

# The Guardian

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## 2022.01.09 - Opinion

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## Names in the newsGame culture

# **Josh Wardle: in Wordle, he has given us an unalloyed pleasure**

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



The daily online puzzle demands nothing of us except a few minutes of delighted concentration



For some reason I thought ‘tiler’ was a better option than ‘tiger’. Photograph: WORDLE

Sat 8 Jan 2022 10.00 EST

Not since Words With Friends, not since Draw Something, has an online game spread with such vigour. [Wordle](#), a short, sweet word game in which the player has six attempts to guess a five-letter word, hangman-style, is everywhere, leaving green-and-yellow-spotted grids in its wake. It was created by software developer Josh Wardle, who wanted to come up with a game that his crossword-loving partner would enjoy playing during lockdown. Then he sent it to his family WhatsApp group and then he gave it to everyone.

Like many, I fell for its charms last week. When it was released to the public in November, 90 people played it, but now hundreds of thousands are on it. I failed to get my first one – for some reason, I thought “tiler” was a better option than “tiger” – but I got the most recent in three tries.

I have placed a lot of hope in Wordle, which might seem disproportionate for a quick game, but hear me out. This is not an era in which good things are taken at face value. We are cynical, irritable and tired, and if there is a

bad intention to be read into anything, someone will scratch away at it until they decide that they have found it. For now, Wordle seems to exist outside of that. A new puzzle appears just once a day. It doesn't demand much time and in an attention economy built on the zombifying potential of an endless scroll or click, this seems like a generous gesture. The scarcity makes it more desirable: you can't get tired of something so shy and retiring. The website is ad-free, there are no paid upgrades, no chance to reveal an extra letter by shelling out cash. When Wardle noticed that people liked to discuss their results, he added a function allowing them to share their grids, hence the green-and-yellow proliferating on social media like algae in a warm spell.

That's all there is to it. It is simple, fun, satisfying and free. Even its name, a nod to Wardle, is charming; even its origins – the *New York Times* has called it "[a love story](#)", describing it as a lockdown gift from Wardle to his partner – are unbelievably sweet. I want to be uncynical about Wordle, I want to be unsuspicious, because right now, Wordle suggests that we can have nice things without breaking them.

## **Kim Kardashian: like her, I too despair at the BlackBerry's fall**



Kim Kardashian: time for an upgrade. Photograph: Gotham/GC Images

I got my [BlackBerry](#) for the Reading festival, somewhere around the mid-00s. Another writer, also there for the *NME*, had suggested that it would change the game: it meant no more running to a backstage cabin to hurriedly type up a review on a spare computer, if one was even spare; instead, you could just write as you watched, with frantic thumbs. It left more time for drinking pints from plastic cups and trying to get someone from Foals to pose for a photo with a fake moustache. (Reader, they declined.)

Much like the Reading festival, I left the BlackBerry behind a long time ago, as a relic of youth. Soon after, the iPhone came along and swept away the BlackBerry's practical good sense, the touchscreen temptress not great for typing anything at length, though in exchange it did offer the ability to pretend your fingers were riding a skateboard or playing a piano. With hindsight, that could be the moment it all started to go wrong.

Nevertheless, the BlackBerry persisted. My favourite holdout was Kim Kardashian, who knows a thing or two about monetising platforms and perhaps knew something we did not. She [tweeted her despair](#) at the death of her BlackBerry Bold as late as 2016. But only last week, on 4 January 2022, after several spluttering death rattles and a number of false alarms, has the BlackBerry finally [shuffled off](#) this mortal coil, with the company ending support for its mobile devices, effectively killing off most of them.

Is there a word for the specific wave of nostalgia that greets the demise of something that has long been obsolete?

## Betty White: farewell, the last and funniest of the Golden Girls



Betty White: a comedic giant. Photograph: Graham Whitby Boot/Allstar

I have always maintained that *The Golden Girls* is muckier, funnier and more anarchic than most contemporary comedies could ever dream of being and I treasure my DVD box set as comfort watch, style inspiration and blueprint for getting older. What a treat, then, to witness people sharing their favourite Rose scenes online, after the [death of Betty White](#), the last living Golden Girl, who died at the age of 99, a couple of weeks before her 100th birthday.

Many of the tributes highlighted White's impeccable [comic timing](#). It can't have been easy to play Rose, famously the ditsy one, against Blanche's blowsy naughtiness, Dorothy's dour wit or Sophia's fabulously blunt ways, but White sailed through on comedy genius, her sweetness a perfect balance to all the acidity, one look from her enough to send the audience into raptures.

You can't help but wonder how White might have felt about *People* magazine's latest issue, which went to print before the sad news broke, and hit newsstands with her face on the cover and the [celebratory declaration](#), "Betty White Turns 100!" In a certain light, you could say it looks like one final punchline.

# Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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## OpinionLaw

# The Observer view on Tories' questioning of Colston verdict

Observer editorial

Conservatives criticising the jury's not guilty decision in case of four Bristol protesters are imperilling centuries of rule of law



From left, Sage Willoughby, Jake Skuse, Milo Ponsford and Rhian Graham celebrate after receiving a not guilty verdict at Bristol Crown Court after the statue of 17th-century slave trader Edward Colston was pulled down and thrown into Bristol Harbour on June 7, 2020. Photograph: Finnbarr Webster/Getty Images

Sun 9 Jan 2022 01.30 EST

There is a plaque in the Old Bailey that commemorates the “courage and endurance” of [Edward Bushell and 11 other jurors](#). In 1670, they were locked up by a judge without food and water for two days because they refused to change their not guilty verdict in the case of two Quakers who had

been charged with unlawful assembly. Bushell petitioned the courts and the chief justice at the time, Sir John Vaughan, ruled that a jury could not be punished on account of the verdict it returned. In doing so, he established in English law the essential principle of jury independence.

That principle means there is no such thing as an “incorrect” jury acquittal: juries have an absolute right to acquit a defendant in a criminal trial regardless of the legal arguments advanced in a case. Yet in the case of the not guilty verdict returned by the jury in the Colston four case, senior Conservative politicians, including the attorney general, the principal legal adviser to the Crown and the head of the Bar in England and Wales, have weighed in with explicit or implied criticism of the verdict, a fundamental undermining of the rule of law.

The Colston four were charged with criminal damage for their role in toppling the statue of the slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol in 2020. Colston made his fortune by trafficking 80,000 men, women and children from Africa to America in the 17th century; one in five died in dreadful conditions en route. Bristol residents have, to little avail, long petitioned for their city to revisit the grossly offensive way he is honoured, including through this statue, which made no mention of his terrible legacy.

The defendants’ acquittal by a jury should be the last word in this case. There were four potential defences put forward by lawyers for the four protesters; even if the jury found none convincing, they were still within their right to return a verdict of not guilty. But Tory politicians, including the prime minister and the home secretary, have picked a culture war with anti-racism protesters and well before the trial made their opinions on the toppling of the veneration of a slave trader well known. Since the verdict, they have not been able to resist implicitly expressing opinions on the lawfulness of its actions, thus undermining the rule of law.

Robert Jenrick, the former communities secretary, suggested that the jury verdict itself undermined the rule of law, thus committing the very deed he wrongly accuses them of. Robert Buckland, the former justice secretary, himself a lawyer, called the verdict “perverse”. The transport secretary, Grant Shapps, said the government would fix the “loopholes in the law” that allowed for the jury verdict, without specifying what he meant, and indeed,

whether he was questioning the very principle of jury independence established in 1670.

By far the worst intervention, however, came from the attorney general, Suella Braverman, who announced via social media that, while trial by jury is an important right, the Colston verdict is causing confusion and so she is considering referring it to the court of appeal to clarify the law. A referral to the court of appeal is within her rights as [attorney general](#) and, as she stated, the court of appeal cannot overturn the jury verdict. However, there is absolutely no justification for her announcing that she is considering seeking a clarification on the law, without also setting out exactly what point of law in the judge's directions to the jury, or in the court proceedings, is unclear. This is a gross politicisation and serves no purpose other than allowing her to inappropriately express a view on the jury's verdict.

Braverman's announcement is only the latest sign of a Tory government only too willing to trash the rule of law for its own political ends. The examples abound, most memorably, Boris Johnson's attempted prorogation of parliament in July 2019, ruled unlawful by the supreme court. Johnson said he disagreed with the supreme court, a nonsensical position given the highest court in the land does not opine on the law, it states how the law applies. Another cabinet minister, Jacob Rees-Mogg, accused the supreme court of a "[constitutional coup](#)".

But there are others. In 2016, Liz Truss while lord chancellor failed to defend the independent judiciary against dangerously hostile attacks from the press. In November 2020, the Home Office released a video that attacked "[activist lawyers](#)" for representing clients against the state, a role without which the justice system would not deserve its name. The government introduced the internal market bill in late 2020, which ministers readily conceded [broke international law](#). And in recent years there have been repeated political attacks on judicial review – a vital route through which citizens can challenge the lawfulness of government actions – that give the impression of a government that wants to avoid all consequences of acting unlawfully. This rubishes the core principle that the law applies equally to us all, including those involved in making it.

The uncodified British constitution means that we as citizens rely on our politicians to abide by an unwritten honour code: that they will act to uphold the rule of law and respect the [seven principles of public life](#). There may be advantages to a flexible constitution, but it is vulnerable to battering by a populist government such as Johnson's. He is a prime minister with little regard for standards in public life or the rule of law. The damage Johnson is doing to fundamental constitutional principles that have evolved over centuries to protect citizens from the unlawful excesses of the state will last long after he leaves office.

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## [Opinion](#)[US Capitol attack](#)

# The Observer view on Joe Biden's Capitol Hill anniversary speech

[Observer editorial](#)

The president is right to rage, but the only real antidote to Donald Trump's dangerous lies is US law



President Joe Biden delivers an impassioned speech marking the one-year anniversary of the fatal attack on the Capitol building in Washington by supporters of former president Donald Trump. Photograph: Michael Reynolds/UPI/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 9 Jan 2022 01.30 EST

The [6 January insurrection](#), when supporters of former US president Donald Trump stormed Capitol Hill, is widely viewed as a seminal moment in the history of US democracy. Never before had the modern nation witnessed such an organised, violent attempt to overthrow the elected government.

Never before, not even at the height of the Civil War, had the Confederate flag flown over the halls of Congress.

Yet last week, as the US marked the first anniversary of the thwarted insurrection, another significant turning point was reached. President [Joe Biden](#), the lawful winner of the 2020 election and Trump's principal intended victim, dropped what some call his Mr Nice Guy act. With gloves off, Biden came out swinging. It was about time.

Since taking office almost exactly one year ago, Biden has deliberately ignored Trump. He has rarely mentioned his predecessor by name. He has refused to engage with Trump's insults, lies and unceasing propagation of the "big lie" – that Democrats stole the 2020 vote. Instead, Biden sought to reunite a divided, fractious nation, appealing to what he called our "better selves" and looking to the future, not the past.

It didn't work. That is not to say it was not worth trying, nor that the effort should be discontinued: it should not. But in the intervening 12 months, [Trump](#), egged on by cynical, unprincipled Republicans such as House minority leader Kevin McCarthy and far-right disruptors such as Steve Bannon, has not only not faded from view but, rather, he has emerged, strengthened, as Republican king-maker and his [party's leading 2024 presidential contender](#).

Trump's bottomless mendacity, lacking any factual, legal or moral basis and flying in the face of numerous court judgments, vote recounts and electoral inquiries, has nevertheless persuaded a majority of Republican voters that Biden was not legitimately elected while seeding doubt in the minds of others. His poison corrodes America's governing institutions and incites civil strife. Trump embodies a clear and present danger to US national security, stability and democracy. He must be stopped.

Biden's 6 January speech appeared to unleash a new strategy to do just that. Trump, he said, was "holding a dagger" at the throat of American democracy. His "web of lies" could no longer be tolerated. Trump "rallied the mob to attack", then did nothing to stop the ensuing lethal violence, Biden fumed.

