

## **So, what does it take to do this kind of work?**

**Amelia Gentleman:** At the height of reporting on the [Windrush scandal](#) there were three or four weeks when it completely enveloped my life. It was quite lonely because I was working by myself, I was aware that there was a really serious problem. It was really frustrating, I was wondering whether I was barking up the wrong tree.

**Sirin Kale:** I was placing upwards of 20, 30, 40 phone calls a day. You start to lose your voice after a while. You have to have attention to detail because one date or place that's wrong can really undermine your story.

**Juliette Garside:** It's a collaborative process and you are working a bit like a detective, you have pieces of a jigsaw and you're trying to figure out how they go together. There's the agony of trying to figure out the story, but that's really only half the battle.

**David Pegg:** A lot of the process is a feeling of scarcity and uncertainty and self-questioning. You follow the leads, the leads haven't gone anywhere and you're not really sure what you are doing. This is punctuated by moments of eureka, when you've got a source, you've got a document, we've discovered that what we thought was true is true.

**Luke Harding:** It requires perseverance and background knowledge to piece together the big picture plus off-the-record conversations with sources. You need a collaborative mentality too – anything we discovered in the [Pandora papers](#) we shared with other colleagues on the project.

**Felicity Lawrence:** Stamina, forensic attention to detail, an open, objective mind, a healthy scepticism about authority, a certain bloody-mindedness in the face of obstacles, plus hours and hours of often mind-numbing homework.

### **What about the people we expose? Presumably they don't make it easy for us?**

**Paul:** Generally speaking, we're making life difficult for people and institutions that have money or power (and sometimes both). Often we're up against small battalions of well-paid lawyers, public relations advisers and private investigators who are hired to defeat our reporting. This is the stuff

readers never see. People see the media as powerful, and they're right inasmuch as we have huge audiences. But the people whose secrets we're exposing can be well-resourced adversaries.

**Juliette:** Right ... what can I say without getting sued?

**Rob:** Often those who commit wrongdoing hide behind many layers of secrecy and then reach for their lawyer when they fear they are about to be exposed.

**Felicity:** Over my 20 years investigating for the Guardian, I am struck by how long and ever more aggressive expensive lawyers' letters have become. Government departments have changed over that period too – gone are the days when you could have an honest and open discussion to inform yourself better; it feels as though it's all chess moves and obfuscation now, which is so damaging to the democratic process.

### **What qualities do you need to be an investigative journalist?**

**Stephanie:** Investigative journalism is really all consuming because you have to live and breathe the topic. It has to be so, or you're not going to get very far. The skill of persuasion is really important. It's not a transaction where you can just demand information. You need to develop trust with people because there are a lot of hoops.

**Sirin:** You have to be good with people and you need to be straight. You're not their friend, you're a journalist. You need a steady hand and the ability to hold your nerve. It's a really difficult skill set.

### **What about the cloak-and-dagger stuff? Do you have to wear long trenchcoats and meet people on rainy nights in underground carparks?**

**David:** You do have to use encrypted chat a lot of the time. If you did it all the time it would be tedious. When we did our investigation into [Pegasus](#), the spyware, we did have to go the extra mile. Our phones were constantly left in a lead-lined case so we couldn't be spied on; we wrangled an entire team of people to speak around the world not using mobile phones.

Most of the time it's not like that. We are obsessive and determined, but we are not Jedi knights or magicians. We really rely on readers. A good 50% of the stories we do are because people get in touch with us and give us information. And then we get back in touch and say we think this is important, can you tell us more?

### **How do we ensure that we don't fall foul of the UK's punitive libel laws?**

**Paul:** In the UK, privacy laws can be as restrictive as defamation laws. But the short answer is we're meticulous in making sure we get everything right – and we have some of the best in-house lawyers in the business.

**Juliette:** We have to work quite hard on what the public interest is. Is there genuine value? Are we adding to the public debate in a useful way?

**David:** We've got the best lawyers in Fleet Street because they don't tell you you can't do things, they tell you how you can do things.

**Rob:** The key is to carry out careful research, and also to make sure that those we write about are given a clear opportunity to respond to any allegations and provide a response. That is crucial in terms of being fair with people and also gives us a legal defence under the defamation laws

### **What about impact? How does this kind of journalism change the world?**

**Luke:** It's too early to say what the consequences the Pandora papers will have. The topic of offshore reform is surely back on the agenda. And there's a message for the super-rich: don't hide your cash under a palm tree because sooner or later an investigative journalist will find it.

**Amelia:** No one else was investigating the Windrush situation at the time, so without our work it is hard to see how change would have come about. This was a stark example of how investigative journalism can lead to real dramatic policy change.

**Juliette:** One of the stories I've worked on that has had the biggest impact was the Panama papers. We showed the extent to which the rich are cheating.

**David:** The offshore thing is a good example that I'm proud of. After we did Panama papers a large number of laws were passed around the world to try to stop that abusive behaviour. HMRC recouped about £190m – so we do pay for ourselves. Seeing the change that can come as a result of your stories is a tremendously satisfying experience.

**Felicity:** Projects I've worked on for the Guardian on labour conditions, exploitation of migrants, standards in food and farming or global trade, outsourcing in the NHS, corporate concentration and tax dodging have led to parliamentary reports, select committee hearings and government reviews. We have sometimes shamed the powerful into change, or at least into thinking about the reputational risk attached to certain practices.

**Sirin:** Change tends to happen when the general public is shocked or stunned or appalled by something or when something comes to light that people weren't aware of and care quite profoundly about. It's hard to cut through and make people care about things, but that's what good investigative journalism does.

**Paul:** If I look back at the big investigations the Guardian has done over the past 20-30 years, it is the most remarkable heritage. Groundbreaking investigations that have sparked resignations, public inquiries, criminal prosecutions, or led to concrete changes in the law or massive global debates. At its best, this kind of journalism makes a tangible difference.

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## 2021.10.14 - Coronavirus

- [Vaccines Covid booster shots important to stop infection, finds English study](#)
- [Live Coronavirus: Russia reports more than 30,000 daily cases for first time; Hungary cases on rise](#)
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## Coronavirus

# Covid booster shots important to stop infection, finds English study



Researchers at Imperial College London said there is need of booster programme. Photograph: Md Rafayat Haque Khan/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

*[Ian Sample](#) Science editor*

*[@iansample](#)*

Thu 14 Oct 2021 01.01 EDT

Scientists have urged eligible people to have Covid booster shots after a major survey in England found evidence of “breakthrough infections” more than three months after full vaccination.

Researchers at Imperial College London analysed more than 100,000 swabs from a random sample of the population and found that Covid infection rates

were three to four times higher among unvaccinated people than those who had received two shots.

But while full vaccination drove infection rates down substantially, from 1.76% in the unvaccinated to 0.35% in the three months after the second dose, infection rates rose again to 0.55% three to six months after the second shot.

The finding suggests that protection against infection, with or without symptoms, starts to wane several months after full vaccination, though other studies show that vaccine protection against hospitalisation and death is far more robust.

“The possible increase of breakthrough infections over time reinforces the need for a booster programme,” said Paul Elliott, head of the React study and professor in epidemiology and public health medicine at Imperial. “It’s an incentive for people to get their booster dose when it becomes available to them,” added Prof Christl Donnelly, a statistical epidemiologist on the study. The results came as new Covid cases in the UK rose to 42,776, the highest recorded since late July.

#### Covid cases are currently most concentrated among the under-20s and people aged 35-49

The React study has used community testing to provide regular snapshots of the epidemic in England throughout the Covid crisis. The latest data include results from 100,527 swabs provided between 9 and 27 September, and another 98,233 swabs taken in June and July.

All of the viruses sequenced in the study were the highly-transmissible Delta variant, with one sample carrying a mutation called E484K which may help the virus evade immunity from past infection or vaccination. The relative of Delta is being monitored by the UK [Health Security Agency](#).

Preliminary results from the survey, which are not yet peer-reviewed, show that the highest rates of infection in September were among five to 17-year-olds, with about 2.5% testing positive, followed by 35 to 54-year-olds, the age group most likely to have children at school. Efforts to vaccinate healthy

12 to 15-year-olds and provide boosters for those aged 50 and above are now under way.

According to the study full vaccination reduced the risk of infection, with or without symptoms, by about 60%. The Pfizer vaccine appeared to be more effective than AstraZeneca's, but the vaccines were given to different age groups at different points in the epidemic, so they cannot be directly compared.

While previous studies have shown that antibodies against Covid decline in the months after vaccination, recent work suggests that two doses are highly protective against severe disease. Last week, US [researchers reported](#) that two shots of Pfizer vaccine were 90% protective against hospitalisation for at least six months, even though protection against infection halved over the same period.

The React survey shows that while infection rates for England were broadly flat in September, the overall picture masked distinct trends in particular age groups and regions. Infections were rising sharply in school children, with the R number at 1.18 in those aged up to 17 years old. Rates were generally falling in those aged 18 to 54 and steady in those aged 55 and over.

Though R, the number of people an infected person typically passes the virus on to, stood at 1.03 for England as a whole in September, infections appeared to be rising in the East Midlands and London, with R at 1.36 and 1.59, the survey found. The infection rate was nearly twice as high in black participants than white (1.41% versus 0.78%), and more common in those in larger households, and among people who shared their home with at least one child.

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[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

## Covid live: UK reports 45,066 new cases, highest since mid-July; Russia daily cases pass 30,000 for first time

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## World Health Organization

# ‘Last chance’: WHO reveals new team to investigate Covid origins



People wearing protective masks and suits disinfecting at Huanan wholesale seafood market in Wuhan, China, in March 2020. The WHO has created a team of experts to produce a new global framework for studies into emerging pathogens of pandemic potential, as well as the origins of Covid. Photograph: China News Service/Visual China Group via Getty Images

*Agence France-Presse*

Wed 13 Oct 2021 19.20 EDT

The [World Health Organization](#) has unveiled a team of scientists it wants to revive the stalled inquiry into Covid-19’s origins, with one senior official saying it may be the last chance.

The group of 26 experts will be charged with producing a new global framework for studies into the origins of emerging pathogens of epidemic

and pandemic potential – and their remit includes Sars-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19.

Michael Ryan, the WHO's emergencies director, said it may be the “last chance to understand the origins of this virus” in a collegiate manner.

The [WHO](#) announced earlier this year it would set up a Scientific Advisory Group for the Origins of Novel Pathogens (Sago).

Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's technical lead on Covid-19, said Sago would urgently assess what was now known, what still remained unknown, and what rapidly needed to be done.

“I anticipate that the Sago … will recommend further studies in [China](#) and potentially elsewhere,” she said. “There’s no time to waste in this.”

Earlier on Wednesday, Chen Xu, China’s ambassador to the UN in Geneva, told the UN correspondents’ association that Sago’s work should not be “politicised”.

“If we are going to send teams to any other places, I believe it’s not to China because we have received international teams twice already,” he said. “It’s time to send teams to other places.”

In August, China rejected the WHO’s calls for a renewed inquiry on the ground into the origins of Covid-19.

Besides the current Covid crisis, a growing number of high-risk pathogens have appeared or reappeared in recent years, including Middle East respiratory syndrome (Mers), bird flu viruses, Lassa, Marburg and Ebola.

“The emergence of new viruses with the potential to spark epidemics and pandemics is a fact of nature, and while Sars-CoV-2 is the latest such virus, it will not be the last,” WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. “Understanding where new pathogens come from is essential for preventing future outbreaks.”

The 26 members the WHO has put forward were chosen from a field of more than 700 applications and are drawn from a range of scientific disciplines.

The team is subject to a two-week public consultation.

They include Christian Drosten, the head of Berlin's Institute of Virology; Yungui Yang of the Beijing Institute of Genomics; Jean-Claude Manuguerra of France's Institut Pasteur; and Inger Damon from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Several of the experts were on the joint WHO-China scientific mission investigating the origins of Covid-19: Vladimir Dedkov, Farag Elmoubasher, Thea Fischer, Marion Koopmans, Hung Nguyen and John Watson.

The terms of reference say the group must give the WHO an independent evaluation of all available scientific and technical findings from global studies on the origins of Covid-19.

It must also advise the UN health agency on developing, monitoring and supporting the next series of studies into the origins of the virus. That could include “rapid advice” on the WHO’s operational plans to implement the next series of studies into the pandemic’s origins, and advice on additional studies.

The pandemic has killed more than 4.85 million people and battered the global economy since the virus was first detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019.

After much delay, a WHO team of international experts went to Wuhan in January 2021 to produce a first phase report, written in conjunction with their Chinese counterparts. [Their March report drew no firm conclusions](#), but ranked four hypotheses.

Most probable was that the virus jumped from bats to humans via an intermediate animal, it said. It judged a leak from the Wuhan virology laboratories was “extremely unlikely”.

However, the investigation faced criticism for lacking transparency and access, and for not evaluating the lab-leak theory more deeply.

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## ‘We’re ready’: Fiji prepares to welcome tourists almost two years after closing borders



Fiji closed its borders to international travellers at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Photograph: Torsten Blackwood/AFP via Getty Images

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[Geraldine Panapasa](#) in Suva

Wed 13 Oct 2021 22.13 EDT

Fiji says it is already experiencing a boom in demand after announcing this week that it would open up quarantine-free travel to visitors from select countries, almost two years after closing its borders due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Our website data is well up – we are seeing a real lift in interest. It is exciting, and we want to encourage people to come and spend Christmas and new year in Fiji,” Tourism Fiji chief executive Brent Hill said.

“Our tourism industry has been waiting a long time for this. While not everyone will be able to open on 1 December, the overwhelming majority of our industry and those employing significant numbers are very much behind the announcement, and ready to safely open our borders once again to the world.

“We have seven more weeks to really fine tune our preparations, but we have all been working overtime since the start of the year, to reopen our industry again to the world. We’re ready.”

Fiji [will reopen its borders](#) to fully vaccinated travellers from countries including the US, UK, Australia, New Zealand and most Pacific Islands countries from November 11, though the official reopening will be on 1 December, when the country's first scheduled tourism flight on national carrier, Fiji Airways, will arrive.

Visitors must have a negative Covid test three days before arrival and also take a rapid test on arrival. Tourists and returning residents will still have to undergo a two or three-day hotel confinement respectively.



Fiji is allowing quarantine-free travel from select countries after launching an aggressive Covid vaccination campaign that has so far seen 96% of over-18s receive a first dose. Photograph: Rob Rickman/The Guardian

Prime minister Voreqe Bainimarama said the country was “entirely confident in our ability to manage the risk associated with quarantine-free travel.”

“Our planes are prepared. Our airports are adapted. Every Fijian hotel and tour operator in Fiji will be certified under the Care Fiji Commitment Certification program, which will require all hotels and excursions to meet the highest standards of comfort, health and safety.”

Bainimarama said hotels would have to guarantee access to comfortable, well-supplied isolation facilities and medical care such as testing, routine

staff-swabbing, and escalation protocols in the event that positive cases were detected.

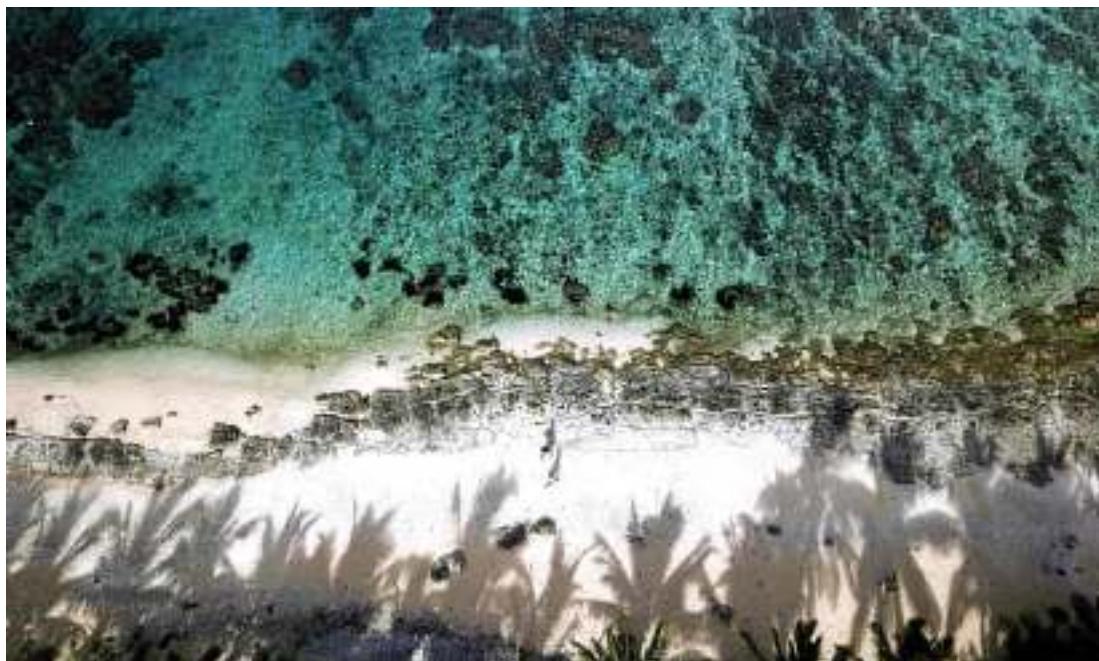
## ‘No jab, no job’

The easing of travel restrictions and quarantine requirements comes after the government launched an aggressive vaccination campaign; 96.6% of the target population of those aged 18 and over have received their first dose, while 80.3% have received both doses.

The government’s “no jab, no job” work policy for civil servants and staff in the private sector, [announced in July](#), forced many Fijians to get vaccinated.

Fantasha Lockington, head of the Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association, said months of preparation had gone into planning the reopening.

“The industry has been keenly watching our core markets of Australia and New Zealand and their own management of vaccinations and border management, because Fiji’s reopening must eventually coincide with these countries allowing their citizens to travel here,” she said.



An aerial view of the Fiji’s Coral Coast. Before the pandemic, tourism made up almost 40% of Fiji’s economy. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

“Those tourism operators who have remained open, have been ready with the required health protocols in place, even though these openings may be at reduced capacity or only opening intermittently.

“But they’ve been ready nonetheless and have been able to survive on the limited local demand, as well as the smaller but quite lucrative influx of visitors through our Blue (yachting) and VIP Lane initiatives.”

Lockington said it had been extremely difficult for smaller operators with restricted movement curtailing even local tourism, with many operators needing confirmation of their key markets being allowed to travel to more confidently plan their respective reopenings.

“From a resort’s perspective they have to factor in the cost of a closed resort maintaining their operations with a skeleton staff to keep things on, against when they go fully operational with higher overheads and open with all staff on deck and restaurants and bars fully stocked up again but still without any revenue coming in until your guests have all but arrived,” she said.

Before the pandemic, tourism [contributed nearly 40% of Fiji's gross domestic product](#) – about FJ\$2bn (AU\$1.4bn) – and directly or indirectly employed over 150,000 people. But as visitor arrivals fell by 87%, the economy plummeted by 19% in 2020.

“Even though the economists keep saying otherwise, Fiji might just surprise everyone with what may start with a gradual recovery that gathers momentum,” Lockington said.

“The Fijian diaspora around the world are really keen to see family and friends and have shown massive support with interest in bookings way ahead of the announcement. They’re planning to take their holidays here knowing that they will be supporting more Fijians to get their jobs back.”

Fiji’s highest growth markets for the past five years were India, South Korea, China and New Zealand. Australia remains Fiji’s largest market, with the number of Australian visitors growing at an average rate of 2%. Since 2013, tourist arrivals to Fiji have grown by an average of 5%.

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## 2021.10.14 - Opinion

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[\*\*Opinion\*\*](#)[\*\*Conservatives\*\*](#)

## The Tories' plan to 'level up' Britain can't be taken seriously. Here's why

[Aditya Chakrabortty](#)



Illustration: Bill Bragg/The Guardian

Thu 14 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

Sweet reader, do you long for light relief? Well, I have just the thing! A quiz. Below are three statements made by a leading politician in the not-so-distant past that would be unimaginable from any government frontbencher in these days of “levelling up”. So, which throwback said them?

1) “A pound spent in Croydon is of far more value to the country than a pound spent in Strathclyde.”

Who could that be – Chuka Umunna?

2) “The city is the best place to exchange ideas. It is the best place for economic activity. People in cities live longer than people who live in the countryside; they do. They are better educated ... They are better fed, and there are many more opportunities for reproduction in the city than the countryside. It is absolutely true.”

Nick Clegg?

3) “London is to the billionaire as the jungles of Sumatra are to the orangutan ... we’re proud of that.”

David Cameron?

How did you fare? Since this is a column, not a detective novel, let’s cut the suspense and reveal the answers:

1) Was [said by Boris Johnson in 2012](#), although today he [frets](#): “By turbocharging ... London and the south-east, you drive prices even higher and you force more and more people to move to the same expensive areas.”

2) [Again, Johnson](#) – who now [bemoans](#) that “for too many people, geography turns out to be destiny”.

3) Guess who? Yes, the [prime minister](#)! Who at last week’s Tory party conference [deplored](#) how “we have one of the most imbalanced societies and

lop-sided economies”.

You could write a book on the vast gulf between that first set of quotes and the second. They are not just in affable, murmuring disagreement with each other: they are diametrically opposed philosophies.

One side of the dispute says: let the rich get richer while the rest of us scrabble for their crumbs, let the oligarchs rule London and allow the capital to lord it over other cities and towns. The other proposes: stop the country being overwhelmed by the needs, desires and fashions of its south-eastern corner, share round wealth and power, and – to coin a phrase – level up.

Yet these rival projects were given voice by one man – and not in his guise as a spaff-first-think-later columnist, but as an elected politician. While the first argument may have been voiced by Johnson as mayor of London, it goes well beyond municipal boosterism. This isn’t boilerplate about London as “the greatest city in the world”; it is a heavily redacted version of the capital, excised of its housing crisis and kids in poverty. And it expresses a worldview straight out of Matthew: “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.”

That Johnson bears no resemblance to the one we have today, champion of equality and tribune of the workers. So either he disavows everything he said on the subject until quite recently, or he is lying now. Which is it? And what does it say about British politics that it is now beholden to a complete skin-shedder?

“So what?” you may say. This is [Mr Two Columns](#) we’re talking about here. Trolley is as trolley does. This is the guy who supported Theresa May’s Brexit, then rubbed it, then struck his own deal with Brussels and now wants an entirely new arrangement over Northern Ireland. Except if there’s one political project that Johnson wants to be defined by, it’s levelling up. It was the great theme of last week’s Conservative bacchanal, at which Michael Gove, our new secretary of state for levelling up, declared the agenda “do or die”. And as the politico-media class always does when faced with a powerful man speaking in platitudes, they took it all very seriously.

The Mail on Sunday [calls](#) levelling up “as bold as anything Maggie ever tried”, the BBC commissions hours of airtime and the thinktanks dutifully publish their reports. The sight is akin to watching some of our finest minds wallpapering over a gigantic black hole. For all the government departments and No 10 delivery units devoted to the programme, exactly what it is, how it is to be implemented and how its success is to be measured – all this remains undefined, nearly two years into this administration.

When a bright young Tory, Neil O’Brien, is appointed chief thinker on the subject, the press lavishes him with superlatives. “As close to the perfect candidate as you could get,” pronounces the Economist. Never mentioned is that while O’Brien ran Policy Exchange, David Cameron’s favourite thinktank, it published a [paper](#) in 2008 arguing that struggling northern cities should go to the urban equivalent of Dignitas, and their residents move to London: “For people in regions that do not neighbour London this has an obvious and unavoidable implication: if you want to share in London’s success, you may have to move to London … As the old phrase goes, if you can’t beat ’em, join ’em.” Less levelling up than migrating down. Yet O’Brien defended the paper, saying it had been misunderstood by the press, even after Cameron called for its author to be shipped off to Australia.

My argument here isn’t with O’Brien, whom I liked when we met courtesy of the BBC for a [debate](#) in which I argued for greater regional equality, while he called London “the goose that lays the golden egg”. I can respect his point of view, which was until very recently the standard Conservative line. But there’s the rub: it is a rightwing argument. As a [new report from the Town and Country Planning Association demonstrates](#), the government’s planning model undermines the levelling-up promise, eroding the local democracy it is supposed to safeguard. It cannot be dressed up as being about social justice or “left on economics, right on culture” or any of those other terms used to enable the Tories to hold on to their new voters in the north. Some of the best thinking on regional development is being done on the left, not the right, and not in Westminster but Cardiff, where ministers are trying to combine local procurement, Preston-style, with protecting the [everyday economy](#).

I am not shocked to see politicians changing their clothes, but there is something deeply wrong with a political and media culture that merely

applauds each costume change; that is enthralled when George Osborne launches a “northern powerhouse”, yet never asks [why at the end of it](#) all more public sector jobs were created in London, even while they were cut in the north, while far more pounds a head were still spent on the transport needs of the capital. It’s a culture that breathlessly reports each rally of the Brexit negotiations without acknowledging the bad faith in which Johnson and David Frost lumbered on to the court; that deplores Trumpian post-truth politics, while ignoring the role of the media and the rest of society in auditing politicians’ lies.

No doubt sceptics like me will be confounded when the white paper on levelling up is published and ties up all the many loose ends. But I am not so sure. To develop its work, the Cabinet Office last month corralled a bunch of top-flight academics and experts from across western Europe. The grand round table was called “What do we mean by ‘levelling up’?” As shoulder-shruggingly, head-scratchingly basic as that. Perhaps next time No 10 will hold an awayday to discuss Emperor Johnson’s new clothes.

- Aditya Chakrabortty is a Guardian columnist
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## [OpinionCop26](#)

# Forget net zero – let's have a 'fossil freedom day'

[Mark Lynas](#)



'My suggestion is extremely simple: we set a date for the worldwide exit from fossil fuels, a sort of independence day from carbon.' Composite: Guardian/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 14 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

The important thing about any agenda isn't so much what's on it, but what is missing. And so it is with the 21st UN climate change conference ([Cop26](#)), in Glasgow. There are some crucial issues up for discussion and negotiation: the [\\$100bn finance promise](#), the [1.5C target](#) and how to raise global mitigation ambition to meet it. But I have a proposal for something that is still firmly off the agenda, even though it would arguably do more than anything else to address the climate emergency.

The problem with Cops – and I’ve been to a few – is that activity tends to substitute for action. The atmosphere is frenetic: people rush to and fro, from meeting to meeting, negotiation to negotiation, clutching bundles of paper, phones, laptops, and (if they are lucky) a hastily grabbed, limp sandwich. Some negotiators trundle everywhere with wheeled suitcases, stuffed with printed materials from every previous Cop – so they never have to miss an opportunity to refer directly to the Bali declaration or the Berlin mandate.

It’s heaven for lawyers – but hell for everyone else. Everything hinges on wording: whether the square brackets contain “shall” or “should”, “may” or “must” becomes an all-consuming obsession. The details are so tiny they are almost fractal: dive in and you find yourself in a parallel universe of ever-expanding detail, with passionate arguments about incomprehensibly arcane sub-clauses which run for weeks, or sometimes even years. Former Maldives president Mohamed Nasheed, who I advise on climate issues, has a joke about Cop babies – that negotiators have been doing this so long that some of them have even got married and had children. It’s funny because it’s true.

The one thing that tends to get lost is the bigger picture – actually solving the climate emergency. It’s on the agenda, of course, because it’s what the meeting is meant to be about, but at the same time it’s not actually on the agenda. We might get an agreement on financing, on loss and damage, on carbon markets, on “nationally determined contributions” – the Paris pledges that are meant to deliver on the 1.5C goal – which would all be great. I’ll be the first to celebrate, and to dance on the Cop tables at five in the morning on the final weekend.

But even 1.5C is a slippery target: it is not something anyone can actually deliver, even collectively. Whether the planet’s temperature will cross the threshold of 1.5C above pre-industrial temperatures is a product of the Earth system’s response to cumulative emissions of greenhouse gases, which cannot be known precisely except in hindsight. That’s why it is framed probabilistically by scientists; for example there is a one-in-six chance that we have already exceeded the 1.5C budget as I write today.

So what might be a Glasgow climate emergency target that we actually could meet? My suggestion is extremely simple: we set a date for the

worldwide exit from fossil fuels, a sort of independence day from carbon. Like all ideas that eventually become mainstream, at first sight this looks preposterous. You mean, we actually have to stop burning oil? No more petrol? No more LNG tankers plying the world's oceans? No more giant coal machines scraping up carboniferous forests from underneath medieval villages in eastern Germany?

Yes, that's exactly what I mean. A fossil fuels exit date forces us to confront what net zero doesn't – that we have to actually entirely stop combusting carbon. (We also have to figure out ways to remove the excess carbon already in the atmosphere and to get everyone on largely plant-based diets, but one thing at a time.) It means there must be no more exploration for fossil fuels well before that date, because all that would be doing would be creating unwanted hydrocarbon reservoirs. It means there must be no more building of fossil infrastructure – coal-burning power stations, LNG terminals, oil refineries and so on – at least 30 years before that date, because doing so would merely be creating stranded assets.

There will, of course, be objections from carbon addicts, citing the “methadone” option of carbon capture and storage. This – which is as physically and thermodynamically implausible as the endlessly receding fantasy of nuclear fusion – has been touted for decades as a way to carry on burning our carbon cake and eating it. Yet it is still nowhere near to at-scale deployment anywhere in the world, and never will be. I'm sorry my friends, but fossil fuel freedom day means we have to leave the unburned stuff in the ground, right where the dinosaurs left it.

Of course, the date is crucial. If we set it at 2150, as Saudi Arabia would no doubt immediately volunteer, we will be well on our way to turning Earth into Venus by then. I propose 2047, far enough away for a rapid transition to zero-carbon economies to be feasible worldwide with minimal economic damage, but close enough to still give us a decent – probably 50:50 – chance of keeping the Earth from heating up beyond 1.5C. Fittingly, 2047 is also exactly a century on from the year of Indian independence in 1947, when the world's largest democracy came into being after more than a century of British colonial exploitation. As Jawaharlal Nehru said then in his tryst with destiny speech: “At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom.”

At Glasgow we could make our own tryst with destiny, one that could save our civilisation from the carbon catastrophe that looms over us all. Imagine that evening, in August 2047, as the clock ticks towards midnight: we could all awake, as the sun breaks through the smoky ruins of the industrial revolution, to the life and freedom of independence from fossil fuels.

- Mark Lynas is a freelance writer working full-time on climate change
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## OpinionBrexit

# Britain and the EU are on a Brexit collision course – but there is a way out

[Anand Menon](#)



‘The offer from European commission vice-president Maroš Šefčovič could surely have been proposed as soon as the practical implications of the protocol were becoming clear.’ Photograph: Yves Herman/Reuters

Thu 14 Oct 2021 05.15 EDT

After days of rising tensions, the [European Union](#) has agreed to drop most checks on supermarket goods arriving in Northern Ireland from Britain. But it still fears that Boris Johnson will reject the new offer.

According to Britain’s Brexit negotiator [Lord Frost](#), speaking on Tuesday, the Northern Ireland protocol is not working – either in terms of its impact on trade or in terms of the hostility towards it from parts of the unionist population.

And so, the government presented a new legal text for a new protocol that would not only reduce the need for checks on goods travelling from Great Britain to [Northern Ireland](#), but also minimise the role of the EU's court in overseeing the agreement.

Frost's claim that the European commission has been inflexible in its interpretation of the protocol has some merit. After all, the offer from European commission vice-president Maroš Šefčovič could surely have been proposed as soon as the practical implications of the protocol were becoming clear. That the commission is only coming up with these proposals now will, apart from anything else, simply strengthen the impression held by some in Johnson's government that if they talk and act tough, the EU will eventually cave. And one can only imagine what might have happened had the EU shown the same kind of flexibility to Johnson's predecessor, Theresa May.

The EU's new "[bespoke Northern Ireland specific solution](#)" means checks would be removed on 80% of lines on supermarket shelves, with sourced British sausages no longer at risk of being prohibited. And lorries bound for Northern Ireland carrying meat, dairy or confectionery would have to provide only one health certificate for each journey, rather than one for each product line.

On the surface, then, it would appear that the commission is responding to UK concerns and trying to make the protocol work for both parties. But this, it seems, is no longer enough: Lord Frost says he no longer believes such technical fixes are sufficient. Yet it is here that his arguments are most flawed.

He says the protocol was negotiated under duress. Even if it is true that the pre-election parliament of 2019 had "radically undermined the government's negotiating hand", it's ultimately up to ministers whether or not they sign a treaty. Johnson had a choice – to sign this deal, negotiate another, or not sign at all.

Second, Frost says: "Maybe there is a world in which the protocol could have worked, more sensitively implemented. But the situation has now

moved on.” It’s too late, in other words, to try to fix a flawed agreement because some parties no longer trust it. But is this credible? If the protocol has been the source of dissatisfaction, particularly among Northern Ireland’s unionists, then surely steps to make it operate differently, and more in keeping with their wishes, might make them reconsider?

Which brings us to the nub of the problem. The government now insists that key institutional provisions – notably the role of the European court of justice – should be revised. This demand has led many observers to conclude that Britain is interested not in resolving problems but in collapsing the negotiations (a suspicion hardly allayed by [remarks](#) this week by Dominic Cummings, who said the government always intended to ditch the protocol).

Frost says it is the “facts on the ground” – ie trade restrictions and a lack of unionist consent – that matter above all and mean the protocol must be changed. Yet the role of the European court was entirely clear two years ago and has not changed since implementation. It is hard to see how a government can sign up to something one day, and claim it is opposed to it in principle two years later.

And, perhaps most importantly, it is impossible to imagine the EU being willing to even countenance a reconsideration of the role of the court: because Brussels has been adamant from the start that no renegotiation is possible; and because, under the protocol, Northern Ireland is subject to EU law, and the ultimate arbiter of disputes under EU law is ... the European court of justice (ECJ).

So where does all this leave us? Britain’s combative approach will cause further irritation in EU capitals.

If, as Frost’s words imply, no amount of technical fixes would suffice, then it is hard to imagine anything other than the current standoff continuing, with the EU possibly restarting legal action against Britain for non-implementation, and the UK government seriously considering launching the article 16 process.

At the same time, however, both sides need a resolution. So maybe, just maybe, Britain will decide to test the EU proposals in practice before

deciding on more drastic action. After all, in his foreword to the government's "[command paper](#)" in July, Johnson made much of the problems caused by the implementation of the protocol but said nothing at all about the ECJ.

The Northern Ireland protocol, as the prime minister has stated, represented a "[huge compromise](#)" by the UK. Indeed, in negotiating this part of the withdrawal deal, Johnson put his name to something that, in the words of his predecessor, "no British prime minister could sign up to". His current Brexit minister seems intent on ensuring that everything on which Johnson compromised is removed. This he will not achieve. Yet there is still a chance that a functioning settlement for Northern Ireland may emerge from the current impasse.

Anand Menon is director of The UK in a Changing Europe and professor of European politics and foreign affairs at King's College London

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[Opinion](#)[Life and style](#)

## A stranger on a train – and a small, stunning act of kindness

[Adrian Chiles](#)



The man in seat 51 ... sadly there was no kind stranger to help this passenger. Photograph: Ernesto Rogata/Alamy

Thu 14 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

As simple unexpected acts of kindness go, this one will take some beating. I was on a train from London to Plymouth last Friday afternoon, on my way to a reunion of some university friends, among them people I'd not clapped eyes on for more than 30 years. Oddly, I found myself getting nervous about it, feeling almost as frightened as a fresher at the prospect of making friends again with old friends. And when I get nervous, I get tired. I have this much in common with the footballing great, Gordon Strachan, who tells me that when he was nervous before games, he couldn't stop himself from yawning uncontrollably. This greatly annoyed his managers, not least Sir Alex Ferguson.

I tried to lean my head on the window but the gap between the seat and the window was too big, making it most uncomfortable. After a bit of wriggling, I felt something soft being pushed into the gap. It was a rolled-up pink woolly jumper from the woman behind, for me to use as a pillow. Being prone to a bit of a slobber while snoozing, I tried to refuse but she insisted. I slept very soundly, thinking what a wonderful species humankind can be.

When I woke up, I was quite unable to find words to adequately convey my gratitude. The sentences I composed in my head all felt a bit cloying. In the end, I just said thank you several times and left it at that, which still doesn't feel enough. So, to the woman in the red dress and slobbered-on pink jumper who alighted at Totnes on Friday, I thank you again, most sincerely. And please post the garment to the Guardian so I can get it washed for you.

Adrian Chiles is a broadcaster, writer and Guardian columnist

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## 2021.10.14 - Around the world

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## Hunger

# **UN development goal of zero hunger ‘tragically distant’, global index shows**



An Ethiopian child queues for food at the Um-Rakoba camp, on the Sudan-Ethiopia border in Al-Qadarif state, Sudan. Photograph: Mohamed Nureldin Abdallah/Reuters

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[Saeed Kamali Dehghan](#)

Thu 14 Oct 2021 05.01 EDT

Global targets to eradicate hunger by 2030 will be missed as a “toxic cocktail” of the climate crisis, conflict and [the Covid-19 pandemic](#) reverses progress, new projections have revealed.

The fight to end hunger is “dangerously off track” and [the UN sustainable development goal of zero hunger](#) “tragically distant”, according to the 2021 Global Hunger Index (GHI), published on Thursday. Forty-seven countries will fail to achieve even low levels of hunger (ie countries that have adequate food and low numbers of child deaths) by 2030 and millions of people will experience severe hunger in the coming years.

The findings come amid warnings from the UN’s food agency, the World Food Programme (WFP), that an average temperature rise of 2C from pre-industrial levels will mean 189 million more people [going hungry](#).

Hunger levels around the world have been declining since 2000, according to the GHI, a tool to measure and track hunger developed by NGO [Concern](#)

[Worldwide](#) and German humanitarian aid agency [Welthungerhilfe](#). But progress is slowing, showing “signs of stagnating or even being reversed”.

Sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia have the highest levels of hunger.

The GHI score is calculated using four indicators, including undernourishment, child wasting (children under the age of five with low weight to height ratio), child stunting (children under the age of five with low height for their age) and child mortality rates.

Undernourishment [is particularly high](#) in sub-Saharan Africa, while south Asia [has high levels of child wasting](#).

Countries are ranked on a 100-point scale: a score of 50 or above is classified as “extremely alarming”. Somalia, with a rating of 50.8, is the only country out of 135 ranked to fall into this category.

At least five countries have levels of hunger that are “alarming” – Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar and [Yemen](#). A further 31 countries have “serious” levels of hunger.

Fourteen countries succeeded in reducing their GHI score by a quarter between 2012 and 2021.



A camp for internally displaced people, Somalia. The country is the only one of the 135 ranked to fall into the extremely ‘alarming’ category. Photograph: Mahamud Utaama/The Guardian

“A toxic cocktail of climate crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic and increasingly severe and protracted violent conflicts is threatening to wipe out any progress made against hunger in recent years,” said Dominic MacSorley, Concern’s chief executive.

“Violent conflict is now the primary cause of hunger, and it is worsening food security and malnutrition around the world at a ferocious rate this year,” he said. “The GHI report shows that conflict is a major driver of hunger in eight of the 10 countries with hunger levels classified as ‘alarming’ or ‘extremely alarming’.”

The report said that in 2020 more than half of the people grappling with undernourishment, which reflects on insufficient calorie intake, lived in countries affected by conflict and violence.

“After decades of decline, the global prevalence of undernourishment – one of the four indicators used to calculate GHI scores – is increasing,” the report says. “This shift may be a harbinger of reversals in other measures of hunger.”

David Beasley, the WFP’s executive director, said: “Large swathes of the globe, from Madagascar to Honduras to Bangladesh, are in the throes of a climate crisis that is now a daily reality for millions. The climate crisis is fuelling a food crisis.”

The agency said tens of thousands of lives are at risk in southern Madagascar, where famine-like conditions have been driven by climate breakdown. Consecutive droughts have pushed nearly 1.1 million people into severe hunger.

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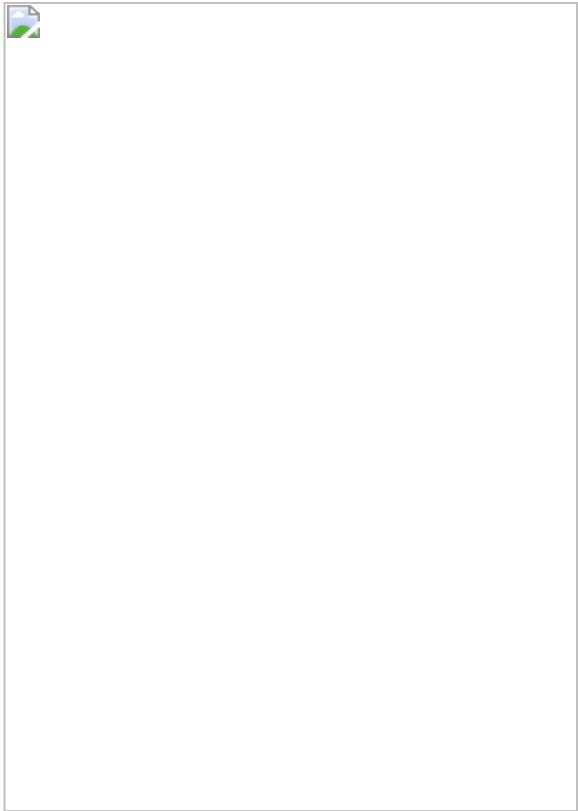
## The age of extinctionBirds

# One in five of Europe's bird species slipping towards extinction



The common snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) is considered vulnerable in Europe due to sharp declines since 2015. Photograph: Arterra/Universal Images Group/Getty Images

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[Phoebe Weston](#)

[@phoeb0](#)

Wed 13 Oct 2021 19.01 EDT

The common swift, common snipe and rook are among species slipping towards extinction in [Europe](#), according to the continent's latest "red list" report, which finds that one in five bird species is now at risk.

From the Azores in the west to the Ural mountains in the east, birds that have been the cornerstones of European ecosystems are disappearing,

according to the BirdLife International analysis, which is based on observations of 544 native bird species. Three species have become regionally extinct in Europe since the last report in 2015 – Pallas's sandgrouse, common buttonquail and pine bunting.

In total, 30% of species assessed are showing population decline, according to observations from thousands of experts and volunteers working in 54 countries and territories. At a European level, 13% of birds are threatened with extinction and a further 6% are near threatened. “The results are alarming but we are not surprised,” said Anna Staneva, interim head of conservation, BirdLife Europe and Central Asia.

Key trends echo findings from the three previous publications of the red list, in 1994, 2004 and 2015, showing declines continuing unabated. The data is based on millions of observations made since 1980. “We’re running out of time, the clock is ticking. We don’t want to see the dramatic changes we’re seeing now happening in the next five or 10 years,” said Staneva.



Pallas's sandgrouse (*Syrrhaptes paradoxus*) at a drinking pool in Kazakhstan. The species has become regionally extinct since the last report in 2015. Photograph: AGAMI Photo Agency/Alamy

The findings – which were collected in 2019 – are based on the IUCN red list categories and criteria applied at regional level. They corroborate conclusions from the [State of Nature in the EU 2013-2018 report](#), which found only a quarter of species have good conservation status. Loss of habitat, intensification of agriculture, the overexploitation of resources, pollution and unsustainable forestry practices are driving declines, with the climate crisis a growing factor.

“These are big, large-scale threats which we call systemic threats, and they’re very much related to the way our society works and how we use resources,” said Staneva. “It’s a signal that something is seriously going wrong around us. We need to change the way we live, that is the key message coming from our results.”

The common swift is near threatened and rooks and common snipe are now considered vulnerable due to sharp declines since 2015 when they were listed as of least concern. For species to be placed in the near threatened category the population has to have declined by 25% over three generations. When declines are greater than 30% they enter the threatened category.

Staneva said it was a surprise to see such well-known species in big trouble. “There are probably lots of things each and every one of us can do in our daily life to change the way we consume natural resources, but obviously as active citizens probably the most important thing we can do is demand our politicians take action,” she said.