The president's sudden switch to direct confrontation entails obvious dangers. It plays to Trump's agenda and ego, making him the centre of attention. The shift may also be indicative of political weakness. Biden's approval ratings are low, his legislative agenda has stalled, the Democrats in Congress are split and the party is widely expected to lose Congress in November's elections.

Yet Biden really had no choice but to go on the offensive. Trump and Trumpism's world of "[alternative facts](#)" has had a free run for too long. To be defeated and debunked, it must be publicly and robustly challenged at every turn. Legal remedies, soft-pedalled until now by the justice department, must be pursued with renewed vigour and determination.

"The legal path to investigate the leaders of the coup attempt is clear. The criminal code prohibits inciting an insurrection or 'giving aid or comfort' to those who do, as well as conspiracy to forcibly 'prevent, hinder or delay the execution of any law,'" veteran Harvard constitutional law expert Laurence Tribe [wrote recently](#). It's a widely held opinion.

The many documented actions of Trump and his circle in attempting to overturn the 2020 vote provide numerous grounds for criminal investigation and prosecution. Why is [Merrick Garland](#), the attorney general, still dragging his feet? Biden can righteously rage. But the best antidote to toxic Trump's dangerously lawless spree, and fears of civil war, is the law itself. Take him down – before it's too late.

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## NotebookUK news

# Sidney Poitier wasn't blinded by success, he paved the way for other Black actors

[Kadish Morris](#)

He knew that his Oscar win wouldn't suddenly open doors for others and became a formidable force for a generation



Sidney Poitier in The Slender Thread, 1965. Photograph:  
Paramount/Sportsphoto/Allstar

Sat 8 Jan 2022 12.00 EST

The death of [Sidney Poitier](#) is a moment of great sadness for many, but especially for people like my parents, who remember him being the first Black actor they ever saw on TV. Raised in the Bahamas by tomato farmers, he was the youngest of seven children and came from extreme poverty. He moved to New York aged 16, where he worked as a dishwasher, took acting lessons and taught himself how to read, write and enunciate by reading

newspapers and listening to the radio. He was the definition of a self-made man.

When he won an Academy Award for best actor in 1964, he was the first Black person to do so. He was proud of his victory but, admirably, wasn't blinded by it. "I don't believe my Oscar will be a sort of magic wand that will wipe away restrictions on job opportunities for negro actors," he said in an interview. He wasn't wrong. It would be 38 years before another Black person (Denzel Washington) would win a best actor Oscar.

Poitier's authenticity, whether thoughtfully navigating the racial politics of Hollywood or turning down roles that he felt were typecast, made him more than just an actor, but a formidable force in setting a precedent for Black actors in leading roles. "I had to satisfy the action fans, the romantic fans, the intellectual fans. It was a terrific burden." He was a trailblazer who carved out a path for the likes of Morgan Freeman, Whoopi Goldberg, Will Smith, to name a few.

## Analogue love



'Whenever I delicately lower the needle on the edge, I feel like I've achieved something.' Photograph: Martin Bureau/AFP/Getty Images

A year ago, I was given a record player by fellow poet Malika Booker and I welcomed it with open arms. Throughout my early 20s, I bought vintage items such as typewriters and sewing machines purely for the aesthetics, but something about the pandemic and turning 30 made me wander into the wilderness of analogue. [Vinyl](#) sales in the UK took its highest market share since 1990 in 2021. As a child of Limewire, I came of age at the onset of digital streaming and I love the convenience of Spotify. But hearing Grace Jones's 1981 album *Nightclubbing* on vinyl for the first time felt transcendent. Brandon Taylor recently wrote about the experience beautifully: "You can't mistake it for some imaginary thing that comes out of the air like digital can sometimes be. With a record, you know there's another person on the other side of the music."

I wish I had known sooner that streaming takes away so much of the ritualistic magic of music. Of course, saying: "Hey Google, play I've Done it Again" is an effortless act, but whenever I take a record from its sleeve, set it down and delicately lower the needle, I feel I've achieved something. Perhaps that's why I bought some disposable cameras before a recent trip to the Lake District. There are 26,186 photographs on my iPhone, so I clearly lack self-control. But with only 27 exposures on a disposable, I took my time. I waited for good light. I enjoyed learning the art of composition.

## **Wise up, Molly-Mae**



Molly-Mae Hague: productivity shaming. Photograph: David Fisher/REX/Shutterstock

A clip from [an interview](#) with 22-year-old influencer, ex-*Love Island* star and PrettyLittleThing's creative director Molly-Mae Hague has been circulating on social media, in which she quotes the internet's favourite proverb: "We all have the same 24 hours as Beyoncé." I hate this productivity-shaming axiom that seems to forget that Beyoncé [employs six nannies](#). This mythical belief that "working hard" is the answer to success is just another way to call poor people lazy. When people talk about working hard, they rarely mean working to the best of your abilities. They mean working for nothing, accepting low pay and compromising ethical and moral standards and don't even think about sleeping.

What Hague fails to realise is that success is unlikely a consequence of graft alone. In most cases, it's down to privilege, luck, geography, nepotism and, more often than not, exploitation. Does she think that her seven-figure deal with PrettyLittleThing came from working her "absolute arse off" and not from the fact that the brand, owned by Boohoo, was selling clothes made [by workers](#) paid as little as £3.50 an hour?

Kadish Morris is a freelance arts writer and critic

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**Observer comment cartoon**

**Boris Johnson**

## **Nightmare on Downing Street – cartoon**

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Opinion**Boris Johnson**

## **UK as a leader in animal welfare? Well, some animals are more equal than others**

Catherine Bennett



To protect game birds, the government has decided it's fine to kill crows and jackdaws



Boris Johnson with No 10 rescue dog Dilyn. Photograph: Dylan Martinez/Reuters

Sun 9 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

With a zillion images of themselves to choose from, many taken by a reverent state photographer, Boris and Carrie Johnson used a picture of their dog, Dilyn, for their recent [Christmas card](#).

If unlikely to [appeal to the current pope](#), the pet is, they presumably concluded, more generally inoffensive, ostensibly uninvolved in the family's tireless requisitioning of free luxury goods and, on a more positive note, a pointed reminder of the household's remaining claim to virtue. Or if that's putting it too strongly: to their formal recognition as sentient beings.

For say what you like about his indifference to human welfare, not excluding that of close family members, the PM has, by his standards, worked tirelessly for lobsters. Better still, his wife, who's employed by the [Aspinall Foundation](#), a zookeeper so upmarket that it disdains zookeeping, is routinely described as an "animal rights campaigner". There is talk of a [Carrie wildlife show](#) on Netflix. True, lizards, adders, insects and many other less immediately captivating creatures have yet to see the benefit of having, in Downing Street, these natural successors to Armand and Michaela

Denis or the *Born Free* couple – but have we mentioned Dilyn, the famous rescue dog?

Since the start of this administration, animals – occasionally [held aloft](#) for the purpose – have been the couple’s way of signalling that they are not, after all, shits. Johnson may have failed, for instance, to free [Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#), having idly blighted her hopes of liberation, but consider his work for badgers, following his girlfriend’s (as she then was) well-publicised intervention.

In 2019 the future Mrs Johnson, after a briefing from Dominic Dyer, then CEO of the Badger Trust, got Johnson, not formerly known for any interest in animals beyond [dressing up and killing them](#), to stop an imminent badger cull in Derbyshire. A judicial review, brought by the National Farmers’ Union, was later [dismissed](#). Carrie Symonds went on to condemn trophy hunting, elephant rides and the fur trade and became Peta’s UK 2020 person of the year. “Symonds is a true ally to animals and her activism gets results,” Peta said, citing her condemnation of monkey labour.

As for her husband, his government later produced an Action Plan for Animal Welfare, a characteristically boastful [document](#) in which George Eustice, the environment secretary, explained why, even as it discards EU regulation, the UK will lead the world in animal welfare. “The way we treat animals reflects our values and the kind of people we are,” he wrote. “We will continue to raise the bar and we intend to take the rest of the world with us.”

A government proudly sensitive on badger survival, will happily surrender livestock standards for trade deals

A lesson in international bar-raising occurred sooner than anyone could have expected when, during the chaotic Kabul evacuation, the Johnsons intervened to save some of the dogs and cats collected by Pen Farthing’s charity, Nowzad. Farthing’s ally, Dominic Dyer, [told the BBC](#) he had again “reached out” to Symonds, and “forced the prime minister’s arm”. So it seems reasonable to ignore Downing Street’s denials, especially given the whistleblower Raphael Marshall’s [evidence](#) to the foreign affairs select

committee. There was an “instruction from the Prime Minister” to evacuate Farthing’s dogs, zero policy justification for this and it came at a sickening cost. “There was a direct trade-off,” Marshall writes, “between transporting Nowzad’s animals and evacuating British nationals and Afghan evacuees, including Afghans who had served with British soldiers.”

To balance this triumph for a UK brand of animal welfare so world-beating that it privileges pets over people, there are indications, however, that the government is not so much anti-speciesist as species selective. Had Farthing chosen to deliver neglected Afghan goats they would probably not, for all their sociability and cleverness, have inspired a Carrie Johnson mercy intervention. The RSPCA has already [noted](#), following Liz Truss’s Australia trade deal (likely to be a template for others), that a government proudly sensitive on pet-smuggling and badger survival will happily surrender livestock standards for trade deals. Unless some new intervention is imminent, Dilyn’s owners, recently willing to trade interpreters’ lives for Farthing’s cats, have no problem with imported beef from cattle raised on “enormous bare feed-lots” and subjected to transport times of 48 hours and lamb from animals mutilated without anaesthetic.

As applied to killing animals for fun, Johnson’s eclectic welfare principles could lead to yet more confusion in countries unfamiliar with the UK tradition of class-based animal protections. What, for instance, makes a UK badger’s welfare more worthy of consideration than a UK crow’s? The bird is famously brainy, capable of social learning, of [reasoning](#) and of using tools – quite likely [more effective in that respect than Johnson](#), for all his opposable thumbs.

Nest sanitation is, in contrast to the prime ministerial “tip”, a given. Their rank in Tory animal taxonomy dictates, however, that crows are among several wild creatures that can now, following an updating of the law, be more easily killed in order to protect game birds, which vastly outnumber all native British birds and are the cause of extensive ecological damage. Jackdaws, pigeons and rooks can be likewise sacrificed for a higher purpose: the subsequent slaughter of the protected game birds, by landowners, in still greater numbers. The RSPB said the revised regulations could be a “[massive backward step for nature conservation](#)”.

Again, it's not too late for another intervention by Mrs Johnson. Even if crows and pigs lack the superficial appeal of dolphins, monkeys and Dilyn the rescue dog, she might yet decide that some registered aversion to killing game birds for amusement, and to mistreating livestock for profit, is a minimum requirement for her career in animal welfare. Though admittedly no law says professional animal lovers must love all animals. The late Steve Irwin was killed harassing a stingray. And they're still seeking a [successor to Joe Exotic](#).

*Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist*

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

# For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 9 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

A [review](#) of the film *The Electrical Life of Louis Wain* should have credited Simon Stephenson as co-writer (2 January, New Review, p27).

An article ([And the good news is ... Omicron is less likely to infect and damage lung cells](#), 2 January, p14) said: “If the virus produces more cells in the throat, that makes it more transmissible ...”. As quotes from the researchers made clear, the virus infects and multiplies in cells, so we should have referred to transmissibility increasing when it “replicates more” in the throat.

The former Hungarian MP backing the opposition leader in upcoming elections is Zoltán Kész, not “Késv” ([He’s religious, on the right – and the left backs him to beat Orbán](#), 2 January, page 30).

We referred to the tenor Freddie de Tommaso stepping into a leading role in “Verdi’s *Tosca*” at the Royal Opera House; the opera is by Puccini ([Who’s who in ’22](#), 2 January, p34).

Ray Illingworth did not captain Yorkshire for three championship-winning seasons from 1959-1968, as we said; he was the team’s captain only in 1982-83 ([Successful captain who always spoke his mind](#), 26 December, Sport, p15).