An adult male pine bunting (*Emberiza leucocephalos*) in Russia. The species is now extinct in Europe. Photograph: blickwinkel/Alamy

A species is regionally extinct if it has not been observed in Europe over a minimum period of five years. Two species that were believed extinct in 2015 – the Caspian plover and the Asian desert warbler – have since reappeared in Europe. For more than 50% of species living on rocky habitats such as inland cliffs and mountain peaks, there is not enough research to plot accurate population trends.

However, it is not all bad news. The recovery of the bittern, Azores bullfinch and griffon vulture show targeted action on species recovery can work. Certain raptors such as red kites are doing better thanks to the banning of pesticides such as DDT and legal protection against persecution.

A few species are currently benefiting from a warmer climate. The black-tailed godwit, for example, has moved from vulnerable to not threatened since 2015, and this is probably due to rising spring temperatures in Iceland, which holds about 47% of the European population. The [2020 European Breeding Bird Atlas \(Ebba2\)](#) showed Mediterranean species such as the European bee-eater and little egret are now reaching the UK and other areas of northern Europe, mainly due to milder winters.



A little egret (*Egretta garzetta*) in the South Downs National Park, England. The species is now reaching the UK and other areas of northern Europe due to milder winters. Photograph: John Lauper/South Downs National Park Authority/PA

Martin Harper, regional director of BirdLife Europe and Central Asia, said he hoped the report would serve as a catalyst for more people and organisations to take action to protect Europe's birds. "Governments across Europe need to translate the new global ambition to restore nature into legal targets, backed up by the right policies and funding," he said.

The latest list will help inform on-the-ground conservation action and national and international environment policies. Recommendations from the report include creating a larger and better managed network of protected areas, consistent with the UN target of [protecting 30% of land by 2030](#), with substantial areas under strict protection, such as "no take" marine protected areas and "no logging" forests.

Carbon-rich landscapes such as peatlands, grassland and forest which can deliver benefits for biodiversity and the climate should be prioritised, the report found, and efforts to sequester carbon should also aid biodiversity. In terms of funding, a key recommendation is to end perverse subsidies that

harm nature and switch to an agricultural policy that supports wildlife-friendly farming.

*Find more [age of extinction coverage here](#), and follow biodiversity reporters [Phoebe Weston](#) and [Patrick Greenfield](#) on Twitter for all the latest news and features*

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**North Korea**

## **North Korean leader watches extreme martial arts performance – video**

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[Taiwan](#)

## At least 46 killed as fire engulfs building in southern Taiwan



Emergency personnel at the scene of the fire in Kaohsiung. The cause of the blaze remains unclear. Photograph: CNA/AFP/Getty Images

*[Vincent Ni](#) and agencies*

Thu 14 Oct 2021 07.32 EDT

A cross-departmental investigation has been launched in the southern Taiwanese city of Kaohsiung, after at least 46 people died and another 41 were injured in a fire in that engulfed a building overnight.

The 13-storey building caught fire at about 3am local time (20:00 BST) on Thursday, officials in the city of Kaohsiung said. An earlier fire department statement said the blaze was “extremely fierce” and destroyed many floors.

At least 11 bodies were sent straight to the morgue, the fire chief, Li Ching-hsiu, told reporters. Another 14 people who showed no signs of life were among 55 taken to hospital. In Taiwan, official confirmation of a death can only be made in the hospital.

Officials said firefighters conducted search and rescue efforts into the afternoon. “An investigation that involves the city’s fire and police departments is under way,” said Rita Li, a spokesperson from Kaohsiung.

The fire looks set to be Taiwan’s deadliest in years. The last fire of a similar magnitude was in 1995, when 64 people perished inside a packed karaoke club.

As an island frequently battered by earthquakes and typhoons, Taiwan has strict building codes and a generally good safety record. But critics say there is often a gap between what the rules state and how safety standards are applied, especially in older buildings.



Witnesses told Taiwan media that they heard an explosion at about 3am.  
Photograph: Fire Bureau Of Kaohsiun/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Video footage of Thursday’s fire on Taiwanese television showed flames and smoke billowing out of the lower floors of the building as firefighters

sprayed water from the street. After daybreak, they could be seen hosing the middle floors of the still smouldering building from elevated platforms.

The cause of the fire was unclear, but firefighters noted the flames burned most intensely where a lot of clutter had been piled up, the fire department statement said.

Witnesses told Taiwan media they heard an explosion at about 3am. Residents reported hearing a number of loud noises when the fire first broke out on the lower floors.

“I heard many loud bangs - ‘bang, bang, bang’ - on the ground floor and came down to investigate,” an unidentified man who lived in the building told local media. “That’s when I realised there was a fire and called the police,” he added.

An unnamed female survivor, describing the scene on her floor, said: “When I opened the door to get out, the hallway was full of black smoke.”

The building is about 40 years old with shops on the lower levels and apartments above. The lower floors were completely blackened, eyewitnesses said.

A constable at the Kaohsiung police department told the AFP news agency that the building was mostly occupied by low-income residents.

Survivors had estimated about 100 people lived in the apartment block, the constable added, giving only his surname Liu, adding that officials had not yet ruled out arson.

*With the Associated Press and AFP*

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## Animals

# Walrus from Space census seeks public help to spot animals in satellite images



Little is known about how many walruses exist along the Arctic coastline.

Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

*[Robyn Vinter](#)*

Thu 14 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Conservationists are on the hunt for “citizen scientists” to spot walruses from their own home to help track populations of the creatures and give scientists an understanding of how many are left in the wild.

Keen-eyed members of the public are being asked to scour images of the [Arctic](#) taken from space for the blubbery mammals and report any sightings to WWF and the British Antarctic Survey, as part of a census of Atlantic walrus and walrus from the Laptev Sea.

It is hoped half a million people worldwide will join [the Walrus from Space research project](#), and look through thousands of high-resolution satellite images – a task too gargantuan for researchers to complete alone.

Despite being an important species in the Arctic ecosystem, little is known about how many walruses exist along remote and largely inaccessible 25,000 sq km (9,650 sq miles) of Arctic coastline – an area larger than Wales.

The project builds on the knowledge of indigenous communities, tracking the effects of global heating on the animals, whose habitat is heating up almost three times faster than the rest of the world, with roughly 13% of summer sea ice disappearing every decade.

Rod Downie, chief polar adviser at WWF, said: “What happens in the Arctic doesn’t stay there; the climate crisis is a global problem, bigger than any person, species or region. Ahead of hosting this year’s global climate summit, the UK must raise its ambition and keep all of its climate promises – for the sake of the walrus, and the world.”

Hannah Cubaynes, a research associate at the British Antarctic Survey, said: “Assessing walrus populations by traditional methods is very difficult as they live in extremely remote areas, spend much of their time on the sea ice and move around a lot. Satellite images can solve this problem as they can survey huge tracts of coastline to assess where walrus are and help us count the ones that we find.

“However, doing that for all the Atlantic and Laptev walrus will take huge amounts of imagery, too much for a single scientist or small team, so we need help from thousands of citizen scientists to help us learn more about this iconic animal.”

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## **Headlines friday 15 october 2021**

- [Covid PCR tests At least 43,000 in UK may have had false negatives](#)
- [Live Coronavirus: testing at UK lab paused over thousands of possible false negatives](#)
- [Supply chain crisis Foreign lorry drivers to be allowed to make more UK deliveries](#)
- [Live UK haulage association blasts cabotage changes](#)

## Coronavirus

# Covid PCR tests: at least 43,000 in UK may have had false negatives



A laboratory technician uses a pipette to process Covid tests. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images

*[Jamie Grierson](#), [Steven Morris](#) and [Rowena Mason](#)*

Fri 15 Oct 2021 05.31 EDT

At least 43,000 people may have been wrongly given a negative Covid test result, the UK Health Security Agency has said, as it announced the suspension of operations at a privately run lab in Wolverhampton.

NHS test and trace has suspended testing operations by Immensa Health Clinic at its laboratory in Wolverhampton, the agency said.

The move comes after an investigation into reports of people receiving negative PCR test results after they had previously tested positive on a

lateral flow device.

NHS test and trace said about 400,000 samples had been processed through the lab, the vast majority of which will have been negative results, but an estimated 43,000 people may have been given incorrect negative PCR test results between 8 September and 12 October, mostly in south-west [England](#).

The Welsh government said about 4,000 Welsh residents were among those given inaccurate Covid test results.

NHS test and trace is contacting the people who could still be infectious to advise them to take another test.

The UKHSA said it was “an isolated incident attributed to one laboratory but all samples are now being redirected to other laboratories”.

Dr Will Welfare, the public health incident director at UKHSA, said: “There is no evidence of any faults with LFD or PCR test kits themselves and the public should remain confident in using them and in other laboratory services currently provided.”

Immensa Health Clinic, which is owned by the founder of a healthcare firm called Dante Labs, was incorporated as a company in the UK in May 2020, just months before it started processing tests under a UK government contract. Its website shows it offers testing services for people travelling in and out of the UK.

Jonathan Ashworth, the shadow health secretary, said: “Serious questions have to be asked about how this private firm – who didn’t exist before May 2020 – was awarded a lucrative £120m contract to run this lab.

“From duff PPE to failing test kits, ministers have sprayed around tax money like confetti and utterly failed to deliver the service people deserve.”

In a statement provided by the UKHSA, the chief executive of Immensa Health Clinic, Andrea Riposati, said: “We are fully collaborating with UKHSA on this matter. Quality is paramount for us. We have proudly analysed more than 2.5m samples for NHS test and trace, working closely with the great teams at DHSC [Department of Health and Social Care] and

UKHSA. We do not wish this matter or anything else to tarnish the amazing work done by the UK in this pandemic.”

Dr Kit Yates, a mathematical biologist at the University of Bath and a member of the Independent Sage group of scientists, suggested the error could be behind a recent rise in coronavirus cases.

He said: “There’s been a concerted effort to highlight what’s been going on with these strange results for a while now in the hope that someone would investigate. We now know 43,000 people are believed to have been given false negatives, but this doesn’t even come near to the cost of the mistake. Many of these people will have been forced into school or work, potentially infecting others. This could be part of the reason behind some of the recent rises we’ve seen.

“It’s really important that we’ve had lateral flow tests which, at the very least, allowed us to understand there was an issue, even if people weren’t allowed to act on the results. We need to find out exactly what happened here in order to make sure it doesn’t happen again elsewhere.”

Health minister for Wales Eluned Morgan said 4,000 Welsh residents may have been affected, with the majority of these in the Gwent and Cwm Taf Morgannwg areas of south Wales.

Morgan said: “Anyone who had a test from 4 October and received a result from the affected laboratory will be contacted by NHS test and trace by text message and/or email and advised if it was negative to book an appointment to be retested.

“It will also advise that their close contacts who are symptomatic book a test. People who had a test processed at the laboratory between 8 September and 4 October will also be contacted and advised to get a test if they have symptoms.”

She added: “My immediate concern is the information and support for the Welsh residents impacted and I have asked Public Health Wales to provide additional support and advice to the affected health boards. They will also be

assessing the potential impact of this incident on the case rates and epidemiology reports for Wales.”

This comes after members of the public were urged to book further testing after some PCR tests at a government-run site in Berkshire resulted in false negatives.

## Cases

West Berkshire council said in a statement some of the tests at the Newbury Showground testing site, operated by the DHSC, “have had results sent out that may have incorrectly shown as negative for Covid-19”.

It added: “After receiving reports from local residents in recent weeks that there were concerns about the accuracy of test results from the site, we passed these concerns on to the DHSC for further investigation. The DHSC has now confirmed that a number of sites nationally may have been affected by this issue, including the one at Newbury Showground.”

People who received a negative result for a PCR test between 3 and 12 October, as well as their close contacts, were “strongly” encouraged by the local authority to take another test.

The councillor Graham Bridgman said: “Testing continues to remain important as we learn to live with Covid, and anyone who has symptoms, or who has been in contact with someone who tests positive, should book a PCR test straight away. We also strongly encourage the public to do twice weekly lateral flow testing.”

The DHSC has been contacted for comment.

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[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

## Covid: UK records 44,932 new cases and 145 deaths; US set to partly lift travel restrictions – as it happened

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/oct/15/coronavirus-live-uk-booster-shot-rollout-for-vulnerable-a-chaotic-failure-covid-pass-now-mandatory-for-all-workers-in-italy>.

## Supply chain crisis

# Foreign lorry drivers to be allowed to make more UK deliveries



Containers sit on the tarmac at Felixstowe port on Wednesday. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

*[Jamie Grierson](#)*

*[@JamieGrierson](#)*

Fri 15 Oct 2021 10.49 EDT

Foreign lorry drivers will be able to make an unlimited number of pick-ups and drop-offs in a fixed period in the UK under changes to rules proposed by the government to prevent shortages of products in the run-up to Christmas and into the new year.

On Thursday, ministers announced a consultation on a plan to increase deliveries in the UK by temporarily changing so-called “cabotage” rules,

which govern how many trips foreign transport firms can make within another country.

Currently, hauliers from the EU can only pick up and drop off goods in the UK twice in a seven-day period, but the proposals would allow them to make an unlimited number of deliveries across two weeks. If approved, the plans would come into force before the end of the year and last for six months.

But lorry drivers reacted strongly against the move, saying: “We don’t want cabotage to sabotage our industry.”

The lorry driver shortage in the UK – caused by the effects of [Brexit](#), the pandemic and other factors – has affected petrol stations and supermarkets and has led to containers stacked up at Felixstowe port unable to be moved.

The transport secretary said the effect of the proposed change to cabotage rules was the “equivalent of adding thousands of extra lorry drivers to the road, but we don’t have to do anything with visas in order to do this”.

Grant Shapps told Sky News: “It’s a straightforward measure. It’ll come in towards the end of the year. It’s one additional measure to 24 as a government we’ve already introduced and there’s evidence that’s working.

“People will be able to get things for Christmas – these measures are having an impact, things are loosening up.

“When I talk to ports they’re saying: ‘Yes, it is busy, it’s a globally busy picture,’ but if you compare us to many ports around the world, we need to keep this in proportion – things are flowing.”

Rod McKenzie, the managing director of policy and public affairs at the Road Haulage Association, told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “We don’t want cabotage to sabotage our industry.

“I spoke to some of our members last night, they were appalled. ‘Ridiculous, pathetic, gobsmacked,’ were some of their more broadcastable comments.

“The government has been talking about a high-wage, high-skill economy, and not pulling the lever marked ‘uncontrolled immigration’, and to them this is exactly what it looks like: allowing overseas haulage companies and drivers to come over for perhaps up to six months on a fortnightly basis to do unlimited work at low rates, undercutting UK hauliers who are facing an acute driver shortage, rising costs, staff wages.

“This is about taking work from British operators and drivers and giving it to Europeans who don’t pay tax here and pay peanuts to their drivers.”

Shapps said issues with supply chains were a problem internationally but they were being dealt with “resiliently” in the UK.

“We know that the globe has woken up following coronavirus with huge supply chain issues everywhere around the entire world,” he said. “But in this country we have taken 24, now 25, different steps on the domestic side of that – the lorry drivers side of things – and we’re seeing it have a big impact.

“We’ve got now three times as many people applying to become lorry drivers every single day than before the crisis. We have to be careful, we mustn’t try and report ourselves into a crisis.”

Jim McMahon, the shadow transport secretary, said: “The government are bumbling from one delayed reaction to another – a direct result of their failure to properly plan to make [Brexit](#) work.

“Meanwhile, British people are paying the price for their incompetence and face another potentially ruined Christmas thanks to Boris Johnson’s refusal to acknowledge the scale of the winter crisis we are facing.”

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**Business live**

**Business**

# FTSE 100 hits pandemic high; FCA chair leaving early; insolvencies rise – as it happened

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## 2021.10.15 - Spotlight

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## **Adele: Easy on Me review – reliably, relatably Adele-esque**



Cathartic empowerment ... Adele. Photograph: Simon Emmett/Columbia Records/PA



*Alexis Petridis*

Fri 15 Oct 2021 04.45 EDT

Adele's [statement announcing the release](#) of her fourth album was published on social media earlier this week. In it, the singer doesn't talk much about music, more about her emotional state during the album's making, provoked, one assumes, by the breakdown of her marriage: "absolute mess and inner turmoil ... consumed by grief". She compared the album she made amid it to friends coming over with "a bottle of wine and a takeaway" and offering earthy, if astrologically based, advice: "It's your Saturn return, babes, fuck it."

It all sounds thoroughly grim, but it also has a hint of reassurance about it for her fans, who come to [Adele](#) in record-breaking numbers for relatable heartbreak – the musical equivalent of an old friend in the pub, tearfully relating the latest chapter in their reliably disastrous love life as they demolish a third glass of pinot grigio. For one thing, it underlines that she has fresh heartbreak to write about, which had been an issue with her last album, 25, on which she was forced to rake over the same relationship that had inspired its predecessor for material. For another, her fans might have cause to be alarmed by what the cover of Vogue refers to as "a new look, a new love, a new sound". How reliably relatable can Adele now be, with her

home in LA, her squad of Hollywood A-list pals, her three-times-a-day exercise regime and, the *Vogue* profile suggests, an employee on hand with a different pair of shoes should the singer want to change out of her heels? It's a statement that, consciously or otherwise, sends out a message: "Business as usual babes, fuck it."

It's the same message sent out by [Easy on Me, a single](#) so Adele-esque it's quite hard to make a qualitative judgment about: you hear it and think "yes, that's definitely Adele, doing the stuff that Adele does" and adjust your response according to whether or not The Stuff That Adele Does is your idea of musical nirvana.

It offers mournful piano that gradually becomes more strident as the song progresses – suggesting a hint of [cathartic empowerment about sharing your misery](#) – gently supported by subtle touches of bass: the figure it plays during the verses has a vague hint of the opening to the old theme from *Hill Street Blues* about it. Her voice, as powerful as ever, sounds initially wounded, then soars. Even if you find The Stuff That Adele Does miserable, you'd have your work cut out arguing that her vocal during the final bridge is anything other than fantastic. The lyrics – as on *Someone Like You*, or *Hello*, or *Send My Love (To Your New Lover)* – address the other party in a failing relationship, asking for forgiveness and understanding while underlining that it isn't really her fault – "you can't deny how hard I've tried, I changed who I was to put you both first – but now I give up" – which has a realistic tang: it's very much an emotional note people strike when they're tearfully offloading their woes three glasses of pinot grigio to the good.

Unlike *Someone Like You*, it's not the kind of Adele song built to stop the listener in their tracks, but, unlike the lesser moments of *25*, nor is it the kind of Adele song that just goes in one ear and out the other. It's reliably relatable business as usual, which – one suspects – is exactly what the millions of people who buy Adele's albums want, especially at this particular juncture in history.

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## [Leicester](#)

# ‘A growing divide’: Leicester East faces potential loss of second Labour MP



Claudia Webbe’s constituency office in Leicester. Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

*[Jessica Murray](#) and [Rajeev Syal](#)*

Fri 15 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

The constituents of [Leicester](#) East have become accustomed to seeing their local MP in the news. Often for all the wrong reasons.

The former Labour MP Keith Vaz, who held the seat for 32 years, stepped down after he was caught [offering to buy class A drugs](#) for sex workers, and has subsequently been found to have [bullied a parliamentary staffer](#).

Now his successor, Claudia Webbe, elected in 2019, has been [found guilty of harassment](#), including a threat to use acid against a female friend of a

partner, and is facing calls to resign.

Despite support for the former Jeremy Corbyn ally appearing to drain away on the party's left and among constituents, no one is enthused by the idea of a byelection.

Webbe, who will be sentenced on 4 November, has insisted upon her innocence and intends to appeal. But the likelihood of her being forced from office increased when she was warned that she could face prison. Under parliamentary rules, any custodial sentence that is not overturned will lead to a recall petition. If 10% of the electorate then vote for Webbe to be recalled, there will be a byelection.

“I’m glad that it’s come to light, and it goes to show it doesn’t matter who you are or what position of power you’re in: harassment isn’t tolerated,” said Aman Singh Thind, 24, from his family’s online clothing retail business in the constituency. He thinks Webbe should step down.



Aman Singh Thind. Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

“Even if somebody else comes into her position, this has all just shown you can’t judge somebody by a few posters and pictures,” said a business owner on Green Lane Road who, like many in the area, was wary of giving her

name. “Someone in that position has to be respectable; they’re working for the community. But as we’ve seen, it’s hard to judge someone’s character.”

Webbe won her seat with a majority of 6,019, down from Vaz’s more than 22,000 two years earlier. The Conservatives’ vote share increased from 24.2% in 2017 to 38.6% last time. “Leicester has generally been quite Labour-heavy for years, but I think there’s a growing divide. I think Labour would probably stay in though,” said Thind.

Vaz, a former minister and Labour fixer, remains a party member and has many supporters among the local party and its constituents. His Labour opponents fear he may yet have a significant hand in choosing any future byelection candidate because of an obscure rule change at this year’s party conference.

The new rule, introduced by card vote 15, means byelection candidates will be chosen by a five-member panel, three of whom will be selected by the constituency party executive.

One local party source said: “It is well known that Keith and his allies have great influence over Leicester East CLP [constituency Labour party]. This rule change effectively allows them to choose the next Labour candidate, if, as expected, Claudia is forced out.”

Party activists said half a dozen names of potential candidates had been raised locally, including Vaz himself, although last month he told the Guardian he would not stand again. Labour and Vaz have been approached for a comment.

The potential loss of a second Labour MP after serious allegations could encourage Tory supporters. Outside Webbe’s constituency office, 64-year-old Ellen Anderson said she would probably vote Conservative. “It wasn’t worth voting in Leicester when Keith Vaz was around; unless you were a Labour voter it was a waste of time. It’s different now,” she said.

Bernadette Martin, 60, said she voted Labour for the first time in 2019 because Vaz had finally left office.



Bernadette Martin. Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

Webbe's seat is on the outskirts of Leicester's centre, home to many of the city's garment factories. According to the 2011 census, two-thirds of the population were minority ethnic and 48.5% of people described themselves as Asian, a third of whom were Hindu.

Poverty is the area is high, with 42% of children living below the poverty line. In the area to the west of Spinney Hill Park, this rises to 51%. "We've got to think about our kids' futures. A lot of people around here still don't get proper wages; where I used to work I never got a proper minimum wage," said one woman, who asked to remain anonymous, as she sat in the park.

"I think a lot of people voted Conservative [across the UK] thinking they'd do something good, but that hasn't happened. I've got my mother-in-law living with me and she's over 85, she's always cold but I'm scared to turn the heating up as we have to pay the bills. We need someone who really understands what is happening to people in Leicester," she said.

Support for Webbe among the left in Leicester's Labour party is ebbing away. Helen Lentell, a local activist who campaigned for Webbe's victory in 2019, said: "I feel solidarity with Claudia as a person and she has been a

good MP. But I cannot support someone who can make threats like that against another woman.”

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Interview

## Nicole Holofcener: ‘Actors over 50 have distorted their faces so badly’

[Guardian readers](#)



‘My impulse is to make other people feel comfortable and in the process I make them uncomfortable’ ... Nicole Holofcener. Photograph: Sophia Evans/The Observer

Fri 15 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

**A lot of your films have, I think, been autobiographical. How much of yourself were you able to put into The Last Duel [Holofcener focused on the section from the point of view of Jodie Comer's Marguerite]? Is the “concept” of your third to debunk the ways in which male narratives distort women’s stories? Did that feel apiece with your previous work? And if this was a big break from the norm for you – in terms of period, location etc – how did that feel? Refreshing or unnerving? [bumble1](#)**



Holofcener with co-writers Matt Damon and Ben Affleck and director Ridley Scott on the red carpet for *The Last Duel* in Venice. Photograph: Alessandra Benedetti - Corbis/Corbis/Getty Images

Yes, my movies are semi-autobiographical, and I can't say that I'm aware of anything similar in Marguerite to me except that she's smart and educated and probably much braver than I would be. But she had a really rotten life and didn't have much to lose until she had her baby. And, yes, that is the point of the movie. It is a bait-and-switch. You think it is one kind of male historical sword fight movie and it becomes a human story about this woman

and her assault and the delusion of men – which I cover in my own films, occasionally.

I was initially intimidated by the language, and the fact I don't know that much about medieval history. But I sort of got the hang of the rhythms and the backward sentences and which words we couldn't use. Once I was writing about [female] friendships and feelings, she just felt like a regular woman in a really, really bad time.

**Your films are so intimate and conversational. How did that focus influence the way you wanted to shape the more vigorous, physical, non-chatty battle scenes in The Last Duel? You worked [on the script] with Matt Damon and Ben Affleck; is it a misconception to think swashbuckling films are inherently macho? [laurasnaps](#)**



Jodie Comer in The Last Duel. Photograph: Patrick Redmond/AP

I would say that the swashbuckling in this movie is quite macho. It's like animals fighting; they're brutal. I did not mess with that. We'd all look over each other's work and I might say something about a line, or maybe this battle doesn't have to be so long. But in terms of the duel, I stayed out of it.

I'd seen many of Ridley [Scott, who directed The Last Duel]'s other movies, but I hadn't seen Gladiator, because that's not the kind of movie I watch.

And I really liked it! I was really glad I saw it. I would say my favourite duel movie is Love and Death by Woody Allen, where he gets shot and is saying: "I just don't want to end up a chicken hanging in the window of Tresky's deli." But I'm not really a duel girl.

**Amazing to have had Scorsese and Woody Allen as teachers! What did they teach you? [JillCummings23](#)**



Michael Caine and Barbara Hershey in *Hannah and Her Sisters*. Photograph: TCD/Prod.DB/Alamy

Woody Allen was in no way my teacher. I was a production assistant on one of his movies, out there yelling: "Rolling!" and: "Cut!" I sunk the dailies on *Hannah and Her Sisters* [Holofcener was an apprentice editor on the film]. So that was really interesting, to be able to watch different takes and see what he was going for. It was a unique situation. Woody was going to shoot the whole movie and then edit it, not have an editor work on it while he's shooting. So me and the assistant editors – my bosses – just alerted him to any problems. And then at night he would come and watch the dailies with some of his cast and certainly with Mia [Farrow] and her children. But I didn't get the privilege of watching him and Sandy Morris, who was his editor, then cut the film. That was really, really disappointing. I was fired because I think she wanted to pick her own apprentice editor. So it wasn't

him teaching me anything, but his movies certainly have a lot, because I love them.

Martin Scorsese taught me at Columbia for a year when he was mixing The Color of Money. He was so entertaining and so generous. It was really fun. My short film was so not his cup of tea. He had to watch it over and over. I think once he fell asleep, leaning back in his chair. I don't remember what kind of notes he gave. Good ones, I'm sure. But I can't remember what I did last week.

**Who has been your biggest influence so far? Bernie1030**

Woody Allen. Mike Leigh. Scorsese, even though my movies are so different. You watch Raging Bull and just want to make a movie. Truffaut. Buñuel. Harold & Maude and Coming Home and Martin Ritt. All men. But, y'know, what are you going to do?

**I absolutely loved the Amy Schumer sketch [Last Fuckable Day, which Holofcener directed]. Do you think Hollywood has changed in its attitudes to women in the five years since it came out, especially after #MeToo? If not, what do you think ought to change immediately? sweetadeline**

I think it's almost getting worse, because anybody over 50 has distorted their own face so badly. I can't even find a list of actors that haven't done anything to their faces, because we're deemed not fuckable. It's still absolutely prevalent in Hollywood and elsewhere.

**You're so good at mining the small awkward moments in your movies. Do you enjoy them in real life? ArthurTheMightyDog**

Oh, no. I hate awkward moments. I have them all the time. Mostly because I'm very unfiltered and I don't read the room very well. I'll make some disgusting joke in front of somebody I don't know. I think I'm hilarious. And I'm not to them. I've embarrassed my kids for sure in that respect. I think someone was coming over to the house to do something and my kids said: "Mom, just don't make a joke." It's almost impossible for me not to do

that. My impulse is to make other people feel comfortable and in the process I make them uncomfortable.

I'm an idiot, because it's a compulsion born out of my family dynamics, basically. And I'm trying to become definitely more aware of it and stop people-pleasing. I think it's better if I just shut up and read the room better. Not everyone has to feel comfortable and not everyone has to think I'm funny.



Holofcener, James Gandolfini and Julia Louis-Dreyfus on the set of *Enough Said*. Photograph: PR Company Handout

I'm obviously very hilarious, but it's kind of like party shame – you have a couple of drinks, or maybe you don't even, and when you come back from the party you think: did I say something stupid to that person?

Does being a screenwriter change the stakes? No, because I'm telling the pool man a joke. He has no idea who I am. I'm telling the checkout person at Whole Foods a joke. And they're like: "Who's that old lady? And who cares what she's saying."

**Are there things you regret having done and wish you had done differently? [Bernie1030](#)**

There's a couple of TV shows I wish I hadn't directed. You're like the new kid at school and don't know anybody; everyone knows each other. And sometimes – only a couple of times – it has been mildly unpleasant, where actors are tired of the rotating directors. Or I think they want my input, my vision, my choices, and it turns out they don't really, because it's already a well-oiled machine.

There was one movie that I wish I'd directed: The Weatherman, with Nicolas Cage and Michael Caine. I blew the interview. I was so dumb. I think they said: "We're really interested in Nicolas Cage and we think he's interested." And I was like: "I don't think he's right for the part *at all*." But he was great!

**What's your passion project? What's holding it back? Bernie1030**

Financing. I wrote a script and it's taken a really long time to get financing. It's similar to my other movies: very small plot, character-driven story, and it looks like I'm finally gonna get it made in February. I'm holding my breath.

The film is like a joke pitch: "A female writer finds out her husband doesn't like the book she wrote." Run, don't walk! You can see why financing took a while coming ... It's about so much more, though. The difference between honesty and support and how to love someone. And it's about a family. So it's a me movie, for sure.

**Hi Nicole, big, big fan here, back to the Walking and Talking days. My question is: from this distance, it looks as if it must have been pretty tough to be a female director on the US indie scene in the mid-90s and 00s. Do you have any horror stories you are prepared to share? Or was it, in fact, incident-free? BenderRodriguez**

Certainly not incident-free. I was actually at the right time at the right place to get my first movie made – albeit it took six years. So many different studios were going to make it and then decided not to. I'd lose the actresses I had and then recast more actors. I remember when Walking and Talking finally premiered at Sundance. It was not ready. We went from the lab where

the film was still kind of *wet* and hired a private plane in a snowstorm and didn't know it was going to be able to get there in time. Todd Solondz was standing on the stage trying to entertain people because they were waiting. It was harrowing and I was terrified and I was on all these Valium on this little plane. I couldn't believe I was screening a movie at Sundance, so I really, really wanted to make it there alive.

**Even having seen all your films multiple times, I was surprised when I showed a few to my girlfriend and she took quite strongly against some of your characters. I thought about it and I think what makes your films feel so real (and apparently your characters divisive) is that, while your characters do go through experiences that shape them, they don't have those full three-act transformations that are so typical in films. Do you believe people can fundamentally change, or is a portrait of a human being more interesting than a journey anyway? *erlendsp***

Great question. I think the journey is so much more interesting. I think people can change a little and I hope that in all of my movies the characters change a little. And I think people who like subtlety and realism will like that, too. But there's generally no big happy endings. With *Friends with Money*, the studio was so behind me and loved it and it was great. And when I turned in my director's cut for them to see, they were like: "Where's the last reel? That's not an ending!" They wanted me to think about shooting a new scene on a beach with all the friends together.



Jennifer Aniston, Catherine Keener and Joan Cusack in Friends with Money, 2006. Photograph: C Sonypictures/everett/Rex Features

**I very much enjoyed Friends with Money. Was the character that Simon McBurney played really gay or not? [WhatALife](#)**

I never made up my mind. I guess I believed he was not, because he was in love with his wife and he was just very feminine and gentle and sweet. And that's what I wanted ultimately to portray. But he sure *seemed* gay, right? So many straight people do.

More now than before? Oh my God, yes. I mean, those stereotypes are of course just terrible and now those are thrown out the window. Straight guys can wear anything now. It's very baffling to me, because of my generation.

**What is it about Catherine Keener you like so much? [JillCummings23](#)**

It's funny, because we're so different in so many ways. And yet I guess she was the person who represented me in my movies. Not all of the characters, for sure. But some of them. I think she's just got this lit-up face and she looks like nobody else. She's gorgeous but interesting-looking and her emotions are right on the surface and she's got a great sense of humour.



Melissa McCarthy and Richard E Grant in *Can You Ever Forgive Me?*, which Holofcener wrote. Photograph: Allstar/Fox Searchlight Pictures

**A lot of *Can You Ever Forgive Me?* takes place in Julius, my favourite New York bar. Have you ever written a scene while under the influence? And do you think that screenwriters tend to be big drinkers?**

[AlexNeedham](#)

I've tried writing stoned. [Cannabis is legal in New York and California.] Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's bad. Sometimes I just fall asleep. And I'm not a big drinker. But I think it does open up new channels when you are kind of under the influence of something. A small amount: a couple of puffs. One drink.

This article was amended on 15 October 2021. An earlier version misspelled [Luis] Buñuel as “Brunel”.

The Last Duel is released on 15 October

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Grace Dent on restaurantsFood

## Haugen, London E20: ‘A whole lot of yodelling and melted gruyere’ – restaurant review



Haugen, London E20: ‘a Las Vegas version of a Gstaad mountain lodge’. Photograph: Karen Robinson/The Guardian



[Grace Dent](#)

[@gracedent](#)

Fri 15 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

It is impossible to miss [Haugen](#), a multi-floored, pagoda-shaped, alpine-themed fondue restaurant that's appeared in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, east London. As erections go, it is remarkable. Look out for the multitude of white faux-fur rugs draped over terrace chairs, the twinkling amber lights, the DJ booth and the après-ski vibes. Or the après-retail therapy vibes, because Haugen is a Las Vegas version of a Gstaad mountain lodge that's been hammered up outside Westfield Stratford on the main drag to West Ham's football stadium. The ground floor cafe-bistro serves breakfast from 8am and then fondue and schnitzel until around 10pm. The rooftop bar offers ski-themed cocktails such as the Saint Bernard and the Black Diamond. A more formal, pricier restaurant will open on one the upper floors in due course. Haugen is colossal, shimmering and jaw-dropping. To give an idea of scale, the private booking info claims it has potential for "exclusive events of up to one thousand". That is a whole lot of yodelling and melted gruyere.

On the West Ham match day I ate there, all the restaurants in and around the Westfield shopping centre – Busaba, Wahaca, The Real Greek and so on –

were protected by barriers. Security guards and police routed the football crowds away from anything smashable, with Haugen being closely guarded. Whether similar measures will be in place come spring 2022, when the nearby [Abba Arena](#) opens, is unclear. How rowdy are Abba fans? Will the £200 tickets to watch holograms cavort to Dancing Queen leave any spare cash for raclette, Berner würstel and tartiflette?



Haugen's smoked trout with celeriac remoulade, beetroot, dill, horseradish and malted rye starter: 'smaller than my palm'.

The one fact I do know is that Haugen is the humongous, ski-lodge-themed, multi-use, [schweinshaxe](#)- and black-forest-gateau-serving leisure space that literally not one diner was crying out for, but it's here now and, frankly, I'm fixated.

On my first attempt to eat here, I sat for 25 minutes being ignored while legions of staff floated rudderless and unmanaged. I left without eating, but felt rather bad afterwards. Here, I thought, is yet another post-pandemic, post-Brexit gargantuan restaurant project setting sail, whether or not the staff are trained, and I should learn to accept the new chaotic normal. The second time, Haugen had clearly got wind of my appointment and the brightest and best staff were on hand; the emmental and appenzeller were quickly on the melt and my fondue appeared with great alacrity.



Haugen's 'classic' mountain fondue is let down by its accompaniments.

Haugen could be rather lovely in a kitsch, take your friends for a laugh kind of way, but what's sabotaging it presently is the quality of its produce. A "classic" mountain fondue is for a minimum of two people at £22.50 per head. Admittedly, the heralding at the table of the bubbling *caquelon* of melty cheese with requisite long-prong forks is a fun moment, but then one surveys the things to dip into the goo: biteless, cheap silverskin onions; forgettable, unseasoned, steamed new potatoes; an unlovable plate of poor-quality speck, coppa and stale cornichons; a large plate of stale bread. Of course, many will argue that the bread is supposed to be stale, but, at £45, this began to feel like an assault. Fondue is purposefully simple: it is dipping miscellaneous things in communal cheese, mainly for sociable purposes. However, those items should be excellent. In the past, I've eaten showstopping fondue with crisp radishes, pickled vegetables and delicious hunks of crusty bread that left people fighting for the final cheesy smear.

A starter of grilled autumn squash consisted, quite hysterically, of one diminutive slice of squash hiding among a vast plate of rocket leaves, like Martin Sheen in *Apocalypse Now*. A portion of [Severn & Wye](#) smoked trout was smaller than my palm, and arranged in two pieces; it was dry and arrived with an egg cup full of quite good celeriac remoulade for £12.50.



Haugen's sachertorte: 'pleasant enough'. Photograph: Karen Robinson/The Observer

Haugen's semi-open kitchen is evidently busy, with several chefs arranging food on plates, but they are utterly hampered by someone's desperate need to make profit. Nothing felt or tasted as if it has been made from scratch. We ordered two cakes for dessert: a slice of [sachertorte](#) – a chocolate marzipan cake – which was pleasant enough, albeit clearly mass-produced, and at least looked appealingly glossy in Instagram photographs (phew, thank heavens); and an allegedly twice-baked cheesecake that tasted vaguely of vanilla and came with a small pot of purple compote that may have been blackberry but was actually blueberry.

As is the case with many of these huge, tourist-magnet restaurants, Haugen relies on a one-time clientele who will be bedazzled by the decor and unquestioning of the menu's prices and provenance. This pains me. There is fresher, better grab-and-go food in the M&S food hall a short walk away, even if you do have to eat it on the wall outside the Holiday Inn. I've tried my best to love Haugen, but my overall tip re their fondue is fon-don't.

- [Haugen](#) 9 Endeavour Square, London E20, 0204-568 1444. Open all week, noon-9pm (10.30pm Fri & Sat). About £40 per head à la carte;

set lunch £14.50 for two course, £18.50 for three, all plus drinks and service.

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## 2021.10.15 - Coronavirus

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## **‘Phenomenal’ turnaround: how Australia is vaccinating its way to freedom**



People walk past a retail store in Sydney on 11 October 2021, as the city ended its 106-day Covid-19 lockdown. Photograph: Steven Saphore/AFP/Getty Images

## *[Samantha Lock in Sydney](#)*

Fri 15 Oct 2021 05.34 EDT

Bars and restaurants along Sydney's harbour foreshore bustled with the sounds of clinking glasses and full kitchens as [thousands of people poured into venues](#) after Covid restrictions ended this week.

Across the city, cinemas filled up and queues formed outside pubs. Salons buzzed with the sound of clippers as people jumped at the opportunity to tame their lockdown hair. Some beachside restaurants are booked up until February.

Thoughts even turned to travel after New South Wales authorities said they would [remove quarantine measures for international arrivals](#), though federal authorities have the ultimate say.

Dee Irwin, 57, was scheduled to have an appointment for a cut and colour at Luxxe Concept Salon on Sydney's north shore on the day the city was plunged into lockdown. After waiting for five months, she was "over the moon" about coming back.

"When I got the call I nearly had kittens," she said. "It was the most exciting call I've had in the whole of lockdown. I told my husband to stop Netflix ... It makes such a difference to how you feel when you wake up in the morning."

They were scenes that were almost unimaginable four months ago when a Delta outbreak sent the state of New South Wales into a hard lockdown. Then, Australia was lagging behind the rest of the world with vaccination. Israel had already given more than 60% of its population at least one dose and the US over 40% by the time Australia hit 10%. The outlook was bleak.

But the outbreak spurred the nation into action.

## **A public health disaster**

The [country's rollout](#) began in late February and was [stymied by delays](#), [supply problems](#) and [government missteps](#). Fifty million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine were ordered and then shelved after [changing health advice](#) over links to an extremely rare blood-clotting condition.

[Negotiations with Pfizer stalled](#) as government representatives dithered and the prime minister, Scott Morrison, declared the nation's vaccine program was "not a race".

Public unease towards AstraZeneca compounded delays already made by the decision to secure only 10m doses of Pfizer, a move the company's former president of global research and development, John LaMattina, later described as "[unconscionable](#)".

The federal government "put most of their eggs in the AstraZeneca basket" and this became "a major problem", Prof Adrian Esterman, the chair of biostatistics at the University of South Australia, [said](#) later.

The problem became a public health disaster when one case of Delta leaked into Sydney via aircrew in June and launched an outbreak that could not be controlled.



A bartender prepares a cocktail at Sydney's Kings Cross Hotel as the city celebrated the lifting of a months-long Covid lockdown. Photograph: Lisa Maree Williams/Getty Images

Covid-19 infections rose steadily, with more than 2,000 new cases a day being recorded nationally throughout October, mostly across Sydney and Melbourne – the country's largest cities – and the capital, Canberra, in the country's worst outbreak since the pandemic began.

Forced to abandon the aim of returning to Covid-zero, vaccination became the only hope for a way out.

"For a long time people became complacent," Dr Paul Griffin, an associate professor and infectious disease physician at the University of Queensland, said. "The risk-perception was relatively low at the time," he added, describing people's lack of urgency to get vaccinated, thanks to the protection offered by rigid border controls.

Only "once people saw the virus circulating firsthand and saw the consequences" did a shift in vaccination uptake begin to change, Griffin said.

## Vaccinations surge

Only a few months ago, Australia had the lowest fully vaccinated population in the OECD. As of the end of last week, the nation had risen eight places.

Leading the charge were the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales and Victoria. Since July, the cumulative total doses administered in the three regions has surged in near-record time compared with other countries at similar times in their rollouts.

In NSW, 91.1% of people over the age of 16 had at least one dose by 14 October, and 76.5% had two. In Victoria, these [figures](#) stand at 86.7% and 61.5%.

A staggering 98% of people aged over 12 and living in Canberra, the capital, have received at least one dose of the Covid-19 vaccine, and 75.9% have had both. The city is on track to be the [most Covid-vaccinated city in the world](#), and authorities estimate that by November almost all of the territory's population will be fully vaccinated.

Nationally, 83.2% of Australians over 16 have had at least one dose, as of Wednesday, and 64.4% are fully vaccinated, according to the Australian government's [Covid-19 vaccine rollout report](#).

The speed of vaccination uptake allowed those in NSW to enjoy “freedom day” on Monday. Schools will reopen next week.

Setting vaccination targets at 70% and 80% for reopening certainly “incentivised people quite a bit”, Griffin said.

Vaccination rollouts have tended to slow as countries approached the 50% mark – this was [particularly pronounced in the US](#), which vaccinated 1% of its population every day in April but has stalled since, with less than 56% having received two jabs. The UK also began to slow after hitting its peak in the 20-25% range, and took almost twice as long to go from 45-50% and 50-55% as it managed in its peak.

Australia has [bucked this trend](#) – but the country is divided. The states of Western Australia and Queensland have the lowest rates of vaccination because they have seen less circulation and impact from the virus. The states are still pursuing Covid-zero and their borders are closed to their neighbours in the south-east.

“The states that have been the most impacted [by the virus] have had the most successful rollouts,” Griffin said.

#### [Percentage of the population fully vaccinated by country for the OECD](#)

Dr Greg Dore, an infectious diseases physician and epidemiologist at Australia’s Kirby Institute of medical research, described the turnaround in vaccine rates as “in one word: phenomenal”.

“If you went back three or four months, nobody would have anticipated this level of coverage we have now,” he said.

Dore credited a mix of government initiatives as well as community leadership, bipartisan support and the urgency created by the Delta outbreak.

Mary-Louise McLaws, a professor of epidemiology at the University of NSW, said: “The Delta hotspots in Sydney demonstrated that partnership between the authorities and the community resulted in exceptional vaccination response.”