Other recently amended articles include:

[US judge delivers double setback to Prince Andrew’s abuse case battle](#)

[Speaker defends Tony Blair knighthood after backlash](#)

## [Shops in Great Britain fear gaps on shelves as new Brexit import rules hit](#)

*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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## Observer lettersInequality

# Letters: real levelling-up means going local

If it is serious about reducing inequality, the government should devolve some of its powers



Oxford Science Park: ‘The Oxford/Cambridge/London research and development triangle grows apace while universities elsewhere often struggle to find funds.’ Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Sun 9 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Phillip Inman strikes exactly the right note on the so-called levelling-up agenda (“[It’s hard to ‘level up’ when No 10 is bearing down on us](#)”, Business). If Michael Gove and co focus on structures rather than activity, outputs and outcomes, levelling up will struggle to get off the ground. Let’s also accept that meaningful activities, outputs and outcomes are in any case hard to achieve, given tough economic times, short-term political life cycles and economic and social inequities.

If funding is to be properly channelled to relatively poor regions and localities, a government with less centralised control tendencies would be welcome. Beyond cities and regions with mayors and to avoid the inevitable mess and cost of too much restructuring, maybe it's time to trust local authorities with regeneration activity and the like. Wouldn't that be something after more than a decade of devastating cuts to local services? Central government could require local plans, a reporting process and some incentives or curbs, depending on progress. Even better, local people could have some involvement through existing consultation methods and citizen assemblies could be tried out. This approach might just stand a fighting chance of making a real difference.

**Steve West**

Fordingbridge, Hampshire

Phillip Inman rightly draws attention to the problems with levelling up the north. Some of the problems lie here in Oxford, where donors seemingly queue up to fund new establishments, leading to all sorts of problems with affordable housing and undesirable green-belt development. Sometimes, the investment is very much to the good (there will be soon be millions more invested in vaccinology, for example), but the Oxford/Cambridge/London research and development triangle grows apace while universities elsewhere often struggle to find funds. A combined government and private enterprise initiative to divert research money to, say, Bristol, Birmingham and Sheffield would be welcome, though I cannot see our Oxford-based political establishment agreeing to this, alas.

**Don Manley**

Oxford

## Nazi art theft revealed

With Vanessa Thorpe's interesting article about Pauline Baer de Perignon's sleuthing to recover her family's Nazi-looted art, another piece of the jigsaw of wartime art theft falls into place ("[The amateur sleuth, the galleries and a fight for family art looted by the Nazis](#)", News).

I am reading the seminal work on the subject of Nazi art theft and the fate of Europe's treasures in the Second World War, *The Rape of Europa* by Lynn H Nicholas. It must have been an influence on the making of the film *The*

*Monuments Men* because so many events recorded in the book are portrayed in the film. The book is a masterwork of research, explaining the convoluted schemes to illegally acquire much of the patrimony of the conquered nations of Europe. It also explains the Allied programme for rescue, repatriation and restitution by “the monuments men” and their work with museum curators in the liberated nations.

There are many unrecovered treasures from the period that perhaps will come to light, not least because of the diligent and persistent endeavours of people such as Pauline Baer de Perignon.

**Paul F Faupel**

Somersham, Cambridgeshire

## The wrong trousers?

Your piece about school uniforms in Kerala was informative and insightful (“[Unisex school uniforms come to Kerala. But some parents aren't happy...](#)”, World). It was also instructive, inadvertently, in illustrating gender-based assumptions in supposedly non-gendered thinking. Why is it that “unisex” and “gender-neutral” clothing is nearly always based on what is worn traditionally by boys/men? Obvious answers will refer to the disinhibiting practicality for girls and the need to disrupt the tendency to equate power and capability with items worn by boys. They are liberating interventions in the context of sexism.

Just as there is nothing inherently male about trousers, there is nothing inherently female about a skirt or dress. Despite greater sensitivities about gender fluidity, gender-neutral clothing is still modelled on “male” norms. If we conceive of unisex clothing in terms of what girls must wear, and model gender-neutral clothing on what boys have worn, we should not be surprised if our children learn a lopsided message.

**Paul McGilchrist**

Colchester, Essex

## The politics of Covid

In his interview with Robin McKie, infectious diseases expert Professor Mark Woolhouse makes a valid public health observation (“[Britain got it wrong on Covid: long lockdown did more harm than good, says scientist](#)”, News). However, what is missing is the political dimension of the decision-making process. While it was obvious in March 2020 that the global public health machinery was mobilised to combat the pandemic it had prepared for, rather than the one it was presented with, for the UK government to have admitted this would have shone a light on the consequences of its policies over the previous 10 years.

Care homes should have been fortified, with enough skilled staff to safeguard residents. To have done so would have laid bare the working conditions, low pay and zero-hours contracts that facilitated the spread of Covid among those least able to cope. Infected patients were returned to care homes because the NHS had been so poorly funded that there was no slack in the system. While labour deregulation led to infected people having to continue working and concomitant poverty resulting in vulnerable people living in multi-generational households. All this overseen by a government (and party) whose inability to manage anything is only eclipsed by its willingness to lie.

**David Hoare**

Kingston, Lewes, Sussex

## **Eleven years of council cuts**

Anne McElvoy’s interesting piece on Keir Starmer omits any reference to local government, which has suffered significantly over the last 11 years and faces more cuts (“[Starmer is making headway, but has he got enough to worry the Tories?](#)”, Comment). Councils are facing the prospect of having to continue to reduce staffing and services across the communities they struggle to support. It’s time the media began to cover the damage being inflicted by the government in this area of public policy.

**Jeremy Beecham**

Newcastle City Council

Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne

## **Yes sir, no sir**

I'm a great admirer of Sir Lindsay Hoyle. He has made the role of Speaker of the House of Commons his and continued to assert the independence of the office. He's right to support Tony Blair's knighthood – his support for George Bush over Iraq was a serious error of judgment, but there is still a worthy legacy, not least peace in Northern Ireland. However, Hoyle's suggestion that all former prime ministers should be knighted ([News](#)) is surely a step too far: "Arise, Sir Boris" – no, thank you!

**Ian Ferguson**

Thornton Dale, Pickering, North Yorkshire

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**OpinionConservatives**

## **Obese? Need nanny's help? Don't rely on the Tories, baffled by today's world**

[Nick Cohen](#)



Crises such as public health must be met by the state and there's the Conservatives' rub



Former Conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher pictured circa 1987.  
Photograph: Duncan Raban/Popperfoto/Getty Images

Sat 8 Jan 2022 14.00 EST

Conservatives look like cranks today, not because of personal failings of this or that politician, but because they cannot deal with the crises of the modern world. It's not that they don't have answers – rightwing thinkers spit them out faster than a machine gun fires bullets. It's just that their answers are irrelevant and, even in Tory terms, self-defeating.

All viable responses to global warming, vaccination, the job losses artificial intelligence will bring and failing public health enhance the role of the state. It must provide jobs and benefits to society's losers, protect their health and drastically reconfigure markets to sustain the planet. Small states that allow sovereign individuals and companies to decide for themselves now feel as antiquated as Margaret Thatcher's handbag and pearls.

At best, Conservatives will the ends but not the means, as the Johnson government does with the climate crisis and protecting the NHS from the Covid pandemic. At worst, they retreat from modernity into denial and conspiratorial gibberish.

I know of no better example of the inability of the right to face the world in front of its eyes than the collapse in public health, which will become ever more visible as 2022 progresses.

Inflation and tax rises are pushing a great segment of the population into poverty or a place close to it. In ways that would astonish our forebears, poverty will produce obesity. Anyone in the government who has cared to study the crisis knows that the cheapest meals are no longer vegetables and rice, potatoes or bread, the traditional diet of the poor. Now, they are ultra-processed industrial foods, whose manufacturers use the cheapest and least nutritious ingredients and economies of scale to keep the price as low as possible and lashings of fat, sugar or salt to make their gunk palatable. Government knows it, but will do next to nothing about it.

Tim Lang, the author of *Feeding Britain*, refers me to [studies](#) showing the UK had the worst diet in Europe, with half of all food bought processed to the nth degree. The result is hundreds of thousands suffering avoidable deaths or years of painful and cramped lives as they deal with the chronic illnesses fatness brings: cancer, heart disease, strokes, dementia and, indeed, Covid.

The moral argument for preventing needless pain is overwhelming. Even the most hard-hearted Tories, meanwhile, should want to limit the escalating costs of healthcare if only to hold on to their money. The NHS spends [£18bn a year](#) treating obesity-related conditions, a figure that can only rise. Dreadful diets mean higher taxes.

They cannot bring themselves to act, just as they cannot bring themselves to tell the UK's Novak Djokovices that there is a price to pay for refusing to be vaccinated or level with the public on the revolutionary changes to national life a serious attempt to cope with climate change will bring.

The best the Conservatives could manage was to commission Henry Dimbleby to produce a [national food strategy](#). Last summer, it recommended the government intervene to produce a long-term shift in eating habits, that sugar and salt be regarded as modern versions of tobacco and taxed accordingly, and that the government protect food standards in trade agreements.

Whatever electoral success they enjoy, Conservatives can see the world Thatcher and Reagan created collapsing

The report was criticised for treating food poverty as a distinct condition. Our own [Jay Rayner](#), the Robespierre of radical restaurant critics, roared there is no such thing as food poverty, there's only poverty. The best way to deal with today's fall in living standards is to listen to [Marcus Rashford](#) and restore the cuts to universal credit.

Dimbleby is indeed a classic establishment figure: fathered by David, schooled by Eton. But that is what makes him interesting. He offered Tories the chance to modify rather than overthrow their beliefs. Throughout its history, the Conservative party has survived by making concessions to shifting times the better to ensure that it stayed in control of change. "Tory men, Whig measures", as Disraeli put it.

Now it cannot adapt or concede. Ministers have sat on the Dimbleby report for months. In cabinet, all the familiar arguments are heard against, in that tellingly upper-class phrase, the "nanny state" interfering with free markets and freedom of choice. Civil servants are muttering that better health labelling on food products is as far as their political masters will go.

Readers may scoff at Conservatives babbling about nannies. But there is a long tradition of leftwingers worrying about the middle classes telling the working classes what to do.

"The ordinary human being would sooner starve than live on brown bread and raw carrots," wrote George Orwell in 1936. "When you are underfed, harassed, bored and miserable, you don't want to eat dull wholesome food. You want something a little bit 'tasty'." In other words, it's not that worries are not justified. It's just that they provide no solutions.

History isn't an exam. No teacher rewards the students who get the questions right. Maybe Conservative politicians can prosper by riding the reaction against the costs of the push towards net zero. Donald Trump has already shown them the way.

But whatever electoral success they continue to enjoy, Conservatives can see the world Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan created collapsing. They fear a prim and constricted future when the state represses enterprise, tells you what to eat, how often you can fly, when to be vaccinated, how you must heat your home and what type of car you can drive, if any. But then, when the current wave of conservatism began in the 1980s, leftwing critics saw how it would lead to a corrupt and divided future. If Thatcher wins, said [Neil Kinnock](#), in 1983, “I warn you not to be ordinary, I warn you not to be young, I warn you not to fall ill, I warn you not to get old”. His oratory and foresight did the Labour party no good because the left no longer seemed to have credible solutions.

Now it is Conservatives who cannot respond to change. The 21st century baffles them. They don’t know what to do about it. This is why, for all their apparent self-confidence, so many speeches by Conservative politicians and articles by Conservative thinkers sound more than a little unhinged.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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## Headlines tuesday 4 january 2022

- [Live UK Covid: up to 15% of Omicron cases are reinfections, says top scientist](#)
- [Coronavirus Omicron infections may have plateaued in London, Neil Ferguson says](#)
- [England NHS trusts declare critical incidents amid Covid staff crisis](#)
- [Schools Heads warn of weeks of Omicron disruption in England](#)

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

## **UK Covid: Johnson admits some hospitals already feel overwhelmed at times – as it happened**

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2022/jan/04/uk-covid-coronavirus-live-news-omicron-may-have-plateaued-amongst-under-50s-in-london-top-scientist-says>

## Omicron variant

# Omicron infections may have plateaued in London, Neil Ferguson says

Top scientist ‘cautiously optimistic’ but warns cases may be an underestimate due to lack of tests

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



Prof Neil Ferguson is a mathematical epidemiologist who helped shape the UK’s lockdown strategy. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

[Matthew Weaver](#)

Tue 4 Jan 2022 03.33 EST

Prof Neil Ferguson, the scientist who helped shape Britain’s coronavirus lockdown strategy, said he was “cautiously optimistic” that Omicron

infections had plateaued in [London](#) and could reduce in the next week.

Ferguson, a mathematical epidemiologist from Imperial College London, cautioned that record cases numbers being reported were likely to be an underestimate because test supplies have run out in some areas.

But speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme, he said: "An epidemic reaching such high numbers [can't sustain those numbers](#) forever. So we would expect to see case numbers start to come down in the next week, maybe already coming down in London, but in other regions a week to three weeks."

He added: "I'm cautiously optimistic that infection rates in London in that key 18 to 50 age group, which has been driving the Omicron epidemic, may possibly have plateaued. It is too early to say whether they're going down yet."

Ferguson also said that despite a recent doubling in Covid hospital admissions the vaccinations were proving effective at preventing severe disease.

He said: "Vaccination is holding up in terms of protection against severe disease, assisted by the fact that Omicron almost certainly is substantially less severe, but it still puts pressures on the health system."

Ferguson said: "Omicron is substantially less severe. And that has helped us undoubtedly. We would be seeing much higher case numbers in hospital otherwise. And vaccines are holding up against severe disease and against severe outcomes well, but that doesn't mean it's not going to be difficult few weeks for the NHS."

Matthew Taylor, the chief executive of the NHS Confederation, said the NHS did not want staff going back into hospitals with Covid and risk passing it on.

He told Times Radio that reducing the self-isolation period to five days should be done only if the science "said it was absolutely safe".

On the general outlook, he said: “We should feel some hope and confidence about the medium term, [and] that we will gradually become more able to live with Covid as the prime minister has said, that when Omicron has gone through us that we make it to that stage and the NHS will recover.”

But Taylor added: “On the other hand, we’ve got to recognise that in the next few weeks at least things are very, very difficult. One thing that people in our service find difficult is that it does seem as though there’s a kind of almost politicised attempt to suggest that things aren’t as difficult as they are, that any suggestion that we should sustain the restrictions or whether it’s personal responsibility or policy.

“If you’re working in health service, you see the reality, and what you want politicians, what you want people, to be driven by is the data and what’s happening at the frontline, and let’s not be in the business of … getting away from the reality of this.”

### Covid infections in England’s regions

He said the judgment on restrictions “needs to be driven by the data and what’s in the best interests of the country”, adding: “It shouldn’t be driven by a kind of political virility symbolism, where the sooner we can be free, the better it is, regardless of the effects. Let’s carry on being driven by the data.”

The minister for vaccines and public health, Maggie Throup, said she was “not sure” how many Britons were currently in self-isolation.

She told Sky News: “I’m not sure of that [actual] figure, but I think what’s shown over Christmas is that a lot of people have caught the disease, the Omicron variant is very transmissible, but what is good news, it doesn’t seem to be resulting in severe diseases as some of the other variants did.”

She added: “Well, not everybody declares that they’re self-isolating, I think that’s one important thing, that it’s something that they do because they’ve tested positive or they’ve been in contact with somebody whose tested positive, they don’t have to report that in.

“The vaccine is working and that’s the best way to stop the transmission, and to stop hospitalisations and for our life to get back to normal.”

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**NHS**

## NHS trusts in England declare critical incidents amid Covid staff crisis

At least six trusts in have issued alerts as fears grow vital care will be compromised by workforce absence

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



A man passes a ‘Nightingale’ field hospital constructed in a car park at St George’s hospital in south London. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

*[Andrew Gregory](#), [Peter Walker](#) and [Robert Booth](#)*

Mon 3 Jan 2022 14.40 EST

Multiple [NHS](#) trusts across England have declared “critical incidents” amid soaring staff absences caused by Covid-19, with health leaders saying many

parts of the service are now “in a state of crisis”.

Boris Johnson on Monday ruled out the introduction of new curbs “for now” but said he recognised that the pressure on the NHS and its hospitals, was “going to be considerable in the course of the next couple of weeks, and maybe more”.

More than half a dozen trusts have issued alerts over “internal critical incidents” in recent days, it is understood, as concerns mount that some may be unable to deliver vital care to patients.

Health leaders said the “rapidly increasing” number of absent NHS staff was piling “very serious” pressure on hospitals already struggling to cope with increasing Covid admissions and “huge wider pressure” on urgent and emergency services.

They said pressure was increasingly spreading to hospitals outside [London](#), with those in the north-east and Yorkshire reporting the most rapid growth in Covid patient numbers in recent days.

Johnson said there was no question Omicron continued “to surge through the country”, adding it would be folly to think the pandemic was over. A further [157,758 lab-confirmed Covid-19 cases](#) have been recorded in England and Scotland as of 9am on Monday, the government said.

However, speaking publicly for the first time this year during a visit to a vaccination centre in Aylesbury, Johnson said the UK remained in a much better position than this time last year thanks to vaccines and stressed Omicron was “plainly milder” than previous variants.

NHS chiefs also expressed cautious optimism that after weeks of rising [hospitalisations in London](#) – the centre of the Omicron outbreak – the increases may have peaked and are starting to level off.

Chris Hopson, the chief executive of [NHS](#) Providers, which represents NHS hospital, mental health, community and ambulance services, said: “We were seeing increases in the number of Covid-19 patients in London hospitals go up by 9% a day, 15% a day … in terms of 27, 28 and 29 December.

“Interestingly, in the last two days the increases have only been 1% and 2%, so they’ve dropped pretty significantly, so there’s a hope we might have seen a possible peak and plateau.”

Another piece of positive news, he added, was that hospitals were still not admitting large numbers of seriously ill older people with Covid. Hopson said it was striking that hospital bosses were “pointing to the fact” that outbreaks in care homes were not translating into hospital admissions.

One of the UK’s biggest care home operators called on the government [to lift visiting restrictions](#) after it recorded one Covid death in the last fortnight. Four Seasons Healthcare, which operates 165 care homes, said close to 4,000 residents were living under strict lockdowns because of outbreaks, but Omicron was proving so mild in a well-vaccinated population that limits on seeing family and friends were in “total imbalance” with the risk.

Hopson cautioned that the biggest challenge facing many NHS trusts – like many workplaces across the country in the first week of the new year – was mounting staff absences. Covid-related staff shortages are causing havoc in many sectors, with [bins in some areas “overflowing” with waste](#) from the festive period and schools scrambling to hire substitute teachers for the start of the new term.

Hopson said a number of trusts across the country had declared “internal critical incidents” over the past few days. [United Lincolnshire hospitals NHS trust declared a critical incident](#) with “extreme and unprecedented” staff shortages resulting in “compromised care”.

Critical incidents are declared by NHS trusts when they believe they may no longer be able to provide a range of critical services. Declaring an incident enables local health chiefs to call for help from staff and other organisations, and creates a formal interim emergency governance structure to make prioritisation decisions at speed, for example redeploying staff or reprioritising services.

Joe Harrison, the chief executive of Milton Keynes University hospital, said while his trust was not yet declaring a critical incident, he expected the “very pressured” situation to get worse before it got better. Meanwhile, in

Yorkshire, the ambulance service said: “The added challenge of Covid-19-related absence among staff … is having a significant impact on our frontline operations.”

In a [blog published on Monday](#), Matthew Taylor, the chief executive of the NHS Confederation, which represents the healthcare system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, issued a stark warning that many parts of the health service were “currently in a state of crisis”.

“In the face of high levels of demand and staff absence some hospitals are having to declare a critical incident,” he wrote. “Some hospitals are making urgent calls to exhausted staff to give up rest days and leave to enable them to sustain core services. Many more hospitals are having to ban visitors to try to reduce the spread of infection.”

Taylor also urged politicians “making optimism and complacency a kind of political virility symbol” not to turn Covid policy “into a new terrain for the culture wars”, but instead to focus on the facts and “listen to those trying to cope on the frontline”.

Meanwhile, the Royal College of [Nursing](#) (RCN) has written to ministers calling for further measures in England amid “confusing and concerning” differences in restrictions across the UK.

“Nursing professionals are questioning the level and nature of the variation between governments,” wrote the RCN’s council chair, Carol Popplestone, and its general secretary and chief executive, Pat Cullen. “We therefore ask that, as secretary of state for health and social care, you work with counterparts across government on a more cautious approach for England without further delay.”

Parliament will return from its Christmas recess on Wednesday, when the cabinet is set to meet to review the plan B rules. Ministers are expected to keep restrictions – including mask wearing, Covid passports and home working – as they are.

On Monday, Johnson rejected the idea that England’s relatively limited Covid restrictions amounted to a gamble. “The way forward for the country

as a whole is to continue with the path that we're on," he said. "We'll keep everything under review. But the mixture of things that we're doing at the moment is, I think, the right one."

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jan/03/several-nhs-trusts-declare-critical-incidents-amid-covid-staff-crisis>

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## Schools

# Heads warn of weeks of Omicron disruption in English schools

Staff absences mean some pupils face return to remote learning, amid doubts over advice to combine classes

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)



School pupils in Stalybridge at the start of the autumn term in September. The spring term starts this week. Photograph: Anthony Devlin/Getty Images

*[Sally Weale](#)*

Mon 3 Jan 2022 11.38 EST

School leaders in [England](#) are warning of weeks of disruption owing to high levels of staff Covid absences, which could lead to children being sent home to learn remotely.

One secondary headteacher said he and 26 of his staff had tested positive for the virus, while others were having to stay at home to look after their own children as nurseries were closed, also because of Covid absences.

As the impact of the spread of Omicron over Christmas becomes apparent in Covid data, heads said it was inevitable that some classes and year groups would be sent home to learn remotely because schools would not have sufficient teachers or supply cover.

A number of headteachers and one leading education union have expressed concern about new government advice to combine classes in the event of staff shortages, warning that it risks spreading Covid further and increasing disruption.

In an email sent to schools on Sunday, the Department for Education (DfE) advised heads to deal with staff absence by teaching larger groups, but school leaders said this was not a workable long-term solution, with one warning it could lead to something “like a scene out of Mad Max”.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said: “Schools and colleges desperately want to be able to maintain face-to-face teaching on a consistent basis, but the reality is that if large numbers of staff are absent this will cause disruption, which may include having to send home classes or year groups for short periods of time to learn remotely.”

Meanwhile, heads are preparing for “difficult conversations” with some parents after the government called for masks to be worn in classrooms, while others are dealing with time-consuming subject access requests and freedom of information requests over vaccination programmes from anti-vaccination groups.

Boris Johnson said on Monday he was not happy about calling for masks in classrooms but it was a necessary step. “There’s an increasing body of scientific support for the idea that face masks can contain transmission. I don’t like the idea of having face masks in [the] classroom any more than

anybody else does, but we won't keep them on a day more than is necessary," he said.

With the risk of widespread disruption to schools, Oak National Academy, the national online classroom set up by government when the pandemic first hit, is preparing for increased demand.

"Schools and teachers are doing all they can to make sure pupils have a smooth return to the classroom after the holidays," said Oak's principal, Matt Hood. "For those children who cannot be in the classroom, Oak National Academy stands ready to support them."

Dr Mary Bousted, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said it was "alarming" that the education secretary, Nadhim Zahawi, was advocating combining classes of pupils to overcome staff shortages. "Collapsing classes will mix groups of pupils and risks providing the conditions for the virus to spread more rapidly, which will result in greater pupil and staff absence," she said.