Dore said he was “very confident” Australia would soon find itself in the top 10 countries of vaccine coverage. “The outbreaks have absolutely jet-propelled vaccination uptakes” and “generated that urgency”.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/oct/15/a-phenomenal-turnaround-how-australia-is-vaccinating-its-way-to-freedom>

## Coronavirus

# Volunteers on Covid jab trials should get travel certificates, say top scientists



From 11 October Chuvashia Republic in Russia required people to show QR codes, vaccination certificates or Covid-19 recovery certificates before entering cultural centres and restaurants. Photograph: Semyon Antonov/TASS

*Ian Sample* Science editor

*@iansample*

Fri 15 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

Senior government science advisers from the UK, Europe and Canada have called on countries around the world to offer vaccination certificates to volunteers on Covid jab trials so they can travel internationally.

The UK has led the way in granting vaccine certificates to trial participants, but many countries have failed to follow suit and refuse to admit people

unless they have had two doses of Covid vaccine that has already gone through trials and been approved by regulators.

The situation means many tens of thousands of people globally who enrolled in clinical trials to assess Covid vaccines, or combinations of different shots, cannot travel abroad unless they get an additional round of approved jabs.

In an open letter to governments around the world 14 senior advisers, including England's chief medical officer, Prof Chris Whitty, and the UK's chief scientist, Sir [Patrick Vallance](#), warn that preventing trial volunteers from travelling was "unfair" and had led some participants to drop out of trials and seek extra vaccinations.

"Vaccine clinical trial volunteers have given their time freely to help others, and clinical trials are the way in which the world can understand which vaccines work and are safe," the letter states. "There is a moral and ethical obligation to treat volunteers in a way that feels fair to them and to the wider public. It is the right thing to do."

Among those affected are more than 15,000 people who [took part in the phase 3 Novavax trial](#) at hospitals across the UK. The firm has not yet submitted the trial data to regulators for approval.

Kris Gumbrell, the chief executive officer of a pub chain, took part in the Novavax trial and received four shots in total, two vaccine, two placebo, between October 2020 and April 2021. He has a vaccine certificate that can be used to enter events in the UK, but he cannot travel to any country that requires approved vaccines. To complicate matters further, the NHS app considers him vaccinated so he cannot book the extra shots he now wants so he can travel with his family in January.

"You hit a brick wall because your Novavax vaccination doesn't count. You're stuck in this trap. You can't go anywhere that requires an approved vaccine," Gumbrell said. "There's an awful lot of upset people out there. The UK has done a huge amount of heavy lifting with vaccine trials. The politicians should be fighting our corner more."

In an effort to find a solution, the [UK government announced](#) last week that it would provide two shots of the approved Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for thousands of Britons who took part in trials so they could travel abroad – meaning they would have four shots of Covid vaccine total.

The letter urges foreign governments to issue vaccine certificates or “passports” to volunteers on vaccine trials that have been approved by regulators, regardless of whether the participants have received unlicensed vaccines, combinations of shots, or even placebo jabs.

“Given the numbers of trial participants globally, the population contribution of admitting a small number of placebo recipients in trials will be trivial in terms of public health and national disease epidemiology,” the letter states.

“Of course trials will continue to be needed to improve vaccine design and coverage, especially as the virus mutates and evolves. Anything that acts as a disincentive to participate in trials will be to the detriment of public health,” it adds.

Prof Saul Faust, the Wessex regional lead for Covid vaccine trials at the University of Southampton, said the letter was “a massively important intervention” by Chris Whitty and his colleagues.

“Vaccine trial participants – of whom there are more than 50,000 in the UK but many tens of thousands more globally – have been discriminated against as second class citizens by politicians globally instead of treated as the heroes they are. Without them we would have no vaccines at all,” Faust said. “While the UK decided to honour participants with UK accreditation before the summer, because no other countries have agreed this principle none of our UK participants have been able to travel or go abroad so far without lying to get extra doses of approved vaccines – also at considerable personal risk as the effects of such combinations or doses are unknown.”

“If governments don’t sort this out, no one will ever want to take part in trials again, so booster trials and of any future pandemic vaccines will be at risk,” he added.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/15/volunteers-on-covid-jab-trials-should-get-travel-certificates-say-top-scientists>

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## Coronavirus

# Travellers to England able to take lateral flow Covid tests from 24 October



Travellers arriving in England who have been double vaccinated no longer need to take a PCR test, but must upload results of a lateral flow test instead to be exempted from quarantine. Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

[Nadeem Badshah](#)

Thu 14 Oct 2021 17.30 EDT

Fully vaccinated international passengers arriving in England from countries not on the red list can take a cheaper and quicker lateral flow test from 24 October instead of the PCR version, the government has announced.

Those who have been vaccinated, and most under-18s, can take a lateral flow test on or before day two of their arrival into the UK.

The change will come into effect for those returning from half-term breaks, with Covid-19 tests available to book through private providers listed on the government's website.

The Department of Health and Social Care said that the tests can be booked from 22 October and passengers must upload a photo of their test to verify their results as soon as possible. Anyone who tests positive will need to self-isolate and take a confirmatory PCR test.

Eligible travellers are those vaccinated in over 100 countries and territories including Brazil, Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Pakistan, South Africa and Turkey, and will be eligible for the quarantine exemption.

Sajid Javid, the health secretary, said: "We want to make going abroad easier and cheaper, whether you're travelling for work or visiting friends and family."

"Lateral flow tests will be available later this month for those returning from half-term holidays.

"This change to testing is only possible thanks to the incredible progress of our vaccination programme, which means we can safely open up travel as we learn to live with the virus."

Passengers are also able to book a test which they can take on their arrival into the UK at centres located in some airports.

The government added that travellers who have already bought a PCR do not need to buy another test and lateral flow tests for international travel must be bought from a private provider, as NHS test and trace tests cannot be used for international travel.

Grant Shapps, the transport secretary, said: "Today's rule changes will make testing on arrival simpler and cheaper for people across the country who are looking forward to well-earned breaks for this October half-term.

"Taking away expensive mandatory PCR testing will boost the travel industry and is a major step forward in normalising international travel and encouraging people to book holidays with confidence."

The government said it will extend regulations to allow some tests supplied to the private testing market that are pending validation to remain on the market in the short term to address any potential shortage of supply.

It will continue to publish a list of private testing providers who meet the minimum standards for the public to choose from along with PCR test options available.

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## Statins

# People taking statins less likely to die from Covid, study suggests



A large study has suggested statins are associated with a slightly lower risk of dying from Covid-19. Photograph: Soumyabrata Roy/Pacific Press/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Andrew Gregory](#)* Health editor

Thu 14 Oct 2021 14.00 EDT

Millions of people who take statins may be less likely to die from Covid, research suggests.

The cholesterol-lowering drugs are one of the world's most popular medications. They can also reduce inflammation in blood vessels, which has prompted questions over whether they could help with outcomes in coronavirus patients.

Now a large study published in PLOS Medicine suggests statins are associated with a slightly lower risk of dying from Covid-19. However, experts urged caution over the results and stressed that the findings did not prove that statins can reduce death rates.

The research looked at the relationship between the drugs and Covid mortality. Using data from Swedish registers, the Karolinska Institutet followed 963,876 residents of Stockholm over the age of 45 between March and November 2020.

The results were based on analyses of data on the participants' prescribed medication and healthcare and from the cause of death register. The information was analysed with respect to such factors as diagnosed medical conditions.

The co-first author Viktor Ahlqvist, of the Department of Global Public [Health](#) at the Karolinska Institutet, said: "All in all, our findings support the continued use of statins for conditions such as cardiovascular disease and high levels of blood lipids in line with current recommendations during the Covid-19 pandemic."

The researchers cautioned that randomised studies would be needed to ascertain whether there is a causal relationship.

Limitations of the study include the use of prescription data without the possibility of checking individual drug use, and not being able to control for risk factors such as smoking and high BMI.

Tim Chico, a professor of cardiovascular medicine and honorary consultant cardiologist at the University of Sheffield, who was not involved in the study, said it was not yet clear why statins may help Covid patients.

"Covid-19 can cause very severe lung infections but it also causes inflammation of the blood vessels," he said. "Because statins reduce inflammation in blood vessels, there has been a lot of debate as to whether they might improve outcome in Covid-19."

“This study does not prove that statins reduce death in Covid-19, but does provide some supportive clues. It observes that people prescribed statins were less likely to die than similar people. However, this does not prove the statins caused the reduced death rates; to do so needs a randomised controlled trial.”

Chico also urged caution after other drugs that had initially shown promise in helping Covid patients did not turn out to be beneficial.

“It’s important to learn from this and to be suitably measured in how we describe these results,” he said. “These results do not in any way justify using statins to treat Covid-19. We already have effective ways to lower risk of death in Covid-19 – social distancing, hand washing, mask wearing and vaccination in the population, and use of techniques and drugs with a good evidence base (like dexamethasone) in people with severe Covid-19 infections.”

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## 2021.10.15 - Opinion

- It's easy to feel pessimistic about the climate. But we've got two big things on our side
- GPs have become the new fall guys for government failures
- The Conservatives are in more danger than they think
- Can we please stop invoking the 'blitz spirit' at the first sign of crisis?

## [OpinionCop26](#)

# **It's easy to feel pessimistic about the climate. But we've got two big things on our side**

[Bill McKibben](#)



‘Vested interest is slowly shifting towards the ever-larger renewable sector.’ Whitelee, the UK’s largest onshore wind farm, in east Ayrshire and south Lanarkshire. Composite: Guardian

Fri 15 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

So many things have broken the wrong way since the Paris climate accords were agreed in mid-December of 2015. Within eight weeks Donald Trump had won his first presidential primary, an insane comet streaking across the night sky, trailed by outliers like Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro. The world has endured *opéra bouffe* distractions like Brexit, and the true paralyzing emergency of the pandemic.

Sign up for our weekly environment newsletter, Green Light.

And yet here we are, staggering and stumbling towards the real follow-up to Paris, starting 31 October in Glasgow. The international order, such as it is, is held together with baling wire and duct tape: China (its housing market cratering) and the US (between rebellions) are spitting at each other, India half-lost in its ugly experiments with repression, Europe Merkelless. The global south is ever more rightly angered by the failure of the north to deliver on its necessary pledges for climate finance – and to pay for the increasingly obvious damage that global warming has inflicted on nations that did nothing to cause it. But somehow all these players must stitch together a plan for dramatically increasing the speed of a global transition off fossil fuel – and if they don't, then Paris will forever be the high-water mark of climate action. (And the actual high-water mark of rising seas will jump upward.)

At least no one remains in the dark about the importance of the work: since Paris we've endured the hottest heatwaves, the biggest and fastest storms, the highest winds, the heaviest rains; we've watched both the jet stream and the Gulf Stream start to sputter. The physical world, once backdrop, is now foreground, a well-lit stage on which the drama will play out.

And to make the theater interesting, there are two things that have broken the right way, two things that will have to be the bulwark of progress in Glasgow.

The faster we move towards true renewable energy, the more money we save, and the savings are measured in many trillions of dollars

One is the continuing astonishing fall in the cost of renewable energy and the batteries with which to store it. This trend was evident by the time of Paris, but still new enough that it was hard to trust it: we still thought of wind and sun as expensive, a sacrifice. We now understand that they are miracles, both of engineering and economics: last month an Oxford team released an ([undercovered](#)) analysis that concluded: “Compared to continuing with a fossil-fuel-based system, a rapid green energy transition will probably result in overall net savings of many trillions of dollars – even

without accounting for climate damages or co-benefits of climate policy.” That is, the faster we move towards true renewable energy, the more money we save, and the savings are measured in “many trillions of dollars”.

And the second lucky break is the continuing astonishing growth in the size of citizens’ movements demanding action. Again, this was already evident in Paris: 400,000 people had marched on the UN the year before demanding action, and as Barack Obama said at the time, “we cannot pretend we do not hear them. We have to answer the call.” He’d been able to slink back from Copenhagen in 2009 with no agreement and pay no political price; by Paris that had changed. But it’s changed even more in the six years since, particularly since August 2018 when Greta Thunberg began her first climate strike. There are thousands of Thunbergs now scattered across the planet, with millions of followers: this may be the biggest international movement in human history.

Those two strengths go up against the equally powerful bulwarks of the status quo: vested interest and inertia.

The first, the fossil fuel lobby, has suffered damage in recent years: a global divestment campaign, for instance, has put \$15tn in endowments and portfolios beyond its reach, and it builds little now without resistance. People increasingly see through the fossil fuel lobby’s attempts at greenwashing. But it maintains its hold on too many capitals – in the United States, the Republican party is its wholly owned subsidiary, which makes progress halting at best. And the planet’s financial superpowers – Chase, Citi, BlackRock and the rest – continue to lend and invest as if there was nothing wrong with an industry that is literally setting the Earth on fire.

As for inertia, it’s a deep obstacle, simply because the climate crisis is a timed test. Without swift change we will pass irrevocable tipping points: winning slowly on climate is simply another way of losing. Every huge forest fire, every hurricane strike, every month of drought heightens public demand for change – but every distraction weakens that demand. Covid could not have come at a worse time – indeed, it very nearly undid these talks for the second year in a row.

So, that's the playbill. We have two big forces on each side of the drama, behemoths leaning against each other and looking for weakness to exploit. In the wings, old hands like John Kerry, the US climate envoy, push and probe; if the US Senate actually passes a serious climate plan before Glasgow, his power will increase like some video game character handed a magic sword. If the price of gas keeps rising in Europe, perhaps that weakens chances for a breakthrough.

We know which side will win in the end, because vested interest is slowly shifting towards the ever-larger renewable sector, and because inertia over time loses ground to the movements that keep growing. But we don't know if that win will come in time to matter. Glasgow, in other words, is about pace: will it accelerate change, or will things stay on their same too-slow trajectory? Time will tell – it's the most important variable by far.

- Bill McKibben is the Schumann distinguished scholar at Middlebury College, Vermont, and leader of the climate campaign group [350.org](https://350.org)

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[OpinionGPs](#)

## GPs have become the new fall guys for government failures

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



Illustration by Nate Kitch

Fri 15 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

The corridors of my once bustling GP's surgery were eerily quiet, the waiting room deserted. The new routine too was disconcerting; wait in the car park, phone to announce your arrival, and only then will someone in full PPE collect you, as gingerly as if they were handling a suspect parcel.

But arguably that's what we all are now, at least to the kind of clinically vulnerable people often found in doctors' waiting rooms. The cheerful nurse who did my smear test a few weeks ago – sorry if that's too much information, but take this as a friendly reminder that too many people put off life-saving screening appointments during the pandemic – confided that, days earlier, someone had pitched up for a routine non-urgent test maskless, coughing and with a temperature. Despite the risk of infecting the whole building, they had still been startled to be sent home.

This nervous arm's-length handling of patients – fending some off with telephone or video consultations, staggering appointments for the rest so that the unknowingly infected don't mingle with the frail or immunologically compromised – exists for good reason. But it also means distressed people wait longer to see a doctor, while fuelling understandable fears of something being missed over Zoom.

A [GP interviewed](#) on Radio 4's Today programme on Thursday morning talked of receptionists quitting, sick of being screamed at by frustrated patients. Why, she asked, weren't ministers defending doctors against what the chair of the Royal College of GPs, Martin Marshall, calls "[malicious criticism](#)" from some press and politicians who have effectively branded them shirkers?

But, faced with the [Daily Telegraph](#) and [Daily Mail](#) on the warpath, the new health secretary, Sajid Javid, is no mood for subtlety. Two weeks ago he told social care workers, already in desperately short supply, to "[get out and go and get another job](#)" if they didn't want the Covid vaccine (compulsory from 11 November for working in a care home in England). Now it's GPs' turn to take some medicine.

The spoonful of sugar is an extra [£250m in funding](#) for GPs in England – not enough, according to the Royal College, holding its annual conference this week – but there will also be rights for patients to insist on seeing a doctor in person, the publishing of data allowing lagging surgeries to be named and shamed, and the [scrapping of social-distancing rules](#) in surgeries. The days of clapping for carers suddenly feel a long time ago.

People will always seek more from their NHS: who doesn't want appointments on the day of our choice, the reassurance of being whisked through to a specialist for anything dubious, or prompt surgery if it's needed? But that costs billions, opening up hard choices that neither politicians nor voters particularly want to face.

Whenever a gap yawns between aspiration and reality, it's tempting for politicians just to spray the blame around, even if that risks tarnishing people who have risked their working lives on the Covid frontline and spent their days off volunteering at vaccination centres. Take enough potshots at lazy, overpaid GPs – and of course there will be some, as in any profession – and maybe people won't ask too many awkward questions about what was happening to the NHS in the decade of Conservative rule leading up to "[one of the worst public health failures](#)" in British history, as this week's joint select committee inquiry described the handling of the pandemic.

There has been much public huffing and puffing about the number of GPs going part-time – the slackers! – yet arguably that's what has allowed many doctors to absorb the ever-intensifying pressures on them without feeling driven to hang up their stethoscopes. Five years ago, researchers for health charity [the King's Fund](#) were surprised by how few GPs seemed to be working full-time. Contrary to popular belief, they found that it wasn't simply down to mothers cutting back after having children; older men too were increasingly shortening their hours, most likely as an alternative to retiring early. Doctors seemed to be trying to avoid burnout, or the deadly mistakes too easily made when you're tired. Some were using their supposed "days off" for paperwork.

Yet the fewer hours that GPs want to work, the more GPs we need. The result of a previous Conservative government's failure to respond quickly

enough to this potential crunch is a system in England with [1,900 fewer doctors](#) than it had in 2015, yet still cramming in record numbers of appointments. An unusually despairing British Medical Association report this summer warned that “we’re working too hard, we’re burning out and we’re terrified of making mistakes”.

Patients feel short-changed and doctors demoralised, especially in parts of the country where new housing estates have mushroomed faster than new surgeries meant to serve them. What Javid risks squandering is the goodwill holding things together, which perhaps explains the more emollient tone [he took in Thursday's Daily Mail](#), writing that his mum always hoped he'd become a doctor.

Javid wouldn't be the first health secretary to learn that doctors aren't easily browbeaten into submission – not least because, once they leave, their replacements take so long to train. At the height of the last major attempt to cut NHS waiting lists, under Tony Blair, the Department of [Health](#) spent months soothing ruffled feathers after a briefing suggesting consultants were spending too much time treating lucrative private patients (or playing golf). Javid will only get through a potentially difficult winter by working with doctors, not berating them.

And, while it's obvious that many patients ([and, indeed, doctors](#)) just want to go back to the good old days of “the doctor will see you now”, stuffing the telemedicine genie back into its bottle may prove just as hard as nagging born-again home-workers back into the office. Talk to GPs and they'll tell you that, now there's the option of a phone consultation, some patients are more likely to call the doctor with things that didn't seem worth it before. Expectations of what they exist to do may be expanding, not shrinking, especially among the so-called “worried well”.

A hybrid system of seeing some people face to face and some remotely may mean fitting more patients in than a complete return to the old normal – although crucially that will only work if the triage systems used to decide who should and shouldn't be physically examined are good enough. But wasn't the whole point of “building back better” to extract any useful lessons from this strangest of years and develop them, rather than just defaulting back to a flawed norm?

Given the daunting challenge now facing the NHS as it struggles to get waiting lists down, Javid may well need to push health professionals far from their comfort zones in the coming months. But if he wants their co-operation in doing so, he'll have to show he can be flexible too. To mangle an old saying: politician, heal thyself.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
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## [Opinion](#)[Conservatives](#)

# The Conservatives are in more danger than they think

[Andy Beckett](#)



‘Much of the media and many voters are so invested in the idea that Brexit and Johnson are going to make Britain dramatically better that they don’t require evidence that this is happening.’ Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Fri 15 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

Britain has a disorienting government. It is both lazy and hyperactive, ambitious and complacent, dominant and volatile. It zigzags between different policies and ideological positions, confusing commentators, opposition parties and Conservative supporters – and sometimes even its own ministers.

These contradictory qualities come partly from the character of [Boris Johnson](#), with all its chaos and careful contrivance. The government’s

eclectic coalition of support is also important. So is the government's unusual place in the electoral cycle. It is both the latest, wearying instalment of a long period of Tory rule, and an apparent effort to be something fresh: a government that transforms both the country and its own base of support.

Usually, British governments that attempt those difficult tasks are in an early period of supremacy by one party: Tony Blair's first two administrations; Margaret Thatcher's first half-dozen years in power. Unlike Johnson's, such governments tend to have plenty of able, inventive ministers, their ideas and talent nurtured while in opposition.

Such politicians are often intensely interested in the society they want to change. One future Blairite minister frequently took the same bus as me through east London in the 1990s. She spent the commute looking at copies of the famous London poverty maps produced by the Victorian social reformer Charles Booth, and comparing them to what she could see out of the window.

Johnson was often on the same bus. He was a journalist then, but the condition of the East End seemed less fascinating to him. Instead he would sit with his head down and an open holdall beside him, pulling out and poring over the day's output from the rightwing press. What the Tory tribe was thinking was what mattered most.

All political parties are inward-looking to a degree. But the [Conservatives](#), who occupy such a large political and media space in Britain – so large that they sometimes mistake their party for the country – are more inward-looking than most.

Under Johnson this tendency has grown even stronger. So confident have the Tories become of their position – throughout this unpredictable year, more than [80% of their members](#) have expected to win the next election – that an assumption now pervades the party that only its ideas, personalities and internal battles really count.

This may be true, up to a point. Many Welsh and Scottish voters have a different perspective. But the Conservatives' current narcissism, and their incuriosity about those social and political trends that are not going their

way, sits oddly with their claims to care about more of the country than previous Tory governments.

Take [their conference](#) in Manchester last week, held in a fortified enclave that felt entirely separate from the rest of the Labour-voting city. “Labour doesn’t represent working people any more,” it was claimed; the opposition had become merely “the party of high-status city dwellers”. If the Conservatives want to weaken Labour’s strengthening hold on often heavily working-class urban England and Wales, such wishful thinking won’t help.

Yet despite the relatively modest scale of their “landslide” Commons majority – much smaller than those of Blair and Thatcher – many Tories seem to feel that they don’t need to widen their support any further. A session in Manchester on how they could improve their terrible standing with young people was held in one of the conference’s smallest rooms. It was not full.

It’s sometimes argued that the apparent lack of substance behind the government’s expansive talk doesn’t matter. Goals such as “[levelling up](#)”, the argument goes, are about political positioning: making the Tories’ new voters feel heard, throwing Labour off-balance.

It has worked for Johnson so far. Much of the media, and many voters, are so invested in the idea that Brexit and Johnson are going to make Britain dramatically better – a belief that is really a faith – that they don’t require evidence yet that this is actually happening. Unconsciously, some traditional [Labour](#) voters who have switched to the Tories may not even want there ever to be a clear reckoning about the government’s record. Any revelation that they had been taken for a ride might be too disturbing.

But raising expectations is usually dangerous for governments in the end. Especially when the future being promised looks less attractive to the governing party’s usual backers. Sometimes the higher-wage, more regionally equal economy that the Tories have begun advocating – albeit mostly in response to this autumn’s disruption – sounds a little like something you’d find in a modern European social democracy. Britain in the 1970s, before Thatcher, could even be described this way too.

Such an economy is not what the property developers and financiers who fund the Tories – and who have done very well out of the far more unequal country Thatcher created – probably give their money for. Nor are many Tory voters in the home counties likely to want a country that less strongly privileges their wealthy towns and villages.

But such traditional Tory interests shouldn't worry too much. Despite having so much power of his own, Johnson still dislikes making enemies of powerful people. When it comes to shaking up Britain, he will probably carry on talking big and acting small.

Near the end of the Tory conference, there was a session about [levelling up](#) featuring two of its supposedly most influential advocates: Ben Houchen, mayor of Tees Valley, and the MP Neil O'Brien. The session was in one of the main halls, and both men spoke passionately, if mostly in upbeat generalities.

Yet only a few dozen people heard them. The session had been scheduled right before Johnson's speech, and predictably most delegates were elsewhere, queueing to hear "King Boris". In his [speech](#), between all the usual self-referential jokes, he praised "the City of London", "capitalism" and "our free-market economy".

On the surface, this is a new kind of government. But the Conservatives never change their priorities that much.

Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist

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[Opinion](#)[Second world war](#)

## Can we please stop invoking the ‘blitz spirit’ at the first sign of crisis?

[Joel Golby](#)



Blitz shelter recreated for an exhibition at the former Aldwych underground station. Photograph: John Stillwell/PA

Fri 15 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

I don’t know about you, but lately I have been craving the cruel, cold horror of the blitz. Haven’t you? Huddling underground in tunnels, staring at the ceiling as the whistle of a bomb drops to ominous silence, the distant rumble of explosions, not knowing whether your family are alive, whether they will find enough of your friend to hold a proper funeral; whether, when you emerge into daylight again – if you ever emerge into daylight again – the things you hold dear will still be there. Doesn’t that sound good to you? They grew their own veg! They knew their neighbours’ names! It was a different era! Men wore shirts!

We're talking about "blitz spirit" again, obviously, because every time something mildly crisis-shaped happens in this country we hark back to the time our forebears barely survived a war. A couple of weeks ago we were on the precipice of blitz spirit mania because we manufactured a panic where a lot of people thought the [petrol might run out](#). This week we're doing blitz spirit because supply chain issues, as a direct result of voting for Brexit, might threaten the holy sanctity of [Christmas dinner](#). This winter is going to be long and hard and cold, and for a lot of people the next few months will see them having to make the impossible decision between food and fuel. As a solution, the politicians and the media will cheerfully tell them: remember the war! Remember blitz spirit! They grew their own veg! Men wore shirts!

This week [Iain Duncan Smith](#) has been attracting no little criticism for suggesting civil servants need to get back into the office – presumably to protect precious small businesses such as Pret a Manger and commercial landlords with a diverse city-centre portfolio. In a really quite bizarre piece in the Mail on Sunday that included a segue about trying to get his motorcycle licence that any other writer on earth would have had firmly edited out, Duncan Smith – a man born in 1954 – wrote: "When I think of all the brave civil servants who went to work in the 1940s, determined to do their bit regardless of the threat from falling bombs, I wonder what has happened to us as a nation." Well Iain, we got broadband.

It's important at this point to note – and with due respect, I wasn't there, but I am going on what I've heard – the blitz wasn't very good. As the historian [Richard Overy](#) wrote the last major time Britain invoked blitz spirit, ie March 2020, the term was "an invention at the time" that "masked the reality of being bombed night after night". People watched their neighbours die and their houses turn to rubble. People trekked out to the countryside only on the promise that food, shelter and organised protection awaited them. It's weird that, in the years since it has evolved into a cheerful slogan, which glorifies surviving through war then spending the rest of your life dealing with the untreated trauma of doing so – it's even weirder that anyone in this bitter, atomised country thinks they are particularly capable of it any more. To me, the blitz spirit suggests showing empathy for your fellow man, enduring hardship and discomfort in pursuit of the greater good, and cheerfully getting on with things without grumbling at all. Does that describe the last 19 months of reality to you?

It's all the more bizarre to see blitz spirit being so cheaply invoked during the solemn time of year where people start to get very strange about wearing poppies. The further we get away from the world wars, the more time we spend feverishly commemorating them, but listening to Iain Duncan Smith – a 67-year-old man learning to ride a motorcycle, ie someone who clearly knows a thing or two about having a crisis – it sounds like a case of just throwing a few sandbags up outside Whitehall, keeping calm and carrying on. I can't keep up: was war so unendurable that we need to spend weeks of our year respecting it, or was it basically quite easy if you had a flask of brandy and were made of sterner stuff?

I am, as ever, haunted by the words of Hagrid actor Robbie Coltrane, born in 1950, who last year came to the defence of J.K. Rowling. "They wouldn't have won the war, would they?" Coltrane – who himself has never won a war – [told the Radio Times](#) about the "Twitter generation" criticising her, and in quiet moments that sentence floats into my brain again in a slightly Scottish but mostly English brogue: *They wouldn't have won the war, would they? They wouldn't have won the war, would they?*

My solution to this is radical but I think it would please basically everyone in the country: everyone born in the 1950s who thinks war is good because they ate stew a lot when they were children and they never really had a conversation with their dad, they can go and live in a special fantasy war camp that I'm setting up at the Black Country Living Museum. We'll set the air raid sirens off every afternoon and they can spend a disproportionate amount of time queueing up for Spam. There's only one TV channel and it's in black and white. The men can wear shirts and know each other's names and grow their own vegetables, and they never have to go into the outside world of 2021. [Robbie Coltrane](#) can live next to Iain Duncan Smith, and both their lives can be absolutely dire, just like they apparently both want them to be, and then the rest of us never have to hear about the blitz spirit ever again.

- Joel Golby is a writer for the Guardian and Vice and the author of [Brilliant, Brilliant, Brilliant Brilliant](#)
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## 2021.10.15 - Around the world

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## **Italy using anti-mafia laws to scapegoat migrant boat drivers, report finds**



Smugglers often use migrants who cannot afford the passage to drive boats.

Photograph: Juan Medina/Reuters

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# HUMANITY UNITED

[About this content](#)

[Lorenzo Tondo](#)

[@lorenzo\\_tondo](#)

Fri 15 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

Italian police have arrested more than 2,500 migrants for smuggling or aiding illegal immigration since 2013, often using anti-mafia laws to bring charges, according to the first comprehensive analysis of official data on the criminalisation of refugees and asylum seekers in [Italy](#).

The report by three migrant rights groups has collected police data and analysed more than 1,000 criminal cases brought by prosecutors against refugees accused of driving vessels carrying asylum seekers across the Mediterranean.

The report by Arci Porco Rosso, the NGO Alarm Phone, and the nonprofit Borderline Sicilia, found evidence of police officers offering immigration papers and other incentives to migrants to persuade them to testify against the suspected boat drivers, who, in some cases were asylum seekers forced at gunpoint by traffickers to navigate refugee boats.

The NGOs claim the new evidence in the report confirms that Italy has spent decades pursuing a policy of criminalising asylum seekers, alleging prosecutors have been filling its prisons with innocent men used as scapegoats.

“We have examined over 1,000 court cases, spoken to hundreds of people involved,” the report stated. “We spoke to persons accused of boat driving, lawyers, judges and members of the police and coastguard, to reveal the full extent of Italy’s process of criminalising migration.”

Using police data and evidence presented in hundreds of court cases, the report revealed how refugees were targeted for prosecution.

Before sending a boat to Italy, from Libya, Tunisia, or Turkey, the report said smugglers often choose a migrant as a driver. This can be someone who does not have enough money to pay for the trip or with experience of navigation.

When the boat enters Italian waters, the authorities ask passengers to identify the driver, who is then arrested.



Boat drivers, who are often refugees, are being prosecuted for serious charges, such as human trafficking and criminal association, with sentences

ranging from 15 years to life in prison. Photograph: Andreas Solaro/AFP/Getty Images

Boat drivers, who often come from war-torn countries, are accused of crimes, from illegally piloting migrant boats to the country, to trafficking in migrants, to criminal association. They can face sentences from 15 years to life in prison.

[Although in several court cases](#) judges have recognised the “state of necessity” – that the unlawful conduct is justified to protect the perpetrator or another person from imminent and serious danger – hundreds of cases are currently making their way through Italy’s legal system.

Since 2013, at least 24 people have received sentences of more than 10 years, while six have been given life sentences, according to the report.

“This happens when, unfortunately, during the journey, some of the passengers die,” said Maria Giulia Fava at Arci Porco Rosso. “In that case, the boat driver is charged with murder. It is in those moments that justice is transformed into a terrible machine that risks destroying the lives of these people forever.”

Four Libyan professional footballers were arrested in Sicily in 2015 and sentenced to 30 years after 49 people died during a sea crossing. The men’s families and friends said they were refugees fleeing the civil war to continue their careers in Germany and were forced to pilot the boat. Last year, [Libyan warlord Gen Khalifa Haftar reportedly refused to release 18 Italian fishers accused of illegally fishing](#) in Libyan territorial waters until Italy had freed the footballers. But the move was unsuccessful.

Italian prosecutors’ use of anti-mafia laws in the cases of migrant boat drivers, which the report said has been framed as a continuation of the country’s prolonged battle against organised crime, has led to hundreds of boat drivers facing draconian charges, such as criminal association.

Evidence in the report appears to show that in some instances police have offered incentives to migrants to identify those driving the boat as being part

of smuggling operations.

“In one case a Nigerian witness told us that the police officers promised him that, by providing an accusatory statement [against a boat driver], he would be allowed to go to school and have a bed in a hostel,”, said the report. “Sometimes, the same thing happens with translators, who are asked by the authorities to find the boat drivers among the other passengers.”

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## Myanmar

# Aung San Suu Kyi's lawyer says he has been barred from speaking about her case



Ousted Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi asked earlier this month to reduce court time due to 'strained' health, according to her lawyer Khin Maung Zaw, who says he now faces a gag order. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

*Reuters*

Fri 15 Oct 2021 00.56 EDT

The head lawyer representing Myanmar's ousted leader [Aung San Suu Kyi](#) has said that authorities in the military-ruled country have imposed a gag order on him because they said his communications could cause instability.

Myanmar's state media has not reported developments in Aung San Suu Kyi's multiple legal cases, filed after she was ousted in a February coup, and

her lawyer, Khin Maung Zaw, has been the only source of public information on her trial and her wellbeing.

He said in a Facebook post on Friday he had been barred from speaking to media, diplomats, international organisations and foreign governments and later posted details of the order.

“Khin Maung Zaw’s communications may cause harassment, hurting a person who is acting in accordance with the law, may cause riots and destabilise the public peace,” the order said.

“Some local and foreign media outlets, illegal media outlets and the media are inciting fake information that could destabilise the country.”

A spokesperson for the ruling military did not answer calls seeking comment.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been held in an undisclosed location since the 1 February coup with no means of communicating with the outside world other than through her lawyers, who she meets only in court.

She is charged with a litany of offences, including breaking coronavirus protocols, illegally importing and possessing two-way radios, incitement to cause public alarm and violating Myanmar’s officials secrets law.

In his most recent correspondence with media, Khin Maung Zaw on Tuesday provided by text message a summary of the testimony of Aung San Suu Kyi’s co-defendant, ousted president Win Myint, who told the court the military had told him to resign hours before the coup, warning he would otherwise be harmed. He said he refused.

The lawyer said Aung San Suu Kyi had asked him to make public Win Myint’s testimony, his first account on what took place before the coup.

Aung San Suu Kyi led a civilian government after her party swept a 2015 election called after the military stepped back from half a century of direct rule.

Junta spokesperson Zaw Min Tun, in written remarks on Wednesday, said her case was being handled fairly by a judiciary that was independent.

The February coup ended a decade of tentative steps towards democracy and economic growth after decades of authoritarian rule and economic stagnation.

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**Boeing**

## **Boeing pilot indicted for allegedly deceiving US regulators over 737 Max**



A Boeing pilot was indicted Thursday on charges of deceiving safety regulators. Photograph: Jason Redmond/AFP/Getty Images

*Associated Press*

Thu 14 Oct 2021 20.25 EDT

A [Boeing](#) pilot involved in testing the 737 Max jetliner was indicted on Thursday by a federal grand jury on charges of deceiving safety regulators who were evaluating the plane, which was later involved in two deadly crashes.

The indictment accuses Mark A Forkner of giving the Federal Aviation Administration false and incomplete information about an automated flight-control system that played a role in [the crashes, which killed 346 people](#).

Prosecutors said that because of Forkner's "alleged deception", the system was not mentioned in critical FAA documents, pilot manuals or pilot-training material supplied to airlines.

The flight-control system automatically pushed down the noses of Max jets that crashed in 2018 in Indonesia, and 2019 in Ethiopia. The pilots tried unsuccessfully to regain control, but both planes went into nosedives minutes after taking off.

Most pilots were unaware of the system, called the maneuvering characteristics augmentation system, until after the first crash.

Forkner, 49, was charged with two counts of fraud involving aircraft parts in interstate commerce and four counts of wire fraud. Federal prosecutors said he was expected to make his first appearance in court on Friday in Fort Worth, Texas. If convicted on all counts, he could face a sentence of up to 100 years in prison.

Boeing designed the Max to be a more fuel-efficient version of the venerable 737 that could compete with a plane developed by the company's European rival Airbus. The flight-control system was meant to make the Max fly like previous 737s despite a tendency for the nose to tilt upward under some circumstances.

Congressional investigators have suggested that Forkner and Boeing downplayed the power of the system to avoid a requirement that pilots undergo extensive and expensive retraining, which would increase airlines' costs to operate the plane.

Chad Meacham, acting US attorney for the northern district of Texas, said Forkner had tried to save Boeing money by withholding "critical information" from regulators.

"His callous choice to mislead the FAA hampered the agency's ability to protect the flying public and left pilots in the lurch, lacking information about certain 737 Max flight controls," Meacham said in a statement.

[Chicago-based Boeing agreed to a \\$2.5bn settlement](#) to end a justice department criminal investigation into the company's actions. Boeing said in the settlement last year that employees had misled regulators about the safety of the Max. The settlement included a fine, money for airlines that bought the plane and compensation for families of the passengers who died in the crashes.

Dozens of families of passengers are suing Boeing in federal court in Chicago.

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[Adele](#)

## **Adele's heartfelt new single Easy on Me wins praise from Lil Nas X and Alicia Silverstone: 'You always make me cry'**



'I've shed many layers but also wrapped myself in new ones': Adele in the film clip for her new song Easy on Me. Photograph: YouTube

*[Steph Harmon](#)*

*[@stephharmon](#)*

Thu 14 Oct 2021 22.09 EDT

Adele has finally released a much-anticipated new single, Easy on Me – with a film clip that attracted more than half a million views within an hour of being uploaded to YouTube.

After a six-year hiatus for the 15-time Grammy-winning singer, the song is the first track from her fourth album, 30, due out on 19 November, which

reflects the “[inner turmoil](#)” she experienced after her divorce from Simon Konecki in 2019.

The clip appears to pay homage to the video for Adele’s 2015 hit Hello, one of the best-selling digital singles of all time. Both were directed by Xavier Dolan and both are set in an old country home.

In Hello, Adele arrives and makes a phone call to her past self; in Easy on Me, she packs the house up and drives away.

Adele’s growth she finally left the house

Hello Easy On Me [pic.twitter.com/VD1G0lKa1p](https://pic.twitter.com/VD1G0lKa1p)

— KALYJAY (@gyaigyimii) [October 14, 2021](#)

#EasyOnMe has everything that makes a perfect Adele music video.

1. Vintage filter.
2. House in disarray.
3. So much wind.
4. Rustling leaves in nature.
5. A dramatic cell phone exchange.
6. Emotional singing in a chic chair.
7. Eyeliner and nails on point.
8. Emotional terror.

— Alex Goldschmidt (@alexandergold) [October 14, 2021](#)

“I’ve learned a lot of blistering home truths about myself along the way,” [Adele said in a statement announcing the album](#). “I’ve shed many layers but also wrapped myself in new ones … I’ve painstakingly rebuilt my house and my heart since then and this album narrates it.”

The lyrics include the lines: “Go easy on me. I was still a child, didn’t get the chance to feel the world around me, had no time to choose, what I chose

to do, so go easy on me.”

Alicia Silverstone was among thousands of fans on Twitter reacting to the song, posting a video of herself preparing to listen with armfuls of wine and hard spirits.

Go easy on me [@Adele](#)... you always make me cry...  [#Adele](#)  
[#EasyOnMe](#) [pic.twitter.com/9EUP1GRDNY](https://pic.twitter.com/9EUP1GRDNY)

— Alicia Silverstone (@AliciaSilv) [October 15, 2021](#)

On [Instagram Stories](#), Drake wrote: “One of my best friends in the world just dropped a single.”

On Twitter, Lil Nas X posted: “I feel like I’m 15 again.”

easy on me is so good. it’s so crazy to think the last time adele released new music i was sitting on stan twitter. i feel like i’m 15 again.

— MONTERO  (@LilNasX) [October 15, 2021](#)

I think I love Adele. Don’t tell anyone.

— marc maron (@marcmaron) [October 14, 2021](#)

In a statement, Dolan said Adele had undergone enormous change in six years. “For me, there’s nothing stronger than artists reconnecting after years apart,” the director said.

“I’ve changed. Adele’s changed. And this is an opportunity to celebrate how we’ve both evolved, and how we’ve also both remained faithful to our dearest themes.

“It’s all the same, but different.”

ADELE oh ADELE i love uuuuuuuuuuu

— Normani (@Normani) [October 15, 2021](#)

adele just sucked the air out of my lungs with [#EasyOnMe](#)

— ilana kaplan (@lanikaps) [October 14, 2021](#)

This month Adele told Vogue that if 30 was to be classified as a “divorce album” it was more about “me divorcing myself … Just being like, ‘Bitch, fuckin’ hot mess, get your fuckin’ shit together!’”

“I always say that 21 doesn’t belong to me any more,” she continued. “Everyone else took it into their hearts so much. I’m not letting go of this one. This is my album. I want to share myself with everyone, but I don’t think I’ll ever let this one go.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/oct/15/lil-nas-x-and-alicia-silverstone-react-to-adeles-new-single-easy-on-me-you-always-make-me-cry>.

[Robert Durst](#)

## **Robert Durst sentenced to life in prison for murdering his friend Susan Berman**



Robert Durst, a real estate heir, has been sentenced in the murder of his friend Susan Berman. Photograph: Robyn Beck/AP

*[Dani Anguiano](#) in Los Angeles*

*[@dani\\_anguiano](#)*

Thu 14 Oct 2021 18.05 EDT

Robert Durst, the real estate heir suspected in a string of killings over nearly four decades, was sentenced to life in prison without parole for murdering his friend and confidante Susan Berman.

A Los Angeles jury [convicted](#) Durst, 78, of first-degree murder last month for the 2000 killing. Prosecutors argued that Durst had shot Berman at point-blank range in her home to prevent her from telling police what she knew about the 1982 disappearance of Durst's first wife, Kathie McCormack

Durst. The verdict marked the first homicide conviction for Durst, who has been linked to the deaths of three people in three states.

Durst's attorneys filed a motion seeking a new trial, claiming there was insufficient evidence to convict Durst, which the judge dismissed on Thursday at the start of the sentencing.

"The defendant's testimony was profoundly incredible and incriminating," said Judge Mark Windham, adding that there was "overwhelming evidence of guilt".

Thursday's sentence was expected as prosecutors did not seek the death penalty and the jury had also convicted Durst of the special circumstances of lying in wait and killing a witness, which carry mandatory life sentences.

Family and friends of Berman told the court how Durst had robbed them of an unforgettable and loyal friend who cared deeply for other people.

"It's been a daily, soul-consuming and crushing experience," Sareb Kaufman, Berman's stepson, said of her murder.

Another relative said he had visited Berman's grave to tell her that justice had been served and she could finally "rest easy".

Before sentencing Durst, the judge said Berman was an "an extraordinary human being" and her death was a loss to the community.

The sentencing came six years after the documentary series [The Jinx: The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst](#) thrust the multimillionaire into the spotlight. The series chronicled Berman's murder, as well as the disappearance of Durst's wife and the 2001 death of a neighbor in Galveston, Texas, where Durst was hiding out while disguised as a deaf-mute woman. He was arrested on the eve of the airing of the last episode of the series, in which Durst appeared to confess to the killings, saying to himself, "What the hell did I do? ... Killed them all, of course."

In court, the 78-year-old appeared sick and far more frail than he did in the 2015 documentary. He struggles with hearing and used a wheelchair

throughout the trial. At one point, after [38 hours of cross-examination](#), the judge urged the lead prosecutor to stop his questions. “At some point, there’s a limit,” the judge said.

Authorities have sought to put Durst behind bars for years for his role in crimes that officials believe date back to the disappearance and probable murder of McCormack.

“Everything starts with Kathie Durst’s disappearance and death at the hands of Mr Durst,” John Lewin, the deputy district attorney, said in his opening statement at the Berman trial.