## **'A sense of trepidation'**

Ben Davis is the headteacher of St Ambrose Barlow RC high school in Greater Manchester, which opens to pupils again on Thursday with a phased return to allow each year group to be tested for Covid. "I do feel a sense of trepidation," he said.

Masks have been reintroduced into classrooms in his school twice previously on the recommendation of Public Health England because of high infection rates, and Davis had to send a number of year groups home before Christmas owing to staff absence.

As the spring term gets under way Davis fears there will be more of the same and is worried about the impact on summer exams. "My expectation is there will be quite a lot of disruption over the next few weeks and we will have year groups working from home."

Glyn Potts, the head of Blessed John Henry Newman RC College in Oldham, has himself tested positive for Covid and will not be in school at

the start of term. A further 26 staff have also tested positive and he is waiting to find who will be out of isolation and available for work when pupils begin to return to school on Thursday.

“What we are going to get on our return are absences of staff and children and a large number of challenging conversations with parents – those who are for or against masks and vaccinations – all of which distracts and takes time,” he said.

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## 2022.01.04 - Spotlight

- 'I saw a big set of white teeth coming towards me' The people who survived terrifying wild animal attacks
- 'We need to respect the process of healing' A GP on the overlooked art of recovery
- 'We were the AYBs – the angry young Blacks' The art movement that rocked Thatcher's Britain
- 'Elton John listening to us blows my mind' Yard Act on humour, despair and celebrity fans

## Wildlife

# **'I saw a big set of white teeth coming towards me': the people who survived terrifying wild animal attacks**

How does it feel to fight off a predator in the wild? And what effect does it have on your life? Five people who lived to tell the tale explain



‘We have to learn to live with them, not to kill them from fear’ ... a great white shark. Photograph: Brad Leue/Alamy



*Ammar Kalia*

Tue 4 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Although, mercifully, still rare, there are signs that wild animal attacks on humans are increasing. Research from the [scientific journal Nature](#) found that, as our urban areas further expand into the territories of carnivorous animals, attacks on pets, livestock and sometimes humans have been on the rise. In Kashmir, local wildlife departments have been reporting a [marked increase in attacks](#), with almost 200 people killed and more than 2,000 others wounded in man-animal conflict in the region since 2011.

From a British citizen [attacked by otters](#) in Singapore, to [monkey attacks in Thailand](#), [squirrel attacks](#) in New York, and a man who [fought off a crocodile](#) with a pocket knife in Queensland, these encounters capture our imaginations. But how does it feel to survive such an ordeal – and how does it affect your life?



A mountain lion: ‘People have no clue how powerful these animals are.’  
Photograph: Max Allen/Alamy

## **‘I tried to punch the mountain lion in the face’ – Anne Hjelle, 48, Orange County, California**

One day in January 2004, I texted my biking friend Debi to see if she wanted to meet for a ride. I live in California and wanted to do a 45-minute loop at Whiting Ranch, which was only a 10-minute drive from my house. I left my groceries on the counter at home.

It was about 3.45pm when we started. I was coming around a blind corner and saw a man in the middle of the trail with another bike propped up against the bushes. I slowed down and asked if everything was OK. He said he had found an abandoned bike and was looking for the owner.

Debi and I continued, trying to pick up speed. A minute later, I came to a twisty section, bordered by thick brush and a slope down to a ravine. In my peripheral vision I suddenly saw this flash of reddish-brown fur. I knew it was an animal, but my first assumption was that it was a deer, since they would sometimes bound across the trail. In the next second, the animal leapt and grabbed me.

There's only one animal that would attempt that; I knew it was a mountain lion. It latched on to my shoulders and tried to bite down on the back of my neck. It felt like getting hit by a truck. I was slammed to the ground and it knocked the wind out of me; I could not believe this was happening.



Anne Hjelle. Photograph: Courtesy of Anne Hjelle

The cat started to drag me down into the ravine. It had me by the back of the neck and I tried to punch its face but it didn't have any effect. It dragged me several feet and then readjusted its grip to over my left ear and then the left side of my face. I realised that it was working its way around to the front of my neck. At this point, I was trying to scream for Debi and I saw her – she was screaming, too, and in a tug of war with the cat over me. It had me by the head and she grabbed me by my calf to try to keep it from pulling me down into the ravine.

Meanwhile, it closed its grip on the left side of my face and pulled my cheek away. It was like a hot knife through butter. I started to say goodbye to Debi as it tried to grab the front of my throat. Within a matter of seconds, things began to go black. I was convinced this was the end of my life. I just felt peace.

But Debi's screams had brought other riders over to us. One went back to call the emergency services and two others started throwing rocks at the cat. They hit it three times – and when one landed on its head, it let go of me.

Shortly after that, I came to. I remember being very shocked that I had woken up – and that the cat was gone. I was choking on my own blood and it felt as if I was drowning. The left side of my face felt like someone had stapled a steak to it. My next concern was whether I could see out of my left eye. When I realised I could, that was the first moment I thought I was going to be OK.

It took 19 minutes from the 911 call until the paramedics arrived. When the helicopter was flying overhead, the pilot saw the cat crouched down, waiting for another chance. The sheriff's deputies later found a body that was identified as Mark Reynolds. He was killed earlier by the cat – the abandoned bike was his.



Anne Hjelle having facial therapy to reduce scar tissue and swelling in 2005.  
Photograph: Sipa US/Alamy

Without Debi stepping in, I would not be here. Mark was a high-level athlete and he did not survive because he was by himself. People have no clue how powerful these animals are – it was like being mobbed by 10 people.

That night, I went into surgery for six-and-a-half hours. My trauma surgeon later said that my injuries were the worst he had ever seen. But I was lucky – out of the 20 deep puncture wounds I sustained, none hit my trachea, oesophagus, voice box or carotid artery. My doctors said it was a miracle.

I got back on a bike only four months later. I got friends together and went to ride that same trail. Either I let the fear control me or I take control; I wanted to check it off the list and move on. I've had zero issues with nightmares or PTSD since the attack. I am just so thankful to be alive.

I don't let this attack define me. I now have a daughter, who is eight, and I try to be strong and set an example for her.

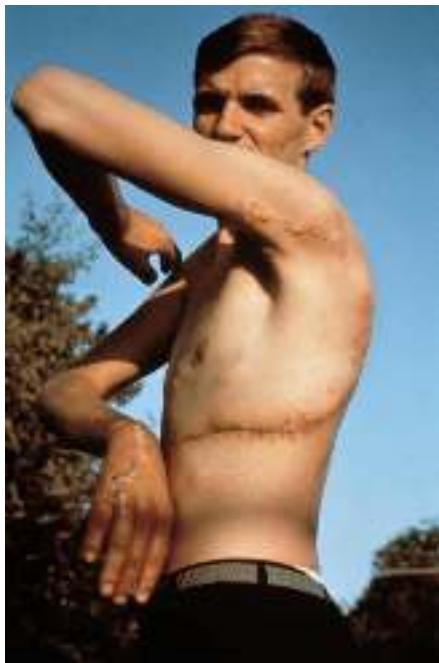


A great white shark: 'I started to realise that maybe the sharks weren't going to attack us every time we went in the water. Photograph: Brad Leue/Alamy

## **'I grabbed the shark in a bear hug to stop it biting me' – Rodney Fox, 81, Adelaide**

At 22, I was the winner of the South Australian spearfishing championships, holding your breath and spearing a variety of fish under a time limit. I was trying to regain my title in 1963, off Aldinga beach. After three or four hours, I needed to catch some special species, so I swam a long way

offshore, where none of the other competitors had been, and dived to the bottom. I was just about to pull the trigger on a really prized fish when a huge crash hit me in the side. It knocked the gun out of my hands and the mask off my face and I was dragged through the water faster than I'd ever swam before.



Rodney Fox showing the scars from his shark attack. Photograph: Jeff Rotman/Alamy

I initially thought I'd been hit by a submarine, but then I realised it had to be a giant shark – a great white. Fortunately, I had been talking to a guy who had been bitten on the leg a year earlier, and we had worked out that the most vulnerable spot on the shark was its eyes. So I gouged around its head trying to get the shark to let go of me. And it did.

I fell out of its mouth and I instinctively thrusted away with my hand, but that went into its mouth and tore on its teeth. I then grabbed the shark in a bear hug around the belly because I knew it wouldn't be able to bite me there.

I was 30 or 40ft underwater and I realised I was going to drown if I didn't move. So I let go and kicked up to the surface, then I looked down through the blood red water and saw this big set of white teeth coming back towards

me. I kicked as hard as I could at the shark but I only just touched it. Instead, it turned and swallowed the float that I had tied my fish to. That float was connected to my lead belt by a rope and that caught on the shark's teeth. It dragged me underwater again.

I knew I had to find the quick release for the belt, but my hands were all cut up. I was within split seconds of drowning when the shark pulled, the line snapped and I managed to thrash to the surface. Miraculously, a boat was on its way over to have a look at all this red water and the people on board pulled me in.

The fear of dying overrides pain. It was only when I was lying down on the boat that the waves of pain arrived. I knew I had done my best – now it was up to my rescuers to try to save me.

In those days, there was no microsurgery, so they put 29 stitches in my lung to close up the pleural sac, and every rib on my left side was broken. I had 462 stitches in my chest in total, since all of my organs were exposed and my torso was ripped open. Doctors said it was the worst shark attack they had seen.

Just seven months after the attack, I was at Adelaide zoo looking at a lion's cage. I had this idea that I could build a cage underwater and reverse the roles. I would look at these sharks and try to understand them, and then see if I wanted to go back to diving. In 1964, I managed to organise an expedition with two other shark-attack survivors. The sharks were more interested in the bait than us, and I started to realise that maybe the sharks weren't going to attack us every time we went in the water.

A lot of people would say the best sharks are dead sharks, but I knew there was already lots of blood in the water from the speared fish, so I don't blame the shark for coming and biting something. Over the years, it's been a huge battle trying to get people to understand sharks better. We have to learn not to kill them from fear.

A year and a half after the attack, I entered the Australian spearfishing championships and came first in several events. I'm 81 now and it hasn't given me any real problems, except that I have a tight feeling in the left side

of my chest to remind me how lucky I was. I've been running expeditions for people to watch sharks in their habitats ever since.



'I had never thought they would attack anyone' ... a river otter. Photograph: Jouko van der Kruijssen/Getty Images

## **'The otter kept torpedoing underwater to bite my legs' – Leah Hiller, 42, Minnesota**

My dad owns a cabin in a remote area on Island Lake, Minnesota, where we would often spend holidays. In July 2012, when I was 31, I was staying there while training for the USA Triathlon National Championships. My husband and two children, who were four and two at the time, were with me. One morning, I went for my usual mile-long swim. I'd done it 100 times before and my dad was going to take my kids out to follow me on his pontoon boat.

Everything was going great until my kids said they wanted to be taken back to eat some snacks. I told my dad it was fine for him to go, since there was no boat traffic.

In Island Lake, the water is the colour of dark rum, so when your hand passes into it, you can't see past your elbow. You don't know what is

beneath. I circled the island in the lake and was on my way back to shore when I was bitten on the heel. It was a really sharp pain. At first, I thought it was a muskie, which are these huge fish that populate the lake, but they're not known to be violent. Then I was attacked on the calf. Something grabbed my leg and just started biting.

I was in real pain and my mind was in shock. About 20ft away, a head popped out to look at me and I realised it was an otter.



Leah Hiller. Photograph: Courtesy of Leah Hiller

I'm an animal lover and had never thought otters would attack anyone. Over the next 10 minutes, I was yelling and calling for help. The otter kept torpedoing underwater to bite my legs and then it would come up, track where I was, and attack again. I knew I couldn't outswim it, so I just had to brace for the bites and try to protect my neck because, if it hit me there, I would have drowned.

These sharp, searing bites were coming from every angle and it bit me 25 times. Some of them were two inches deep and one pierced my ankle bone, while another went through my calf muscle.

But I am no stranger to adversity. When I was 18 I survived a car crash where I was sent flying through the windscreen. I spent six months in the

hospital and had to have multiple surgeries. When I was 23, I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and had to have my lymph nodes removed. I believe these experiences helped me – I knew I had to fight.

I kept on screaming and eventually my dad heard me. He was so panicked he flooded the motor of the pontoon boat trying to start it. He had to get to his other boat, which luckily did start, and he made it to me and pulled me out of the water.

He couldn't leave my kids alone, so they were in the boat, too, and my daughter was bawling at seeing her mum covered in blood. Even though I was in pain, I switched into mum mode and was comforting her. I knew, now I was out of the water, I would be fine.

It must have been 10 to 15 minutes before my dad got out to me, and without him it could have gone on for a lot longer because there were no other boats nearby. My wetsuit was a saviour – that quarter inch of neoprene took a lot of the scratches and it was shredded. The blood was streaming under it. We went straight to the hospital where the doctors were worried that the otter might have rabies. Since I had 25 open wounds, I had to get a rabies shot in each of them – it was so much medication that I threw up everywhere.

The first thing I asked when I stopped vomiting was, “When can I get back in the lake?” The doctors thought it was crazy, but I knew that if I could not get back in the water and face my fear, I would never want to again. I was given a two-week course of antibiotics and after that I was told I would be good to go. There was a triathlon happening about two weeks later and I knew that would be my way to get back in. I did it in a wetsuit that said “otter girl” on the back.

I still swim now. I’m proud of that otter attack story because it showed me how mentally strong I can be. That otter still lives, too. No one knows why it attacked me, but the doctors guessed that it must have been a mother otter protecting its babies. My dad would see it swimming around for years afterwards – I just don’t think anyone else swam in that spot again.



Colin Dowler at the logging camp at Mount Doogie Dowler. Photograph: Courtesy of Colin Dowler

## **'The grizzly bear carried me 30ft in its mouth' – Colin Dowler, 47, Vancouver Island**

In summer 2019, I was exploring potential hiking routes to climb Mount Doogie Dowler in British Columbia. I was cycling down a narrow logging path when I came around a corner and spotted a grizzly bear. I had seen two or three black bears before and, usually, if you make some noise, they move away. But this was the first time I had seen a grizzly – and it was staring at me.

I got off my bike, since it wasn't moving. I was peering out of the corner of my eye and noticed it slinking towards me, until it was only a couple of feet away. It had almost cleared past my bike – until it made a 180-degree turn towards me. I spun around to put the bike between us and got my hiking pole out as it moved closer, placing it between its eyes. It pushed back a little and that seemed like a decent stalemate until it rolled its head, bit on to the pole and tossed it away. I took off my bag and threw it to the side – I thought it would go for the food in there instead of me. It took a sniff but then started prodding me with its paw. Each poke got a little more aggressive

until it lifted its paw high. I thought it would inflict some serious damage so I threw my bike at it.



'I thought it would inflict some serious damage so I threw my bike at it' ... a grizzly bear. Photograph: Reuben Krabbe/Ascent Xmedia/Getty Images

It lunged forward and sank its teeth between my ribs and hips on my left side and soon I was in the bear's mouth as it carried me 30 or 40ft towards a bush. I was in crushing pain. It put me down and I tried to gouge at its eyes but I couldn't reach. I was thrashing while it pinned me and started biting and tearing at my thigh. It was so painful it felt like my hip was going to dislocate. It excavated into my thigh so far I could hear its teeth grinding against my femur like a dog chewing a bone.

I started saying goodbye to my wife and kids in my head and felt guilty that I'd even taken this trip in the first place. Then I realised I had a pocket knife. I had to use both hands while I was still pinned down but I eventually managed to get it out. The blade was under three inches long but I gave the bear a stab in its neck with all the energy I had. When I pulled the knife out, it lifted its head up and a big gush of blood splashed on to my waist. It got off me and walked to my bike, sniffed at it for a while and then stood back at the bush where it had stepped out from.

I knew I had to move fast otherwise I'd bleed to death. While the bear was still watching, I cut the sleeve off my shirt and made a tourniquet for my left leg. I looked over again and the bear had gone.

It was 12.01pm and I knew there wouldn't be any loggers here until later in the afternoon. So, I dragged myself to my bicycle, gathered my wits and started pedalling with one leg for about 45 minutes until I finally saw a loggers' cabin.

The door was open and I crashed into their stairwell, yelling for help. Thank God there were five guys there who seemed panicked but got their first aid kits out and called 911 while patching my 60 puncture wounds up. One wound was so big that my kidney was visible. An air ambulance came about an hour later; they gave me two pints of blood on the cabin floor and then flew me to hospital for six-and-a-half-hour surgery.

The next day, I began 40 days of recovery at Vancouver general hospital. They had me back up and walking 24 days after the attack and, by January 2020, the specialists were seeing some nerve regeneration in my left leg. By February, I began jogging on a treadmill. In September, I ran a half marathon.

Mentally, it was a lot harder than I thought it would be getting back into the woods. I made a conscious effort to walk in the bush behind my house as soon as I could so I wouldn't be overwhelmed by fear. I used tactics to help me, like playing music in headphones to drown out the noise of critters moving around. I have since bumped into a few black bears on the trails, too, but I yell and they get out of the way.



‘It grabbed my leg and pulled me straight down’ ... a hippopotamus in the Zambezi River.

Photograph: Blaz Accetto/Getty Images/EyeEm

## **‘The hippo was thrashing me around like a toy’ – Kristen Yaldor, 41, Odessa, Florida**

My husband, Ryan, and I decided to go to Victoria Falls for my 37th birthday in 2018, and take a canoe trip down the Zambezi River on the day itself. The weather was great and the temperature was perfect. As far as safety was concerned, the guides just said that if you fall out, swim to shore as fast as you can. We brushed it off – we’re from Florida and are used to being on the water, so we didn’t think we’d fall out.

There were three canoes in total – the first one had a guide and another tourist, the second canoe was myself with Ryan in the back, and the third was another guide. We were only around the corner from where we had launched when a guide told us that he had seen a group of hippos ahead, so we should head to the bank. We were paddling left and I glanced over to look for them. I saw one submerged – and as we paddled a few more strokes, it came under our canoe. It leapt up and forced us out, bending the canoe with a big thud.



Kristen and her husband Ryan canoeing on the Zambezi River, just before the attack. Photograph: Courtesy of Kristen Yaldor

I fell forward towards where the hippo was and Ryan fell backwards towards the bank. We had lifejackets on so I quickly popped back to the surface. I started swimming, but after a few strokes it grabbed my leg and pulled me straight down. I was only about six strokes from the shore. My first instinct was to reach for the sky to see if my hands would break the surface and when I just felt more water, that's when I went into survival mode. Just before I went down I had instinctively taken a deep breath and I told myself to hold it and stay calm.

As soon as the hippo dragged me to the bottom, it started thrashing me around like a toy. I bunched up around its snout and tried to pry its mouth open. I knew I wasn't strong enough to, but it must have got freaked by me grabbing it, or my staying still made it think I was dead, since it then, surprisingly, let go.

Because I was wearing a lifejacket, I popped back up to the surface, but I couldn't swim. I couldn't kick my leg and I thought I had broken my knee. I yelled to everyone on the shore and started back stroking with my arms before reaching for the guide's paddle, and was pulled out.

I think the whole episode only lasted about 45 seconds but, from Ryan's account, when he came up to shore and looked back, he saw nothing. Even though I was being thrashed around underwater, there was no surface movement, I was just gone.

My entire trouser leg and the skin on my thigh and knee were ripped apart. I could see my muscle, and a chunk of it was sitting on top of my leg. We waited 45 minutes for a helicopter to come and take us to the local hospital. They prepped me there and then we waited for an emergency flight to take us back to the trauma centre in Johannesburg.

My femur was broken and I also needed a skin graft. I spent two weeks in the Johannesburg hospital before taking a medical flight home to finish the remaining procedures. I have had 21 surgeries to date and I don't know if it's because nerves were severed, but I have had hardly any pain throughout.

I'm very determined. I didn't ever think I wouldn't be able to walk again. My husband signed me up for a charity 5k run when I wasn't even able to walk, knowing that I'm goal-oriented. I told him that if I was able to achieve it, he would need to dress up as a hippo and come with me. Even though I couldn't run, we took part in 2019. After that, we signed up for a 10k, which we completed in November, and in January we're doing a half marathon.

The attack was so instantaneous that I didn't properly see the hippo. I haven't been haunted by PTSD. My struggle has been to get over the muscle loss and to walk again. I'm almost there now, and I've just finished physical therapy. I know I'm going to be working on it for the rest of my life but that's OK. At least I'm still here and doing the things that I want to do. I just won't go back canoeing on the Zambezi again.

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Photograph: Science Photo Library/Getty Images/Science Photo Library RF

[The long read](#)

## **‘We need to respect the process of healing’: a GP on the overlooked art of recovery**

Photograph: Science Photo Library/Getty Images/Science Photo Library RF

As I embark on a third year of general practice under Covid, I am more conscious than ever that recovery is different for every illness and every patient

by [Gavin Francis](#)

Tue 4 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Over the past two years I’ve spent much of my time as a GP assessing and managing the fear, fever and breathlessness caused by coronavirus, but I’ve

also spent more of my time than ever before talking to people about recovery and convalescence – not only from the virus, but from the damaging effects of repeated lockdowns. I'm a GP in central Edinburgh and, with three other doctors and two nurses, provide medical care to about 4,000 patients.

The words “recovery” and “convalescence” were rarely mentioned during my six years of medical school and seven years of specialty training. Many of my tutors seemed to assume that once a crisis of illness has passed, the body and mind find ways to heal themselves. But nearly 20 years as a GP has shown me time and again that the reverse is true: guidance and encouragement through the process of recovery can be indispensable.

My medical training took for granted a western medical approach to the body. But illness is not simply a matter of biology, but also one of belief, psychology and sociology. The ways we get ill are as much about culture as they are about disease, and our ideas and expectations of the body profoundly influence the ways in which we fall ill, and the ways we recover. I have learned much from those other clinicians – the nurses, physiotherapists and occupational therapists – who have most helped my patients, and I am constantly being reminded of how much more there is still to learn.

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What follows, then, is a discussion of recovery and convalescence as seen from within a particular medical tradition – my own as a 21st-century European general practitioner. While I acknowledge the value and the virtues of alternative approaches to the body and to illness, I will leave discussion of them to others trained in their use.

It was on 31 December 2019 that the Chinese government alerted the World [Health Organization](#) to a new and dangerous strain of coronavirus that was infecting people in and around Wuhan. Humanity has learned an enormous amount over the subsequent two years – new ways of managing the pneumonia caused by the virus, as well as how to build a suite of vaccines proven to be effective against it. We move into this new year still struggling

to contain a pandemic many thought would be over by now. New, more transmissible and more dangerous strains of coronavirus are still emerging. As they put our powers of recovery to the test, it's worth thinking more deeply about what convalescence really means.

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When I was eight years old, I woke one autumn morning with a hammer-blow headache and a churning in my stomach. My GP was called for – a kindly man of the old school who took one look and, suspecting meningitis, sent me urgently to an infectious diseases hospital an hour's drive away where the diagnosis was confirmed. I spent eight days and nights in that hospital, in a room with large windows that gave on to trees and bright afternoon sunshine.

In the niches of my memory I carry no images of the doctors, only one of a nurse in a sky-blue tunic, her black hair in a bun, her kind face lined with smiles. I remember an iron-framed bedstead, glaring white sheets and the smell of floor disinfectant. A window in an internal wall of the sickroom looked on to a nurses' station – I was kept under continual surveillance. Though my mum and dad took shifts to be with me for most of the day, they also had my brother to attend to, and I spent many hours alone in silence waiting for them to come; waiting for home.

A couple of years later, I broke my leg and was obliged to pass the whole of the summer holidays and part of the autumn school term in plaster. Beneath that plaster my leg withered and, when the plaster came off, I remember being shocked by how pallid, stunted and weakened it had become. Again, I don't remember any of the doctors involved in my treatment. My recovery was led by a pair of brisk and cheerful physiotherapists.