McCormack’s body was never found, though she was declared dead in 2017. Durst was never an official suspect in the case, but prosecutors argued he was responsible for her death. The couple had been fighting before she disappeared, Durst admitted, and in the [preceding weeks](#) McCormack had gone to the hospital with injuries she said Durst had caused.

Prosecutors said Durst had killed Berman, his best friend, because she was prepared to tell police how she helped cover up the killing of McCormack. Berman had reportedly told friends she had provided him with a false alibi.

Prosecutors said on Thursday that they did not believe Berman had known she was covering up a murder, and that she had instead been trying to help her friend. Durst, they said, had probably told her what happened to McCormack was an accident.

Durst had previously faced a murder trial in Texas for the death of his neighbor Morris Black. While in Galveston, the heir tried to pass himself off as a mute woman named Dorothy Ciner, but Black didn’t buy the disguise and he was shot and dismembered, [prosecutors said](#). Durst and his legal team argued he had killed Black in self-defense, and he was acquitted.

Prosecutors in New York are expected to [pursue charges](#) against Durst over his ex-wife’s death. The Westchester district attorney’s office has reopened the investigation into McCormack’s death but has not confirmed reports of its plan to seek an indictment against Durst.

McCormack's family had hoped to speak at Thursday's sentencing, a request that was denied as California law mandates that only Berman's family is eligible to offer victim impact statements in court, the [Los Angeles Times](#) reported.

"It was never really a thought that they wouldn't be allowed to give a victim impact statement," Robert Abrams, the McCormacks' family attorney, told the newspaper. "When somebody is the central focus of the criminal trial, you would expect it."

Berman's relatives pleaded with Durst to tell the McCormack family where he buried his first wife's body.

"Any hope of any kind of redemption you can find is in letting them know where to find Kathie," Kaufman said.

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## Headlines monday 11 october 2021

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- [Live Boris Johnson criticised for being on holiday as energy crisis leads to warnings factories might close](#)
- [Asos Chief executive resigns as retailer warns over supply chain pressures](#)
- [Kwasi Kwarteng Business secretary accused of misleading claims over power cable project](#)

## [Politics](#)

# Energy crisis: minister denies Kwasi Kwarteng lied over Treasury claims



Kwasi Kwarteng said he was consulting the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, about what help could be offered to struggling energy businesses. Photograph: Jeff Overs/BBC/AFP/Getty Images

*Peter Walker Political correspondent*

[@peterwalker99](#)

Mon 11 Oct 2021 04.04 EDT

A minister has sought to play down splits between government departments over support for firms struggling with fast-rising energy prices, denying that the business secretary had lied and blaming a spat between the Treasury and business department on “unnamed sources”.

In extraordinary events on Sunday, after the business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, said he was consulting the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, about what

help could be offered, Treasury sources [openly rejected this](#) and accused Kwarteng of “making things up”.

Asked if this meant Kwarteng had lied, the Home Office minister [Damian Hinds](#) said: “Of course not.”

Hinds, who also defended Boris Johnson’s decision to go on holiday to Spain for the week, told Sky News: “These unnamed sources stories come out from time to time. The fact is, government departments, government ministers, talk to each other the whole time, and of course with an issue like this, with these rising global prices and business having to grapple and deal with it to make sure they break even and can make a margin, of course that is something that the business secretary – and of course the energy secretary – is going to be totally focused on.”

Many businesses, particularly those with high energy needs, have expressed alarm at the pace of increase in energy prices, warning they could affect production. Some have said the businesses department did not seem aware of the extent of the crisis.



Damian Hinds also defended Boris Johnson’s decision to go on holiday to Spain. Photograph: Mark Thomas/Rex/Shutterstock

One industry boss who attended the meeting with Kwarteng on Friday said the business secretary suggested soaring prices were temporary and driven by the weather.

However, after pressure from businesses, which said they were likely to be forced to suspend production if costs remained high, he had promised to examine their suggestions and ask the Treasury to consider some of their demands, including a cut to green levies and a request that the energy regulator, Ofgem, replicates the network tariff discounts offered to competitor industries in the EU.

Gareth Stace, the director general of UK Steel, which represents the sector, said companies wanted parity with trading conditions experienced by EU competitors. “We’re asking very much the same, because when government says, ‘We’re not going to do any bailouts’, that’s not what we’re asking for,” Stace said.

“What we’re asking for is, ‘Hey, government, we’ve been telling you for a decade that your policies add something like £55m that we pay in the UK, as the steel sector, that our competitors in, say, Germany don’t pay.’ Historically that puts us at a competitive disadvantage.”

He called on Johnson to “bang ministerial heads together, take control and remember that if he does nothing, then his levelling-up ambition will be left in tatters”.

The prime minister is on holiday this week, reportedly staying at a luxury villa in the south of Spain owned by Zac Goldsmith, the Conservative former MP who Johnson [made a peer](#) and kept on as a government minister after he lost his Commons seat.

Hinds defended the timing of the holiday, telling Sky: “When is the right time? I think it is important that people do have an opportunity to be with their families to have some relaxing, unwinding,

“But I wouldn’t want to overstate the amount of unwinding and relaxing you get to do as prime minister because, as I say, you are constantly in touch,

you are constantly being briefed and you remain in charge of the government.

“What is important for the rest of us actually, for the whole country, is that the prime minister does get to have some family time, does get to have a break.”

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

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

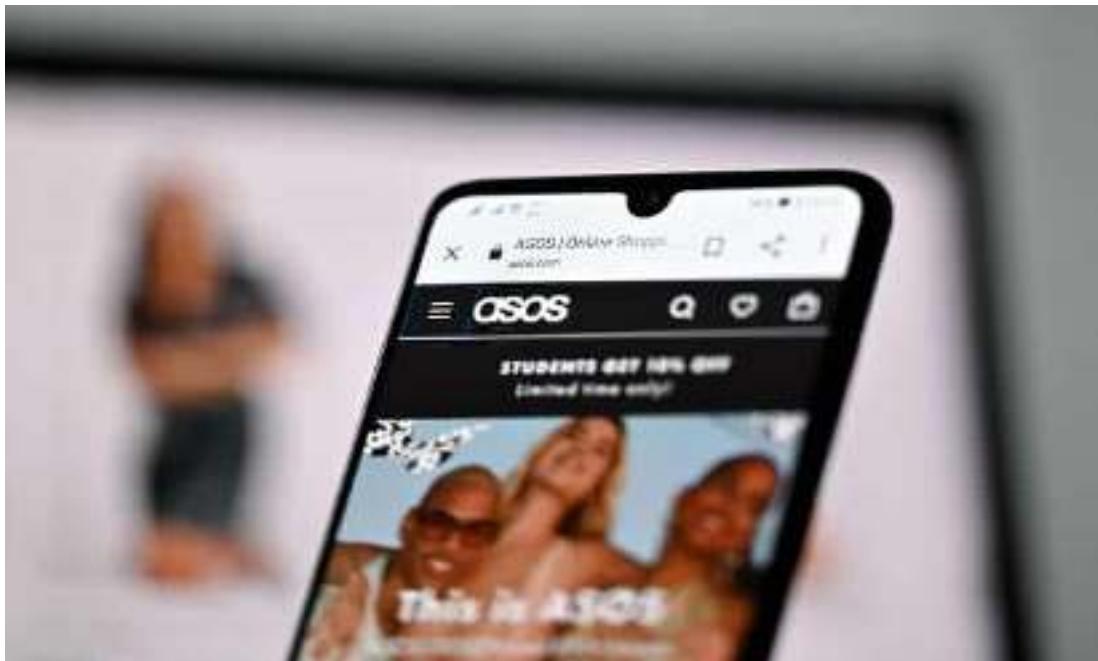
# **DUP boycott of meetings with Irish government ministers unlawful, court rules – as it happened**

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[Asos](#)

## Asos chief Nick Beighton resigns as it warns over supply chain pressures



Asos reported profits of £177m in the year to the end of August. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images

[Mark Sweney](#)

[@marksweney](#)

Mon 11 Oct 2021 06.26 EDT

Nick Beighton, the chief executive of [Asos](#), is leaving with immediate effect as the online fashion retailer warned supply chain problems and rising costs would affect its profits.

Asos said Beighton and the board had agreed it was “the right time” for him to go. It said after the departure of Beighton, who has been at the company for 12 years with the past six in the role of chief executive, it would continue to focus on international growth.

“Asos’s management and board have spent considerable time over recent months developing and validating a clear strategic plan to accelerate international growth, building on Asos’s undoubted strength in the UK,” said the Asos chair, Adam Crozier, who is to stand down next month to [take over as chairman at BT](#).

“Key to that is ensuring that we have the right leadership in place for the next phase, and the changes we are announcing today are designed to ensure we deliver against our clear strategic intent.”

The company, which has benefited from the online shopping boom during the Covid pandemic with revenues up by a fifth and profits rising by more than a third in the year to the end of August, warned the global supply chain shortage was affecting its business.

“Supply chain challenges loom relatively large,” said the Asos chief financial officer, Mat Dunn, who will lead the business on a day-to-day basis until Beighton’s successor is found. “There is anticipation of extended supply lines and pressure on some brand partners means lower availability than we would want. We are expecting the situation to improve [but] peak [pressure] on global supply chain capacity is in the run-up to Christmas, early January through to lunar new year.”

Asos said there would be “notable cost headwinds” including inbound freight costs, labour cost inflation, outbound delivery costs and Brexit duty.

The company, which reported adjusted pretax profits up 36% to £193.6m in the year to the end of August, said it expected profits to fall between £110m and £140m for its next financial year. This is below analysts’ expectations of £186m.

Shares plunged more than 13% on Monday, closing at £24.08, the lowest since May 2020. Shares have fallen nearly 50% this year.

Beighton said: “I have enjoyed every moment of my 12 years at Asos. When I joined, there were fewer than 200 people and we had annual sales of around £220m. I leave a business reporting turnover of almost £4bn, with

more than 3,000 fantastic Asosers delivering for 26 million customers in 200 markets around the world.”

Asos said revenues grew by 22% year on year to £3.9bn, driven by “exceptional” growth of 36% in the UK. In the US revenues grew 21%, Europe rose by 15% while across the rest of the world revenue growth was just 6%.

The company said its performance across the rest of the world was particularly poor because of how long deliveries take: for example, in Australia customers have to wait 30 days for an order to arrive.

Dunn said the company was aiming to double the size of its US and European business in the medium term. “We want to evolve from a UK-centric brand,” he said.

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Russ Mould, the investment director at AJ Bell, said: “Asos seems to have found it hard to keep up with the fast fashion movement in recent years, coming in for criticism for not being able to turn around new product designs quickly, experiencing warehouse problems and poor stock availability. Customers have so much choice with where they buy clothes and competition continues to grow. Asos will need to do something extra to make it stand out from the crowd.”

Earlier this year [Asos acquired the Topshop and Miss Selfridge](#) brands for £330m, but Dunn said not to expect a flurry of new deals.

“We have the strength and flexibility on our balance sheet and we have the strategic option and if things meet our criteria we will look at them,” he said. “I anticipate we will look at lots of things but not do very many [deals].”

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**Kwasi Kwarteng**

## Kwasi Kwarteng accused of misleading claims over power cable project



Kwarteng told Andrew Marr that he had never voiced support for the Aquind project. Photograph: Jeff Overs/BBC/AFP/Getty Images

*[Jessica Elgot](#) Chief political correspondent*

*[@jessicaelgot](#)*

Sun 10 Oct 2021 13.52 EDT

A cabinet minister has been accused of making misleading claims about a £1.2bn cable project linked to a Conservative donor.

Almost one in 10 Conservative MPs had taken money from firms linked to Viktor Fedotov, revealed in the Pandora papers to have [secretly co-owned a company once accused of participating in a massive corruption scheme](#). One of those firms included Aquind.

Labour highlighted that the business secretary, [Kwasi Kwarteng](#), had said he was supportive of the project in a 2019 letter released under freedom of information, despite Kwarteng saying on Sunday he had never voiced support.

A source at the Department for Business, [Energy](#) and Industrial Strategy said the letter was part of a proposal for cross-border infrastructure schemes to the “EU projects of common interest” (PCI) register, which included Aquind as one of four interconnector projects. The source said the planning decision was separate and quasi-judicial and proposing the project to the PCI did not mean it would be approved.

Kwarteng is due to decide whether to approve the project this week. Aquind and other businesses owned by Fedotov have given £700,000 to the [Conservatives](#). Another donor, Alexander Temerko, who is the public face of Aquind, has also publicly donated over £700,000 to the Conservatives.

Kwarteng told the BBC’s [Andrew Marr](#) show that he had “never commented on this specific project” and said he would rely on official advice from civil servants as to whether to approve or reject the application.

“I am very much in favour of more interconnectors because they can actually get electricity, sources of power, cheaply from the continent, and in many cases it helps with our decarbonisation because certainly in France a lot of that power is generated through nuclear power,” he said. “So broadly, I’m in favour of interconnectors, I haven’t said anything about this particular project.”

In a letter to Temerko in October 2019, Kwarteng, then the minister of state for business, energy and clean growth, said: “We have written to the commission to reiterate our support for a number of projects including, of course, the Aquind project.”

The Business Secretary said on [#Marr](#) on [#AQUIND](#) today “I haven’t said anything about this specific project”. That’s not true though is it Mr Kwarteng?  [pic.twitter.com/i1W9JZJKvr](https://pic.twitter.com/i1W9JZJKvr)

— Stephen Morgan MP (@StephenMorganMP) [October 10, 2021](#)

Ed Miliband, the shadow business secretary, said: “Britain cannot afford this chaos and incompetence,” he said. “Kwasi Kwarteng is in a vital position at this moment, safeguarding our energy supplies. He must be straight with people. He must now correct the record and recuse himself from making the decision on [the] project.”

Lawyers for Fedotov and Aquind have strongly denied all accusations of fraud and said accusations of corruption aimed at his Russian firm were “completely false”. They said Fedotov did not personally donate to the Tories.

There is no suggestion Temerko had any knowledge of the possible origins of Fedotov’s wealth. Three Conservative ministers have already had to recuse themselves from the decision-making process over the Aquind undersea cable because of their links to the company.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has been approached for comment.

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## 2021.10.11 - Spotlight

- 'There was always an excuse to take a drink' Succession's Alan Ruck on Ferris Bueller, booze and bouncing back
- 'The rich don't always fight fair' Guardian lawyers, libel and lawsuits
- 'You feel like a child again!' Would exercising at 5am make you a happier person?
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Interview

## **‘There was always an excuse to take a drink’: Succession’s Alan Ruck on Ferris Bueller, booze and bouncing back**

[Hadley Freeman](#)



Alan Ruck at home in Los Angeles. Photograph: Philip Cheung/The Guardian



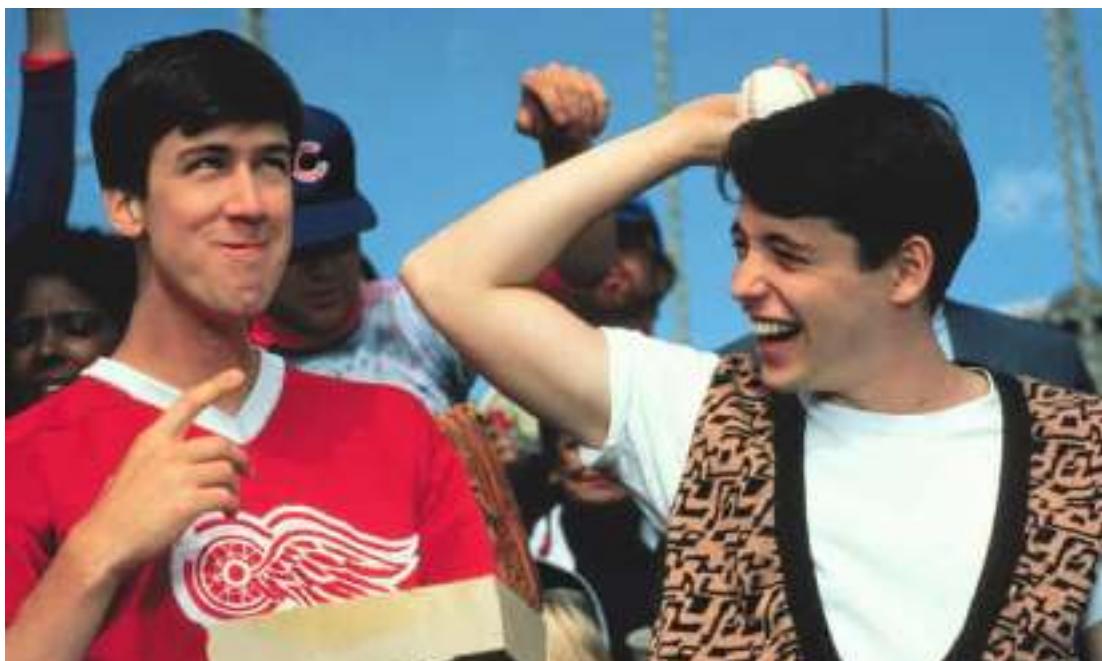
[@HadleyFreeman](#)

Mon 11 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Alan Ruck is talking to me by video about the present, but he appears to be sitting in the past. The present we are discussing is the forthcoming third season of Succession, the wildly adored HBO series about plutocracies and dysfunctional families, created by Jesse Armstrong, a co-creator of Peep Show. Ruck plays Connor, the neglected eldest son of a media magnate, Logan Roy (Brian Cox). Like all the actors on the show – as the Guardian's unofficial Succession correspondent, I have [interviewed Cox](#) and [Jeremy Strong](#) – Ruck has thought deeply about his character and is very eloquent on the subject. It is, however, a little hard to focus on what he's saying because the bright and spacious kitchen in which he's sitting bears a striking resemblance to another kitchen audiences associate with him. More than 30 years before Ruck played Connor, he was Cameron Frye, another neglected son of a cruel and wealthy man, in the 1986 John Hughes classic film Ferris Bueller's Day Off. Alan, I say, are you actually sitting in Ferris Bueller's kitchen?

“Ha! No, I see what you mean, but this is *my* lovely kitchen. And upstairs are my lovely children,” he says in his occasionally ironic, lightly mocking tone, although that mockery is always directed inwardly rather than outwardly. At one point, he makes a fleeting reference to “a western I was once in”, and I interrupt him to say he cannot casually refer to the great 1990 movie *Young Guns II* as just some western.

“Oh right, OK,” he says with an embarrassed duck of his head, as if his mum was bragging to the neighbour about her son’s grades. “But you know I was just the widower in that movie, right? And you don’t want to be the sad, sorry guy in a western – you want to be the guy who rides his horse through a plate-glass window and shoots everybody!”



With Matthew Broderick in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. Photograph: Cinetext Bildarchiv/Paramount/Allstar

By the time he was cast in *Succession*, Ruck, now 65, was well accustomed to playing the sad and the sorry. As Captain John Harriman in *Star Trek Generations*, he had to deal with the loss of Captain Kirk; as Rabbit in *Twister*, he was the dorky member of the tornado-chasing team, prissily fussing over the maps. He worked with Rob Lowe and Andrew McCarthy (*Class*), with [Charlie Sheen](#) twice (*Ferris Bueller*, *Spin City*) and, of course, he was in *Young Guns II* alongside Emilio Estevez, but he was never really

part of the Brat Pack. Instead, as with the Roy family, he was slightly on the outside looking in – he even auditioned for *The Breakfast Club*, but didn’t get it.

He is really terrific as Connor, the self-deluding eldest Roy child who can go from pathos to petulance in a blink, gazing at his smarter half-siblings – Connor was born from Logan’s first marriage – with a dash of discomfort. He describes his work on the show with charming discursiveness, referencing everything from John F Kennedy’s tragic younger sister Rosemary, who ended up being lobotomised (“Maybe Connor got a little stuck in the birth canal, like Rosemary did”) to a club at his college, the University of Illinois, called the Society for Creative Anachronists, where members would dress up like medieval lords and ladies. “I can imagine Connor being attracted to that world,” he says. “When I auditioned for the show there was a line in which Connor says, ‘Dad, there’s this job I want: it’s president of the United States.’ I said to Adam [McKay, the show’s executive producer], ‘He’s putting the old man on, right?’ And Adam said, ‘Oh no, he’s deadly serious.’ That gave me a big window into who this guy is.”

“Big” barely does it justice, and Ruck relishes the storytelling. “I think with Connor, up until he was eight years old, he was a little prince and anywhere he went with his dad, people bowed down, and he was old enough to think, ‘Oh, Dad’s a big deal. This is good.’ Then his father divorced his mother, and there were hints in season two that she had psychological challenges. So between eight and 18, Connor was alternately at boarding school or with a very sick woman, so he started to develop a very active fantasy life and now he has a delusional disorder. Then, because he wanted his pop’s attention, he probably tried business school, lasted a couple months, then maybe tried art school and realised he had no talent. And then he realised he didn’t have to do anything because there was this big pile of money in the account. Now he’s in his 50s and he’s never had a job. So the upside is, he’s never wanted for anything, but he has also never been needed. And I think it’s starting to get to him.”

That Ruck has repeatedly been cast as the bullied rather than the bully is not a coincidence. In *Speed* (1994), he played the good-hearted but terrified tourist who had the misfortune to board the wrong bus on a trip to Los

Angeles, but the part was originally written, Ruck says, “as an asshole, an entitled lawyer whose BMW broke down. But when I went in and did a reading, I think they thought, ‘Oh, this guy’s a softie – let’s have him play that.’” Even as Stuart Bondek, the sexist and boorish assistant deputy mayor he played for all six seasons of *Spin City*, the sitcom starring Michael J Fox and then Sheen, Ruck couldn’t help but let Stuart’s sweetness come shining through.

“I’m a character actor with not a lot of character,” says Ruck, reverting to his comfort zone of self-deprecation. “Most character actors have their thing, like John Malkovich is kinda scary, or whatever. I’m just this white guy who’s not especially intimidating in any way, not intellectually and certainly not physically.”

But Connor Roy represents a change for him because, unlike all his other characters, there is nothing especially endearing about him. Absurd, yes; endearing, no. Is it hard to play someone with so little appeal?



With Brian Cox in *Succession*. Photograph: HBO/Kobal/Shutterstock

“No, it’s really refreshing,” he laughs. “You get to get all that dirty and miserable stuff out at work and then you go home and hopefully are a decent human being. What’s great about Connor, and the show, is that it’s

unpredictable. I know there's a lot of aficionados out there who are all, 'This is what's going to happen ...' But everyone will be surprised at what's come out of Jesse's brain this season. The gloves are off."

Maintaining this sense of surprise is of utmost importance to everyone involved in [Succession](#), and I receive multiple messages ahead of the interview from TV people saying that I am forbidden to ask Ruck anything about the new series. But it's not easy for someone as friendly as he is to keep secrets, and multiple sentences end abruptly with: "Oh no, I can't say that!" At one point, talking about Connor's future, he stops himself almost that bit too late. HBO are going to have to kill me now, I tell him. "Yeah, I think they are waiting outside your door," he says drily.

Ruck has been around long enough not to get overly caught up in the hysteria around the show. Don't get him wrong – he is *thrilled* to be on it. "I've been waiting for a show like this for more than 30 years, something that's ostensibly a drama but is really twisted and funny," he says. But he also knows not to get carried away. After all, he co-starred in one of the seminal movies of the 80s, and then didn't get another really meaty and starry role until ... well, now. "Someone asked me once, 'How do you choose your roles?' And I was like, 'Meryl Streep and Brad Pitt do that. That's not how it is for the rest of us.'"

Ruck got into acting because he felt like a nobody. As a teenager growing up in Cleveland, school was a "misery": "I couldn't concentrate, I wasn't athletic, my family didn't have any money, so I couldn't throw parties. So I was looking for something where I could get a bit of attention. Then, when I found out I could do this, I never let it go because I had an identity," he says. By the time he played Cameron, he was 28 and married, but it was not hard for him to mine teenage misery.

He studied drama at college and acted in plays around Chicago. In his late 20s, he was cast in the Broadway production of Neil Simon's play *Biloxi Blues* alongside Matthew Broderick, and the two became instant friends. It was Broderick who persuaded him to audition for *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, as he had already been cast as the lead. Despite the casting directors' initial qualms about Ruck's age, the real-life friendship between the two actors was so palpable that they cast him, and it's now impossible to imagine anyone

else in those roles. It's especially hard to imagine John Hughes' first choices for Ferris and Cameron, who were, according to Ruck, Anthony Michael Hall and Emilio Estevez.

Ferris Bueller's Day Off is so familiar that it's easy to forget what a weird film it is, this story of a bunch of kids who skip school, not to smoke or make out, but to go to a fancy museum and a restaurant. Because of its weirdness, superfans have long sought hidden meanings. I ask Ruck what he thinks of the theory that Ferris is actually just a figment of Cameron's imagination because he represents who he wants to be. Ruck throws back his head and laughs in a manner inescapably reminiscent of when Ferris tells Cameron he'll take the miles off the speedometer by [driving home backwards](#).



Photograph: Philip Cheung/The Guardian

“Ferris Fight Club!” he chuckles, imagining Ferris as [Tyler Durden](#). “Well, I hope whoever came up with that got at least an A on their paper, because it’s very clever.”

The implication behind that theory is that Cameron is, really, the star of Ferris Bueller's Day Off, because he – unlike Ferris – is the one going

through the emotional change. Hughes often put elements of autobiography in his movies and I ask if he ever talked to Ruck about this.

“No, but he did say to me during filming: ‘The reason you’re wearing a Red Wings T-shirt [in the movie] is, the relationship with your father stinks. But you have a really good relationship with your grandfather in Detroit and he takes you to Red Wings games.’ Then I found out some time after the movie that John had spent a good chunk of his early years in Detroit,” he says with a fond smile.

After Ferris Bueller, Ruck flitted between theatre, TV and film. TV had almost no credibility then. Were his agents worried that he was harming his career by appearing on short-lived sitcoms with names like *Daddy’s Girl*?

“I think they were just happy that I was getting a job anywhere! I had some attitude problems that got in my way then,” he says.

Ruck is so personable that I find it hard to imagine him with attitude problems.

“Well, I used to drink a lot,” he says. “I don’t do that any more. There was always an excuse to take a drink. If things were not going well, I would have a drink. If things were going exceedingly well, I’d have many drinks. Then my manager at the time said, ‘I think you’re drinking too much.’ I said, ‘What are you talking about?’ She said, ‘There’s gotta be a reason why you’re not working, and this is the only thing I can think of.’ I was *so* desperate at this point that I was willing to try anything, so I stopped.” Not long after that, he was cast on *Spin City*.

I tell him it amazes me that all actors aren’t alcoholics, given the sheer amount of rejection they have to endure.

“Yeah, it’s true with actors there are a lot of boozehounds. You try to find something to turn off the noise in your head.”

I ask what he uses now to turn off that noise.

“Well, I’m an older guy with kids, so mainly I’m just tired,” he says. Ruck has two adult children from his first marriage, and an 11-year-old and a

seven-year-old with his second wife, the actor Mireille Enos. “I’m really lucky that I get a chance to do it again, but I am really, really tired,” he says.

The big kitchen behind Ruck is reminiscent of Ferris Bueller, but it’s also proof of how far Ruck has come since. Against the odds and despite the hurdles, Cameron came out good, from Brat Pack adjacent to HBO star. “The way I look at it, it was just a really happy day when I went to Adam McKay’s house for the Succession audition,” he says with a shrug. Life moves pretty fast, even if it sometimes takes a couple of decades.

*The third season of Succession begins on Sky Atlantic and Now in the UK on 18 October, and in Australia on Foxtel and Binge.*

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## Media

# ‘The rich don’t always fight fair’: Guardian lawyers, libel and lawsuits



25 years of front page news. Illustration: Guardian Design

*Gill Phillips*

Mon 11 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

It was 9pm on a Friday and I had finally sat down with a gin and tonic to watch a bit of catch-up television when the phone rang. It was an American lawyer fuming about a piece the Guardian had just published. As I scrambled to read into the story and figure out how I would raise the journalist involved, an urgent sport story landed in my inbox following a punch-up at a football match, quickly followed by a 2,000-word Observer story that needed to be 100% legally watertight.

Such is the lot of the media lawyer, often the last line of defence between a publisher and a hefty lawsuit. Freedom of speech is a fundamental part of

any democracy, but exercising and defending it can be a difficult and expensive thing.

The rich, the famous and the powerful don't like criticism and don't like having their dirty laundry aired in public. They can be well-resourced, and will spend heavily on expensive lawyers. They don't always tell the truth, or fight fair. In April 1995, [Jonathan Aitken](#), then a Treasury minister, denounced the "wicked lies" told by the Guardian and Granada TV's World in Action about his business activities.

But the Guardian held its nerve and two years later his legal action collapsed and he was jailed for perjury and perverting the course of justice.

That story set the tone: never again would the Guardian be considered a soft touch when it came to defending itself. But the implication was that it would have to be sure of itself on every contentious story it published.

The Guardian operates with a team of in-house editorial lawyers who are available to work closely with its journalists to get legally difficult stories successfully over the line.

Our small team look after all publishing related legal issues for the Guardian and the Observer – from whether it is OK to publish a particular story or picture, to advising on leaked documents and court reporting. We also pick up and respond to legal complaints after publication.

Our primary aim is to ensure that what is published has been legally and editorially risk-assessed. Of course, not every article needs legalling. We could get sent up to 50 articles a day for pre-publication legal review or checking, and we won't know in advance, in most cases, what an article is about, so we need to be nimble and ready to move quickly from, say, a sport story to a science one, to a long read on sexual abuse, to a foreign investigation about corruption. Ultimately, the decision on what to publish lies with the editors. There's an old adage – lawyers advise, but editors decide.

Making a serious legal mistake can be time-consuming, costly and reputationally damaging. The prevailing global media landscape is pretty

hostile. It's not just about facing down legal threats. Donald Trump referred to reporters as "enemies of the people". Attacks such as this have been a gift to strongmen dictators who wish to silence the press, and have increased the risk and likelihood of physical attacks on journalists.

The UK is not so friendly either. It is very expensive to fight a case all the way to a trial here. It can easily mean costs running into the hundreds of thousands of pounds. Even if you win you may still be well out of pocket, because of the way the legal costs regime works.



Gill Phillips, GNM director of editorial legal services. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

And if you lose, you may have to pay damages as well as the other side's costs. As Voltaire said: "I was never ruined but twice – once when I lost a lawsuit, once when I won one."

London is considered by some as the libel capital of the world, and many use English lawyers to silence their critics. Because we publish via a website, where anyone can access and read our stories, we face the possibility of being sued anywhere in the world.

[Big investigative series](#) generally present the biggest legal challenges, as they often publish material that powerful interests do not want aired – and

involve many stories by a number of journalists, based in the UK and abroad. Here, editorial lawyers tend to get involved early on, so we can advise on what is being planned, and facilitate discussions around the public interest or what the editorial code is saying.

Later, the journalists will put together any “right to reply” letters that will be sent out seeking comment from those who may be criticised. Once those letters go out, we can usually expect to get a barrage of responses, often from expensive claimant-friendly lawyers, some of whom are hired to try to put journalists off publishing, usually by whatever means they can – threats, bluster, as well as, where appropriate, pointing out that we have misunderstood something or missed a key bit of evidence.

03:05

Obsessive, illuminating, high-stakes: why investigative journalism matters - video

These letters are often headed “private and confidential and “not for publication” and can be tricky and time-consuming to respond to, particularly as things near the publishing deadline. We have to take on board what these letters say, consider how they might affect what the journalists want to write, and discuss any next steps.

Publishing 24 hours a day, 365 days a year around the world is a legally fraught business. The law can change very rapidly and we have to try to make sure we are up to date with how the courts are looking at things.

For example, over the past five to 10 years, the courts have got very hot on what they call audit trails – they like to see evidence of journalists and editors’ workings and thought processes before something contentious gets published. This is a relatively new court-created development. It’s not something the government or a regulator have put in place. And it can be tricky when there’s a deadline looming.

A free press stands for the kind of liberties and tolerances that are vital and precious to all of us. As the philosopher JS Mill and the poet John Milton recognised, we need to believe and have faith that in a free and equal encounter with falsehood truth will emerge, that differences of opinion

encourage debate and help truth emerge, and that by this process we have a better chance to get the whole picture and not a partial one fed to us by those in power or who are able to influence it.

My team are very privileged to be working for a news organisation that does its best to espouse these high standards and contribute in our own small way to trying to get the story, and hopefully the truth, over the finishing line.

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## **'You feel like a child again!' Would exercising at 5am make you a happier person?**



Wakey wakey ... Win the Morning, Win the Day brings people together, makes them feel good – and it's free. Photograph: JMichl/Getty Images



[Emine Saner](#)

[@eminesaner](#)

Mon 11 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

A minute's silence – a chance to listen to the wind and the waves crashing on to shingle, and look across the Solent to the lights of a cruise ship in the distance – and then we charge into the water, although some of us (me) are more tentative. There are shrieks and gasps from the shock of the cold; grimacing, grinning faces lit up by a portable floodlight.

It is barely 6am, and still dark. It's also the windiest,雨iest weather this group has ventured out in, but an impressively hardy 12 have turned up. On a good day, about 30 meet each Friday at 5.30am in Gosport, Hampshire, for a two-mile walk along Stokes Bay, followed by a dip in the sea. "It has changed my life," says one man, who has been coming since the group started last year. He says meeting strangers, and the welcoming atmosphere, has allowed him to open up about his mental health and seek some help. Kerry started coming in October last year and says the weekly meet has helped relieve the seasonal affective disorder she usually suffers from at this time of year. "I used to sleep for 10, 11 hours," she says. "If you had told me last year I'd be getting up at this time each week to do this, I wouldn't have believed it."

The group – [Win the Morning, Win the Day](#) – was set up in August last year by Chris Reeves, a physical training instructor in the Royal Navy. He had struggled with isolation and lack of structure to his days throughout the first lockdown, and knew others must be feeling the same. After hearing a podcast with the mixed martial arts fighter Mark Scanlon, talking about the 5.30am circuit training sessions and sea swims he was running in Liverpool, Reeves decided to create his own. Scanlon used the phrase “win the morning, win the day”, which is what Reeves decided to call the group. It’s a mantra popularised by the US entrepreneur and productivity guru [Tim Ferriss](#), which has become popular in motivational circles. Ferriss interviewed a wealth of high-achieving people about their morning routine, with the idea that if you get your morning right (if you “win” it), it’s a good start to the rest of the day. His own [morning rituals](#) include making his bed and journaling; for the Gosport group, it’s more about walking, talking, stripping off, going for a quick dip, then having coffee and more chat afterwards.

In the first week, just over a year ago, 60 people turned up to join Reeves. His group has since spawned others in Surrey, Kent, Preston, Cumbria, Manchester, and Southsea, across the water in Portsmouth. There’s one in Gibraltar, he says, and another in South Africa. Two people have been in touch with Reeves this week to talk about setting up groups. It’s a little like [parkrun](#), the 5km run that takes place in parks around the world every weekend – a simple idea, organised by enthusiastic volunteers.



Win, win ... the Gosport group enjoy an early splash after a walk.  
Photograph: WTMWTD

Why does Reeves think Win the Morning, Win the Day is taking off? “It’s free, I’m not selling anything and it’s a welcoming environment for anyone who wants to step outside their comfort zone,” he says. “I don’t like the sea, I don’t like cold water. But the reason I do this is because it sets me outside my comfort zone.” Challenging yourself, he believes, develops mental resilience, although the sea swim element isn’t essential. People in landlocked areas have been in touch about setting up their own groups. It’s more about getting out of bed, and meeting others.

Win the Morning, Win the Day has connected people at a time when many may have been missing contact with friends and family, and provided a space where the emphasis is on mental health and friendship, not physical fitness or tough challenges. Reeves makes it clear that nobody has to go into the sea if they don’t want to. “I have, and suffer from, poor mental health,” he says. “I know my triggers for that and I know how to look after myself. Some days are OK, some days are bad days, and that’s fine.”

Hearing about Scanlon’s group on that podcast “just triggered something and I thought: ‘I could do this.’ On that two-mile walk I’ve had deeper conversations with people I’ve never met before than with mates of 20, 30

years,” he says. “People have made friendships, some people have stopped drinking. Some people previously wouldn’t go out of the house, some people didn’t like groups. I am immensely proud, not of myself, but of everyone who has made it what it is. I’m not forcing people to be friendly, and to be nice and positive. That’s just what we’ve attracted.”

They *are* kind: when it’s clear that I have drastically underdressed for the weather, one member, Paul, lends me waterproofs. And by necessity, when you’re swimming outdoors in the dark, you have to look out for each other.

Meeting up early to exercise is hardly a new idea, but Win the Morning, Win the Day has a catchy name, a growing community (the Facebook group has more than 3,000 members) and an easily replicable format. Michelle Tucker set up her group in Surrey – they walk, then swim in the Thames – in October last year, after seeing Reeves on a BBC clip and getting in touch with him. “I think it’s the simplicity of it – bringing people together, meeting early, starting your day right,” she says. “People are open and honest, and share some really intimate things – they may be struggling with their mental health, with isolation, and they just talk to each other.” Or it’s simply fun and “a really liberating thing to do” to go swimming in the dark at 6am. “You kind of feel like a child again because you’re doing this funny activity. The inhibitions have gone out the window.”

There is a clear sense of accomplishment – it’s good to know you have done something healthy (the walk, the socialising, and evidence is growing for the benefits of immersion in cold water) before most people are out of bed – and the knowledge that whatever happens during the rest of the day, at least that has been achieved. But the emphasis seems to be on mental and physical wellbeing, not necessarily about optimising productivity and getting up early just to cram more into the day, which is what characterises so much early-morning fitness propaganda.



Chris Reeves: ‘It’s free, I’m not selling anything and it’s welcoming for anyone who wants to step outside their comfort zone.’ Photograph: WTMWTD

There are many books and large online communities devoted to the early-morning rituals of successful CEOs, politicians, artists and other high-achievers, with the implication that if only you could get up at 4am, similar success – or at least the ability to get a bit more done – would be within reach. But what if they get up early because they are CEOs, rather than that they became CEOs because they got up early?

[Fiona Buckland](#), a leadership coach, observes that some of the “outwardly successful people” she works with have to be up early to deal with the amount of work that has to be done and “the early-start mantra is making a virtue of necessity. They are incredibly ambitious and are also under immense pressure from investors and shareholders to produce results, so stress can be a great motivator to find more hours in the day.” They also, she says, “tend to be attracted to extremes and risk-taking, rather than moderation and self-care, and some of the extreme early rising routines are more a symptom than a cause of their drive”. While we are encouraged to perceive such punishing regimes as disciplined and impressive, “the hidden underside is the high level of burnout, alcoholism, depression, mental

illness, relationship breakdown, insomnia, high blood pressure and heart disease,” she says.

While Buckland is all for “optimising your performance, let’s include a few more ideas so that people have a wider range of options and practices, and can discover what works for them”. This may not include an early start. She advises finding out, by experimenting, when you are at your best to work on the projects that mean most. “For instance, I know when my peak times for good, flowing, creative thinking are and I protect this. It’s not 5am, especially in winter when it’s dark,” she says.

We each have a chronotype – loosely defined as a lark (a morning person), or owl (more alert during later hours), though few of us are 100% one or the other, and the balance can shift with age – and it would be “foolishness”, says Colin Espie, professor of sleep medicine at the Nuffield department of clinical neurosciences at Oxford University, to say to an owl type: “You should get up early and be productive then. It goes against their natural sleep-wake rhythms.”

The best way to have a good day isn’t necessarily to jump into the sea – or wake up at 2.30am then pray, work out, play golf and have “cryo chamber recovery” as the actor Mark Wahlberg does – but simply to get a good night’s sleep, says Espie. “That’s the primary fuel for alertness, concentration, productivity, emotional function, mental health and so many physical things such as immune function and cell regeneration. Ensure you get sufficient good-quality sleep, because even small amounts of sleep loss create difficulties for the brain, and with concentration, productivity and emotion.” Trying to go against your chronotype “will be more likely to be counterproductive. If [an owl type] forces themselves to get up early, they may find it difficult to go to bed earlier to get that sleep at the other end. Therefore, they will be running short on sleep, and that will do more harm than good in terms of emotional health and productivity.”

So don’t feel bad if you are not up to some 5.30am socialising and outdoor swimming – blame it on your chronotype. But I’m a lark, and – after being warmed by layers of dry clothing and quite a lot of smugness – I can see the appeal. For the rest of the day, I feel the memory of the chill of seawater on my skin, I am in a good mood, and it does feel as if I am “winning” at

something, however intangible. Reeves says: “It’s not about affecting everyone, but that one message I get most days, that says: ‘I really needed that today.’ That’s my job done.”

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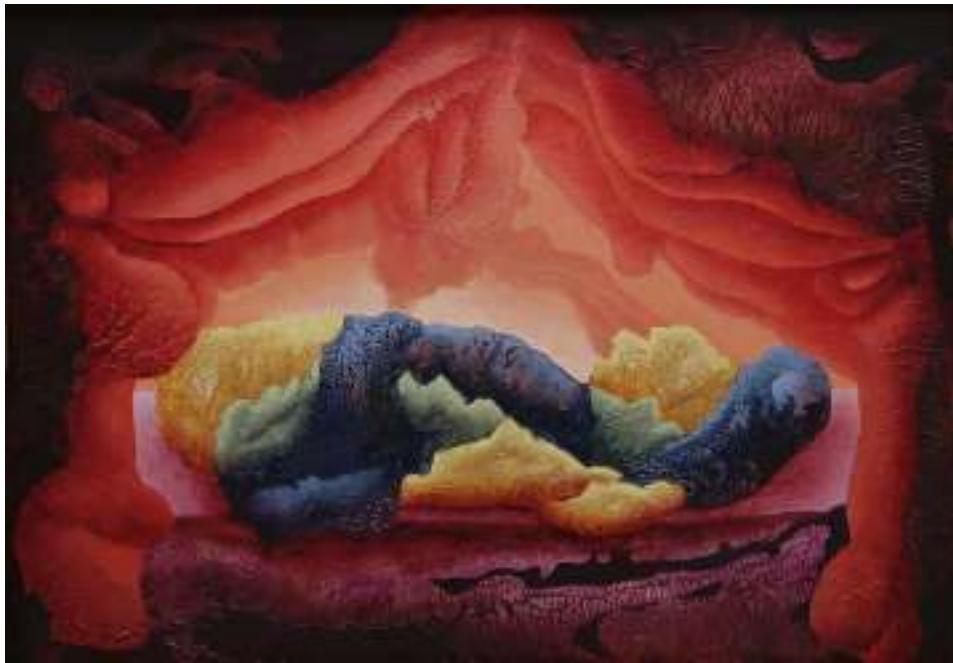
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## Touched by the hand of Ithell: my fascination with a forgotten surrealist



Inner turbulence ... Ithell Colquhoun's Alcove, 1946. Photograph: © Samaritans, The Noise Abatement Society and Spire Healthcare

[Stewart Lee](#)

Mon 11 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

I am a travelling entertainer. I spent decades in secondhand bookshops in shabby sidestreets, filling the sick-stomach void between station and show with palliative possibility, panning for gold. Somewhere at the end of the last millennium, a few measly pounds bought me a signed first edition of the Irish travelogue *The Crying of the Wind* (1954), simply because I liked the accompanying archaeological etchings of its author, one Ithell Colquhoun. More than 20 years later, it's £300 unendorsed on eBay, I got to write the introductions to the 2016 reprint, and a lifelong fascination with this most mysterious of pan-disciplinary artist-writer-mystic saw me asked to be an unworthy speaker at the launch of an exhibition pairing her paintings with work for sale by comparable contemporary artists at Unit London, [Song of Songs](#). Colquhoun and I, it seems, are trapped in the same cramped Ford Fiesta on Google's algorithmic roundabout, and I very much doubt she is at all happy about it. But who was Ithell Colquhoun, what inspired the fecund fleshy forms and prehistoric undulations of her work, and how is she creeping back into the collective consciousness?