‘With a limb, it seemed possible to objectify the part that needed recovery’  
... Photograph: piola666/Getty Images/iStockphoto

With a limb, it seemed possible to objectify the part that needed recovery, to look down on the leg and say “that’s the problem, right there”. My progress was effortful, but at least I could see it, inscribed in the bulk of my thigh and the colour of my skin. My recovery from meningitis was far more difficult to grasp – the edges of what recovery meant were far less clear. A languorous, fuzzy-headed exhaustion dominated my days, burnishing the world with the bright haze of a dream or hallucination. My body was in convalescence, but the process itself felt disembodied, ethereal, as much mental as physical. As I look back on it now, it’s clear that it was my first experience of the complexities of convalescence, and how it can and must take very different forms with different illnesses and between different people.

The word “rehabilitation” comes from the Latin *habilis*, meaning, among other things, “apt” or “fit”, and carries the sense of restoration: “To stand, make or be firm again.” The aim of rehabilitation, then, should be to make someone as fit as they can be – to stand on their own feet if they’re able, and to recover as much mobility and independence as possible if they are not. I worked once as a junior doctor in a unit dedicated to rehabilitation from brain injury, and learned there that convalescence is anything but a passive process. Though its rhythms and its tempo are often slow and gentle, it’s an

act, and actions need us to be present, to engage, to give of ourselves. Whether it's our knees or skulls that need to heal from an injury, or lungs from a viral infection such as Covid-19, or brains from a concussion, or minds from a crisis of depression or anxiety, I often have to remind my patients that it's worth giving adequate time, energy and respect to the process of healing.

There is no hierarchy to suffering, and it's not possible to say of one group of conditions that they deserve sympathy while another group deserves to be dismissed. I've known patients whose lives have been dominated for years by the grief of a failed love affair, and others who have taken the most disabling injuries, pain, indignity and loss of independence in their stride. Though it can be tempting to resent someone whose illness appears to be less serious than our own, or to judge ourselves harshly when others seem to be coping with more challenging circumstances than we are, comparisons are rarely helpful. Neither is it advisable to set out a strict timetable of recovery: it's more important to set achievable goals. Sometimes, all I can do is reassure my patients that I believe improvement of some kind is possible. The recovery I'm reassuring them of might not be biological in nature – in terms of a resolution of their condition – but rather an improvement in their circumstances.

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In the course of my medical work I sometimes see viral infections sending their sufferers to bed for weeks or months, and, in a few cases, for years. Why this happens is poorly understood. It's as if the struggle with illness draws so deeply on one's inner reserves of strength that the body does all it can to retain its energies, even going so far as to manipulate our sense of effort so that to take a short walk, or to climb a flight of stairs, is to risk exhaustion. Through the successive waves of Covid-19 during 2020 and 2021, I spoke to many patients in whom coronavirus has triggered this kind of enduring fatigue. A letter in [the journal Nature Medicine published last March](#) reported that, for their sample group, one in eight victims of Covid-19 suffered symptoms lasting longer than four weeks, one in every 22 had symptoms lasting longer than eight weeks, and one in 44 patients had symptoms lasting longer than 12 weeks. The most persistent symptoms were breathlessness, loss of smell, headache and fatigue.

Physiotherapists encourage people experiencing relentless post-viral fatigue to gently push at the limits of what they can do in terms of physical effort. They've found that if those limits are not tested, then the realm of the possible begins to shrink – horizons contract, muscles weaken and sufferers can become trapped in a cycle of effort followed by collapse. The effort required to provoke each collapse begins to dwindle.

Everyone has a different tempo of convalescence, and will require different strategies. It's normal that the process can be slow, and normal, too, for long-term illness to vary in its manifestations from person to person. Protracted symptoms from viral infections may differ enormously between different individuals, but can include varying amounts of breathlessness, difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, mood changes, insomnia, weight loss, weight gain, exhaustion, muscle weakness, joint stiffness and flashbacks. When I see patients troubled by these kinds of problems, I try to emphasise that to experience them isn't evidence that recovery has stalled, or is going into reverse. On the contrary, those symptoms are evidence that the body and mind are reacting and changing in response to the illness – and where there's change, there's hope. There is a booklet I hand out to people with ongoing symptoms of Covid-19, written by local physiotherapists, that emphasises the importance of this "pacing" approach to recovery. It's an attitude I've benefited from myself.



Patients recovering from coronavirus perform breathing exercises with a physiotherapist. Photograph: Dimitar Dilkoff/AFP/Getty Images

During my first year in training as a GP, I got sick. I'd worked for many years in hospitals, had already qualified as a trainee in emergency medicine, but the intensity and breadth of problems I was learning to face in my new role as a doctor in the community felt to me almost overwhelming. An old problem with my sinuses flared up, leaving me with a ceaseless, drilling headache above the eyes that sapped all of my energy. I was exhausted, couldn't concentrate and was in chronic pain. An MRI scan showed that I needed surgery, which might take months to arrange. In the meantime, I had my GP training to complete.

I couldn't do anything to speed the arrival of my operation date, but I could do something about my exhaustion and my levels of stress. Rather than stop work altogether, I reduced my hours to a three-day week – each day in clinic would be followed by a day off to recover. The headache was as bad as ever, but with more time to rest and recuperate between clinic days, the pain bothered me less. Knowing I'd have the breathing space of a day at home meant that I was able to give my best to my patients on those days I was in the clinic. My training would be delayed – it would now take longer than a year for me to be signed off as a competent GP – but I persuaded myself that there was no point risking burnout for the sake of a schedule of someone else's making.

And I qualified all the same, albeit a couple of months late. The operation, when it came, was successful, my headaches were cured, and I had learned a valuable lesson. We need strength and energy to live with illness. Cutting my workload gave me the reserves I needed not just to live with chronic pain until the operation, but to begin slowly on the path towards recovery from it.

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All worthwhile acts of recovery have to work in concert with natural processes, not against them. Many antibiotics don't "kill" bacteria as such, but merely inhibit the growth of bacterial colonies and leave the body to do the rest. A doctor who sets out to "heal" is in truth more like a gardener who sets out to "grow" – actually, nature does almost all the work. Even when I

stitch a patient's wound, the suture material itself does not knit the tissues – that thread is simply a trellis to guide the body in its own work of healing.

This idea of the body as belonging to the green, organic world is something often forgotten in the clinics and hospital wards where I've trained and worked – so much so that it came as a surprise to read of a physician who has taken it to the heart of her clinical management. Victoria Sweet is an associate professor of medicine at the University of California in San Francisco. For many years she worked in one of the last almshouses in the United States – a hospital for the poor who have nowhere else to go.

Sweet's book *God's Hotel: A Doctor, a Hospital and a Pilgrimage to the Heart of Medicine* explains how, after reading about the medieval healer Hildegard of Bingen, she came to the conclusion that, to better describe the aims of recovery, we should resurrect Hildegard's medieval concept of *viriditas*, or "greening" – to be healed is to be reinvigorated by the same force that gives life to trees as much as it does human beings. She, too, observed that the work of the physician is much more like that of a gardener than it is like a mechanic.

This makes intuitive sense: until very recently, physicians had to study botany, not only because so many medicines are derived from plants, but because the study of plants is a way to understand life itself. The GP I had as a child – the one who sent me urgently to hospital with meningitis – told me later that he had to take botany classes as part of his medical school curriculum in the 1950s. It is as if, with the pharmaceutical revolutions of the later 20th century, we have forgotten something of the importance of a broader approach to recovery. It has been shown that patients recovering in a hospital bed need less pain-relieving medication if they have a view out over something green, growing and alive. This was recognised long ago by Florence Nightingale, but seemingly forgotten by the modern architects of our hospitals.

The word "physician" can be rooted back to the Greek *physis*, meaning "nature", and *phuo*, which means "to grow". Just like a plant, what we need in order to grow back into wholeness is a "regime" of the right nutrients, the right environment and the right attitude – and to be left in peace. This attitude to recovery has been crowded out in modern medicine because it

takes time. Sweet wouldn't want to return to medieval medicine, and wouldn't give up our blood tests and scans, our robotic surgery or antibiotics. But she would like to see the value of time restored to the practice of medicine – and so would I.

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Doctors and nurses bring their own personalities and experience to every medical encounter, and we know that people recover more quickly from physical conditions if they perceive their clinician to be sympathetic to their concerns. Psychological research into “compassion fatigue” has shown that most students begin clinical studies with a great deal of compassion, but the longer they work in caring professions, the more they seem to lose it.

The word “doctor” comes from *docere*, meaning “to teach” or “to guide”, and just as every teacher you’ve ever had works with a different style, so does every doctor. The idea that there’s a universal approach every practitioner should adopt is false, and would be a terrible way to offer medical care. In the 30 or 40 medical encounters I have in the course of a normal working day, there must be several that I misjudge, guessing wrongly which kind of doctor that particular patient needs me to be.

I’m not sure this kind of intuition is something that can necessarily be taught. But what *can* be taught is the confidence to act on the small voices of conscience and experience that suggest when a therapeutic relationship will benefit from going off-piste – away from the well-trimmed paths of textbook solutions into something wilder, more unscripted and perhaps more effective. Within modern medicine, this creates a conflict, between an idea of a clinical encounter that should be measurable, reproducible and thus open to professional regulation of standards, and the idea of the clinical encounter as an alchemy that combines the experience of two human beings in an unrepeatable moment that changes both of them.

Doctors have to be well grounded in the science of medicine – that isn’t up for debate. But what is open to question is whether scientific knowledge is where medical practice ends, or where it begins. The answer might of course be different in different situations. I have some patients who see me solely as the conduit through which to gain access to specialists, and others who want from me, as a representative of the medical establishment, the scientific facts

of their particular condition. And at the other end of the spectrum I've known patients for whom the aim of our consultations is to feel cared for, and to be given a sense of confidence in their recovery even when their condition is one that can't be cured. Just as some people need to understand the science of their disease in order to better appreciate how to defeat it, others need to understand illness as a story that is tending towards a happy ending. I'm happy to take whichever approach the patient prefers: the biology of an illness, or its biography. Both are equally valid ways of approaching medical encounters. Similarly we would do well, as a profession, to expand the notion of what counts as a therapy.



A Covid patient in Spain recovering with the help of two health workers.  
Photograph: Pierre-Philippe Marcou/AFP/Getty Images

Drugs can be the least of healing, and the idea that therapies must be something that you swallow or inject – that they should be pills or syrups or infusions – is manifestly untrue. I've seen choirs, walking groups, gardening clubs and voluntary work revolutionise the health of patients of mine, and there are many opportunities, frequently unexploited, for patients to become their own best physicians, often with the help of non-medical agencies.

Similarly, there can be non-medical solutions that help greatly with medical problems. For a gambling addict I knew, the most effective therapy was

referral to a debt counsellor. For a woman struggling against drug dependency, starving herself to feed her habit, it was referral to a food bank. Having enough food in the cupboard gave her the peace of mind to be able to address her addiction. For a fit, newly retired and newly widowed man I knew, it was volunteering in a charity shop that helped him the most. For someone escaping the stress of an abusive marriage with her three children, it was a phone call to the local branch of [Women's Aid](#). For an immigrant family living in a damp, cramped slum that was worsening one child's asthma, it was a letter to the housing department.

Clinicians such as doctors, nurses and physiotherapists drop in and out of patients' lives so fleetingly that for most people in recovery, the majority of caring work is done by family and friends. Some of my patients over the years have found it difficult to remember the needs and the frustrations of loved ones who are doing the bulk of that work. But the contributions of those around us to healing are irreplaceable, and their resilience is something to be cherished and protected. It, too, may hold the key to recovery.