Amy Hale, author of the most recent Colquhoun study, *Genius of the Fern Loved Gully*, explains: "Historically, surrealism has been utterly dominated by big male personalities. Women were thought of as either muses or monsters who may have been artists on the side, but they can no longer be relegated to those roles. Self-promotion takes swagger and bravado. Colquhoun was quite terrible at it."



Most mysterious ... Colquhoun's Gorgon, 1946. Photograph: © Samaritans, The Noise Abatement Society and Spire Healthcare Group

She's right. Your heart goes out to her. The Crying of the Wind depicts a woman in retreat from life – at one point it alludes elliptically to Colquhoun's split from the Italian surrealist Toni del Renzio via a lone remark that her wedding ring has outlasted her marriage – and yet her story is told as if automatically, landscapes and apparently random observations doing all the heavy lifting. And Colquhoun's artwork is rarely figuratively explicit, illustrating instead the complexities of our inner mental turbulence. For Song of Songs' curator, Rachael Thomas, it is telling that Colquhoun's will copyrighted her works to the Samaritans, and mental health charities are the partial beneficiaries of any Unit London sales.

Born in India to a British military family in 1906, Colquhoun splices aspects of an adopted Celtic identity with surrealist techniques. The Indo-Caribbean multidisciplinary artist Suchitra Mattai, who shows five collages in Song of Songs, agrees that such cross-cultural pollination provokes an almost accidental surrealism. “I use imagery from Indian folktales, memory and oral tales passed down to me from my Guyanese Indian family. I study the patterns and palettes of Indian miniatures and textiles but am steeped in contemporary themes of gender and postcolonialism. For me the ‘accidental surrealism’ emerges through a juxtaposition of disparate materials. I

reconcile my layered past through seemingly harmonic compositions. My Indian, Guyanese, Canadian and American identities create a mashup of oddities emerging from memory, myth and history and parallel Ithell's transnational experiences."



In retreat ... Colquhoun prepares to attend a party in 1949. Photograph: Reg Speller/Getty Images

Clare Ormerod's textiles shadow the occult abstractions of Colquhoun's paintings. Years after she had become aware of Colquhoun she discovered the artist had visited her husband's ancestral home, Huntington Castle in Ireland's County Carlow, the cellar of which houses an ancient sacred well dedicated to St Brigid, the Catholic church's cannibalisation of the Celtic goddess of the same name. "In the 70s my husband's great-aunt, Oliva Robertson, initiated Ithell Colquhoun as a priestess of the Fellowship of Isis, the divine feminine religion that is based in the castle dungeons."

This kind of information can cloud Colquhoun for me. I am not a spiritual person – I'm not even convinced that I exist, let alone any gods or goddesses – but sometimes it feels as if the once forgotten trickster surrealist is organising my existence from the great beyond. It appears the schoolboy me, for example, delivered newspapers to the Birmingham surrealist Emmy Bridgwater, the third party in Colquhoun's failed marriage; I've walked the

west London suburbs and west Cornwall moors where Colquhoun lived, arriving at guarded conversations with suspicious personalities connected to her; and only last Sunday, as I sat in a crowd of less than 50 in a chapel in west Wales watching the last ever live performance by the folk veteran Meic Stephens, a woman leaned forward to introduce herself as Katell Keineg, the singer due to perform with me at Song of Songs' opening, 218 miles and five days away.

The polymath Linder Sterling's sacred not-safe-for-work collages profanely recast Colquhoun's collisionary assemblages, and channel a punk aesthetic Mojo readers will recognise from her work on seminal 70s sleeves like the Buzzcocks' Orgasm Addict. Sterling playfully calls the familiar Colquhoun coincidences I've experienced "the Hand of Ithell".

She notes: "I found a large stash of Health and Efficiency magazines in a bookshop in Penzance. The naturist magazines all dated from the last years of Colquhoun's life. Coincidence? Or the Hand of Ithell at work?" To me these odd intersections show that, despite having been with us all these years, we are suddenly noticing Ithell Colquhoun everywhere. Her time is now.

- [Song of Songs](#) is at Unit London until 6 November.
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## 2021.10.11 - Coronavirus

- [Live Covid: Wales' NHS passes will 'help' venues stay open; French vaccine study shows people 90% less likely to get severely ill](#)
- [Covid Getting flu doubles risk of death, says UK health chief](#)
- [Life expectancy Gap in England 'a growing chasm' exacerbated by pandemic](#)
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## Covid live: UK reports over 40,000 new cases; immunocompromised people should get boosters, says WHO

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## Coronavirus

# Getting flu with Covid doubles risk of death, says UK health chief



Flu has been less widespread since last winter's lockdowns, so people's immunity to it is now lower, says Jenny Harries. Photograph: NurPhoto/Getty Images

*[Maya Wolfe-Robinson](#)*

Sun 10 Oct 2021 06.59 EDT

People who catch flu and Covid at the same time this winter are twice as likely to die than those who only have coronavirus, according to the UK [Health Security Agency](#) chief executive, Dr Jenny Harries.

The former deputy chief medical officer for England warned that the UK faces an “uncertain” winter – with both flu and Covid-19 circulating for the first time – and urged people to take up both the coronavirus and flu jabs if eligible.

Asked how worried the public should be about flu this winter, she told Sky's Trevor Phillips On Sunday: "We should be worried about flu each winter. I think people still don't realise it can be a fatal disease.

"But I think the important thing about this winter is, we are likely to see flu, for the first time in any real numbers, co-circulating with Covid. So the risks of catching both together still remain. And if you do that, then early evidence suggests that you are twice as likely to die from having two together than just having Covid alone.

"So I think it's an uncertain winter ahead – that's not a prediction, it's an uncertain feature – but we do know that flu cases have been lower in the previous year so immunity and the strain types are a little more uncertain," she said.

Harries also warned that the UK could have a multi-strain flu this year, with lowered immunity, as last year's Covid restrictions meant that levels of the virus were extremely low.

She said that on average, about 11,000 people will die from flu each year. "The difference here is because we have, if you like, skipped a year almost with flu, it's possible we might see multi-strain flu – we usually get one strain predominating," she added.

Harries said there are four strains of virus in this year's flu vaccine, after taking advice from the World Health Organization (WHO), the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and looking to countries in the southern hemisphere, where winter and therefore flu season arrives earlier.

"So we've got a pretty good array in our toolbox to try and hit whichever one becomes dominant but it could be more than one this year, and people's immunity will be lower. So I think the real trick here is to get vaccinated in both Covid and flu, but obviously to continue to do those good hygiene behaviours that we've been practising all through Covid", Harries added.

Harries also said that making children wear masks in school would not be at the top of her list of Covid-safe measures.

“I think the important thing is we should make sure children aren’t in school if they are actually infectious. We’ve got a very good testing programme and we know that at the start of the term we expected to see a surge in cases”, she told the BBC’s The Andrew Marr Show.

Harries also said the dominance of the Delta variant globally has caused other coronavirus variants to “become extinct”, but warned we still need to “stay alert”.

The NHS aims to immunise a record 35 million people this winter, [the most ambitious programme of flu jabs](#) in its history. [Free flu shots](#) are available for about 30 million frontline health and social care workers, people aged 50 and over, children up to school year 11, those who are pregnant and those at clinical risk.

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## Life expectancy

# Life expectancy gap in England ‘a growing chasm’ exacerbated by Covid



Blackpool has the lowest male life expectancy in England. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

*[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor*

Sun 10 Oct 2021 10.52 EDT

England’s richest people are living for a decade longer than the poorest, and the life expectancy gap between them has widened to “a growing chasm”, research has revealed.

The difference in expected lifespan between some of the wealthiest and poorest areas has more than doubled since the early 2000s, an analysis of official data by the King’s Fund shows.

“There is a growing chasm in health inequalities revealed by the data,” said Veena Raleigh, a fellow at the thinktank who specialises in the stark differentials in rich and poor people’s health.

“Our analysis shows that life expectancy has continued to increase in wealthier areas but has virtually stagnated in deprived areas in the north with the result that the gap in life expectancy between the richest and poorest parts of the country has grown by almost two-and-a-half years over the last two decades.”

The analysis underlines the scale of the challenge facing the health secretary, [Sajid Javid](#), who in a recent keynote speech in Blackpool on “levelling-up” in health, pledged to tackle “the disease of disparity” – dramatic differences in outcomes based on geography, ethnicity and income.

### chart

For example, in well-off Westminster male life expectancy rose from 77.3 to 84.7 years between 2001-03 and 2018-20 – a jump of 7.4 years. But men in deprived Blackpool only saw their expected longevity increase over the same period from 72 to 74.1 years, a rise of only 2.1 years. So overall the gap in life expectancy widened from 5.3 to 10.7 years in less than 20 years.

Raleigh found the same pattern for women in the two places when she examined Office for National Statistics (ONS) data. While life expectancy shot up for women in Westminster from 82.3 to 87.1 years, among those in Blackpool it only edged up from 78.4 to 79 years, a rise of just 0.6 years. That means that the difference in expected lifespan more than doubled from 3.9 to 8.1 years.

Covid has exacerbated the north-south divide, as well as the “deprivation divide”, in life expectancy, Raleigh added. In 2001-03 the gap was widest – at 8.2 years – between Hart in Hampshire and Manchester. But it is now the 10.7-year differential between Westminster and Blackpool. Similarly, the biggest gap in female life expectancy has widened from 6.6 years to the 8.9-year differential between women in Kensington and Chelsea in London and Blackpool.

London is experiencing significant rises in life expectancy, despite having high deprivation, large minority ethnic populations and reeling from the impact of Covid. That could be because it has a younger population with healthier lifestyles, better access to and quality of NHS care, with older, more unwell people moving out and being replaced by younger, healthier people, Raleigh said.

Her findings come after the latest data from the ONS, released last month, showed that Covid had led to [the first fall in male life expectancy in the UK](#) since records began 40 years ago. A boy born today is expected to live to 79, down from the 79.2 years when the ONS looked at life expectancy in 2015-17. Female life expectancy remains unchanged since then, with girls born today expected to live for 82.9 years, despite the pandemic.

In [a report](#) last week the Longevity Science Panel, a group of doctors, statisticians and NHS leaders, found that male and female life expectancy fell by 1.3 years and 0.9 years respectively in 2020 as a direct result of coronavirus.

Possible further new variants of the disease, the impact of long Covid and the delayed diagnosis and treatment caused by the huge backlog of NHS care could yet affect people's expected lifespans, the experts said.

The Department of Health and Social Care said: "Covid-19 has exposed fractures and inequalities within our health and care system, and in many places the pandemic has deepened them. This government is committed to levelling up from the pandemic and the new Office for Health Improvement and Disparities will drive the mission to tackle health inequalities to ensure everyone has the chance to live longer and healthier lives."

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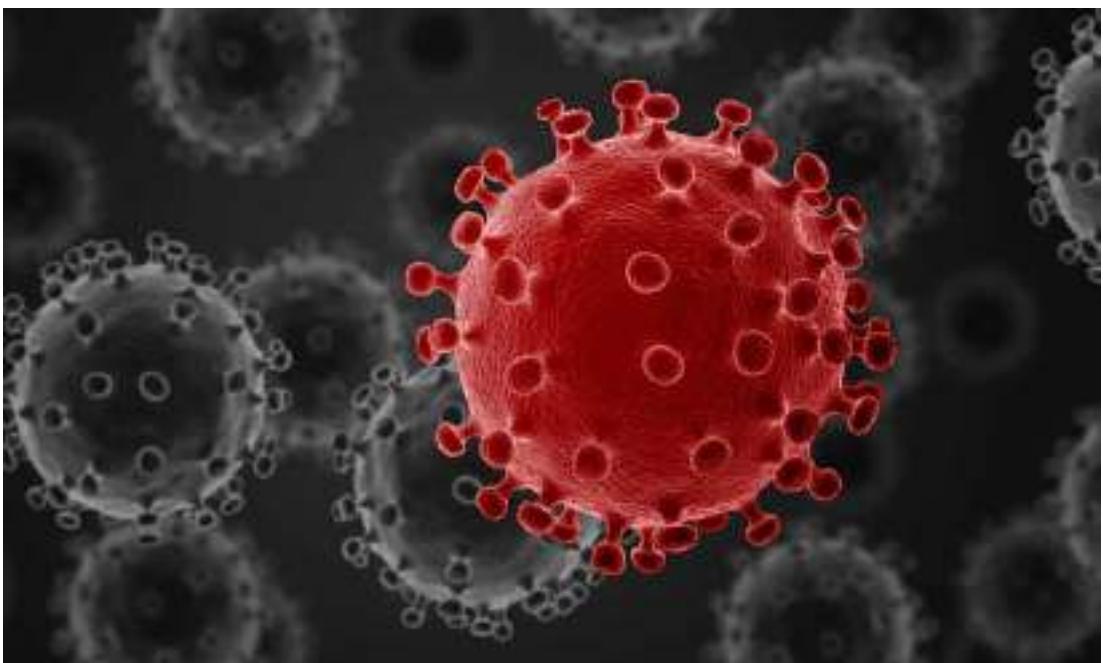
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## Covid by numbers: 10 key lessons separating fact from fiction



Covid is rarely the sole cause of a person's death, though it may be the underlying cause. Photograph: Alamy

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

Sun 10 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

## **1 The UK was hit by more than 1,000 separate outbreaks**

Genomic sequencing has identified more than 1,000 different seeds of Sars-CoV-2 introduced in early 2020. Instead of one central outbreak, reverberating outwards like an explosion, we now know there were many erupting simultaneously across the country. There were far more imports of Sars-CoV-2 from France, Italy and Spain than from China – viruses can take indirect flights. The peak was early March, after the school half-term, but a popular holiday time for adults. At the Champions League football match at Anfield between Liverpool and Atlético Madrid on 10 March, 49,000 local supporters mixed with 3,000 fans of the opposing team, while schools in Madrid were shut and supporters could not attend matches. To add insult to injury, Liverpool lost 3–2, and 4–2 on aggregate.

[Guardian graphic](#)

## **2 Reported Covid deaths depend on the day of the week**

The daily counts on the news of the “28-day” death figures do not represent deaths that happened in the last 24 hours, but those newly reported. There is a clear weekly cycle, with the numbers tending to be higher on Tuesdays and Wednesdays because of reporting delays over the weekend. That has led to some dramatic differences: there were 560 deaths reported for England on Monday 18 January 2021, jumping to 1,507 the next day. Since these numbers are released at about 4pm each day, they become news and so are given journalistic prominence, regardless of relevance.

## **3 In the first year of Covid, over-90s had 35,000 times the risk of dying of Covid-19 as young children**

There is an extraordinary difference in risks faced by different generations. Out of over 7 million schoolchildren aged between five and 14, 11 died with

Covid-19 mentioned on their death certificate over the year (one in 660,000). In the same period, 469 died from other causes. At the other end of the scale, out of more than 500,000 people aged over 90, nearly 30,000 died with Covid-19 on their death certificate (around six in 100). That was 35,000 times the fatal risk experienced by schoolchildren.

[Guardian graphic](#)

## **4 2020 saw the highest number of deaths since 1918 in England and Wales**

There have been claims that the first year of Covid-19 was not particularly lethal compared to past years. But there were only two years when total deaths registered in England and Wales exceeded 600,000: [1918, the start of a global influenza pandemic](#), and 2020.

We should, of course, allow for changes in the size of the population. This shows steadily falling mortality rates and then a noticeable jump in 2020, back to a level not seen since 2003. The increase from the past five-year average was the largest since 1941, when Blitz casualties mounted. When we further consider the changing age profile, 2020 saw the biggest rise in age-standardised mortality rates for 70 years, since the major flu epidemic in 1951. Put in its proper context, 2020 was a historical outlier.

## **5 The UK has led the world in testing Covid treatments**

The UK Randomised Evaluation of Covid-19 Therapy (Recovery) organisation has become the [world's largest collaboration for trials](#) on people in hospital with Covid-19, with more than 180 hospitals and about 40,000 hospital patients taking part so far. Recovery takes advantage of the unique NHS infrastructure to simultaneously run several overlapping trials, so that each patient may be in many studies. The trials have been hugely influential. By March 2021, dexamethasone, a cheap steroid, was estimated to have saved 22,000 lives in the UK and more than 1 million worldwide. Almost as valuable as finding effective treatments, Recovery trials also

established things that did not show clear benefits, such as hydroxychloroquine and convalescent plasma, both touted by the then-US president.

## **6 People who have died with Covid have on average lost about 10 years of life**

Some vulnerable people who died in the first wave would otherwise only have survived a short period longer. This “mortality displacement” often shows when a cluster of deaths due to extreme heat or cold is followed by a dip in mortality rates. At the start of the first wave, one of us (DS) was quoted as saying, “many people who die of Covid would have died anyway within a short period”, while others estimated that this proportion could be more than half. We were proved wrong by the limited deficit in deaths over the following year. It’s been estimated, on average, that about 10 years of life are lost from Covid-19 deaths in the UK, and 16 years globally.

## **7 Most people died “of” Covid rather than “with” it, but most have also had other medical conditions**

There have been many claims Covid-19 has been incidental to many people’s deaths. When Covid-19 was mentioned on the death certificate in the first wave, it was the underlying cause of mortality for more than nine in 10 registrations. That changes somewhat when the virus becomes rarer, with the proportion dying “with” Covid-19 at 32% in late April 2021. When there is less virus around, cases tend to be less severe, though the present infection was considered to have contributed to the death in some way.

It is rare for there to be only one primary cause of death. In the first wave there were pre-existing conditions in 91% of deaths involving Covid-19, with dementia and [Alzheimer’s disease](#) present in 25%.

## **8 Alcohol consumption stayed the same during lockdown**

Personal responses to lockdowns, like the virus, vary hugely: the Alcohol Consumption in England project found the proportion of people reporting high-risk drinking rose substantially during the first wave, but the proportion reporting cutting down on their consumption also went up. Although patterns of drinking change, looking at paid duty, the provisional total amount of alcohol consumed appeared to remain stable. The Alcovision survey of more than 80,000 drinkers showed that even when pubs were closed in lockdown, the average number of drinking days did not change.

## **9 Most people with Sars-CoV-2 don't infect anyone**

It's been estimated, when introduced into susceptible communities not taking precautions, that about 75% of people who caught the original strain of the virus did not go on to infect anyone else. A small minority (10%) were estimated to lead to the great majority (80%) of new cases. Some may be particularly infectious, while "super-spreader" events can also occur. There was a choir practice in Washington state where, after over two hours of singing closely together, one person with "cold-like" symptoms led to 52 infections among 60 other singers, two of whom later died. Prolonged proximity increases the chance of passing it on, although the absolute risk can seem low: individuals infected with the original strain were estimated to infect only about one in six members of the same household.

[Guardian graphic](#)

## **10 The pandemic has been a net lifesaver for young people**

Compared with the past five-year average in England and Wales, there were more than 300 fewer deaths registered in 2020 for people aged between 15 and 29. One putative explanation is reduced accidents and violence: meaning 300 fewer grieving families. These families do not know who they are, in contrast to the 115 families of those in this age group who died with Covid-19. But living through the pandemic has had a large impact on the mental health of younger adults.

*From [Covid by Numbers](#), by David Spiegelhalter and Anthony Masters*

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## 2021.10.11 - Opinion

- Johnson's backing for the Cambo oilfield is unscientific and potentially disastrous
- The Tories have persuaded voters there's a threat worse than fuel shortages
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- Cop26 must not overshadow Kunming: we need joint climate and biodiversity goals

## [OpinionEnergy](#)

# Johnson's backing for the Cambo oilfield is unscientific and potentially disastrous

[Peter Capaldi](#)



An Extinction Rebellion climate protest in London, August 2021.  
Photograph: Vuk Valcic/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Mon 11 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

In three weeks' time world leaders will gather in my hometown of Glasgow to talk about the biggest threat to our future: the climate crisis. We've seen an unrecognisable summer of flooding and extreme heat, and as a result people have lost their lives in Europe and around the world. The crisis is very much upon us.

And yet, incredibly, our prime minister, Boris Johnson, is [preparing to sign off](#) on a new drilling permit at Cambo oilfield, west of Shetland. If approved, [Cambo would produce 170m barrels of oil](#) and would deepen the climate crisis for decades to come. It would be a staggeringly backward move, going against the science and denying us all the [green recovery](#) we've been promised.

Let's bear in mind that in the run-up to these talks kicking off, we have had some stark warnings about the sort of action that's needed. Experts at the [International Energy Agency](#) have said there can be no new fossil fuel projects beyond those already under way this year, and the [head of the UN](#) has said its latest climate report must sound a "death knell for fossil fuels".

Nearly 150 miles up the road from Glasgow is Aberdeen, a city where [one in 10 jobs](#) is dependent on oil and gas. This is a community that has felt every boom and bust of the oil industry, and where the big crash in 2016 led to many [turning to food banks](#). During the pandemic [35,000 industry workers lost their jobs](#).

And across the UK, our reliance on oil and gas isn't doing us any favours. Gas prices are soaring, energy companies are going bust, and many are facing a winter of fuel poverty. In recent weeks, we've seen long queues at the petrol pumps as the government grapples with the fuel distribution chaos. The [business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng](#), has admitted that our dependence on volatile global gas prices has left us exposed.

It's clear that we need to urgently transition away from oil and gas towards using cleaner energy, such as wind power. But in making this shift, we can't be leaving fossil fuel workers behind.

North Sea communities are resilient. They've seen shipbuilding come and go, and are now facing down the next big shift in industry. [Four in five offshore workers have said they're willing to move jobs to work in other industries](#). But those who want to work in renewables face [sky-high training costs](#), and routinely get asked to repeat qualifications they have already done. Too often the government awards industry contracts overseas, meaning that new jobs go elsewhere. We've all heard politicians using

slogans such as “build back better” and “green recovery”. But so far the government has failed to deliver.

To create green jobs, you’d think the government would be throwing all its efforts into creating a thriving renewable energy sector, and upgrading our homes and transport so we can wean ourselves off our oil addiction. But astonishingly, it is backing this new Cambo oilfield. And ministers seem to be the only ones who think this is a good idea – all the other major political parties think we should either reconsider the project or just scrap it entirely.

Now, I’m no expert in creating green jobs, but I’d guess that clinging on to doomed fossil fuels, which need to be phased out, isn’t the way to do it. Meanwhile, the UK is selling and installing fewer heat pumps than almost any other country in Europe.

If Johnson truly wants to be a climate leader and to boost the UK economy, he needs to be blocking climate-disaster projects such as Cambo, and making sure oil and gas workers are able to retrain to work in things such as offshore wind, decommissioning, or retrofitting our homes and buildings to make them warmer. This could be a chance to see the UK prosper and be a world-leading example in energy transition.

We know the climate crisis is happening, and we know our reliance on volatile fossil fuels is causing chaos. But we also know how to tackle it. If only Johnson would move forwards instead of backwards.

- Peter Capaldi is an actor and campaigner
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## OpinionConservatives

# The Tories have persuaded voters there's a threat worse than fuel shortages

[Nesrine Malik](#)



Boris Johnson poses next to a bust of Winston Churchill at the US Capitol last month

Photograph: Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images

Sun 10 Oct 2021 10.33 EDT

The British historian Alex von Tunzelmann explained to me a few years ago why we are unable to discuss empire without denial and defensiveness. “Empire is still all around us,” she said. “It is still so integral to everything about Britain that we don’t really see it at all.” This lesson can be applied equally to our tendency to deny unpleasant and ubiquitous features of our politics. Ever since the Conservative party threw itself aggressively into a

culture war during the Brexit referendum, the effects of this strategy have been constantly minimised. Academic research, polls and media analysis regularly misread the right's hugely successful strategy, concluding that the culture war is [not really taking place at all](#).

No one seems to have told the Tories. In his speech last week, [Boris Johnson](#) issued the standard statements on history and Churchill, throwing in a story on school sports day races that had no winners. Elsewhere, the MP Jake Berry ridiculed “woke-ing from home” and the party chairman, Oliver Dowden, warned leaders of cultural organisations: “Go too woke, risk going broke.”

Many explanations for the right’s recent successes point to Johnson’s [force of character](#), to the mandate for Brexit, to the party’s “[optimism](#)” and Labour’s infighting, but rarely to how convincingly and consistently the Conservatives have sold themselves to a broad electoral coalition as the spiritual caretakers of the country against a diffuse [threat from the left](#).

The culture war isn’t taken seriously because there is a poor understanding of what it is and how it works. Many purveyors of political factual analysis discount the strategy because it doesn’t constitute a tangible policy whose effects can be easily measured. Its impact is not captured by polls, nor easily correlated to how people say they will vote. And so we are told that the culture war is a fiction, a social media hallucination or a preoccupation of elites.

According to [the Financial Times](#), the relish with which Conservative members received pronouncements on identity and history at last week’s party conference are a sign that the party is in a bubble: “The country is struggling to fill up cars and fearing that there may not be enough pumpkins for Halloween or turkeys for Christmas – few are occupied with the issues that make up the so-called culture war.” So the culture war is now not just an irrelevance, but an indulgence.

Yet this war isn’t about issues, it’s about frequency. It’s about forging a view of the world in which concerns about fuel or turkeys are filtered. Few people have Churchill in mind when they’re picking their local MP, or particularly care what the National Trust says about the [dubious history of its properties](#)

when they can't fill their fuel tanks. But if the government creates an impression that there are imminent threats to our way of life – aided by scaremongering about loss of identity, status, control over our fate and the very erasure of our past – those fears can easily be stretched in the public mind to also include loss of jobs or secure income, the lack of school places for children, or the lengthening waiting times for doctor's appointments, all of which come into play at the ballot box.

The culture war transforms emotionally resonant issues into a political force that untethers the government's performance from reality. The goal is to make people think that, sure, things are bad, but perhaps it's not strictly the government's fault. And, even if the government were to blame, things would certainly be worse under the other lot, who will empty not just your supermarket shelves but your pockets too when they transfer your already meagre capital to immigrants and others underserving of it. Economic instability actually helps maintain this jittery status quo: the more volatile life is under the Tories, the more likely people are to be afraid of it getting out of control.

Perhaps the confusion is in the name. “Culture” sounds like something marginal: not central enough to people's lives to have a massive influence on their political behaviour. And most skirmishes that the media likes to amplify are silly and embarrassing to take part in: the unedifying (often fabricated) debates about [removing or editing old episodes](#) of classic TV shows or literature, arguments over [cultural appropriation](#), and the size of the union flag in politicians' offices.

But the culture war includes others things that aren't just cheap fodder for the tabloids or Piers Morgan's Twitter account. They include a punitive border policy that treats all migrants as either benefits or NHS scroungers, or wage suppressors. They include the defunding of academic institutions and museums, and even interfering in the [appointment of senior personnel](#) at the BBC. These attacks sharpen the public's sense of moral purpose and help to galvanise voters in a country they perceive to be under siege. When Labour “rises above” it, as has been the party's strategy in recent times, it cedes this emotional terrain to the right and then wonders why voters regard it as soulless.

There is a belief on the part of many sensible liberals, academics, thinktakers and political advisers, that anything not rational cannot possibly resonate with voters in any meaningful way. Yet the entire business of making electoral majorities is a colossal exercise in triggering people's worst impulses or stirring their best instincts. Neither is achieved through calls for a "fully costed" manifesto or a "smart" government. If Labour is failing to challenge the Tories, it is because the culture war surrounds progressives so completely that they cannot really see it at all.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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## OpinionSupply chain crisis

# Why it's high time to move on from 'just-in-time' supply chains

Kim Moody



‘Speed, as any Formula One driver will tell you, brings its own risk.’ Lorry drivers on the North Circular at rush hour. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Mon 11 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

A price shock on the global natural gas markets [brings down](#) several small energy providers, leaving customers without heating and facing rising fuel prices. A [fire knocks](#) out the huge cable sending electricity from France to the UK, threatening homes with darkness and increasing power bills. The container ship Ever Given, bound for Felixstowe from Malaysia, gets stuck in the Suez canal for six days, backing up shipping traffic at an estimated cost of £730m and delaying that electronic gadget you ordered from Amazon Prime.

What these incidents have in common is the speed at which a single event can disrupt the supply chains that crisscross the world . Almost every time you order something online, it is transported via a network of factories, rails, roads, ships, warehouses and delivery drivers that together form the global economy's circulatory system. This tightly calibrated infrastructure is designed for perpetual motion. Once one link breaks or stalls, the impact on today's just-in-time supply chains can be felt immediately.

Just-in-time was the idea of Taiichi Ohno, an engineer at Toyota in the 1950s, who was inspired by the work of Henry Ford. Ohno defined it as a way of eliminating “waste” – by which he meant stockpiles, extra workers and unused minutes – in the production and movement of goods. Instead of wasting time, labour and money by storing parts along the assembly line or warehousing goods (as manufacturers had done for decades), Ohno’s idea was that suppliers could instead deliver these just as they were needed. In turn this would increase profits, reducing the amount that businesses spent on maintaining inventories and paying for additional labour.

After its introduction to the west in the 1980s, the just-in-time model gradually moved out of the car plant and into every type of goods and service production. It forced its way down every supply chain until each supplier, big or small, was expected to deliver products promptly to the next buyer. This increased competition between companies to deliver goods quickly, which meant firms reduced their costs (usually the price of labour). Just-in-time delivery thus contributed to the growth of low-wage, often more precarious jobs, with workers recruited only when they would be needed. This constant squeezing of workers has fuelled our 24/7 work culture and the mental health problems that go with it, while attempts to cut the price of labour have added to the growth of economic inequality, regardless of who sits in government.

Delivering products at speed relies on infrastructure. From the 1980s onwards, motorways widened, ports deepened and extra runways were added here and there to keep up with the pace of change. Twenty-first century warehouses transformed from places of storage into **vast** distribution and fulfilment centres. But speed, as any Formula One driver will tell you, brings its own risks. Floods, power outages, closed roads, labour disputes and, of course, pandemics can all halt the system. Because just-in-time has

eradicated stockpiles, an unforeseen crisis can lead to treacherous shortages. At the start of the pandemic, there were widespread shortages of PPE, gowns, masks and plastic gloves – all of which rely on just-in-time production, with few stockpiles kept as backup.

Now, our just-in-time world is becoming increasingly crisis prone. The schedules of container shipping have been unreliable since the pandemic began in early 2020. The rise of fuel prices has also led to reduced shipping speeds, known as “slow steaming”, to cut costs. The British International Freight Association, meanwhile, has warned about a “shortage of land transport” – in other words, dockers or warehouse workers have gone down with Covid and lorry drivers are in short supply owing to the pandemic and Brexit, as well as years of stagnant wages, long hours and lack of available training. The Road Haulage Association [estimates](#) the current shortage at 100,000 drivers in the UK. Too few drivers means clogged ports, stalled ships, empty shelves and higher prices.

Supply chain managers and logistics experts are aware of all the potential problems, and have been debating the trade-off between “risk” versus “resilience” – the latter being the ability to minimise or quickly recover from a disruption – for the past decade or more. Low just-in-time inventories increase the risks of shortages when a crisis bites. “Resilience”, however, means bigger stockpiles, more workers, multiple suppliers and higher costs. This creates a dilemma. Competition makes resilience itself risky for individual companies. Who wants to buy from the higher-priced laggard? Yet so long as profitability is the driving force, national efforts to turn inward or “take back control” – ironically, often in order to create an imagined resilience, as with [Brexit](#) – simply create more disruptions, broken supply chains and higher prices as businesses seek to recover losses. The regime of cheap consumer goods becomes more and more difficult to sustain.

There are even bigger implications for this regime of breakneck capitalism. All this global real-time motion is driven by fossil fuels that are driving climate breakdown. The increase in tsunamis, wildfires, floods and other extreme weather events is making supply chains and the necessities they deliver even more vulnerable. Those protesters sitting down in central

London or out on the motorways are on to something. One way or another, if you deprive big business of the free use of its favourite deadly energy sources, you can slow things down to a human pace – and maybe even save the planet while you’re at it.

Decades of deregulation, privatisation and market worship have left society vulnerable to the unbidden force of “just-in-time” supply chains. No amount of government subsidies, lower taxes, job training and other shopworn policies will be enough to address the crises we face, from the pandemic to climate breakdown, which are causing supply chains to fail. Now is the time to think about not just how we make and consume things, but also how we move them.

- Kim Moody is a visiting scholar at the University of Westminster
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## The age of extinctionEnvironment

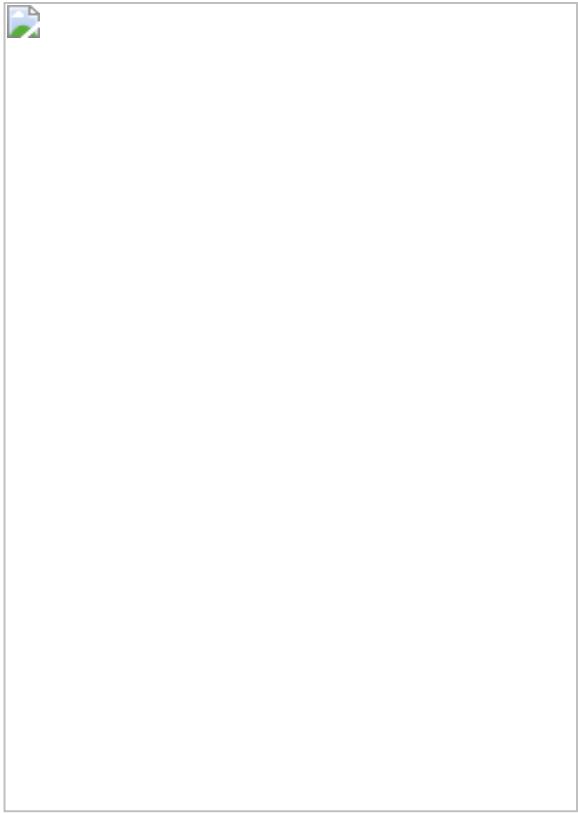
# Cop26 must not overshadow Kunming: we need joint climate and biodiversity goals

[Ma Jun](#)



A herd of wild Asian elephants wandering through China's Yunnan province in June highlighted a key threat to biodiversity: habitat loss. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

The age of extinction is supported by



## About this content

Mon 11 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

All eyes are on Cop26 in Glasgow since the climate crisis aroused worldwide attention and compelled more than 120 countries to join the unprecedented global [Race to Zero](#) carbon-emissions campaign. But the UN biodiversity conference in Kunming, or [Cop15](#), should not be overshadowed, as biodiversity loss is an equally grave threat to humanity.

Cop15, delayed repeatedly by the Covid-19 pandemic, will take place in two parts, online from 11 October, with more detailed discussions left for April's

meeting in Kunming, [China](#). The conference will convene governments from around the world to agree new goals for nature for the next decade, as global biodiversity losses pose a threat to human wellbeing, affecting food, health and security, and increasing the likelihood of pandemics.

Humanity has achieved unprecedented development and prosperity over the past 50 years, with the world population more than doubling and global GDP growing from [barely \\$3tn in 1970 to nearly \\$85tn in 2020](#). But in this time nature has suffered enormous losses, with the global populations of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and fish declining by two-thirds on average, according to last year's [Living Planet report](#).

We must not forget nature's vital role in climate mitigation, resilience and adaptation

We should not take biodiversity for granted from a human development perspective either. About [75% of crops](#) depend on pollinators; approximately [75% of our fresh water](#) comes from healthy forests; and [more than half of the global population](#) depends on nature for their livelihoods. When the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services concluded in 2019 that among the world's 8 million species, [1 million of them were threatened with extinction](#) in the next few decades, it served as a wake-up call.

While conservationists hope an ambitious global biodiversity framework can be crafted in Kunming, it is necessary to recall the lessons of Cop10 in Japan, which agreed the [20 Aichi biodiversity targets](#) to stem the destruction of wildlife and ecosystems. More than a decade later, the [world has failed to reach even one of those targets](#). In a more complex context of global pandemic and climate challenges, the tension between development and conservation is even more pronounced. Without sufficient attention, even if such an ambitious plan were put down on paper in Kunming, it may share the fate of the Aichi targets.

So, first and foremost, governments and societies must recognise that humanity and nature are one community with a shared future. Then we must properly value all products and services provided by biodiversity and the

planet's ecosystems. When all eyes are on the climate crisis, we must not forget nature's vital role in climate mitigation, resilience and adaptation. As healthy ecosystems, including forests, wetlands, seas and grasslands, have served as enormous carbon sinks and helped mitigate climate change, a better way is to coordinate the two Cop processes for a synergised solution.

Despite the challenges, we see hopeful signs that the importance of biodiversity is being acknowledged and that innovative conservation solutions are being developed in different parts of the world. Costa Rica is well known for its [pioneering work](#) in restoring natural ecosystems and reviving rainforests. As the host country of Cop15, China has held up eco-civilisation as one of its fundamental socio-economic development principles. It has designated 25% of its land and territorial waters as "[ecological red-line" zones](#)" and curbed the trend of eco-degradation through concrete measures such as [a logging ban](#), returning farmland to forest and grassland, [establishing national parks](#), controlling water pollution and a ban on fishing in the Yangtze basin.

Information technologies could serve as a gamechanger in building awareness and sharing knowledge. [Global Forest Watch](#) provides real-time mapping data for monitoring the world's forests and unsustainable practices. Our organisation, the [Institute of Public & Environmental Affairs \(IPE\)](#), is working with partners to depict China's red-line ecological zones on our Blue Map website and apps, side by side with local air and water-quality data, and the geolocation and environmental performances of 5m companies.

Over the next 10 years, we hope to see biodiversity knowledge and best conservation practices pooled to better coordinate the protection of nature with pollution control and climate actions, and to help mobilise public supervision, strengthen government regulations and enable green supply chain and responsible investment and financing.

Only such broad-based actions may bring about a transformation in society's understanding of and relationship with biodiversity and ensure that, by 2050, the shared vision of living in harmony with nature can be fulfilled.

Ma Jun is founding director of China's Institute of Public & Environmental Affairs. Xu Xin contributed to this article

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## 2021.10.11 - Around the world

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- ['We have to show courage' Philippines mothers taking Duterte and his 'war on drugs' to court](#)
- ['We are staying!' Poles demonstrate in support of EU membership](#)
- [China Bus falls into river as heavy rains destroy homes](#)
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## Czech Republic

# Czech president in hospital after shock election defeat for PM



It is unlikely that the Czech president, Miloš Zeman, will be able carry out his customary post-election role while in ICU. Photograph: Koca Sulejmanović/EPA

*[Robert Tait](#) in Prague*

Sun 10 Oct 2021 14.58 EDT

The Czech Republic is facing political upheaval and a possible power vacuum after its billionaire prime minister, Andrej Babiš, suffered a [surprise general election defeat](#) and then saw his most powerful backer and sole potential saviour, the country's president, Miloš Zeman, taken to hospital, apparently gravely ill.

In a stunning upset that confounded pollsters' forecasts, Babiš' populist Action for Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO) 2011 party [finished second in this](#)

[weekend's popular vote](#) behind the centre-right Spolu (Together) alliance, which previously vowed not to form a government with him.

Spolu followed up its victory by agreeing to start coalition talks with a liberal-left faction, Piráti-STAN, after the two blocs won a total of 108 seats in the 200-member chamber of deputies in the poll, staged on Friday and Saturday.

Babiš' hand appeared to become weaker still on Sunday as television cameras captured Zeman – who has repeatedly promised to do all he could to keep the prime minister in office – being transported to hospital in an ambulance minutes after the pair had met at the president's countryside retreat to discuss the results.

Miroslav Zavoral, the head of Prague's central military hospital, later told journalists that Zeman had been admitted owing to “complications that accompany a chronic illness” and said the president was being treated in an intensive care unit. The nature of the illness was not disclosed.

Czech media outlets published footage and images of Zeman, a heavy smoker, being wheeled into hospital, apparently unconscious, with a bodyguard holding his head, and in the presence of his wife and daughter.

Speculation about the health of 77-year-old Zeman, who uses a wheelchair and has neuropathy and type 2 diabetes, was rife in the run-up to the poll, leading commentators to question his fitness to conduct his constitutional post-election duty of inviting parties to form a government.

Zeman's spokesman, Jiří Ovčáček, who had previously dismissed reports that his boss was seriously ill despite an eight-day hospital stay last month, pleaded with politicians and journalists on Twitter to exercise a “sensitive approach” and wish the president an early recovery.

The president's condition has a direct bearing on Babiš' political survival because Zeman has said he would invite the leader of the biggest single party to form a government, a status applying to ANO 2011, despite its overall election defeat. The prime minister's party won 72 seats, one more

than Spolu, which is an alliance of three parties, the Civic Democrats (ODS), the Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL) and the pro-EU Top 09.

Although Babiš, a billionaire former oligarch whose industrial conglomerate, Agrofert, controls large chunks of the Czech economy, has no clear path to a viable coalition, analysts believe he could exploit an interregnum period, during which he serves as interim prime minister by seeking to retain power through dividing Spolu and trying to reach an agreement with one of its constituent parties.

Meanwhile, there were calls for parliament to invoke a constitutional clause that would declare Zeman unfit and pass his powers temporarily to the prime minister and the speaker of the chamber of deputies. The latter – currently a Babiš ally – would then have the president's responsibility of choosing who to ask to form a new government. However, the opposition is expected to vote for a new speaker when the newly elected parliament comes into being later this month.

Jiří Pehe, a political scientist and director of New York University in Prague, said the [Czech Republic](#) could plunge into a political crisis.

“The opposition groupings have formed a unity pact, so Babiš needs the president to back him and ask him to start talking about a new government,” said Pehe. “It seems the president may not be able to do that for some time – or ever.

“It’s a very complicated situation constitutionally if the president cannot act in his customary post-election role. If it drags on, parliament may have to step in and declare him unfit to perform his duties. It could be a constitutional crisis. It was so irresponsible of those around Mr Zeman not to have prepared by notifying parliament that he was ill and that it should suspend his duties, or else talk the president into abdicating or stepping down.”

Petr Fiala, Spolu’s leader and a former political science professor, is widely seen as favourite to succeed Babiš as premier. Fiala, a centre-right politician who campaigned in broad opposition to Babiš’ populism, had requested to

meet Zeman on Monday to discuss forming a coalition. It was unclear whether the meeting could take place.

Babiš' defeat followed the disclosure last week of [damaging details about his financial arrangement](#) in the Pandora Papers, which revealed that he had used a network of offshore companies to buy a mansion and other properties in the French Riviera for £13m in 2009. The prime minister denied wrongdoing and dismissed the revelations as a plot designed to undermine his election chances.

Some commentators warned he may remain in office for months, despite his electoral setback, especially if Zeman's health recovers.

"Should he decide to continue doing so, Andrej Babiš could well rule in resignation here until well into 2022," wrote David Klimeš on the Aktuálně news website. "The five-party coalition has a difficult task ahead of it. When the post-election enthusiasm wears off, it will have to jump over all the sticks and traps that Andrej Babiš and Miloš Zeman are now setting under its feet."

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## **‘We have to show courage’: the Philippines mothers taking Duterte and his ‘war on drugs’ to court**



Relatives of victims in Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte’s ‘war on drugs’ comfort each other at a church in Quezon city in 2019. Many are afraid to speak out, fearing their families could be further targeted.  
Photograph: Bullit Marquez/AP



*Rebecca Ratcliffe* *South-east Asia correspondent*

Sun 10 Oct 2021 19.45 EDT

On 11 May 2017, Crisanto Lozano set off early in the morning from his home in Manila. He was going to renew his security guard licence, a requirement for his profession. By afternoon, he still hadn't returned, nor was he picking up his phone. Then the family realised that Crisanto's younger brother, Juan Carlos, was also missing.

The next day, they heard news that two bodies had been discovered nearby. The brothers had been shot dead during a police operation.

"If they died with sickness, maybe I can accept with a free feeling in my heart," says their mother, Llore Pasco. Instead, she says, they were killed by police officers who were operating with brazen impunity under the instruction of Philippine president [Rodrigo Duterte](#).

After declaring a so-called "war on drugs", he had repeatedly called for drug addicts, and anyone involved in the drug trade, to be killed. "If you know of any addicts, go ahead and kill them yourself, as getting their parents to do it would be too painful," Duterte said a [speech after taking office in 2016](#).

“Of course the policemen shoot and shoot and shoot,” Pasco says. “Because he ordered kill, kill, kill.”

[The ICC prosecutor estimates](#) as many as 30,000 people were killed between July 2016 and March 2019.

For more than four years, Pasco, a massage therapist and now an activist with the alliance Rise Up for Life and for Rights, has fought for accountability, and to bring an end to the killings. Along with six other mothers, she was among the first to publicly submit a petition to the international criminal court (ICC) calling for Duterte’s indictment.



Llore Pasco lost two sons in a police shooting during president Duterte’s ‘war on drugs’. Photograph: Leah Valencia

Last month, the [ICC confirmed that it would proceed with an investigation](#) into possible crimes against humanity committed during Duterte’s war on drugs, stating that it appeared to be a “widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population”. The announcement was “probably the best news on the human rights front since the fall of Marcos”, says Carlos Conde, a senior Philippines researcher at Human Rights Watch.

For Pasco and other mothers, the ICC statement offered a glimmer of hope. “It is really like half of the sun is shining upon us,” she says.

It was in August 2018 that the mothers, who organise through Rise Up for Life and Rights, which has documented hundreds of drugs-war cases, first submitted their testimonies to the ICC. The group was apprehensive, says Kristina Conti, a lawyer from the National Union of People's Lawyers (NUPL), who represents the families. "At that time this was the height of the killings," she adds. Many other mothers had been unwilling to speak out, fearing that more of their relatives could be targeted.

Lawyers working on drug war cases have also faced severe security risks. Under Duterte's presidency, [61 lawyers have been killed](#), including some of Conti's colleagues. Earlier this year, Angelo Karlo Guillen, also a NUPL lawyer, was stabbed in the head. Fortunately, he survived the attack.



President Duterte has urged police and even citizens to kill suspected drug users. Photograph: Robinson Ninal/AFP/Getty Images

The large number of cases that lawyers work on means it is hard to determine exactly why they have been targeted, Conti says, but many of those killed have been involved in drugs cases. "There is a general fear – it is unsaid really – but to take on the defence of drugs cases is asking for the death sentence. You're putting a target to your own head."

Despite the risks, the families resolved to publicly petition the ICC, believing this was the only way to bring an end to the killings. “I think this kind of bravery or tenacity on the part of just a few of the mothers carried over,” Conti says. “Hope is contagious.”

## **‘Why should we be afraid?’**

When the [ICC announced an initial inquiry](#) in 2018, Duterte responded by withdrawing from the court, and threatening to arrest the then-prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, if she stepped foot in the country. The withdrawal, however, did not take effect until March 2019, and so the ICC still retains jurisdiction from the start of the Philippines’ membership in 2011 until this point.

Since then, Duterte, who is nearing the end of his six-year term limit, has continued to dismiss the ICC, refusing to cooperate with it and even stating that he wants to slap the judges.

However, he [recently abandoned a controversial plan](#) to run as vice-president, which critics said would be a violation of the constitution, and said he would prepare his defence. Many suspect he will be succeeded as president by his daughter Sara Duterte, who could shield him from prosecution. [She has denied plans to run](#) and did not file a candidacy last week ahead of Friday’s deadline. Substitutions are allowed until 15 November.

It is believed that only one of the deaths linked to anti-drug operations – the killing of 17-year-old Kian delos Santos – has [led to a conviction](#). Three police were found guilty of murder.

The president is very lucky, Pasco points out, because he has been given a chance to defend himself. Her own children were denied the right to do so.

Pasco was told her sons had been involved in a robbery, and that they were shot because they had tried to fight back against the police. The narrative is grimly familiar to activists and human rights lawyers; the same justification – that victims fought back – is routinely given by Philippine police to defend

extra-judicial killings carried out during their operations. According to the ICC, this claim “is consistently undermined by other information” relating to drugs-war killings.

Both Pasco’s sons had, in the past, used drugs, but had since stopped doing so, she said. Crisanto, 34, who was married with four children, was working in another province as a security guard. He would return home once a month, when he received his salary, to see the family. Juan Carlos, 31, was working as a janitor and labourer. He was a sweet son, she says. Whenever he was paid he would try to give some of his wages to her, and, when she refused, he would treat his nieces and nephew instead. He didn’t need to marry, he would tell them, because they were already his family.



Local residents gather around the body of an alleged drug user, killed by unidentified assailants, in Manila in 2017. Up to 30,000 people are thought to have died in the ‘war on drugs’. Photograph: Noel Celis/AFP/Getty Images

When Duterte came to power, both sons responded to official calls for drug users to surrender to their local authorities for rehabilitation. Many other victims of the drugs operations had done the same, believing they would be spared from the police crackdowns. The opposite was true. “They were not

being helped, they were being killed,” says deaconess Rubylin Litao, a coordinator for Rise Up for Life and Rights.

Pasco is aware, she adds, that it will be a long fight for justice. “Our opponent, our enemy is not just an ordinary person, it is the head of the state of the [Philippines](#), and also his cronies.”

With Duterte – and potentially his successor, if they are sympathetic to him – refusing members of the ICC access to the Philippines, the work of activists, human rights lawyers and families on the ground, who will need to gather evidence, will become even more important.

Pasco hopes that other mothers will come forwards. “Why should we be afraid? They should be afraid, because we are telling the truth. This is what is really happening here in the Philippines,” Pasco says. Even now, she adds, the killings continue, but less attention is paid to such deaths because of the pandemic.

“We have to show courage, go out and show our testimony so that we can win soon in this struggle.”

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## Poland

# ‘We are staying!’: Poles demonstrate in support of EU membership



Thousands of protesters mass in support of the European Union at the Main Square in Krakow, Poland, on Sunday. Photograph: Beata Zawrzel/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

*Reuters*

Sun 10 Oct 2021 20.39 EDT

More than 100,000 Poles demonstrated on Sunday in support of [European Union](#) membership after a Polish court ruled that parts of EU law were incompatible with the constitution, raising fears of a “Polexit”.

Politicians across Europe [voiced dismay at the ruling](#) by Poland’s constitutional tribunal on Thursday, which has thrown relations between Brussels and Warsaw into a crisis.

According to the organisers, protests took place in more than 100 towns and cities across [Poland](#) and several cities abroad, with 80,000-100,000 people gathering in the capital Warsaw alone, waving Polish and EU flags and shouting “We are staying!”.

Donald Tusk, a former head of the European Council and now leader of the main opposition party Civic Platform, said the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party’s policies were jeopardising Poland’s future in [Europe](#).



Donald Tusk, former European Council head and now leader of Poland’s main opposition party, Civic Platform, addresses the crowds at Castle Square in Warsaw on Sunday. Photograph: Albert Zawada/EPA

“We know why they want to leave (the EU) ... so that they can violate democratic rules with impunity,” he said, speaking in front of Warsaw’s Royal Castle, surrounded by thousands of protesters flanked by police vans flashing their lights.

PiS says it has no plans for a “Polexit”.

But right-wing populist governments in Poland and Hungary have found themselves increasingly at odds with the European Commission over issues ranging from LGBT rights to judicial independence.

“Just as Brexit suddenly became a fact, something no one expected, the same thing can happen here,” said Janusz Kuczynski, 59, standing in a street in Warsaw’s historic district leading up to the Royal Castle.

Welcoming the court ruling on Thursday, Polish prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki said each member state must be treated with respect and the EU should not be only “a grouping of those who are equal and more equal”.

State-run TVP broadcaster, which critics say focuses heavily on presenting the government’s point of view, ran a news ticker that read “protest against the Polish constitution” during its coverage of Sunday’s events.

Speakers at the demonstrations included politicians from across the opposition, artists and activists.

“This is our Europe and nobody is going to take us out of it,” said Wanda Traczyk-Stawska, a 94-year-old veteran of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising against Nazi German occupiers.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/11/poland-demonstrate-support-eu-membership-polexit>

[China](#)

## China floods: bus falls into river as heavy rains destroy homes



Rescuers evacuating residents in a flooded area after heavy rain in Jiexiu, Shanxi province, China. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

*Helen Davidson in Taipei*

[@heldavidson](#)

Mon 11 Oct 2021 04.55 EDT

A bus has fallen into a river in northern [China](#), leaving at least three people dead and 11 others missing after flooding from heavy rains destroyed homes and covered farmland in two provinces.

Video [posted online](#) showed people on top of an almost submerged bus in a rushing river flowing over a nearby bridge outside the city of Shijiazhuang, about 165 miles (265km) south-west of Beijing.

Authorities in Hebei province said in a social media post that 37 of the 51 people on the bus had been rescued. The state broadcaster CCTV said three had died and 11 were missing.

In neighbouring Shanxi province to the west, flooding has forced more than 120,000 people to leave their homes, destroyed 17,000 homes, forced the suspension of operations of hundreds of mines and damaged 190,000 hectares (470,000 acres) of farmland.

About 1.75 million people have been affected in total in Shanxi by floods caused by heavy rainfall that reached levels almost four times the usual monthly average.



Rescuers drawing water at a flooded area in China's northern Shanxi province. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Villages were inundated by water, trapping residents and causing the collapse of some dams, China Global Television Network reported. Aerial footage showed railway bridges washed away, leaving tracks hovering in the air, and sections of an ancient wall around the Unesco-listed ancient city of Pingyao were also eroded.

Details on casualties or injuries have not been released. The Global Times reported last week that four police officers had died in a landslide on

Tuesday.

Among the more than 400 suspended mining operations, 60 were coal-producing. China is [experiencing crippling electricity shortages](#), reportedly caused by coal shortages and record high prices, which have prompted authorities to order increased coal production elsewhere in the country.

According to state media, 59 national meteorological stations reported the highest ever recorded daily rainfall, and 63 their highest accumulative total over the period. The Fen River reached its highest level in four years, they said.

Torrential rains fell for several days last week across the province. In 12 hours overnight to Thursday morning, Shanxi, which ordinarily has an average of 31.3mm for the month, had an average 119.5mm across the province. Eighteen counties recorded more than 200mm, with a maximum of 285.2mm.

Taiyuan, the capital of Shanxi, recorded rainfall of 185mm, about seven times the pre-2010 average for October. More rain and colder weather were expected, the state news agency Xinhua said on Sunday.

Hao Nan, the head of a disaster information service centre, told the Global Times the scope of the flooding was worse than the disastrous rains that hit Henan earlier this year, but the impact had not been as bad. Hao's primary concern for Shanxi was the accompanying cold weather, the report said.

More than 300 people [died in Henan](#) in July when [record-breaking rainstorms](#) hit the province, overflowing reservoirs, breaching riverbanks, and overwhelming public transport systems and roads in many cities.

The majority of deaths occurred in the capital city, Zhengzhou, where more than 600mm of rain, equivalent almost to an average year, fell in just three days. About 40 people died in underground carparks, while at least 20 others died in a flooded road tunnel and metro station.

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## Women's rights and gender equality

# Digital gender gap: men 50% more likely to be online in some countries – report



Closing the digital gender gap should be part of governments' Covid recovery plans, say experts. Photograph: Yamil Lage/AFP/Getty

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[Sarah Johnson](#)

Mon 11 Oct 2021 02.01 EDT

A failure to ensure women have equal access to the internet has cost low-income countries \$1tn (£730bn) over the past decade and could mean an additional loss of \$500bn by 2025 if governments don't take action, according to [new research](#).

Last year, governments in 32 countries, including India, Egypt and Nigeria, lost an estimated \$126bn in gross domestic product because women were unable to contribute to the digital economy.

The digital gender gap – the difference between the number of women and men who can access the internet – cost \$24bn in lost tax revenues in 2020, which could have been invested in health, education and housing, said the report.

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, former executive director of UN [Women](#) and founder of the Umlambo Foundation, said: “We will not achieve gender equality until we eliminate this digital gap that keeps so many women offline and away from the opportunities the internet provides.”

The study, conducted by the World Wide Web Foundation and the Alliance for Affordable [Internet](#) (A4AI), looked at 32 low- and lower-middle-income countries, where the gender gap is often greatest.

In those countries, a third of women were connected to the internet compared with almost half of men. The digital gender gap has barely improved since 2011, dropping just half a percentage point from 30.9% to 30.4%. Globally, men are 21% more likely to be online than women, rising to 52% in the least developed countries, said the report.



Women with tablets in Ghatagaon, a town in Odisha, India. ‘We will not achieve gender equality until we eliminate this digital gap,’ says Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Umlambo Foundation. Photograph: Amrit Dhillon

Various barriers prevent women and girls from going online, including expensive handsets and data tariffs, social norms that discourage women and girls from being online, fears around privacy, safety, and security and a lack of money – globally, women earn around 77 cents for each dollar a man earns.

Few governments have implemented specific policies to give women easier access to the internet, added the report. According to the A4AI’s [2020](#)

Affordability Report, more than 40% of countries had no meaningful policies or programmes to expand women's access to the internet.

Catherine Adeya, director of research at the World Wide Web Foundation, said: "As the internet becomes a more potent enabler for education, business, and community mobilisation, a failure to deliver access for all means failing to realise everyone's potential to contribute."

As well as limiting opportunities for women and girls, digital exclusion of women has broader societal and economic impacts that affect everyone; with hundreds of millions fewer women able to use the internet, the world is missing out on the social, cultural, and economic contributions they could make, the report said.

Boutheina Guermazi, director of digital development at the World Bank, added: "Investing in a more inclusive digital future gives leaders a tremendous opportunity to promote economic growth while creating healthier societies by addressing inequalities in education and earning power.

"For governments looking to build a resilient economy as part of their Covid-19 recovery plans, closing the digital gender gap should be one of the top priorities."

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/oct/11/digital-gender-gap-cost-low-income-countries-billions-india-egypt-nigeria-women>

# Headlines

- [Covid Ministers face questions over firm linked to suspected test errors](#)
- [Test errors How did wrong PCR results happen?](#)
- [Confused after PCR tests 'I still don't know if I have Covid or not'](#)
- [England Infection rate rises again to one in 60 people](#)

## Coronavirus

# UK ministers face questions over firm linked to suspected Covid test errors



Security staff at the Wolverhampton Science Park, which houses Immensa Health Clinic's laboratories and offices. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

*[Rowena Mason](#) and [Jamie Grierson](#)*

Fri 15 Oct 2021 12.16 EDT

Ministers are facing questions about the Covid testing company linked to suspected wrong PCR results, as it emerged its sister company in the UK is being investigated over travel testing failures and a related US firm sent out used DNA test kits filled with other customers' saliva.

Immensa Health Clinic is under scrutiny after the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) [found at least 43,000 people](#) may have been wrongly

given a negative Covid test result, leading to the suspension of operations at its privately run laboratory in Wolverhampton.

It followed an investigation into reports of people receiving negative PCR test results after previously testing positive on a lateral flow device, many of them [in the south-west](#) and Wales.

Immensa was founded in May 2020 by Andrea Riposati, a former management consultant and owner of a DNA testing company, just three months before it was awarded a £119m PCR testing contract by the Department of [Health](#) and Social Care (DHSC). He is the sole listed owner and board director.

Riposati is also the founder of Dante Labs, which is [under investigation](#) in the UK by the Competition and Markets Authority over its PCR travel tests.

The watchdog said it would look into concerns that Dante Labs may be treating customers unfairly by not delivering PCR tests or results on time or at all, failing to respond to complaints or provide proper customer service, refusing or delaying refunds when requested and using terms and conditions that may unfairly limit consumers' rights.

In the US, Dante Labs admitted having sent five used DNA test kits to customers containing the saliva of other people. One reported finding the tube where he was meant to deposit his spit was already filled with bubbly liquid and sealed up in a biohazard bag.

After the [incident in 2018](#), Dante Labs issued a statement saying five people received "used kits" as a result of an error by its shipping provider, with Riposati saying he took "full responsibility".

There have been further questions over the management of Immensa. Earlier this year, the DHSC promised to launch an investigation after the [Sun on Sunday](#) found that workers appeared to be fighting, sleeping, playing football and drinking on duty while working at Immensa's Wolverhampton lab. The government said at the time it would speak to Immensa as it took "evidence of misconduct extremely seriously".

Despite this, Immensa won a further £50m contract from the DHSC as recently as July. It appears to have [opened another PCR testing laboratory](#) at Charnwood, Leicestershire, in September, with the launch attended by the Tory MP for Loughborough, Jane Hunt.

Jonathan Ashworth, the shadow health secretary, said: “Serious questions have to be asked about how this private firm – who didn’t exist before May 2020 – was awarded a lucrative £120m contract to run this lab.

“From duff PPE to failing test kits, ministers have sprayed around tax money like confetti and utterly failed to deliver the service people deserve.”

The original £119m PCR testing contract was awarded to Immensa last year without being put out to tender, raising questions about how and why the firm was given the deal.

In an unusual move, the government press release announcing the suspension of the Wolverhampton lab on Friday contained a supportive quote from Riposati, saying: “We are fully collaborating with UKHSA on this matter. Quality is paramount for us. We have proudly analysed more than 2.5m samples for NHS test and trace, working closely with the great teams at the Department of Health and Social Care and UKHSA. We do not wish this matter or anything else to tarnish the amazing work done by the UK in this pandemic.”

Immensa has been approached for comment via Dante Labs, and the DHSC has been asked for comment on its due diligence procedures.

NHS test and trace said about 400,000 samples had been processed through the Wolverhampton lab, the vast majority of which will have been negative results, but an estimated 43,000 people may have been given incorrect negative PCR test results between 8 September and 12 October, mostly in south-west [England](#).

Test and trace is contacting the people who could still be infectious to advise them to take another test.

The UKHSA said it was “an isolated incident attributed to one laboratory but all samples are now being redirected to other laboratories”.

A spokesperson for Immensa said:“We have been cooperating fully with the UKHSA on this matter and will continue to do so.”

The company did not respond to questions about the used tests incident in the US or behaviour of staff at its Wolverhampton lab.

In relation to the CMA inquiry, the spokesperson said it was disappointed about the move but fully cooperating, adding: “Dante Labs has completed over 4m tests in support of families, small businesses and local authorities since the pandemic began. We have a strong track record of providing all major Covid-19 tests, as approved by the Department of Health and Social Care.

“While the overwhelming majority of our customers have received a timely and cost-effective service, we recognise the challenges faced by a small proportion of those who have purchased our tests. We have invested significantly in our customer service operation to improve our overall delivery in the face of huge demand.”

Dr Will Welfare, the public health incident director at UKHSA, said: “There is no evidence of any faults with LFD or PCR test kits themselves and the public should remain confident in using them and in other laboratory services currently provided.”

However, some scientists are concerned that false results could have been partly responsible for the recent rise in Covid cases, which have topped [45,000 a day](#).

Dr Kit Yates, a mathematical biologist at the University of Bath and a member of the Independent Sage group of scientists, suggested the suspected testing errors could have had serious consequences.

He said: “We now know 43,000 people are believed to have been given false negatives, but this doesn’t even come near to the cost of the mistake.

“Many of these people will have been forced into school or work, potentially infecting others. This could be part of the reason behind some of the recent rises we’ve seen.

“We need to find out exactly what happened here in order to make sure it doesn’t happen again elsewhere.”

Speaking on a visit in the West Country, Boris Johnson said officials were still “looking into” what had gone wrong but denied that it was a factor in overall rising case numbers.

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## Coronavirus

# Covid: how did error over wrong PCR test results in UK happen?



Scientists say the error could be behind a recent rise in confirmed Covid cases nationwide. Photograph: Narendra Shrestha/EPA

*[Jamie Grierson](#)*

*[@JamieGrierson](#)*

Fri 15 Oct 2021 07.16 EDT

An estimated 43,000 people may have been given wrong negative PCR Covid test results, the UK [Health](#) Security Agency (UKHSA) has said.

Here we answer key questions about the error:

## What's happened?

NHS test and trace has suspended testing operations provided by Immensa Health Clinic Ltd at its laboratory in Wolverhampton following an investigation into reports of people receiving negative PCR test results after they have previously tested positive on a lateral flow device (LFD).

NHS test and trace estimate that 43,000 people may have been given incorrect negative PCR test results between 8 September and 12 October.

## **Where did this happen?**

The laboratory at the heart of the error is based in Wolverhampton but most of the false test results were returned to people in the south-west of England.

## **How serious is the problem?**

UKHSA says this is an isolated incident attributed to one laboratory and the number of tests carried out at the Immensa laboratory are small in the context of the wider network, and testing availability is unaffected around the country.

But scientists have warned the error could be behind a recent rise in confirmed cases nationwide.

Dr Kit Yates, a mathematical biologist at the University of Bath, said: “We now know 43,000 people are believed to have been given false negatives, but this doesn’t even come near to the cost of the mistake. Many of these people will have been forced into school or work, potentially infecting others. This could be part of the reason behind some of the recent rises we’ve seen.”

## **Why did this happen?**

UKHSA says “investigations are under way into the precise cause” of the mass error, adding it is looking to “determine the laboratory technical issues” behind the false negative results. The agency also says there is no evidence of any faults with LFD or PCR test kits themselves.

# Who are Immensa Health Clinic Ltd?

Immensa are a private company contracted by the government to process PCR tests. The company is owned by the founder of Dante Labs, a company that started life as a DNA analysis firm. Immensa was incorporated as a company in the UK in May 2020 and by September 2020 it had been contracted by the UK government to process tests.

Its chief executive and founder, Andrea Riposati, said: “We are fully collaborating with UKHSA on this matter. Quality is paramount for us. We have proudly analysed more than 2.5m samples for NHS test and trace, working closely with the great teams at DHSC and UKHSA. We do not wish this matter or anything else to tarnish the amazing work done by the UK in this pandemic.”

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## [Coronavirus](#)

# Conflicting Covid test results leave Britons suspicious of PCR tests



Jessica, who works as a research administrator in Sheffield, says the negative PCR test cast doubt on its gold standard status. Photograph: Jessica

*[Rachel Obordo](#) and [Alfie Packham](#)*

Fri 15 Oct 2021 13.44 EDT

At least 43,000 people may have been wrongly given a negative Covid test result, the UK Health Security Agency has said, [as it announced the suspension of operations](#) at a privately run lab in Wolverhampton.

The announcement comes after dozens of people reported receiving a negative result after using a Covid PCR test, having got a positive result from their rapid lateral flow test, prompting scientists to call for an [urgent investigation](#).

Three people discuss how they feel about the reliability of PCR tests.

## **‘Is the number of cases actually higher than they are saying at the minute?’**

On 21 September, my lateral flow test result showed up as positive, so I immediately self-isolated and booked a walk-through PCR test. While waiting for the PCR results, I did another lateral flow test, which was also positive. I was really confused as my lateral flow tests continued to show a positive result – all seven of them over a 10-day period. However, three PCR tests came back negative. I called the test-and-trace number for advice after the second PCR result came back negative and they said I did not need to self-isolate as the PCR tests were the better-quality test.

However, I decided I would self-isolate for 10 days as it felt very risky to not do so. It did slightly give me pause for thought as to how reliable PCR tests are, as they’re held up as the gold standard. It would be good to get more information as to what happened in Wolverhampton and how it’s gone terribly wrong. Are the number of cases actually higher than they are telling us at the minute? We seem to just be living with the virus but not getting the full picture of what’s going on. **Jessica, 28, research administrator, Sheffield**

## **‘I still don’t know if I have Covid or not’**



James Calderwood carried on wearing a mask despite having taken a negative PCR test.

We had gone away at the beginning of September and me, my partner, who's a teacher, and my 11-year-old son were all feeling awful, me especially. My first thought was I had Covid, so I did a lateral flow test, which came up positive. The next day I did a PCR test, which came back negative. A few days later my son was in a room with five other boys who all came down with Covid, but when he did a PCR test it came back negative. In the meantime, I started to feel worse, so I did another lateral flow test followed by a PCR test and the results were the same – positive then negative.

I have my 84-year-old mother staying with me, so it's very concerning. I've been cautious, like wearing a face mask, and I'm fortunate in that I'm able to work remotely, but I still don't know if I have Covid or not. In light of the situation in Wolverhampton, it's very worrying to know I could have been passing the virus on to others. It's important that we can trust these tests. If we don't get this right, then it means the pandemic will last a lot longer and take us longer to recover. **James Calderwood, 61, film editor, Bristol**

**'I'm left wondering if my other children had Covid. I guess we'll never know'**



Lisa and Tim Harris. Lisa says her husband tested negative despite having classic Covid symptoms.

My husband, Tim, 52, developed a temperature on 7 October, so he went for a PCR test in Morden. He also took a lateral flow test, which was positive. The rest of the household took PCRs, and on the next day all of ours came back negative, including my husband's. At this point, he had textbook Covid symptoms, and another lateral flow test was positive. Two of our three kids had already had runny noses since 4 October, so we'd immediately removed them from school. My son was desperate to go to a football tournament, and since his PCR was negative, it wouldn't have been against school rules. But I said he could only go if he did a lateral flow test – which was positive. I decided to keep all my children home and we all self-isolated.

I saw on Twitter that there was [an issue with false negatives](#), so I called the UK Health Security Agency to say we were experiencing the same. They told me they were aware of the issue, but there was no system in place to record cases where this may be happening. I believe PCRs have been very effective during the pandemic, but I'm concerned by what went wrong at the Wolverhampton lab. My husband and son's Covid infections were picked up by a second PCR test on 8 October. I'm left wondering if my other children's runny noses were in fact Covid, but I guess we'll never know.

**Lisa Harris, 39, antenatal teacher, Wimbledon**

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## Coronavirus

# Covid infection rate in England rises again to one in 60 people



A man writes a message on the national Covid memorial wall on the South Bank in London. Photograph: David Cliff/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Ben Quinn](#)*

*[@BenQuinn75](#)*

Fri 15 Oct 2021 09.33 EDT

About one in 60 people in [England](#) had Covid-19 last week, according to estimates published on Friday.

The prevalence of infection was up for a third straight week, having been at about one in 70 the previous week, [according to the Office for National Statistics \(ONS\)](#).

At the peak of the second wave in early January, about one in 50 people were estimated to have coronavirus. The latest estimate of one in 60 equates to about 890,000 people.

While the government has continued to insist it will rely on vaccines rather than lockdowns to navigate a difficult winter, some experts have expressed concern about the rise.

Prevalence was highest once again in secondary school pupils, prompting Prof Christina Pagel, the director of UCL's clinical operational research unit, to reiterate criticism of preparations for the return of children to schools. An estimated 8.1% of all secondary pupils were infected, up from 6.93% the previous week.

“When are we going to say enough is enough and protect kids?” [tweeted](#) Pagel, who co-authored a [piece in the Guardian](#) last week that noted countries such as France and Germany were using extra measures as part of a “vaccine-plus strategy” designed to keep cases and deaths low.

Cases have also increased among people in England over 50, who were among the first to receive vaccines and are now being given booster shots.

In [Wales](#), about one in 45 people are estimated to have had Covid-19 in the week to 9 October, up from one in 55 the previous week and the highest since estimates began in July last year.

The latest estimate in [Northern Ireland](#) is one in 120, up from 130 the previous week but well below the recent peak of one in 40 for the week to 20 August.

For [Scotland](#), the ONS estimates about one in 80 people had Covid-19 in the week to 9 October, down from one in 60 the previous week.

Catherine Noakes, a professor of environmental engineering for buildings at the University of Leeds and an expert on indoor air quality and airborne infection, said measures were needed to stop the situation getting worse in the coming months.

“We have higher cases than the rest of Europe. We have less controls than the rest of Europe,” she said, emphasising the need for ventilation, mask wearing and a continued focus on hand washing.

The percentage of people testing positive for Covid is estimated to have increased in all regions of England except the East Midlands, London and the north-east, the ONS said.

In the north-west, south-west and Yorkshire and the Humber, about one in 50 people were likely to test positive last week.

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## 2021.10.16 - Spotlight

- Daisy May Cooper 'It's like I'm flypaper for embarrassing myself'
- Creating This Country 'We cleaned by night and wrote by day'
- Cream teas at dawn Inside the war for the National Trust
- Desperately seeking Diana Can any actor get to the heart of the people's princess?



Daisy May Cooper recreates Kim Kardashian's notorious 'break the internet' photoshoot. Photograph: Simon Webb/The Guardian

## **Daisy May Cooper: 'It's like I'm flypaper for embarrassing myself'**

Daisy May Cooper recreates Kim Kardashian's notorious 'break the internet' photoshoot. Photograph: Simon Webb/The Guardian

by [Rebecca Nicholson](#)

Sat 16 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

A ripple of excitement crackles around the room as the two round cushions that will soon become Daisy May Cooper's new bum are fluffed, plumped and preened, and then packed into her black sequined ballgown. She is about to recreate a shot from Kim Kardashian's [notorious "break the internet" photoshoot](#), swapping champagne for ketchup, and in a couple of minutes, she will have to work out how to stand at the correct angle for a tray of chips

to balance on her bum. Fittingly, the Beyoncé/Destiny's Child playlist that has been on shuffle throughout the day has landed on Bootylicious.

Cooper turns her head, looks down, and laughs. Her laugh is phenomenal, huge, a long, loud hoot drawn out into a throaty cackle. "Let's just go for it!" she shouts, with a few more swear words thrown in. To say she swears like a sailor doesn't do it justice; she swears like a naval fleet. The makeup artist rubs oil on to the tops of her arms to make them look shiny. "Fuckin' 'ell," she says, taking it all in, and lets out a wry chuckle. She seems utterly at home.

These days, this is all par for the course. In front of the camera, Cooper moves the ketchup bottle this way and that, getting the angle just right. Her face shifts and stretches into the perfect comedy grin, or grimace. She squeezes the bottle. The sauce starts to drip from her long black gloves.

When you get inside the celebrity circle, you realise nobody knows how it all works! Everybody's just showing off to the people on the outside

She is, she explains, a little bit hungover, not that you'd know it from her energy levels. Last night, she went to David Walliams' 50th birthday party. She was chatting, drunkenly, to Michael McIntyre, when she saw that John Bishop had picked up his chair and moved it away from their table. What she hadn't noticed was that she was loudly talking through an exclusive live performance by Elton John. "I didn't realise he was on stage! I was just nattering away," she cackles. "I thought, surely, they're just playing music through the speakers?"

For someone who spent many years trying to break into a seemingly impenetrable industry, nights like that suggest she's very much an insider now. When she was trying to catch a break, she spent a long time wondering how it all worked. "But when you get to the inside of the circle, you realise that nobody knows! Everybody's just showing off to the people on the outside," she says. How does it feel now she's on the other side? "I mean, it's all just bollocks," she grins.

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Until she was 30, Cooper was a struggling actor, sharing a mattress with her younger brother Charlie in their parents' house, in their home town of Cirencester, Gloucestershire. The family were living in poverty. There were payday loans, evictions and regular trips to the pawn shop. The siblings scraped a living as night cleaners in an office block, while the auditions that Cooper had expected to get after three years at drama school failed to materialise.



Daisy May Cooper and her brother, Charlie, as Kerry and Kurtan Mucklowe in *This Country*. Photograph: BBC

Daisy and Charlie invented characters and stories to keep themselves amused during shifts. These creations would become Kerry and Kurtan Mucklowe, and their story the award-winning, smash-hit mockumentary [This Country](#). The comedy, which began in 2017 and ended just three years later, followed Kerry and Kurtan as they meandered aimlessly around their rural village in the Cotswolds, bored, broke and stuck in a rut. It was the sort of show that inspired people to shout its lines at the people who made it; Kerry's mother, also voiced by Cooper but never seen, had a particular way with the word "tomato".

Now, aged 35, Cooper is a star. Post-*This Country*, she has continued acting and writing, is a reliable regular on comedy panel shows, and is huge on

social media for posting short clips, which range from the homely to the surreal. Now, she is about to release her autobiography. Unsurprisingly, it's hilarious. More of a surprise is how tough a road she had to travel to get here.

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"Comedy's always been in my bones," Cooper reflects, back in her ordinary clothes, a floaty floral dress and sandals. We are pushed together in a tiny box-room office above the photography studio. Cooper swings around restlessly in a swivel chair. "I love making people laugh. It's my favourite thing to do in the whole world." I can tell; my face hurts after spending the afternoon with her.

One million people follow Cooper on Instagram. They will have seen the saga of the sea captain, a scammer who messaged female celebrities requesting money, to whom Cooper replied, faux-earnestly, trying to strike up a relationship. He finally stopped talking to her when she pretended she was on a flight to meet him. "I felt really sad! I miss the guy." They will also have seen her trolling her publishers about whether she could write about an ex-boyfriend's bent penis. In a meeting she seemingly secretly recorded, she argues with what appears to be complete seriousness that she doesn't think she's asking for much. She also posted a clip of a phone call of her publisher telling her off about it, which led her to briefly deactivate her Instagram in protest. The drama concluded with a [statement to Metro](#): "Penguin have offered to let me dedicate the book to my ex-boyfriend's wonky knob. I have accepted and we have made up," she said.

"I still feel like I'm 15 years old, and I'm in the back of a classroom," she says. "My publishers remind me of really annoying substitute teachers, trying to tell me what to do." She has a perpetual air of barely suppressed mischief, as if she is constantly trying to behave herself but knows she won't be able to. "The wonky cock thing, the way they spoke about it ... the seriousness ... I was like, are you joking? They just get so cross with me."

I don't understand how I keep making the same mistakes, and why I'm not growing up to be a responsible adult

Is the penis still in the book?

“I’ve made sure it is,” she says, triumphantly. “My wrist aches so much, because I had to sign so many. I thought, I don’t know any other job where somebody’s got to draw 20,000 wonky dicks.”

You’ve just drawn them in?

“Absolutely, mate,” she giggles.

On the page that’s dedicated to TV presenter Ben Shephard? (The inscription says that she thinks he’s fit.)

“Yes.” Then her face drops. “Oh, shit. People are going to think that... ... Oh *God*. I didn’t even *think* about that! This is how much of a fuck-up I am.”

Cooper calls herself this a lot. I ask her if she means it fondly. “Well, I mean. I don’t understand how I keep making the same mistakes, and why I’m not growing up to be a responsible adult. It’s like I’m flypaper for just completely embarrassing myself.”

Why does she think that is? “I don’t know. I don’t *think*. I don’t think about the consequences of things. I just act in the moment, and then I fuck up, and then I feel like a twat. Hahaha! People just seem to function really well, and I don’t get it. It’s like, what is your secret? How do you swim through life so effortlessly?”



Photography: Simon Webb. Styling: Andie Redman. Hair: Terri Capon at Stella Creative Artists using Hair by Sam McKnight. Makeup: Lica Fensome at Stella Creative Artists using Nars. Dress in main image: Georgia Nash Couture. Chips : Oh My Cod! Catford

She was offered “a life-changing amount of money” to write her life story. “I said, absolutely, I’ll do it. But it’s like selling my soul, because I’ve had to admit to all the most vile, horrendous, embarrassing things that have happened in my life, that my parents are going to find out about.”

Some of the stories have already been aired. Cooper is a regular on comedy shows, and her episodes are usually must-sees. On *Would I Lie to You?*, she told a true story about slipping crushed-up sleeping pills into her parents’ drinks so she could sneak her teenage boyfriend into the house. She went viral in 2017, when *This Country* was new, for [telling Romesh Ranganathan](#) about the time she accidentally auditioned to be a stripper. Although she warns Ranganathan that it is hard for her to talk about it, she can barely breathe for laughing, as the horrors of her disastrous attempts at pole-dancing become clear. In the book, the same anecdote is obviously painful.

“It was such a bleak time,” she says, now. She had moved to London after an acting summer school and had no work, performing or otherwise. The audition was a last-ditch attempt to earn money for her long-overdue rent on

a crowded room-share in Shepherd's Bush. "All these bad things were happening and it was never-ending. I've never felt so humiliated. I just felt like nothing. It was that bad. I mean, it's hilarious, but it was depressing."

At points, her story is heartbreakng. She nods. "But at least now there was a purpose for those really awful times. I feel like [writing the book] has been quite therapeutic in a way, because, had I not written it, had we not become successful, then those bits would have just been really sad. But it was such a hard journey to get here. It was tough."

She hopes that her book might provide some solace to anyone else going through a similar situation, as other autobiographies did for her. "I read Peter Kay's autobiography a lot, and James Corden's. The most important thing is that you have to talk about it, because it gives people hope, and inspires people to change the situation. There's just so much we need to change about this country."

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Cooper was born in Basingstoke, Hampshire, in 1986, and grew up in Cirencester with her mother, Gillian, and her dad, Paul. Charlie was born three years after her. When she was tiny, her parents took her to a specialist to see if it was right that their small daughter claimed to have voices in her head. The doctors said there was nothing wrong with her. She scared her classmates by making up a school ghost, in horrifying detail, and, when the parents of other pupils complained, the headteacher had to call a special assembly to tell them that it wasn't real. "I would have either gone into this industry or become like [the serial killer] Jeffrey Dahmer and been absolutely terrifying," she says, laughing.

When she was about six, her aunt Alison died in a car crash. In the years that followed, her mother would take Cooper to psychic nights, to see if they could make contact. "That's mad! No wonder I was so messed up," she says. "Normal kids go to the cinema or go bowling, not to talk to the dead."

Every day at Rada, somebody tells you how shit you are, how ugly you look, how you're never going to make it. It was hard

Cooper has two children herself. Her daughter, Pip, is three, and her son, Jack, is one. She is currently going through a divorce from her husband, Will Weston, a landscaper she met on Tinder in 2015 and married in 2019. “He’s an amazing man, but we’re just not compatible,” is all she will say about it. She has stepped back from social media, partly for personal reasons and partly because she’s so busy. But for a time she would post hilarious clips of her daughter, who was briefly convinced that her name was Buckbeak, a hippogriff from Harry Potter. “My poor daughter, I know,” she laughs. “Poor Buckbeak. Maybe that’s not right, as a parent, to plaster your kids all over Instagram. But they’re part of my life, and I have to share her with the world. She’s so funny.”

“I’d *like* to think that I’ve learned from my parents’ mistakes,” she says. “But I’m just doing pretty much exactly what they did to me. Terrible! You just do what you can, as a parent, and try and get through it. As long as your kids feel loved and listened to, that’s the most important thing.” She very much felt that way when she was growing up. “I felt so supported. And I think that’s what people couldn’t understand, why my parents never said to get a normal job and do something that isn’t a million to one, like doing comedy on television.”



‘Money gives you choices. Money gives you self-respect,’ says Cooper.

By the time Cooper left school, she knew she wanted to be a performer. Her parents took out a credit card to help pay for a summer acting course in London. She stayed in the city for a few months afterwards, but hated it – it was the stripping audition era – and moved back home, where she applied for drama schools. She was eventually accepted by Rada for a three-year degree.

Recently, Anthony Hopkins cautioned aspiring actors [against drama schools](#), saying they were a waste of money, calling the teachers “failed actors who set themselves up as gurus”. Cooper is scathing about her time at Rada. “I felt like I had no control,” she says. “Every day, you’ve got somebody telling you how shit you are, how ugly you look, how you’re never going to make it in the industry. You’re doing 15-hour days, then going back and doing homework and reading loads of scripts. It was hard.”

I know everyone in Cirencester from school. If I try to book a table at a local pub, I drop my name and they do not care. It’s great

She was desperately miserable, but she stuck out the full course. Charlie dropped out of his own university course and went to live with her on her floor for most of the final year, which seems to have helped her get through it. Why didn’t she quit? “Fear. Complete fear. Because we knew we had the agents who would come after three years, and, if I left, I wouldn’t get to do the showcase. That’s what kept everybody there.” Would she advise young, aspiring actors to go to drama school? “No. I would actively discourage them.”

How can working-class children, or people who aren’t connected, get a foothold in an industry that is so reliant on nepotism and contacts? “Just write yourself something, which is what we did. Write your own story, because everybody’s got a story to tell. Write truthfully, and send it to every production company you can. You can find them on Google.” She says they’ll warn you they don’t read unsolicited scripts, but it’s a lie. “All agents read them, because they don’t want to miss out on the next Fifty Shades of Grey or Harry Potter. They’re desperate for the talent, and they make out like it’s this great big ivory castle and you’ve got to go through thorn bushes to get through it.”



Daisy May Cooper on the cover of the Guardian's Saturday magazine.  
Photograph: Simon Webb

After the Coopers sent off their early scripts for *This Country*, it spent years being developed, rewritten and remoulded to the tastes of different production companies and channels. In one iteration, Kerry and Kurtan were not cousins but love interests. They made a pilot for ITV ("Horrendous," Cooper says) but the channel decided not to go ahead with a series, and they were dropped by their production company. It sounds like a blessing now, but at the time it felt like a catastrophe, not least financially. Money had always been tight for the family, but it was getting tighter and tighter. The book is brutally honest about what it is like to live in poverty in the UK; Cooper felt it was important to be frank. "Really important," she nods. "Because you've got no self-respect. You're always on the back foot, so you can't even have normal relationships. Even friendships, because you can't afford to meet for coffee."

She felt a pang of recognition when she watched the film *Parasite*, about a poor family who go to work for a wealthy one. "It was just what our family was like. Especially at the beginning, where they're all trying to get wifi in the house. It was so chaotic. You're just trying to get through to the end of the day. And that's what's amazing about money. Money gives you choices. Money gives you self-respect."

After ITV dropped them, Cooper persuaded [Shane Allen](#), then the director of comedy at the BBC, to give them a go, and Allen said yes to the version of This Country that the Coopers had always wanted to make. In its brief existence, the series picked up five Baftas, and Cooper would often appear on red carpets in outlandish outfits. There was the Swindon Town FC kit [fashioned into a ballgown](#), and there was the [bin bag](#) made by her mother, complete with dustbin-lid hat and rubbish attached to the train. On that occasion, she gave the money she would have spent on a gown to a food bank. “Yeah, but also, I knew that none of the paparazzi would know who I was, and I wanted to get in the papers, so I was just a massive show-off,” she laughs.

Being successful has completely changed her life. When she first had money, she “went nuts”. “I was living like I was Rockefeller, it was ridiculous. I need to buy a house because I just spunk the money all the time.” Success meant that she and Charlie could help the whole family. “Our cousins, our aunties, our uncles. We’ve managed to sort everybody out. Do you know how amazing that is?” But she hasn’t bought herself a house? “No!” she cackles, though she says that Charlie has. The book is a testament to the siblings’ closeness. How is their relationship these days? She laughs. “Never see the bastard. He’s got a really good-looking girlfriend, he’s bought himself a lovely house in Stroud, and he never replies to any of my text messages.”

Charlie, she says, isn’t interested in showbiz events or awards ceremonies. “He will not go to any now. I’ll only go if I have a plus-one that I want to show off to,” she says.

Cooper lives just outside Cirencester. “I don’t want to be anywhere else on earth,” she says, warmly. “I know everyone there from school. The duck race!” In her village, there’s a tradition to race plastic ducks every Boxing Day. “It sounds like I’m just saying it to be quirky, but it is the best event I’ve ever attended. It’s amazing.” Many of the characters in This Country were based on people they knew from home. They must be proud of it? “Well, they were in the beginning, and now nobody gives a flying fuck,” she chuckles. “Even if I’m trying to book a table at a local pub, I drop my name and they do not care. It’s *great*.”



Cooper as a team captain on the revived *Never Mind The Buzzcocks*, with Jade Thirlwall and Anne-Marie Photograph: Andrea Southam/Sky

The next few months are looking busy. There's the book, and then a comedy thriller she is writing with her friend Seline Hizli, whom she met at Rada, about a toxic friendship. They film next month for the [BBC](#). I ask her whose career she would like to emulate. "Everybody's," she says. "Michaela Coel, Phoebe Waller-Bridge. I want to go to the States and absolutely rinse it, like James Corden, and buy my own private jet." The US version of *This Country*, called *Welcome to Flatch*, is coming out soon. "Basically, they said to me, let's do the US version of *This Country*. I said, how much work do I have to do? They said, just put your name to it." She laughs. She and Charlie read the scripts, she says, but essentially they left the Americans to it. "I said, do whatever you want and I'll take the money."

She has just finished filming the revived quizshow [Never Mind the Buzzcocks](#), in which she is a team captain, and she has loved every second. On one episode, she had to captain a team comprising her, Shaun Ryder and Bez from Happy Mondays. I can only imagine the chaos. "I was sitting there thinking, I cannot believe I get paid to just fart about," she says, happily. "I am living my best life."

Daisy May Cooper's Don't Laugh, It'll Only Encourage Her is published on 28 October by Michael Joseph (£20). To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](https://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply.

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## **‘We cleaned by night and wrote by day’: Daisy May Cooper on creating This Country**



Daisy May Cooper: ‘Oh, great. My agent can’t even remember who I am.’  
Styling: Andie Redman. Hair: Terri Capon. Makeup: Lica Fensome.  
Photograph: Simon Webb/The Guardian

*Daisy May Cooper*  
Sat 16 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

In my first week at Rada we had an introductory talk from the school principal. “We’re going to dismember you, pull you apart limb by limb, and then piece you back together again.” I kid you not. Those were his first words. Many of us were taken apart but never put back together again.

Before I went to Rada, I wasn’t even aware of the smörgåsbord of ways you could be told how utterly shit you were. It would be far too depressing for me to share all the negative comments made to me by students and tutors alike, but these are the highlights: “I don’t know why you’re here. You have no talent.” In second place: “You’re one of these actresses that’s here by fluke, aren’t you?” And trailing a close third was the withering: “Have you considered teaching, Daisy?”

We made up skits and stupid songs about people we knew from Cirencester. We took the piss out of everyone and everything

One tyrannical tutor basked in the twisted cruelty of it all.

“Daisy, what’s your worst childhood memory?”

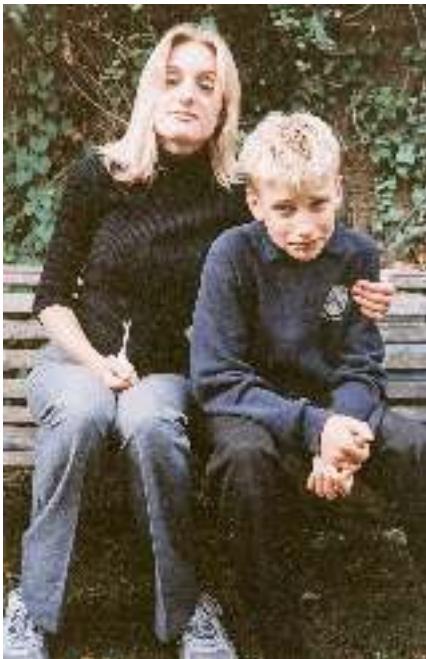
“Erm … probably my Auntie Alison crashing her car when I was around six and my family having to switch her life support off?”

“Not good enough … Think of something worse …”

She pointed menacingly at the next person. “And you … what’s yours?”

“Erm … the … the … the … abortion I had at 15 …” Silence.

“Great!” The teacher clapped her hands triumphantly. “I want you right back in that place. Be the character, don’t play the character!” I think some of the other students loved it but, honestly, I felt as if all the stuffing had been ripped out of me.



Daisy May Cooper at 16, with brother Charlie, 13: ‘Mum took pictures of me and Charlie to send to our grandparents. I tried to be sultry, hoping they would show their fit neighbour.’ Photograph: courtesy of Daisy May Cooper

As it turned out, my brother Charlie was having an equally hard time. He’d dropped out of Exeter Uni and had been working shifts in Pizza Hut back in Cirencester. “Come to London,” I suggested. He didn’t want to go home. Mum and Dad had been struggling to pay their mortgage. With hardly any money coming in, they were talking about selling the house. “You can sleep on my floor.” He thought that was an amazing offer, until he was forced to loiter around the shared kitchen while I had sex with whichever random I brought home. He ended up staying on my floor for a whole year. Without him, I would’ve lost my mind.

Whenever I got back from classes we made up skits and stupid songs about people we knew from Cirencester. Mum sent us the local newspaper regularly and we thumbed through it. We took the piss out of everyone and everything; I guess it was our way of admitting that we missed home. One song we put together was about a fictional red-meat-loving racist butcher whose son announced he was turning vegetarian. Its natural comic potential seemed obvious to me and Charlie. And, for one of our stupidest songs to date, we drew on the old music-hall tradition and created Rang Up the Dong, which was about nothing in particular.

When Charlie and I eventually made it back to Cirencester and were sharing a room, like the crusty old grandparents in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, making shit up became our only escape. We had so little money and so little hope, but something the actor [Jessica Ransom](#) said to me after I'd filmed a scene in Doc Martin had stuck in my mind. I'd told her about my post-Rada nightmare and how I'd found it impossible to get work. She'd suggested I try writing my own material. I'd never thought about it before. I was so caught up with trying to make it as an actor in other people's shows and being reliant on other people's scripts. *Maybe I could*, I thought.

I started writing. Just to make Charlie laugh, I created a character called Kerry. She was like so many girls from around where we lived, and inspired by the school bullies from when I was at Deer Park secondary. She was oafish and selfish, but underneath it all she had a big heart.

We started filming two-minute sketches. The videos got zero views on YouTube, but Charlie and I pissed ourselves

And I created Kerry's mum – the character whose voice I also act on [This Country](#) but who you never see. Then we started filming two-minute sketches. The videos got absolutely zero views on YouTube, but Charlie and I pissed ourselves. Unfortunately, every now and again reality kicked in.

After doing an assortment of shit jobs and signing on, Charlie and I got a cleaning job. It was £100 a month for three hours a night, in an office block in Cirencester. We got the three-hour shift down to 20 minutes. Vacuuming was a lot of effort. Instead, I cast my eye across the floor and picked up the most offending particles by hand. If we were feeling energetic, we emptied the bins.

At home, our Kerry videos got slowly better. So much so that Dad suggested we write a proper scripted comedy based around the character. Charlie and I cleaned by night and wrote by day. At first, we put together four pages of script. To be clear, we didn't actually know what a proper script was or how to present it. It didn't matter. It was more important that we got our ideas down.



Cooper at 16. Photograph: courtesy of Daisy May Cooper

Alongside Kerry and her mum, Charlie and I developed a character called Dale, who was later to become Kurtan in *This Country*. We continued writing until we had 10 pages of script, called *Kerry Gets a New Camera*, which Charlie filmed. It was a skit where Kerry and Dale play Scrabble and want to know if “Dave” is a proper word. I sent the script to my more-than-useless agent. She didn’t reply. I rang her.

“Hi, it’s Daisy … Daisy Cooper? Just wondering whether you … ”

“Daisy who?”

Oh, great. My agent can’t even remember who I am.

“Daisy Cooper? I’m on your books. I sent you a script I’ve been working on … I was … erm … wondering if you’d had a chance to … ?”

“No.”

Quick Guide

**Saturday magazine**

Show



This article comes from Saturday, [the new print magazine from the Guardian](#) which combines the best features, culture, lifestyle and travel writing in one beautiful package. Available now in the UK and ROI.

Photograph: GNM

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

As far as I know, my former agent never did read our script. I got impatient and went to the library and researched production companies. Then I sent out emails to hundreds of them with the videos we made of Kerry attached. It felt as hopeless as catapulting satellites into outer space. Just me and Charlie and our ideas and all the blood, sweat and tears it took to get our work together hurtling out there into the cosmos. But at least I was doing something.

We waited weeks. Then, one day, I received a message from a production company in London. In that moment, all the shitty jobs I'd ever done paled into insignificance. This was it! Somebody, somewhere, in a big, fancy office in London, actually thought we were funny.

This is an edited extract from Don't Laugh, It'll Only Encourage Her published on 28 October by Michael Joseph (£20). To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](http://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply.

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## Cream teas at dawn: inside the war for the National Trust



Selworthy village on the National Trust's Holnicote estate. Photograph: Joel Redman/The Guardian



Gaby Hinsliff

Sat 16 Oct 2021 04.45 EDT

One by one, they tackle the steeply winding path to [Penrhyn Castle](#), pausing halfway to admire the view over a sparkling blue sea. Extended families grapple with pushchairs and picnic cool boxes; there are dapper older gentlemen in panama hats, and panting labradors. A blackboard at the entrance advertises traditional games every Thursday, while the gift shop is a soothing vision of gardening tools, tea towels and jars of chutney. As Eleanor Harding, the National Trust's thoughtful young assistant curator for Wales, enters the castle's ornate library, a volunteer guide says brightly: "No negative comments today!"

Over the past year, the trust has attracted its fair share of those. An institution best known for stately homes, scones and bracing walks has found itself plunged into an unlikely culture war over how the history it is charged with preserving for the nation should be interpreted.

Years of minor grumbling about its efforts to move with the times – or, as a leaked internal document last summer put it, improve on an “outdated mansion experience” – erupted into a full-blown row in September last year over a [report tracing its properties' connections to colonialism and slavery](#).

Published in the aftermath of a summer of Black Lives Matter protests, which saw the [statue of a slaver pushed into Bristol harbour](#) and Winston Churchill's statue on Whitehall boarded up for its protection, it brought together three years' work exploring the histories of 93 estates. Some were built on the proceeds of slavery – Penrhyn's original owners made their fortune from sugar plantations in Jamaica – while others had been home to abolitionists. Powis Castle on the English-Welsh border made the list for holding spoils of war brought back by the military commander Clive of India, while Rudyard Kipling's former Sussex home earned its entry for his writings on empire. But it was the inclusion of Churchill's home at Chartwell, Kent, on grounds including his early opposition to independence for India, that really put the cat among the pigeons.

“A clique of powerful, privileged liberals must not be allowed to rewrite our history in their image,” [thundered 28 members of the Common Sense Group](#) of Tory backbenchers, a rightwing grouping founded to counter what it regards as “woke” thinking, in a letter to the Daily Telegraph accusing the trust of having “tarnished one of Britain’s greatest sons”. The then chair of the Charity Commission, former Conservative cabinet minister Tina Stowell, [promised to investigate whether the trust had strayed from its charitable purpose](#) (the commission later cleared it of doing so). Even Oliver Dowden, then culture secretary, declared that roping in Churchill would “surprise and disappoint people”. Claims that the trust was haemorrhaging members and purging dissenting staff followed, many under the byline of the [influential Spectator columnist Charles Moore](#). A group called Restore Trust – a rebel alliance of disgruntled members seeking to oust senior National Trust leaders – has now tabled a series of resolutions for the charity’s annual general meeting later this month, including one demanding the trust consult its army of volunteers before changing the way a property is presented.

The trust has weathered public controversies before, over everything from demands to ban foxhunting on its land in the 1990s to [lowering the sugar in its flapjack recipes](#) three years ago. But this feels uglier, and more intense. The trust’s director general, Hilary McGrady, received at least one death threat following the report. Corinne Fowler, a professor of postcolonial literature at the University of Leicester, who co-authored it with the trust’s head curator, Sally-Anne Huxtable, and others, was advised for her own safety not to go out walking alone. The charity seems to have become a

lightning rod for the boiling emotions of a nation in flux, racked by arguments over national identity, social justice, pride and guilt.



A visitor stands under a portrait of Samuel Pennant in the Grand Hall at Penrhyn Castle. Photograph: Joel Redman/The Guardian

Yet presiding over it all is McGrady, whose manner is as calm and soothing as a stroll round a herbaceous border. Having grown up on a smallholding not far from Belfast during the Troubles, she is perhaps more used to navigating conflicting histories than most.

“It’s been the perfect storm in many respects, hasn’t it?” she says resignedly down a phone line from rural Somerset. “People have had to get used to what’s going on with Brexit, people having to get used to Covid, the political agenda, levelling up – there are so many things in the mix that are creating this febrile atmosphere. I think we did fall foul of a period of time in the last year when the world was going slightly bonkers.”

But why should the trust be a target? “I think it’s one of the steady reminders of what’s good about life – people like the consistency,” she says. “And then they were reading this stuff, going: ‘Oh my goodness, they’re changing this thing that I absolutely love.’ That’s what frustrated me, because actually I’m not changing anything. What I’m trying to do is

improve and constantly build – take nothing away but just add more *interest.*”

A year on, the trust still has more than 5.4 million members, numbers that no political party can dream of matching. During the pandemic, many drew comfort from walking its peaks and fells, holding outdoor family reunions in its parklands, or holidaying in its beauty spots. But the row hasn't gone away. At its heart lies a tug of war between people who don't want politics intruding on a nice day out, and those arguing that politics were there all along, for those who cared to look.

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The vast dining table at Penrhyn Castle is set for a banquet, groaning with crystal and family silver. Gazing down from the wall, as if surveying his bounty, is an enormous oil painting of Richard Pennant, the first Baron Penrhyn and an 18th-century MP for Liverpool.

But something is amiss. The middle of the table is bare, apart from a battered box labelled “Jamaica papers”. And just below the painting stands a bouquet of white chrysanthemums, whose handwritten card dedicates them to the enslaved people “whose blood and sweat and tears contributed to the wealth that built this castle”. The effect is as if someone has burst into a dinner party and thrown down a bloody gauntlet to the hosts.



‘It’s about justice for my ancestors,’ says Dr April-Louise Pennant ...



... who left this card and flowers at Penrhyn Castle. Photographs: Joel Redman/The Guardian

This is the heart of the [What a World! exhibition](#), Eleanor Harding’s attempt to foreground a history unusually well preserved in the family archive that Richard Pennant’s descendants gave to Bangor University in the 1930s, including records of prices paid for slaves on its six plantations. Built in 1820, the castle sits in what the heritage consultant Dr Marian Gwyn (who has researched the archive for the trust) calls a “slave landscape”. The family’s plantation wealth, plus compensation received when slavery was abolished, was ploughed into a vast estate stretching from Bangor on the north Wales coast into Snowdonia.

That money bought fine art and furniture for the castle. But it also built houses and pubs, roads and railways, chapels and schools; it drained farmland and industrialised the family’s slate quarry near Bethesda, bringing jobs and prosperity but leaving a new legacy of bitterness.

The [Great Penrhyn Quarry Strike of 1900-3](#), called after the Pennant family rejected workers’ demands for better pay and conditions, became the longest-running industrial dispute in British history. Strike-breakers, known as *bradwyr* or traitors, were ostracised for years afterwards by their

neighbours; families were torn apart or driven away. Some local people still refuse to enter the castle, which was seen as symbolising oppression. Six years ago, the trust began devising a strategy to entice them back and introduce tourists to this richly complex story.

The Jamaica box was always part of the exhibition, which features local children's poems responding to objects found in the house. But the flowers arrived unexpectedly this summer via a young black academic named April-Louise Pennant, seeking answers about her family history.

Pennant remains a common surname in Jamaica, although, as Harding explains, it's unclear why. "Is it that after emancipation the British said, 'You need surnames' and the slaves were either given or picked the surnames of the people they worked for? Of course, another possibility is rape."

Pennant, a newly graduated PhD student whose research has focused on black feminist ideology and critical race theory, says going to the castle was both "a professional and a personal journey". Her grandparents came to Britain from Jamaica with the Windrush migration, and she remembers being told their name was Welsh in origin. But it wasn't until she moved to Wales recently, to work for the devolved government, that she made the connection with Penrhyn. Where once only one line of Pennants was represented in the dining room, now there are two. She laid the flowers because, to her, Penrhyn is a monument: "There would be no castle without slavery, there would be no quarry without slavery. I just thought that my ancestors had not been honoured."



A poem produced by a child for Penrhyn Castle's What a World! exhibition.  
Photograph: Joel Redman/The Guardian

The estate was given to the trust in lieu of inheritance tax in 1953, but the family retained some of the land, and visiting it evoked raw emotions that Pennant is still struggling to process. The trust promised that her card would remain displayed when the flowers died, but she wonders if that is enough. "I'd like to see more scrutiny of why these places were given to the National Trust and the fact that there's this huge reparations movement – it's not just about money, it's about justice. How is it that the slave owners got compensation whereas someone like myself didn't get anything, and we can't even get acknowledgment?" Several of her friends, she says, are now keen to trace their own roots; ultimately, she wants to know which part of Africa her own ancestors were taken from.

Most visitors have welcomed the exhibition, Harding says, and some have been deeply moved. But she estimates every castle volunteer has fielded at least one angry outburst. "We have people who are frustrated at the way the world is going and changes to the status quo, who are coming to Penrhyn, knowing what they're going to see and almost needing it as a place to vent their anger," she says. Others let rip anonymously on TripAdvisor, where "Shropshire Lad" from Shrewsbury complains of "an amazing building, gardens and history ruined by an unremitting display of wokeness", while

Alan M compares “the narrow (and oh so fashionable) angle taken to present a complex subject” to communist rewritings of history. Mike from Tonbridge rages: “Give us what we visited for and paid for – History!” But whose history, exactly?

Corinne Fowler, co-author of the colonialism and slavery report, first began collaborating with the trust five years ago on her [Colonial Countryside project](#), which saw children producing creative writing reflecting on properties linked to empire. She is evidently scarred by last September’s backlash, but agrees to answer questions by email. Her report argues that grand country houses are innately political, thanks to a 1711 law limiting House of Commons membership to men with a significant income from the land, which made estate ownership key to legislative power for more than a century. Have we had an overly cosy view of these properties in the past?

The old guard thinks if you don’t know the difference between the Stuarts and Tudors, you shouldn’t be there

“Country houses have become places where you go to switch off, walk your dog and admire designed landscapes,” Fowler says. “Nobody’s going to worry about learning familiar facts on their visit – that the house belonged to an MP.” But being confronted with history you didn’t learn at school can, she argues, feel threatening. “It’s not surprising it feels alien, because we know more about 1066, the Great Fire and steam engines than we know about four centuries of British colonial activity. But just because our education system didn’t really prepare us for this, that doesn’t mean that British history is under attack.”

Fowler anticipated some hostility towards her report but was nonetheless “shocked” by the press coverage and the ensuing waves of bile (one online comment below a newspaper article discussed how she should be murdered). What most angers her, however, is the charge that historians were stoking a culture war simply by discussing the evidence-based research that the National Trust exists in part to do.

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The charity was founded in 1895 by Octavia Hill, a Christian socialist who was evangelical about giving the urban working classes fresh air and green

space, working with two like-minded colleagues. “She used to walk children out of London into Epping Forest because she believed that if you gave them God’s nature, it would inject magic into their lives,” says Ivo Dawnay, the trust’s former director for London (and Boris Johnson’s brother-in-law), who tweeted this summer appealing for critics to stop treating it like a political football. “Alongside Hill, there was Hardwicke Rawnsley, a radical vicar in the Lake District who was fighting the railways – your Swampy type. The final one was Robert Hunter, a campaigner for common land.” Funded by wealthy establishment figures, their mission of acquiring land for free public access was nonetheless radical from the start, Dawnay argues: “I’m sure in 1895 there must have been a lot of people thinking it was outrageous.” Their first acquisition was four and a half acres of gorse-covered hillside at Dinas Oleu on the western Welsh coast, donated by a wealthy philanthropist friend of Hill’s named Fanny Talbot in hopes that it would go to “some society that will never vulgarise it, or prevent wild nature having its way”. The stately homes the trust is famous for, however, were a surprisingly late addition.



Visitors in the castle's dining room. Photograph: Joel Redman/The Guardian

After the first world war, the aristocracy found itself squeezed by high death duties and a dearth of estate workers, many of whom had been killed in the trenches. Historic estates risked being carved up or crumbling into ruins. “The fabric of the landscape was starting to break down,” says Liz Green,

the trust's lead curator in Wales. "You read about this in novels all the time: the young heir comes along, has to flog the family silver off and break apart these great estates." The solution was the National Trust Act of 1937, allowing estates to be given to the Treasury in lieu of inheritance tax and held by the trust on behalf of the nation in perpetuity. (The trust occupies an unusual position, independent of government but answerable to the nation; technically it doesn't "own" its assets, but cares for them on Britain's behalf.) What followed was effectively nationalisation on a scale of which socialists might only dream, albeit in exchange for some hefty tax avoidance, leaving the trust with a new coalition of members: some who joined to walk the land, others interested in "worshipping the aristocracy, or in pictures and furniture and china", as Dawnay puts it.

By the 1960s, that coalition was cracking, with complaints that the trust was becoming a cosy club for the gentry. It was saved by a unifying campaign to rescue the English and Welsh coastline from developers, reflected in the 775 miles of coastal path it owns today, which was so popular that membership soared from about 50,000 in 1960 to a million by 1981. Yet efforts in recent years to broaden the membership have strained that coalition once more.

"You go into properties now and it tells you the difference between the Stuarts and the Tudors. The old guard thinks everyone should know the difference, and if they don't they shouldn't be there," Dawnay says. "It's a small proportion of members, but they have undue influence because they have access to the columnists of the Telegraph and Times and Spectator."

Restore Trust is certainly well-connected for a small protest group, enjoying extensive media coverage for its claims to have attracted thousands of supporters or forced [the resignation of the trust's long-serving chair Tim Parker](#) this summer. (The trust insists Parker's departure was planned, and that Restore Trust demanded he quit the day after stakeholders were confidentially told he would be leaving.) It is backed by an unusually high-powered team, including PR executive Neil Bennett (an ex-journalist who worked at the Sunday Telegraph under Charles Moore's editorship) and the millionaire Tory donor Neil Record. Its slickly designed website is currently pumping out information on how National Trust members can vote at the AGM for a change in direction, either in person, online or by post.

When there's a mainstream media story, we will get abuse. There are culture warriors out there looking for these stories

After a fiery launch, Restore Trust has seemingly tempered its rhetoric. A spokesperson emails that its chief concern is a shift of power from expert curators to managers charged with boosting visitor numbers, leaving properties “peppered inside and out with signage in poor taste and lacking any coherent design, greatly detracting from the aesthetic impact”. Offending examples apparently include signs encouraging children to “pretend to be a bee and waggle along this path”. Worse still, she adds: “There are labels at Stourhead [a Wiltshire stately home], in one of the great libraries of England, on round tables in white gauze – no understanding of the grandeur of the house.” (Museum-style labelling is a surprisingly big bone of contention among members nostalgic for the days when the rooms of country houses were assumed to speak for themselves.) This rather esoteric crusade against dumbing down has, however, been amplified by a cruder rightwing backlash against social justice movements (or what the Common Sense Group calls “cultural Marxism”), plus a post-Brexit push for more “patriotic” history dwelling on past glories, not old wrongs. All three strands of opposition are converging on the AGM.

Stephen Green of the virulent rightwing pressure group Christian Voice – perhaps most notorious for speaking in defence of a Ugandan law threatening to impose the death penalty on HIV-positive gay men who had sex – is standing for election to the trust’s governing council on a pitch accusing the trust of becoming “obsessed with LGBT issues” and “woke virtue-signalling”. Green, who is endorsed by Restore Trust, has over the years opposed abortion, the criminalisation of marital rape, compulsory sex education in schools, performances of the musical Jerry Springer: The Opera (which he regarded as blasphemous) and above all the “sinful” practice of homosexuality. He particularly resents the trust’s outing of Robert Wyndham Ketton-Cremer, the owner of Felbrigg Hall in Norfolk until his death in 1969, as gay. “There’s absolutely no evidence that this quite unobtrusive man was some prototype Peter Tatchell, but because he was single and adopted a funny pose outside Felbrigg Hall, he had to be gay,” Green says indignantly. He doesn’t expect to win, he adds, but wants the trust “not to see itself as a vehicle for social change”.



‘There would be no castle without slavery’: Penrhyn’s original owners made their fortune from sugar plantations in Jamaica. Photograph: Joel Redman/The Guardian

Perhaps more typical of grassroots unease is Andrew Powles, chair of Wellingborough civic society, also standing for the council on a platform questioning the trust’s direction. A member for 40 years, he says he was saddened by the bitter divisions evident at last year’s AGM, held virtually due to Covid. “We all logged in and were left feeling: ‘Does it really have to be like this?’ When you see things on the chat box, some people saying, ‘I’m going to resign now’ – they won’t visit, they won’t go to the shop, they won’t have a cup of tea in the cafe, and all that stuff is so crucial.” Powles sees nothing wrong in saying an estate was built on slavery, although he thinks the right place for that information may be the website: “It shouldn’t necessarily spoil the enjoyment of the house.”

The Tory MP and former Foreign Office minister Andrew Murrison, who led a parliamentary debate on the trust last autumn, predicts “a great groundswell of members’ opinion” coming to a head at the AGM. A former naval surgeon whose Wiltshire constituency includes Stourhead – named in the colonialism and slavery report because its 18th-century owner inherited money made partly from trading shares in the South Sea company, which supplied slave labour to central and southern America – Murrison regards

the report as historically poor, underplaying Britain's role in abolition. "It's worthwhile just reflecting on where Britain actually was in the 19th century in relationship to slavery and the progress this country was able to achieve. None of that is really of particular interest to those behind this report and I think that's wrong, wherever you stand politically."

As trust properties have been either in lockdown or limiting visitors due to Covid since March 2020, it's impossible to be sure how all this has affected visitor numbers – although Marian Gwyn says a 2007 exhibition she staged on Penrhyn's connections to slavery boosted visitor numbers by 12.5%. There are, she argues, commercial as well as ethical reasons for telling stories new to visitors.

Membership fell from a pre-pandemic peak of nearly 6 million to [5.4 million by this spring](#), but began rising again as lockdown restrictions lifted. The trust's director of communications, Celia Richardson, says the numbers closely track whether properties were open to visitors or not (most members are recruited on a visit). The rate of existing members renewing their subscriptions fell by only 1%, while small donations trebled. "What characterises some of this culture war campaign is campaigners completely exaggerating the effect they're having. We're recruiting members at the moment every 25 seconds," says Richardson, who suspects most trust members aren't enormously interested in the row. "People don't join a conservation organisation to argue about political theory."



‘We’ve got to bring about change, even if that means going against the status quo’: farmer Holly Purdey. Photograph: Joel Redman/The Guardian

Yet the attacks on an institution she calls “about as Marxist as a cream tea” take their toll. “When there’s a mainstream media story, we will see quite a lot of abuse starting to hit us via social media, via our call centres, direct threats coming into the director general’s inbox. There are culture warriors out there looking for these stories,” Richardson says. Recently she filed a formal complaint with the Spectator over a Charles Moore piece that quoted an employee who allegedly claimed that “at interviews people are asked how they voted in the Brexit referendum, and rejected out of hand if they voted to leave”. (The Spectator’s editor, Fraser Nelson, declined to comment for this article beyond noting that: “Charles is a pretty well established journalist and biographer with a track record that speaks for itself.”) Some of the social media abuse seems to come from bots or from overseas, Richardson says. But she worries about the chilling effect on other charities and cultural institutions, anxious to avoid similar attacks.

At her lowest point, Hilary McGrady admits she considered leaving. “There were lots of days when I thought, ‘Why am I putting myself through this? Would it be better for the trust, would it make life easier if I was to go?’” Yet she has, she says, emerged more convinced than ever that the charity should

hold true to its beliefs and purpose. Work on slavery and colonialism will continue, but it's only a "tiny part" of what the trust actually does.

The single biggest issue preoccupying her is the trust's role, as a major landowner across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, in tackling the climate crisis. "We need to be active on our land, working to try to save nature – this is really important right now, just as the survival of the country house was the thing to focus on in the postwar period." Once again, that means moving with changing times.

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From the top of Holly Purdey's Exmoor farm, you can see right across the valley – a lush patchwork of forest, moor and meadow, beneath a cornflower-blue sky. But Ben Eardley, riverlands project manager here on the vast trust-owned estate at Holnicote, isn't here to show off the view. We are, instead, gathered expectantly around a cowpat.

"Look at the holes!" Eardley says, pointing at the dung. And soon, a tiny black beetle crawls out. You rarely see holes on cowpats now, he explains, because they're made by dung beetles to whom cattle-worming drugs can be lethal, even once excreted. But Purdey is a rewilding enthusiast, seeking to take her land back to a more natural state, and her cows aren't chemically wormed. That makes their dung safe for the beetles, who in return break it down, fertilising the soil and improving the grass for the cows. "That cowpat is an amazing habitat. It's not as exciting as a wildflower, but it's really important," Eardley says.

When 33-year-old Purdey took over the tenancy of this trust-owned farm three years ago, she planted trees, rested exhausted pastures and used water management techniques to stop heavy rains from washing away topsoil. Now she calculates that her sheep, goat, cattle and chicken farm is finally carbon neutral, absorbing more carbon than it emits.



Ben Eardley, riverlands project manager at Holnicote. Photograph: Joel Redman/The Guardian

Purdey, who grew up on an organic farm on Exmoor, admits her methods initially met with some local scepticism. But she's determined to prove the changes can be economically viable, while reducing carbon emissions and building resilience to extreme weather. "Me and my husband just feel that we've got to bring about change, and if that means going against the status quo, then we've got to make that stand and showcase how we can do it while still producing food," she says.

Further down the valley, the trust has reintroduced the first pair of beavers to roam this land in hundreds of years. [Yogi and Grylls](#) have dammed the shallow streams flowing through their enclosure, creating a lake that teemed with tadpoles in spring and which Eardley hopes will create rich new wildlife habitats. The beavers (and now [their newborn kit Rashford](#)) complement a river management system aiming to get water spilling up over the land where it's safe to do so, reducing the flood risk downstream while creating a carbon-sequestering wetland home to dragonflies, birds, bats and insects.



A beaver on the Holnicote estate. Photograph: Joel Redman/The Guardian

Here, at least, the trust shares common ground with the government. The environment minister, Zac Goldsmith, is a rewilding enthusiast and Boris Johnson unexpectedly pledged in this month's party conference speech to "[build back beaver](#)" in British rivers. Reducing carbon emissions from farming, meanwhile, could help Britain meet its net zero targets.

Yet McGrady insists this focus on the land doesn't mean neglecting the houses; if anything, she sees exhume their hidden histories as a means of revival. "Time and time again I've spoken to visitors who said, 'I love this place, I haven't been in the house for quite a long time because nothing has changed, but I love the garden.' Actually what I want is to get more people *back* into the houses to really learn a bit more, so that every time they come there will be something different that will shine a light on a new bit of the collection."

In hindsight, McGrady admits she wouldn't have published the colonialism and slavery report while she was still busy managing the consequences of Covid, leaving little time to prepare stakeholders for what was coming. But she doesn't regret the work itself, rejecting suggestions that it was released under pressure from social justice campaigners. "I never did this piece of work to appease one community or annoy another. I genuinely did it because

I think it's a fascinating story – it adds more interest, more complexity, a depth of history that we haven't told before. Why is that not a *good* thing?"

What if it exposes the trust to demands for reparations, or repatriating colonial treasures currently in its collections? The shape of a fledgling British reparations movement is still emerging, although so far it has emphasised acknowledging and atoning for past injustices as much as money. McGrady can't yet say what it might mean for the trust, suggesting it would follow a national policy lead: "We would be absolutely falling in behind the people who are responsible for that, like the Arts Council or English Heritage." But relations with donor families remain a delicate subject. The two surviving Pennant heirs – one of whom still lives in north Wales, while the other is a poet living between the UK and Cyprus – have donated to charities in Jamaica, but a source with knowledge of the family says they have faced criticism over its past actions. "I know several families who have connections to slavery and have the same sort of paperwork the Pennants have, and no way will they share it because they've seen what's happened."

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**Saturday magazine**

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Photograph: GNM

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McGrady's Northern Irish upbringing has helped convince her that openness is crucial to reconciling conflict. "I understand the complexities of history and different people's perspective on history and why these are sensitive," she says. "But my attitude, partly *because* I come from Northern Ireland, is that I think we need to talk about it."

Over summer, there have been signs of the culture wars cooling. Oliver Dowden visited the trust-owned Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland and publicly praised its work there; ministers pointedly defended the RNLI after Nigel Farage criticised it for rescuing drowning refugees from the Channel. Does McGrady sense a change in the political weather?

"I'd certainly like to think the nation's being a bit kinder to itself," she says, noting the way England rallied behind its football team this summer despite

initial protests over players taking the knee. “What the England team did was bring a huge sense of celebration and pride to the nation. I thought it was amazing, and to undercut it with all this sort of nastiness was just such an own goal. I think the nation did realise: we’ve got something here that’s really valuable – why are we giving it a hard time? In a way I think that’s a little bit similar with the National Trust.” With a potentially turbulent AGM approaching, she professes herself “hopeful but not complacent”; the lesson she has drawn from the past year is that conflict is unlikely to go away, but that leaders can become more resilient in the face of attack.

A few days later, the charity’s official Twitter account posts a soothing picture of late-flowering roses and lavender, with the caption: “A stroll through a well-appointed garden is where you can find your calm.” But only, perhaps, after the storm.

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## **Desperately seeking Diana: can any actor get to the heart of the people's princess?**



Kristen Stewart as Diana, Princess of Wales in Pablo Larraín's Spencer.  
Photograph: Pablo Larraín



[Hadley Freeman](#)

[@HadleyFreeman](#)

Sat 16 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

The first imitation I ever saw of [Diana, Princess of Wales](#) was in my bedroom when I was five. It was a Diana Bride doll, ordered by my mother from a catalogue, although with her rictus smile and huge helmet of hair she looked more like Nancy Reagan. The details didn't matter: she had the vague outlines of princess – big glittery jewels, big glittery eyes – so I could project whatever I wanted on to her, and I did; I played with her so much I snapped off her right foot.

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This is a true story, but if the metaphor within it feels too heavy-handed, then I would advise you to keep clear of the many films and TV shows about Diana, none of which shy away from the obvious metaphorical nudge and shove. In his eulogy for his sister at her funeral in 1997, Earl Spencer described her as “the most hunted person of the modern age”. Screenwriters since have taken that description and run pell-mell with it: in the [last season of The Crown](#), she was a beautiful stag; in Spencer – the [new film by Pablo Larraín](#), starring Kristen Stewart as Diana – she is a pheasant, “beautiful but not very bright”, as she sighs sadly. Both the stag and pheasant are, of course, hunted by the evil Windsors, because that has been the narrative around Diana ever since her death, even though not even the Daily Express still believes they actually killed her.

Ever since the Windsors saw in young Diana Spencer the vague outlines of a princess, the world has projected on to her whatever it wanted. An unworldly and barely educated Sloane who was married off at 20, she offered a conveniently blank canvas in her lifetime and even more of one afterwards. Was she a saint or a manipulator, a schemer or an airhead? Does the story of Diana tell us something about the royals? [Women](#)? Celebrity? Britain? Pick and choose, folks!

Back in the 80s, when Diana first became a public figure, that other great no-surname-necessary female celebrity, Madonna, was explicitly comparing herself to Marilyn Monroe, but she always had too much personality, confidence and autonomy to fill that role credibly. As Elton John realised when he quickly repurposed his song Candle in the Wind for her funeral, Diana was the real Monroe of the second half of the 20th century: photographed so frequently she seemed more like an image than a person, and she learned to exploit her own appearance as much as the media did. Then suddenly, that perennial little girl lost was lost for good, in a plot twist even her step-grandmother, Barbara Cartland, would have rejected as too OTT. Like Monroe, Diana was only 36 when she died.

Genevieve O'Reilly has a tough job here, conveying a brilliant, selfless saint who just happens to be spending the summer on a yacht

That quality of vagueness around Diana makes her a tempting subject for a certain kind of film-maker, but it also makes her impossible for an actor to capture. I am a great fan of camp absurdity, so years before Naomi Watts simpered her way through the [widely panned 2013 film Diana](#), I watched the 2007 US television movie, Diana: Last Days of a Princess. Now, Diana: Last Days of a Princess requires several leaps of belief, not least of which is its entire plot, predicated on the idea that Diana and Dodi Fayed was the great love affair of the 20th century.

Patrick Baladi – best known as Neil from [The Office](#) – is, even less credibly, cast as Fayed, presumably in an attempt to make the never wildly appealing Dodi somewhat sympathetic. Yet it is Genevieve O'Reilly who really has the tough job here, having to thread the needle of conveying a brilliant, selfless, caring saint who just happens to be spending the summer on the Fayed

yacht. Screenwriters love to talk about how much they like to write “complicated women”, by which they mean a female character who sometimes gets a bit cross and maybe doesn’t always have blow-dried hair. They don’t mean a woman who is caring *and* manipulative, kind *and* shallow. Such women – as the Windsors discovered to their eternal misfortune – are just too much for some to handle.



Josh O’Connor as Charles and Emma Corrin as Diana in The Crown.  
Photograph: Des Willie/AP

Diana’s blankness means film-makers can do what they like with her life, so in the past 12 months, it has been rendered as a musical (Netflix’s [Diana: The Musical](#), starring Jeanna de Waal), a gothic fable (*Spencer*) and a traditional biopic (*The Crown*, whose most recent series starred Emma Corrin as a younger Diana, with [Elizabeth Debicki](#) taking over for next year’s fifth outing). I haven’t seen Debicki’s portrayal yet, but it is to Corrin’s enormous credit that her naturalistic portrayal of Diana in the previous series never seemed ridiculous. Because, really, the further we get from Diana, the more tragically ridiculous her life seems. How else to tell the story of this young girl dragooned into an absurd family, which is then almost undone by her, other than as camp or horror? Never has *The Crown*’s slow-paced, minutely detailed format seemed more fortuitous than in its telling of Diana; whereas the Queen doesn’t change, really, from her teenage

years to grandmotherhood, Diana's shift from childlike virgin to vengeful shagger of the Hurlingham Club makes a lot more sense in a story that doesn't try to capture her life in 90 minutes.

How can anyone make a musical about Diana and not include a song in which the future king is recorded wishing he was a tampon?

But *The Crown* fudges the truth in suggesting that Diana was bewildered by life in the palace, because, really, she was a normal person, as proved by her fondness for Duran Duran. So we are encouraged to imagine how we, fellow normal people, would have felt if we were living in Buckingham Palace and assume that's how she felt, too. Of course, it is precisely because Diana, the daughter of an earl, was nothing like any of us that she was deemed suitable to marry Prince Charles. The one part of royal life that would have been unfamiliar to her was celebrity, and that was the one part she liked. It is fair to suggest, as *The Crown* does, that Diana needed love from the crowds because Charles denied her any; it's equally fair to suspect that Diana also just really liked attention. But the latter doesn't fit within the perennial good (Diana) v bad (the royals) narratives around this saga.

These black-and-white outlines make Diana's life more suited to a musical, so *Diana: The Musical* is something of a heartbreakingly missed opportunity. Unlike apparently everyone else, I rather enjoyed its doggerel lyrics ("Darling I'm holding our son / So let me say jolly well done!") because, let's be honest, Diana was always more of an Andrew Lloyd Webber girl than a Stephen Sondheim devotee, so the form suits the subject. But as both *The Crown* and *Spencer* take pains to emphasise, her favourite musical was *The Phantom of the Opera*, and *Diana: The Musical* desperately needs some of that show's camp and schlock. Instead, it is a weirdly straight faced, adoring show about a princess. Even the royals are treated with far more moderation than they deserve, with Charles coming across more like Hugh Grant than the cold-hearted manchild he seems to be. Seriously, how can anyone make a musical about Diana and not include a song in which the future king is recorded wishing he was a tampon?

Spencer has a lot going for it: it looks great and the premise is amusing, with Diana as a kind of Mrs Rochester figure being driven mad by her cold husband (Jack Farthing) and a cruel servant (Timothy Spall, nostrils constantly flared). For some reason, Stewart plays Diana as if she were permanently being interviewed by Martin Bashir, all furtive meaningful side-glances and pointed muttered asides. After two hours of this, she comes across as not so much mad as peevish.

It doesn't help that she is constantly moaning to the servants about how hard done by she is, while they dress her, cook for her and clean for her. Not even the omnipresent menacing music by Jonny Greenwood can make being summoned for dinner seem quite as abusive as we're apparently meant to find it. Check your privilege, Lady Di! Maybe it's because Prince Harry has spent the past two years going on about his miserable life while still enjoying all the privileges that life has to offer, but the whole gilded cage shtick feels a lot less interesting than the prison that was, clearly, Diana and Charles's actual marriage.

The story of Diana is now so well known it is verging on legend, and legends are only worth retelling if there is something new to say that has the unmistakable feel of truth. The Crown, with its judiciously loose approach to history, has, improbably, found plenty to say about this overtold story; Diana: The Musical has nothing to say beyond that someone called Diana once married a prince (not news). The one moment when Spencer really sang for me is – semi-spoiler – the scene in which Diana introduces her children to the joys of Mike and the Mechanics. It's fun, it's silly, it's sweet, it's shallow, it's irresistible. It's Diana.

*Spencer* is in cinemas from 5 November.

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- US Millions of vaccine doses thrown out as world goes wanting
- New Zealand The country's weird and wonderful vaccine rollout
- UK residents abroad Shock at lack of mask wearing in Britain

## Coronavirus

# **Coronavirus live news – as it happened: UK reports 43,423 new Covid cases; tens of thousands of antifascists and trade unionists rally in Rome**

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## Coronavirus

# US throws out millions of doses of Covid vaccine as world goes wanting



One study based on CDC data found 15m vaccine doses were wasted in the US between March and September. Photograph: Nathan Posner/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Melody Schreiber](#)*

Sat 16 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

The United States is wasting millions of Covid-19 vaccine doses even as shortages plague many parts of the world.

At least [15m doses](#) were scrapped in the US between March and September, according to one analysis of CDC data. A separate investigation found [1m doses](#) were discarded in 10 states between December and July.

States continue tossing unused shots. Louisiana has thrown out [224,000 unused doses](#) of the Covid vaccines – a rate that has almost tripled since the end of July, even as a deadly fourth wave of the virus gripped the state. Some of the lost doses came from opening and not finishing vials, but more than 20,000 shots simply expired.

Thousands of doses are reportedly wasted [each day](#) in Wisconsin. In Alabama, more than [65,000 doses](#) have been tossed; in Tennessee, it's [almost 200,000](#).

The wasted doses represent a small fraction of the number of shots administered in these states – in Louisiana, for instance, 4.4m doses have been given out successfully.

But the news comes as millions of people around the world wait for their first doses. Only 1% of the populations of low-income countries had [received first shots](#) as of July, compared with more than half of those living in a handful of high-income countries.

Many of the discarded doses came from pharmacies. In May, two pharmacy chains had wasted more doses than US states, territories and federal agencies combined, for almost [three-quarters](#) of tossed doses. Now, at least 7.6m discarded doses come from [four major pharmacies](#): Walgreens, CVS, Walmart and Rite Aid.

There are multiple reasons why doses have been wasted: sometimes a vial is cracked or doesn't contain as many doses as promised; sometimes needles malfunction; freezers break down or the power goes out. Frequently, people don't show up for appointments, and the dose set aside for them in a vial isn't used.

But as vaccinations across the country have stalled after peaking in mid-April, a growing issue is simply that the vaccines are expiring amid vaccine hesitancy in the US that is more widespread than first imagined.

Before June, a little over 2m doses had gone to waste, NBC News [reported](#). But over the summer, those figures surged – alongside the virus itself – sixfold as doses expired and vaccinations flagged.

The Biden administration has pushed to use the US vaccine stockpile for boosters, sometimes clashing with scientific agencies on who needs the added protection of an additional shot.

Officials are also working with vaccine manufacturers to reduce the number of doses in each vial.

In the face of global inequities, it's not as simple as states donating unused vaccines. The doses already distributed to states can't be repurposed internationally because of bureaucratic and safety concerns around storing the vaccines correctly.

Joe Biden has vowed to vaccinate 70% of the world in the next year, and has committed to donate several million doses for use abroad. But in the meantime, many countries are struggling to provide shots to the most vulnerable and those working on the frontlines of the pandemic, while Americans refuse the immunizations.

Manufacturers should also scale up production to address global shortages, the administration has said. Moderna, for instance, needs to "step up as a company" when it comes to global production of vaccines, David Kessler, the Biden administration's chief science officer of the Covid-19 response, said on Wednesday.

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## New Zealand's weird and wonderful vaccine rollout



A member of the public speaks to a volunteer after being vaccinated in Auckland, New Zealand. Photograph: Hannah Peters/Getty Images

*Tess McClure in Christchurch  
@tessairini*

Fri 15 Oct 2021 14.00 EDT

You can do it in the cabin of a Dreamliner plane. You can do it at a race track. You can even do it in a fast food drive-through queue.

New Zealand's government is employing a host of increasingly weird and wonderful strategies, gimmicks and sweeteners in a bid to get the last 20% of its eligible population inoculated against Covid-19.

As its daily Covid case numbers rise and large parts of the country are locked down, the government is in a race against time, trying to push vaccination rates high enough to interrupt the spread of the virus and prevent a large-scale outbreak.

The national airline, Air New Zealand, announced this week it would be converting a 787 Dreamliner into a novel vaccination clinic, complete with the traditional snack service and option of in-flight entertainment during the 30-minute post-vaccine observation period.

“People will board through the front door into business premier [class], where they will receive one dose of the Pfizer vaccine in their arm of choice,” the airline said in a statement. “They will then move through the cabin into economy, where a snack service will commence. While they wait to disembark after the observation period, Kiwis will be able to enjoy the in-flight entertainment.”



Residents await Covid jabs from a vaccination bus in Auckland. Photograph: Fiona Goodall/Getty Images

A spokesperson for Air New Zealand confirmed to the *Guardian* that those being vaccinated would be supplied with the airline's traditional in-flight snacks – a biscuit, packet of corn chips or ice-cream – and would be required to wear a mask and socially distance while aboard.

The chief medical officer, Dr Andrew Connolly, said on Thursday: “For people to get vaccinated, it’s going to be: do they believe it in their hearts, do they believe it in their minds?”

## The power of chicken

The key to winning those hearts and minds, a startlingly high number of health providers have decided, is chicken. At a Papatoetoe supermarket, punters were promised they would walk away with a hot roast chicken for every shot. Elsewhere, it was a family-size bucket of KFC for those peckish after a lunchtime inoculation, or across the country, the offer of a boxful of “popcorn chicken” nuggets.

So deep runs New Zealanders' apparent love of fast food that the government has been in talks to send vaccination buses to offer shots at drive-through takeout queues. [In Hamilton, McDonald's customers could get a one-day special](#): a shot of Pfizer alongside their burger combo. In Christchurch, prospective vaccinees would be offered fish and chips from food trucks. Other locations provided king-size blocks of chocolate, supermarket vouchers or gelato.

Several vaccine clinics are also offering low sensory rooms, to make the experience a better one for those with autism, intellectual disabilities or sensory processing disorders. [One Petone clinic hung green cocoons from the ceiling](#), and added squares of astroturf and faux fur to the walls to create a more gentle, quiet and tactile environment for clients who might otherwise get overwhelmed.

In Aotearoa's farthest-flung places, Department of Conservation park rangers offered their services. The rangers typically devote their days to pest control and species management for native flora and fauna and have a network that stretches across the country's most inaccessible regions. A department spokesperson said the rangers would use their fleet of off-road vehicles to transport people to vaccination hubs, with operations in the areas surrounding Te Kuiti and Taranaki, and were standing by to see if their assistance would be needed in other, more remote locations. Where it wasn't, the rangers would be put to work manning sausage sizzles and baking cakes.



A van for transporting people to a drive-through Covid vaccination hub in Hastings. Photograph: Kerry Marshall/Getty Images

It's not clear whether these kinds of incentives are enough to push the vaccine-hesitant over the line. [Surveying by the University of Melbourne](#) found only between 12% and 16% of Australians aged 18 to 49 who were previously unwilling or unsure about a vaccine would be swayed by a cash bonus. But the strategy may prove more effective for those who simply haven't gotten around to it yet – and in a New Zealand context, every percentage point counts. As of Thursday, 81% of eligible New Zealanders – those aged 12 and over – had received at least one dose of the vaccine, while 59% were fully vaccinated.

More broadly, the initiatives are part of a wider push to give a communal, party atmosphere to the vaccination process – and perhaps avoid the grim politicisation it has undergone overseas. The authorities have come up with “Super Saturday” events focused on people proving harder to reach with vaccination drives, particularly Māori and Pasifika young people. This weekend, large-scale vaccination events will run into the night. The city of Nelson organised one vaccination event at the local speedway racetrack, with free speedway tickets. The Pasifika Youth Vax Fest in Porirua east promised live music and DJs.

The government has also launched a daylong “Vaxathon” modelled on the old-fashioned telethons of previous decades – and will live-broadcast the vaccination rates of regions to foster “healthy competition”, said the prime minister, Jacinda Ardern.

“New Zealand has been world-leading on keeping down our case numbers, hospitalisations and deaths,” she said on Wednesday. “I believe we can be world-leading on vaccines too.”

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## Coronavirus

# Why are Britons so much more relaxed about Covid than Europeans?



Jimmy believes the UK should follow France's example and bring in tighter restrictions. Photograph: Jimmy/Guardian Community

*[Rachel Obordo](#) and [Alfie Packham](#)*

Fri 15 Oct 2021 11.51 EDT

Compared with some other countries, along with high numbers of Covid cases and deaths, the UK has relatively relaxed Covid restrictions, with no mandatory vaccine passports, no social distancing measures, and no mask mandate in England.

Four people from the UK and in [Europe](#) share their views on the country's approach to Covid restrictions compared with others they are visiting or living in.

## **‘British people seem to think it won’t happen to them’**

Liz, 60, who is in [Turkey](#), said people there are “excellent at wearing masks”, which makes her “feel safer” than in the UK. “I was on the Metro in Newcastle before I left and I was a nervous wreck because people weren’t wearing them,” she said.

Liz, who is retired and lives in the north-east of England and is in Turkey to help look after an ill friend, said people wear masks nearly all the time indoors and around 50% do so outdoors.

“A lot of the older generations here live with their families so I think people are more aware of not taking germs home to their parents and grandparents.”

She feels a lot of the complacency in the UK “comes from the example set by the government” and that the message given to the public is “not clear and consistent”.

“I get the impression that the government policy is deliberate and is about herd immunity. I also think it’s partly cultural. British people seem to think, ‘It won’t happen to me, we know best,’ like they’re invincible. Sadly, I think it’s been proven to not be the case.”

## **‘The difference in attitudes in France was immediately apparent’**

When Jimmy, 40, a video producer from Leeds, spent four days watching the Paris Roubaix cycling race in [France](#) earlier this month, the difference in people’s attitudes to Covid from those in the UK was “immediately apparent”, he said.

“When you go to a bar or restaurant, you have to show your vaccine pass and you wear a mask,” said Jimmy. “In the UK, everything is just a free-for-all. If restrictions here were a bit more strict, I think it would reduce the impact on us all.”

Jimmy believes the UK should follow France's example, with tighter restrictions in the short term. "I fear that if we carry on as we are, Covid will continue to disrupt our daily lives. I'm having to work extra hours this week as my colleagues are self-isolating.

"The UK government likes to think they're giving people a choice, and people are embracing this idea of free thinking. But I think there's nothing wrong with having some basic public health rules. It's not inhibiting people's freedom of thought, it's just sensible, isn't it?"

## **'There is no rejection of face masks in Spain'**



Lucía says she feels very restricted in where she can go in the UK because of the lack of mask wearing.

Lucía, who is in Zaragoza, [Spain](#), looking after her 90-year-old mother, said she feels the government has failed people in the UK. "I'm clinically extremely vulnerable and feel totally restricted in what I do and where I go because people don't consider it important to protect themselves and others," said the semi-retired 60-year-old.

Normally living in London, Lucía said she's in "no hurry" to return to the UK. "I haven't done it yet, but I was planning to see a film, and when I

looked at booking online, I saw that once you book your seat, the ones next to you get booked up too, so they're empty."

She feels there is "no rejection of face masks" in Spain and that they're seen as "protection, not an imposition". In contrast, she believes the image the UK government projects when they have meetings without face masks tells people they don't need to wear them. "From the beginning of the pandemic, I feel the government has given people a false idea of freedom instead of showing precautions as something positive."

## **'We have more restrictions, but I feel so much freer here'**



Nigel Ross says Italy has 'more restrictions, but I feel so much freer'.

In Milan, [Italy](#), Nigel I Ross, a university lecturer, said restrictions are still very much in place, with green passes needed to enter public buildings. From today, all employees will also need a pass to enter their workplaces.

"It's far from perfect, but it's going extremely well," said Ross, who is British and has lived in Italy for more than 30 years. "There are around 2,000 new cases a day, which is in part due to us having some of the strictest restrictions in Europe."

He believes that it's "the message from the top" that reflects the blasé approach to Covid in the UK. "My sister works in a school and with some family members extremely susceptible to infection, it's like living in semi-terror in some ways. It feels like people are dying unnecessarily, and it's no wonder Britain is seen as the sick man of Europe. I was there this summer for a couple of weeks and I really noticed the difference. It's a real contradiction because we have more restrictions, but I feel so much freer here."

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## Our green royals – saving the planet one helicopter ride at a time

[Marina Hyde](#)



‘The Prince of Wales revealed, somewhat alienatingly, that he’d had his Aston Martin converted to run on ‘surplus English white wine and whey from the cheese process’.’ Photograph: Chris Jackson/Getty Images

Fri 15 Oct 2021 09.19 EDT

I understand why they go out, “but it isn’t helpful to do it in a way that alienates people,” explained Prince Charles of Insulate Britain, in an interview this week in which he also revealed, somewhat alienatingly, that he’d had his Aston Martin converted to run on “surplus English white wine and whey from the cheese process”.

At long last, a line to eclipse Ed Begley Jr’s from an old episode of The Simpsons, in which the actor explains that his preferred vehicle is “a go-kart, powered by my own sense of self-satisfaction”. A deeply committed environmental activist, Begley has always been able to take the piss out of himself – a pastime you sense has never been top or even bottom of Prince Charles’s to-do list. Or, in fact, of the to-do list of the many, many servants who do for him in his many, many residences.

Still, 16 days out from Cop26, it seems to be House of Windsor week for making helpful interventions on climate. In terms of truly selfless good deeds, I’m holding out for Prince Andrew pledging never again to fly to America, or indeed to any US jurisdictions. When you consider the Duke of York once gas-guzzled his way to New York simply to see a paedo and tell him he couldn’t be buddies any more – hey, we’ve all done it – you get a sense of the meaningful lifestyle compromises this family is prepared to make in the course of causing ordinary subjects to explode at the Marie Antoinettishness of it all. Admittedly, these explosions are not at all good for the cause, but you can’t have everything.

Anyway, we’ve had Prince Charles’s interview on Monday, then a withering assessment from Prince William on the various billionaire space programmes on Thursday – and more on both of those shortly. Friday’s big news, however, is that the Queen has been overheard at the opening of the Welsh parliament yesterday, expressing frustration with the pace of concrete action on climate change. According to Her Maj, who is still in the dark about which world leaders are going to show up to next month’s big

conference in Glasgow, “It’s really irritating when they talk, but they don’t DO.”

Totally. The trouble is, even when politicians do manage to get climate action on the statute book, there will always be some people who think these sorts of rules don’t apply to them. Or to put it another way: is this the same Queen whose lawyers very recently lobbied the Scottish government in secret to change a draft law to [exempt her private estates](#) from a major carbon-cutting initiative ? Yes. Yes, it is the same Queen. As a result of this, the sovereign is the only landowner in the whole of Scotland who doesn’t have to facilitate renewable energy pipelines on her various estates in the country. Which feels, hand on heart, “really irritating”.

But back to Prince Charles, who never lets an interviewer forget that he has been banging the environmental drum for a long time now. As he put it in one self-effacing segment in his interview: “Extinction Rebellion came and did a sit-in on my driveway in Highgrove when I was on a tour … they left a letter saying … ‘Back in such a time you said such and such, you were right. Then you said something else, you were right. You were right, you were right.’ That was marvellous, that was the right kind of demonstration as far as I’m concerned.” Well, quite. Unfortunately, he couldn’t pass on his approval to XR in person because he was in the Caribbean, in a year in which the royal family’s travel-related [carbon footprint doubled](#).

Alas, self-righteousness is not a recessive gene in HRH’s somewhat limited pool, with both of his sons feeling uniquely placed to offer prescriptions for how we, meaning others, might live better. Thus [Prince William](#) could be found this week chiding the billionaire space race currently occupying the likes of Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson. According to William, “We need some of the world’s greatest brains and minds fixed on trying to repair this planet, not trying to find the next place to go and live … [It] really is quite crucial to be focusing on this [planet] rather than giving up and heading out into space to try and think of solutions for the future.”

If indeed that is solely what the different individuals are up to. We can’t speak for the ludicrous Branson, of course, though given he was one of William and Kate’s wedding guests he could presumably be reached more directly for berating by William. But various space experts have been on

hand since the latter's interview to explain that Musk's ventures in particular offer hope for climate-saving advances, and suggesting that the prince is perhaps under-read on the subject. As indicated in [this column before](#), I have a lot of sympathy for critiques of billionaire dick-waving via the space race, but maybe both I and William have to concede that as an intellectual point, questioning the fact that any of it is happening at all ranks alongside inquiries such as, "Why is there homelessness yet some people have multiple palaces?"

Spared such philosophical puzzles, Prince William had time to push the "fundamental question" of the carbon cost of space flights. An interesting point, and not limited to space flights. As it happens, I live very near the London spot from which many royal helicopters take off for the various visits/weekend-trips to other estates, and on those days often wonder whether it would sound slightly less like a Vietnam movie if fewer choppers were regarded as essential. As one of the boarders of, and alighters from, these flights, perhaps William could shed greater light?

Then again, maybe none of it matters if your papa has offset by planting [Prince George's Wood](#), as Charles has at one or other of the Scotland estates. Much nicer than a horrid renewable energy pipeline, of course, and presumably a scalable solution for all Scottish citizens.

As for things Charles and other family members might contemplate while walking through this private arboretum, are suggestions permitted? If so – and I appreciate this is a far-out theory – I do wonder whether, in all the years of bemusement that people weren't listening to him, Charles ever considered the possibility that the problem might not be so much with the message, as with the messenger.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist
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## After David Amess's death, MPs will feel the cold shiver of vulnerability

[Rafael Behr](#)



David Amess at Old Leigh regatta, Leigh on Sea, September 2019.  
Photograph: Penelope Barritt/REX/Shutterstock

Fri 15 Oct 2021 13.19 EDT

One of the most common accusations to be levelled at MPs is that they are “out of touch”. It is sometimes true, but not as often as people may think. The charge is frequently a device to portray ideological difference as cultural alienation. We disagree with a politician’s opinions, and want that to indicate some moral detachment from the ordinary people they are elected to represent.

In reality, most MPs are more closely connected, more palpably in touch with the electorate than their many critics appreciate. David Amess was making contact with his constituents – physically present, personally attentive, intimately available – when [he was killed](#) in his Essex constituency on Friday afternoon.

Whatever the identity and motives of the killer – facts that will emerge in due course – the act is felt as an assault on democracy, as well as a cruel human tragedy. The MPs’ constituency surgery is one of the least examined institutions of British politics partly because so much of what happens there is confidential. Anyone who has had the privilege of sitting in on a session will know how intensely private and often harrowing the stories can be of vulnerable people, anxious, adrift in chaotic lives or hostages to dysfunctional bureaucracy, turning to their elected representative for advice – or sanctuary.

There are often time-wasters, too, cranks and vexatious complainants. But variety and unpredictability is a function of the open door. A wide spectrum of characters, opinions and temperaments are found in every constituency, and each is entitled to be heard. But the MP is entitled to hear them without fear of violence. Democracy shrinks when every new figure in the doorway might cast a murderous shadow.

In 2010, Stephen Timms, Labour MP for East Ham, [survived a knife attack](#) in his constituency office. Once recovered from life-threatening injuries, he

went straight back to holding face-to-face constituency surgeries, considering it an essential fulfilment of the duty to which he was elected.

In June 2016, [Jo Cox](#) was shot and stabbed outside the library she was due to visit in her West Yorkshire constituency. She had been an MP for less than a year, which was long enough to make one of the most memorable interventions in the House of Commons for a generation. It was her maiden speech, celebrating the social and cultural diversity of the area she represented. The peroration became her epitaph: “What surprises me, time and time again, as I travel around the constituency is that we are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us.”

It is a radiant truth too often submerged in the brackish foam of partisan rage. The shine on Cox’s words needs regular protection from the tarnish of corrosive cynicism. That which divides us has a nasty habit of shouting over the top of what we have in common.

MPs from all factions in all parties will be united in shock and grief at the death of David Amess. They will also feel the cold shiver of vulnerability, since many of them will have received abuse and threats online and in person. And it is not just the MPs who are affected. Their families and staff are targeted. Many will have installed extra security precautions, not just in their constituency offices but in their homes, on the advice of police, when the threats are deemed to be not idle. Most will have been accosted at some point in the street, in the supermarket, at a local fete, and been told of their worthlessness, of their greed and corruption, of their complicity in all manner of foul policies and far-fetched conspiracies.

MPs will have borne those verbal assaults with dignity and patience because it is part of the job. Or, rather, it has become part of the job and no one has yet worked out a way to restore boundaries of basic civility. If it is a choice between security and accessibility, British politicians have collectively stuck with the latter, which is the courageous path, but it is not a dilemma that they should face in a civilised democracy.

For all the ferocity of a hyper-partisan political culture and the febrile, intemperate mood that seems to have become the permanent condition of Westminster, an immutable quality of parliament is its purpose as a house of

representation. It may seem culturally remote, even out-of-touch. But an MP was killed today, in the act of getting in touch. David Amess was making the human connection between the institutions of democracy and the people who are represented there. On a day like this, we forget them-and-us. We are reminded: they *are* us.

- Rafael Behr is a Guardian columnist
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[The Secret Negotiator](#)[Cop26](#)

## **The fight against climate change goes beyond reducing CO2 emissions**

[The Secret Negotiator](#)



Cows are one of the biggest producers of methane, but also have huge economic and cultural value in many countries. Photograph: Robin Utrecht/Rex/Shutterstock

Sat 16 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

While global climate efforts have tended to focus on the fight against carbon dioxide, many other threats that attract less attention are just as dangerous to our planet.

Negotiations over these more granular issues take place away from the limelight. But the policies and agreements that emerge are some of the most vital steps in the fight against climate change.

Over the past few weeks, one of these issues our team has focused on has been methane reduction. [Methane](#), one of the most prevalent greenhouse gases, has accounted for nearly a third of global heating since the pre-industrial era. Yet efforts to combat it have been half-hearted.

On Monday, my country chose to join the fight to reverse this trend. We became one of 24 new signatories to the [Global Methane Pledge](#), initiated by the US this year. The pledge, which is outside the traditional UN framework on climate change negotiations, committed its signatories to a 30% cut in methane emissions by the end of this decade.

Methane is up to 80 times more powerful than carbon dioxide, though it breaks down faster. [Making urgent and drastic cuts](#) will therefore have an immediate impact on reducing global temperatures.

Among the negotiating teams of climate vulnerable countries such as mine, however, scepticism is still rife. While the goals of the pledge are admirable, actions are needed to convince those of us most at risk that these efforts will pay dividends.

The international community has a recent history of lagging behind on some of its most celebrated pledges. The \$100bn annual target for climate finance for poor countries, for instance, from 10 Cops ago, has [still not been reached](#). Progress on the Paris agreement's key commitments is mostly lagging around the world.

The only way forward is for the developed world to take immediate action and lead by example. The developing world is more than willing to commit to action, but it is a significant challenge. In our country, as in many others, methane is the principal source of emissions. Cows, which produce methane, have enormous economic and cultural value to many of our nations. Furthermore, rapid urbanisation results in huge increases in waste production, which also releases methane.

The only way forward is for the developed world to take the lead, share technology, and provide financial assistance. Then we can decouple economic development from methane, and strive towards a cleaner future. While there are barriers to cutting emissions in the developing world, we are

more than willing to work with our international partners to overcome them. The security of our people is at risk, after all.

While the past week has demonstrated the potential of international collaboration to produce positive outcomes, there is far more to be done. For one, only 33 countries have signed on to this pledge. Major emitters – including China, India and Russia, which are among the top methane emitters – cannot shy away. For another, not enough financial support has been pledged to achieve the targets.

The negotiations around the methane pledge have been similar to the overall negotiation process. The demands from the climate vulnerable ring out as clear as ever: urgent action, global collaboration, and increased financial support are the only routes to a stable future. As [Cop26](#) looms, these demands must be heard, understood, and acted upon by the developed world.

- *Every week we'll hear from negotiators from a developing country that is involved in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations and will be attending the Cop26 climate conference.*
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## UK news

# After two killings in five years, we must get serious about MPs' security

[Chris Bryant](#)



Flowers near the scene of the stabbing of David Amess in Leigh-on-Sea.  
Photograph: Andrew Couldridge/Reuters

Fri 15 Oct 2021 12.41 EDT

I'm in shock. So is every MP. It feels like Jo Cox's murder was only moments ago. Many of us cried to see her sister Kim Leadbeater courageously take the seat Jo once held and make her maiden speech in front of Jo's commemorative shield last month.

Coming so soon after the untimely death of James Brokenshire, the stabbing of the unfailingly magnanimous and courteous Sir David Amess has left MPs of every party hue in tears. He was a character. There was always a

twinkle in his eye. He seemed never to bear a grudge. And his campaigns for Southend were legendary.

In truth, everything is not right in our body politic. We pride ourselves on being a safe country. We're not like America with its terrible murder rate, but two politicians have died simply doing their job in five years.

We MPs pride ourselves too on making ourselves available to our constituents. Anyone can turn up at our advice surgery, catch us in Morrisons, chat to us on the bus or the train, bend our ear in the rugby club or turn up in central lobby and ask to see us. It's in the nature of our constituency system that many constituents don't just know where our office is, they know where we live. That openness is absolutely central to our democracy and we must never surrender it.

But I've seen our political culture go terribly sour over 20 years. Social media act as a vortex of nastiness. Anonymity inflames intolerance. It's true that we politicians sometimes pour too much bile into the cauldron of politics too. So we need to do some real soul-searching. Let's think before we spit venom in each other's face. And please, please, please, let's end the anonymity on social media that somehow seems to grant people permission to write things online they would never dream of putting their name to or saying to another person's face.

But as I have been saying for many years, we also have to get serious about MPs' security away from the parliamentary estate. That starts with the police. My local police have always been great in dealing with threats of violence to me. But I know from colleagues that this is patchy. One office manager was laughed at only yesterday by his police inspector when he asked what support was available. Others dismiss concerns as trivial or pay mere lip service to MPs' security. That has to end. There needs to be a central set of standards governing all security concerns and much tighter coordination between police forces.

We MPs need to take our own security more seriously too. Mostly we shy away from insisting on security measures. We don't want special treatment. We know the pressures on the police. We let our guard down. But any other

workforce that had seen two killings in five years would rightly demand action.

So there must be a review of all MPs' security arrangements, both in Westminster and in the constituency. We may have to insist on surgeries by appointment only. Sensible measures maintained and regularly reviewed can protect that pearl of great price – democratically elected representatives that are easily but safely accessible. We don't want to live in fortresses. But I don't want to lose another colleague to a violent death.

- Chris Bryant is the Labour MP for Rhondda and has campaigned about the safety of MPs.
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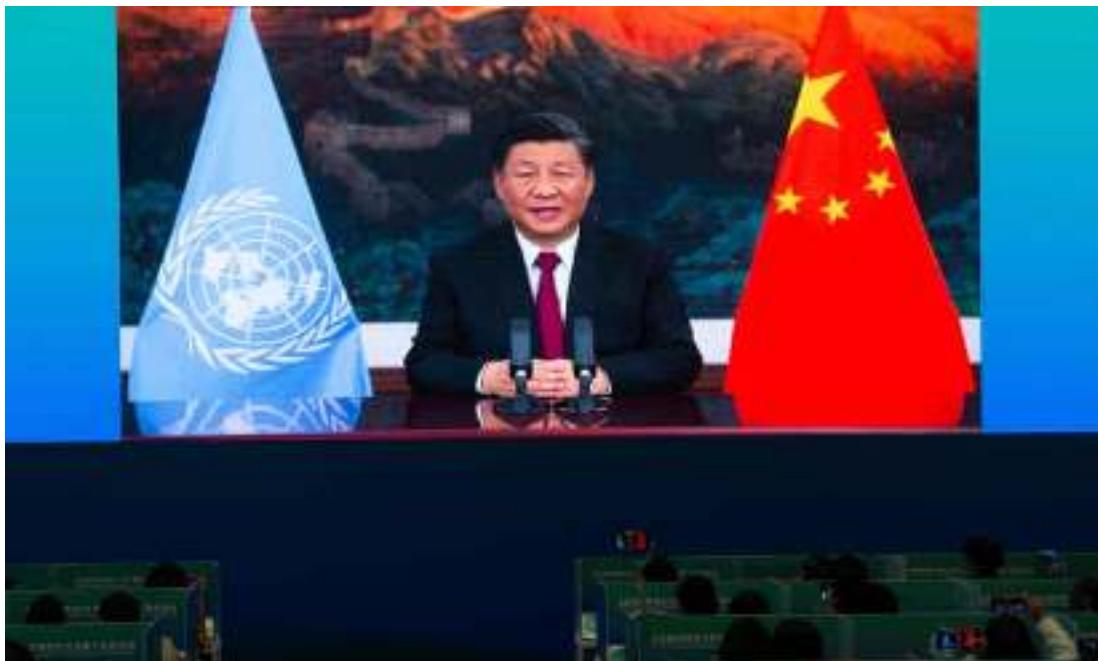
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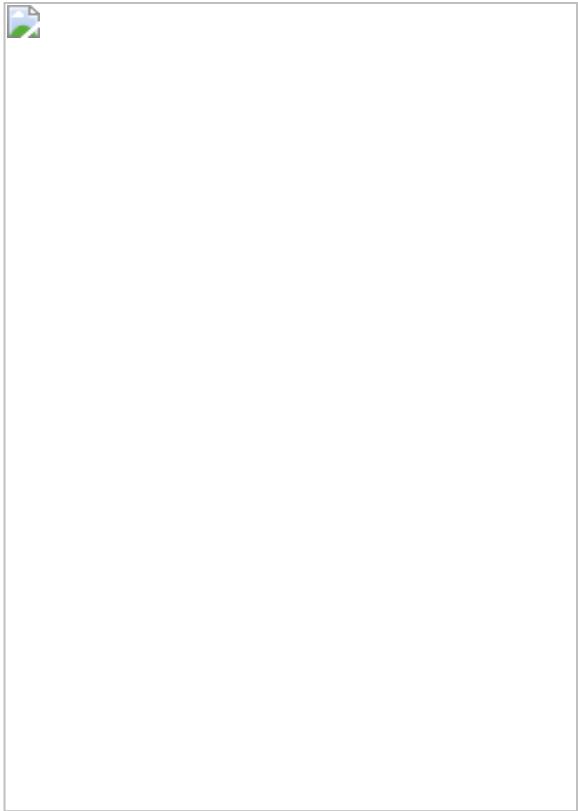
## The road to KunmingEnvironment

# ‘Ecological civilisation’: an empty slogan or will China act on the environment?



China's President Xi Jinping opens the UN biodiversity conference (Cop15) in Kunming. Ecological harmony is one principle of ‘Xi Jinping Thought’. Photograph: AFP/Getty

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## [About this content](#)

[Patrick Greenfield](#) and [Vincent Ni](#)

Sat 16 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

This week, China took charge of hosting a major UN environmental conference for the first time, at the opening of [Cop15 in Kunming](#). The world's biggest greenhouse gas emitter and largest consumer of natural resources might seem a strange choice to host talks to stop the destruction of ecosystems and mass extinctions of wildlife, but the conference marks a tipping point in China's development and an international debut for

“ecological civilisation”, a little-known phrase outside its borders with big implications for the planet.

Amid uncertainty around whether President Xi Jinping will attend critical climate talks at Cop26 in Glasgow, the environmental slogan is at the heart of a potential misunderstanding between China and the west. Some commentators have been quick to suggest that Xi’s reported absence is proof that China has reverted to type, an example of the world leaders that “talk but don’t do” who have [so irritated](#) the Queen. But others point out that Xi, who has not left China since last year – he did not attend the UN general assembly in New York – and did not even travel to Kunming for the Cop15 summit that China was hosting this week, has been clear about his guiding principles on the environment.

“We shall take the development of an ecological civilisation as our guide to coordinate the relationship between man and nature,” Xi said in his keynote speech at the largely ceremonial opening of Cop15 in the southern province of Yunnan on Tuesday, where he announced a \$233m (£170m) fund to protect biodiversity in developing countries. Governments are expected to reach a [Paris-style UN](#) agreement for nature during phase two of the summit next year by agreeing targets on reducing pollution, halting the spread of invasive species and increasing protected areas.



Residential tower blocks in Beijing. China's rapid economic growth in recent decades has come at a great cost to nature. Photograph: Greg Baker/AFP/Getty

Xi emphasised the importance of living within planetary boundaries and building a green, low-carbon circular economy while solving problems created by industrialisation. Russia's president, [Vladimir Putin](#), also alluded to an ecological civilisation in his remarks to delegates. Prince Charles has hinted at it too, paying tribute to the "intimate understanding of nature" that has underpinned Chinese civilisation for thousands of years.

But what does ecological civilisation mean for China and the world? Superficially, it is the slogan for Chinese efforts to embrace environmental sustainability and move on from four decades of rapid economic growth that have come at great cost to nature, say experts. Beijing's [2060 carbon-neutrality target](#), commitment to reach peak emissions by 2030 and decision to [end financing for coal-fired power stations](#) overseas are part of it, they add, but it also covers traditional medicine, the wildlife trade, hydropower dams and farming methods. Ecological civilisation is an axiom of "Xi Jinping Thought", the Chinese president's political ideology, now enshrined alongside Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory in the Chinese Communist party's constitution.



Books by Xi Jinping on sale at Cop15 this week. The president's policies now rank alongside Mao Zedong Thought within the Chinese Communist party. Photograph: AFP/Getty

"It started from 2017 when Xi Jinping inserted ecological civilisation into the party charter," says Dr Yu Jie, of the London-based [thinktank Chatham House](#). "It shows the huge significance of a policy revolving around environmental protection. Sustainable development is one of the key policy areas he is focusing on in his term. In the past few years, ecological civilisation has mostly been about words but very little deeds on the international stage. But I think the announcement from China about abolishing funding for coal-fired plants [abroad] is part of a change that is beginning to emerge."

The opening of the repeatedly delayed Cop15 has presented China with an opportunity to bring ecological civilisation to the world stage. Unlike the UN climate talks, the US is not a party to the [convention on biological diversity](#) and China can more easily set the agenda. A [declaration](#) backed by more than 100 environment ministers this week has Ecological Civilisation: Building a Shared Future for All Life on Earth emblazoned at the top, a sign that Beijing wants to make its mark on biodiversity and climate talks.

"Many western policy analysts believe that perhaps climate diplomacy will be one of the elements where the US and [China](#) could work together. But actually, I don't think so," Yu cautions. "China will play a much bigger role in international environmental governance. We will see a much stronger push from Beijing for their environmental agenda to be adopted by the rest of the world."

In China, ecological civilisation is marked by phrases with awkward English translations such as "green mountains are gold mountains and silver mountains", commonly cited by Xi, which is meant to highlight the importance of a healthy environment to economic development. In the past few years another phrase, "building a beautiful China", also popped up in Chinese state media, suggesting a top-level push in a similar direction.



Shennongjia, a world heritage site in Hubei province. ‘Green mountains are gold mountains and silver mountains,’ is a slogan Xi uses to highlight the environment’s importance in economic development. Photograph: Sipa Asia/Rex/Shutterstock

Since Xi first used the phrase, a flurry of documents have been issued by central government, and reforms have been introduced. On Tuesday, Beijing announced it would establish China’s first national parks. State media say that the protected land area covers 89,000 sq miles (230,000 sq km), and nearly 30% of the main terrestrial wildlife species identified in China.

Phrases that feature ecological civilisation are everywhere now in Chinese media, says [Ma Jun, a Beijing-based environmental campaigner](#) and a former investigative journalist. Ma’s writing on pollution helped spark an environmental awakening in China in the early 2000s. His book, [China’s Water Crisis](#) – published in China in 1999 and in the west in 2004 – detailed the suffering of communities caused by pollution, which had largely been accepted as the price of economic development.

He said: “Chinese people are getting increasingly more affluent and they want a safe and sound environment. We are entering a new phase in human development. For the Industrial Revolution, man gained all this power to conquer and transform nature. But this new civilisation means that we need

to try to live in harmony with nature. Mountains, rivers, forests, farmland, lakes, wetlands and grasslands: they are all part of a community. For an ecological civilisation, we must try to tackle the pollution of air, water and soil.”

As China grows richer, its citizens expect the environment they live in to be protected. It is also rewriting the social contract between the ruler and the ruled. Reports of water contamination and air pollution anger citizens, who then turn to social media to complain.



A residential block in Chengdu, Sichuan. Although environmentalism looms larger in Chinese policy, the country's coal and gas imports have surged.  
Photograph: AFP/Getty

But despite the prominence of the phrase in China, some suggest that ecological civilisation is a triumph of style over substance when it comes to the environment.

Experts say that the decisions China makes in the next decade will define the success of international agreements on the climate and nature. But amid a growing energy crisis, China coal and natural gas imports have surged. Nor, so far, has Beijing joined the growing movement of countries pledging to

protect 30% of land and sea by 2030 (the “30x30” initiative) led by France, Costa Rica and the UK, [which recently added India to its ranks](#).

It is a dilemma for China’s policymakers. But whatever the final definition of ecological civilisation, Xi has made it the core of Beijing’s action on the environment.

“Ecological civilisation represents the development trend of human civilisation,” he said, as he concluded his speech on Tuesday. “Let us join hands and follow the philosophy of ecological civilisation and shoulder our responsibility for future generations.”

*Find more [age of extinction coverage here](#), and follow biodiversity reporters [Phoebe Weston](#) and [Patrick Greenfield](#) on Twitter for all the latest news and features*

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**Bill Clinton**

## **Bill Clinton to remain in hospital as he recovers from urological infection**



The former US president Bill Clinton speaks in 2016 at the Democratic National Convention. Photograph: Robyn Beck/AFP/Getty Images

*Reuters*

Fri 15 Oct 2021 20.48 EDT

The former US president Bill Clinton's health is improving but he will remain in a California hospital for at least another night to receive antibiotics intravenously for a urological infection that spread to his bloodstream, his spokesperson said on Friday.

The 75-year-old Clinton, who served as president from 1993 to 2001, entered the University of [California](#), Irvine, medical center on Tuesday evening after suffering from fatigue. He spoke with Joe Biden on Friday.

Clinton's spokesperson Angel Ureña said that Clinton's white blood count has decreased, indicating his health is improving.

"All health indicators are trending in the right direction, including his white blood count which was decreased significantly," Ureña [said on Twitter](#). "In order to receive further IV antibiotics, he will remain in the hospital overnight."

Since his admission to the intensive care unit at the hospital, Clinton has received fluids along with antibiotics, his doctors said.



The University of California, Irvine, medical center in Orange, California.  
Photograph: Apu Gomes/AFP/Getty Images

His wife, a former secretary of state and 2016 Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, was at the hospital on Thursday and Friday, and the two read books and talked about politics, Ureña told Reuters.

It remained unclear when Clinton would be released.

Biden said Clinton would likely go home soon, though it was not clear whether he would be released on Saturday or later.

“He is getting out shortly. . . Whether that’s tomorrow or the next day, I don’t know,” Biden told reporters in Connecticut. “He’s doing fine. He really is.”

On Thursday, Ureña said Clinton was “up and about, joking and charming the hospital staff”.

Clinton has dealt with heart problems in the past, including a 2004 quadruple bypass surgery and a 2010 procedure to open a blocked artery.

The Democrat served two terms in the White House, overseeing strong economic growth while engaging in bruising political battles with congressional Republicans.

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## Paris attacks

# ‘There was blood everywhere’: UK and Irish survivors on 2015 Bataclan attack



A ceremony at the Bataclan venue marking the fifth anniversary of the terror attacks in Paris. Photograph: Benoît Tessier/Reuters

*[Angelique Chrisafis](#) in Paris*

*[@achrisafis](#)*

Fri 15 Oct 2021 14.44 EDT

British and Irish survivors of the 2015 terrorist attack on the Bataclan concert hall in [Paris](#) have told a court how they played dead on the ground in a river of blood to avoid being shot, or crawled across the floor between bodies as gunmen murdered concertgoers one by one.

English-speaking witnesses travelled to Paris on Friday to testify at France’s biggest ever criminal trial over [the attacks claimed by Islamic State on 13 November 2015](#), which killed 130 people and injured more than 400 in

synchronised suicide bombings and mass shootings across the French capital.

The [Paris attacks](#) began about 9pm on a Friday night when a suicide bomber blew himself up after failing to get into the Stade de France France-Germany football match. This was followed by drive-by shootings and suicide bombings at cafes and restaurants in Paris, and the attack at the Bataclan music venue during a rock gig by Eagles of Death Metal where 90 people were killed and scores suffered devastating injuries during a two-hour massacre.

Witnesses aged between their 30s and their 50s told how they had travelled to [France](#) by plane or Eurostar in 2015 for the “joyful” gig by the Eagles of Death Metal because they were fans or celebrating birthdays or romantic visits to France. They said they would never forget the people they saw die in front of them and they continued to bear physical and psychological scars six years later, but that terrorism and hatred “will never win”.

The [survivors told of the attack](#) that lasted for more than two hours as three young gunmen fired into the crowd, recharged and continued firing and then shot directly at people who were trying to flee. They described piles of bodies in a scene that resembled a war.

Mark Blackwell, an NHS worker, described how he had been bought the concert tickets for his 50th birthday and was standing near the stage with a group of friends. He heard the first shots and the lights went on – revealing the people who had already died.

“I thought that this would go extra bad for me if I was taken hostage, not being French, being a foreigner in the city, so I determined I had to get out, but then a body fell on my feet. This body was over both of my feet and my ankles. At first I started to panic then a voice in my head told me, ‘just stay calm’ ... I managed to move my feet out one foot at a time, and I could see ahead of me everyone else was already facing down on the floor, I don’t know how many were alive still, how many weren’t.”

He saw a blood-smeared path on the floor through bodies and decided to crawl very slowly to try to escape as bullets continued to fly past him. “The smell was horrible, that horrible mix of gunpowder and blood – so strong, you can almost taste it. It invaded the whole place. I started crawling because I thought if I run for it I won’t make it.”

Blackwell felt himself being hit by two bullets, one of which took “a piece of flesh out of my arm”.

At one point he looked up and saw one of the young gunmen across the room: “I could see his eyes, there was nothing in them, no humanity.”

He said: “I came to rest in front of a face a few centimetres away from mine, a girl’s face, I was looking right into her eyes, and they were full of fear and pain. Everything in those eyes just faded, just stopped, went blank. I think she died.”

Blackwell said that looking back towards the bar, “there was blood everywhere, bodies that I didn’t know which were alive, which were dead. There was a guy towards the back … it was like he had got up on his hands and knees to make a run for the exit and he just fell back to the floor and didn’t get up again. I just saw him fall back to the ground and not move again.”

When he reached the exit, “there was a pile of bodies, three or four high tangled up in each other” as if they were killed trying to run for the exit.

Blackwell said that after being treated in a Paris hospital that night, he wanted to get back to London. “For a few months after, I was quite hyper, quite determined. Once the hyperactivity faded, I just grew sadder and I realised that over time the strongest memory were the faces of the guy trying to make a run for it – and the girl with blue eyes.”

An Irish former construction site worker, who did not want to be named in the media, said “at one point, gunfire became single shots, it seemed as if they were just walking around executing people individually.” The couple lay on the ground and whispered their last goodbyes to each other. His wife,

an Irish woman who also asked not to be named by the media, told the court she saw a man dying “and I reached out my hand so he didn’t die alone”.

The Irishman, whose foot was destroyed by a bullet wound and had to be rebuilt in several surgeries, said: “Psychologically, it’s still there, just speaking about it now I can see the images in my mind of people that were dead and I can’t get them out of my head, they will always be there.”

An English woman, who did not want to be named in the media, said she and her husband had hid in a cupboard at the concert hall, caring for a woman they didn’t know who was slipping in and out of consciousness “stroking her hair like a small child to comfort her”.

She said that six years later: “I still have to sleep with the light on every night, I can’t be in a darkened room. I always tell people that I love them.” She said the “biggest positive are the friends I have made” and the close-knit community of survivors.

She said she was often asked if she hates the terrorists. “The short answer is no, there’s too much hatred in this world already and that’s why we’re here. I don’t hate them, I feel sorry for them. I feel sorry that they felt the need to do it, that they will never feel the love or compassion that most of us take for granted. It must be a very lonely choice for them.”

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## Indonesia

# ‘Holding each others’ hands’: 11 children drown in Indonesia during river cleanup



Rescuers search for victims in a river in West Java, Indonesia, after 11 students drowned on a school outing. Photograph: Yopi Andrias/AP

*Associated Press*

Sat 16 Oct 2021 01.28 EDT

Eleven students drowned and 10 others were rescued during a school outing for a river cleanup in Indonesia’s West Java province.

Local officials said 150 students from an Islamic high school were participating in the cleanup on Friday along the banks of the Cileueur river when 21 of them slipped into the water.

“The weather was good and there was no flash flood,” said Deden Ridwansyah, the chief of the Bandung search and rescue office. “Those children who drowned were holding each others’ hands. One of them slipped and the others followed.”

Nearby residents and a rescue team managed to save 10 of the students, who were sent to a nearby hospital.

Rescuers used big orange inflatable rafts to search for victims and all students were accounted for when the search ended on Friday night.

The students apparently were not wearing flotation devices. Some reports said they were trying to cross the river, which is popular for rafting and inner tubing, when they fell in.

Rains cause frequent landslides and flash floods in Indonesia, where millions of people live in mountainous areas or near flood plains.

In February 2020, a flash flood killed at least six students who drowned in a river in the Sleman district of Yogyakarta province.

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## Archaeology

# ‘Sensational’: skeleton buried in Vesuvius eruption found at Herculaneum



Archaeologists find remains of a fugitive buried by the AD79 eruption of Mount Vesuvius at Herculaneum. Photograph: Herculaneum Archaeological Park

[Angela Giuffrida](#) in Rome

Fri 15 Oct 2021 15.33 EDT

The partially mutilated remains of a man buried by the AD79 eruption of Mount Vesuvius at Herculaneum, the ancient Roman town close to Pompeii, have been discovered in what Italy's culture minister described as a “sensational” find.

Archaeologists said the man, believed to have been aged between 40 and 45, was killed just steps away from the sea as he tried to flee the eruption.

His skeleton was found on what would have been the ancient town's beach with the head pointing back in the direction of the sea, and surrounded by carbonised wood, including a roof beam, that might have crushed his skull, the Italian news agency, Ansa, [reported](#).

"The last moments here were instantaneous, but terrible," Francesco Sirano, the director of Herculaneum archaeological park, told Ansa.

"It was 1am when the pyroclastic surge produced by the volcano reached the town for the first time with a temperature of 300-400 degrees, or even, according to some studies, 500-700 degrees. A white-hot cloud that raced towards the sea at a speed of 100km [60 miles] per hour, which was so dense that it had no oxygen in it."

The man's bones were a bright red colour, which Sirano said was "the mark of the stains left by the victim's blood".

The discovery was made during the first archaeological dig at Herculaneum, a much smaller and less well-known site than neighbouring Pompeii, in almost three decades.

Excavations in the 1980s and 90s unearthed the skeletons of more than 300 victims piled in boat sheds, where they are believed to have been sheltering while they waited to be rescued by sea.

Dario Franceschini, Italy's culture minister, said: "The sensational discovery of the remains of a fugitive at the archaeological site of Herculaneum is great news, first of all because the find is due to the resumption in this place, after almost 30 years, of scientific excavations conducted by the ministry's technical staff."

Herculaneum was buried under about 15 metres (50ft) of volcanic ash until it was rediscovered during the digging of a well in the early 18th century.

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