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It is a tyranny to assume that positivity can overcome all obstacles. Much of what constitutes illness consists of things we cannot change. In his book Between Sickness and Health: The Landscape of Illness and Wellness, the rehabilitation specialist Christopher Ward has written of how his first step with a new patient is always to acknowledge their suffering, and to then redefine the goals of treatment not necessarily as "rehabilitation", but as "possibilitation": the opportunity of each person to work towards the best possible version of their life.

Even with the advances of 21st-century medical technology, surgery, DNA profiling and gene therapy, the list of illnesses that can be definitively cured is surprisingly short. In terms of drugs or quick fixes, medicine has depressingly little to offer people suffering from long Covid symptoms. But for all that the western medical attitude to the body and illness frequently disappoints, it remains a powerful approach, and for that reason has been adopted in some form or another across much of the globe. Even its ability to define and name our illnesses can offer consolation – I've seen many reassured by that act of naming, comforted by the knowledge that what afflicts them has an existence separate from themselves. The naming of an

illness offers access to a community of others who have found ways of living with the same difficulties, and that itself can be a source of hope. But there's a paradox at work: categorising an illness can offer a false sense of definition, locking us into an expectation that becomes self-fulfilling. I've known patients who accept the label of an illness with relief, and others who detest all labels as stigmatising. Where possible, I try to take those preferences into account.

The reality of mind and body is one of dynamism and change – any vision of human life that is static at heart is an illusion. Sometimes the most helpful attitude to adopt is not to think of illness categories as concrete, immutable destinies, but as stories of the mind and the body. Within certain impassable limits, stories can be rewritten.

No one is getting any younger, and all of us would do well to remember that health can never be a final destination, but a balance between extremes, different for everyone, and whether we achieve it or not depends on our goals and priorities as much as it depends on anatomy and physiology. Every illness is unique, which means that all recoveries must also be in some sense unique. There is no one-size-fits-all to getting better. And though I have tried to set out some principles that have proven helpful over the years in guiding me, and my patients, through the many landscapes of illness, I'm conscious that it's possible to touch on only a few waypoints – it's rarely possible to indicate an easy way out. It's a landscape we all have to visit sooner or later. From time to time we all need to learn the art of convalescence.

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## **‘We were the AYBs – the angry young Blacks’: the art movement that rocked Thatcher’s Britain**



‘Taking the mickey’ ... The Spirit of the Carnival by Tam Joseph (1982).

The Blk Art Group – whose once-shunned work is now coveted by galleries – were radical young artists who tackled shootings, racism and uprisings in

the 1980s. So where are they now?

Alex Mistlin

Tue 4 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Shortly after Margaret Thatcher became prime minister in May 1979, Eddie Chambers made an artwork called [Destruction of the National Front](#). Then a 19-year-old student in Wolverhampton, Chambers reconfigured the union jack as a swastika, before tearing it into fragments across four panels. The image stands as a defiant rebuke to a resurgent far right, evoking the anger many Black Britons felt at the time.

The work was emblematic of the Blk [Art](#) Group, a radical association of young Black artists founded by Chambers in 1979. The group, stylised as Blk and pronounced “Black”, aimed to combat racism with work that focused on the experience of being Black in Thatchers’ Britain, while promoting a distinctly Black British political identity. Although short-lived – it only lasted for five years – the group casts a long shadow over British art, through its influence on subsequent generations of Black artists and its impact on contemporaries such as Lubaina Himid and Sonia Boyce.

More than 40 years on from the group’s foundation, Keith Piper, 60, still looks every inch the artist in his red flannel shirt and goatee. Malta-born and raised in Birmingham, he now lives in London, though his accent is still unmistakably Brummie. Piper met Chambers in 1979 while studying at Lanchester Polytechnic, Coventry, now known as Coventry University. “I overheard him talking about a show,” he says, referring to Black Art An’ Done, held at Wolverhampton Art Gallery. “I thought, ‘He’s very serious.’ But we had a lot in common because we were the only two Black students on the course.”

Chambers quickly set about recruiting Black students from West Midlands’ art schools and soon their ranks grew. By 1982, Dominic Dawes, Claudette Johnson, Wenda Leslie, Ian Palmer, Donald Rodney and Marlene Smith had joined. “Eddie was a great organiser,” says Piper, “but we all had our own specific creative concerns.”

It wasn't just about making sense of the world – it was about making sense of me

*Marlene Smith*

The group's work features prominently in a new exhibition at Tate Britain, Life Between Islands, which focuses on the work of British artists of Caribbean heritage. Life Between Islands was co-curated by the director of Tate Britain, Alex Farquharson, and David A Bailey, an artist and contemporary of the Blk group. You can see how their work influenced subsequent generations, not least the Black [YBAs](#) Chris Ofili, [Yinka Shonibare](#) and Steve McQueen.

Chambers, now professor of art history and African diaspora art at the University of Texas at Austin, epitomised Blk's political approach. How Much Longer You Bastards, from 1983, directly challenged the activities of Barclay's bank in South Africa at a time when Margaret Thatcher was refusing to impose sanctions on the apartheid regime. The collage features the bank's logo alongside pages from the Financial Times and [a widely publicised image](#) of parents carrying their dead child after the 1976 Soweto uprising, to illustrate British complicity in the inhumanity of apartheid.



Made from his own skin ... Donald Rodney's In the House of My Father. Photograph: Andra Nelki/Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © The Estate of Donald G. Rodney

Piper, in turn, incorporated text into pieces such as 1983's The Body Politic in order to articulate complex narratives of dehumanisation and torture, for which he took inspiration from the work of Gavin Jantjes and Rasheed Areen. The work features two naked and headless bodies – a white woman, a black man – with identical text alongside each figure: "To you I was always (just) a body." Piper says: "I needed the audience to understand the hostile scrutiny Black bodies came under from the white majority."

The group's work was always rooted in the politics of the era. "Wolverhampton was one of a number of places to be decimated by the experiment Thatcher was undertaking," says Piper. "It was the usual tensions of the 1980s – the far right on the rise, anti-apartheid, [Greenham Common](#), policing, [the New Cross Fire](#). It was a very politicised time – and that was core to my perspective as a young Black man."

This febrile atmosphere was evident in the reception the group received. They were immediately polarising: a breath of fresh air in some quarters, an unwelcome source of aggravation in others. "We were surrounded by a lot of reactionary forces, people who were openly hostile," says Piper. At a 1983 showing of The Pan-Afrikan Connection at the Herbert in Coventry, complaints from a security guard about the exhibition's subject matter forced the gallery to erect a warning notice outside the entrance: "Not suitable for people under 18." Even on the left, the group's work was largely dismissed. A note left in the visitors' book read: "Angry. Too angry ... more Marxist approach needed." In the Guardian, Irene McManus wrote: "Their work is really just a collection of political posters."

But some Blk members are now considered innovative. [Donald Rodney](#) was a leading figure, who died in 1998 at just 36. "Donald was a very active and energetic person," says Piper, who shared a Nottingham flat with the artist in the early 1980s and is now a trustee of his estate. Completed shortly before his death, In the House of My Father is a closeup photograph of Rodney's hand. In his palm is a tiny sculpture of a house made of pieces of his own skin. Rodney suffered from sickle cell anaemia, an extremely painful blood

condition that is particularly common in people of African or Caribbean heritage.



‘It was a very politicised time’ ... Keith Piper’s Go West Young Man. Photograph: Courtesy the artist

The artist and curator Marlene Smith was 18 when she joined the group and believes they shared a vision. “We were very coherent, both in terms of our pan-Africanism but also in wanting to make Black lives visible. There was a lot of protest in the work but what’s overlooked sometimes is the humanity.”

Pan-Africanism – the idea that African peoples and diaspora share a common history and identity, often symbolised through the colours red, gold and green – was a guiding principle for the group. “We wanted to illustrate the connection between Victorian colonialism and the struggle that we had as teenagers to find our place,” says Smith. “We were all children of Windrush but, for me, pan-Africanism wasn’t just about making sense of the world but also about making sense of me.”

The movement could only provide limited answers, however. “Pan-Africanism really fed me but it couldn’t help me understand the role gender played in my identity. We were devouring books in an attempt to make sense of that time.” She mentions Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism,

by [bell hooks](#), who died last month, as well as the work of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker.

Smith's 1985 sculptural installation Good Housekeeping depicts a Black woman beneath the words: "My mother opens the door at 7am she is not bulletproof." The work was a direct response to the [police shooting of Cherry Groce](#), who was left permanently paralysed by the incident that incited the 1985 Brixton Uprising.



'My mum would adopt a similar position after she's been on her feet all day'  
... Reclining Figure by Claudette Johnson.

Smith remembers the first meeting of Blk at Chambers' parents house: "Claudette Johnson did an absolutely jaw-dropping job of showing her work in relation to the canon – Picasso, Rubens, Manet's Olympia. She showed us how Black women were seen as decorative in art history, either as exotica, or evidence of how wealthy someone was."

In a statement for The Pan-Afrikan Connection, Johnson wrote: "While the black woman experiences oppression on the grounds of her sex, sexuality and race, there is not yet a word that describes the specific and deliberate nature of this oppression." As she says now: "The word 'intersectionality' didn't exist at the time." Johnson's career stalled in the 1990s but has

restarted in earnest. Last month she presented a solo exhibition, [Still Here](#), at Hollybush Gardens in London. “The oppression of black women was a hot potato. It could be seen as divisive. People would ask me where I was putting my energy in terms of fighting for change: are you black, or are you a woman?”

Johnson’s 2017 work Reclining Figure was emblematic, she says, of “the subtle and dramatic difference that occurs when the person doing the gazing was a black female herself.” This almost lifesize image depicts an exhausted Black woman lying horizontal. “My mum used to adopt a similar position on the sofa after she’d been on her feet all day. I had in mind that poignant moment when she finally wasn’t doing something for someone else.” Of Blk, she says: “In the 1980s, we were seen as people passing through – so much of our work was about making the point that we were here to stay.”

Sonia Boyce was a contemporary, as was the future Turner-prize winner [Lubaina Himid](#). Smith and Johnson both mention The Thin Black Line, a show curated by Himid at the Institute for Contemporary Arts in 1985, as the high-water mark of Black British art in the period. The show featured key works from 11 Black female artists, including Johnson, Smith and Boyce, along with Himid herself. “That show was like storming the citadel,” says Johnson. “Lubaina had gone to the Royal College and was trying to find black artists – she curated, she wrote, she was like a magnet gathering different artists together. In terms of persuasive power, she was very similar to Eddie Chambers.”



Claudette Johnson: ‘The word “intersectionality” didn’t exist.’ Photograph: Ingrid Pollard

Blk’s members were not only defined by their youth (at 25, Johnson was the oldest when the group disbanded) but also by their art school education. “Blk wasn’t outsider art,” says Johnson. “We were full of hope that we could change things – that our art could mobilise black people and inspire white people to see us differently. We were trying to bring in a new audience that hadn’t been served by those galleries before.”

Beyond Blk, 1980s Britain was fertile ground for a thriving ecosystem of Black artists. Now 74, Tam Joseph was both a forerunner and a contemporary of Blk. Sitting in his paint and dust strewn studio, he explains how his childhood in Dominica lends his work a different emphasis. “I am Windrush,” he says. “I didn’t experience growing up as a Black child in England.”

By way of explaining his approach, he says: “I love taking the mickey.” And he points to a bubble-wrapped painting of Jimi Hendrix as Frans Hals’s Laughing Cavalier. “Hendrix looks more like a cavalier than a fat white man,” he says. Another painting, 1982’s The Spirit of Carnival, encapsulates the legacy of police aggression towards British Caribbean communities. The image features a [carnival masquerader](#), alone in a sea of British police;

Joseph was inspired by his experience at the 1976 Notting Hill carnival, where a riot broke out after police clashed with revellers.

Debates around education, housing and the police were central to the work of many Black artists in the 1980s. Joseph's 1983 work UK School Report depicts the passage of a Black child through the British education system in three portraits captioned: "Good at sports", "Likes music" and "Needs surveillance". The director and artist Steve McQueen has mentioned the work in reference to his [Year 3](#) photo series.



'I am Windrush' ... Tam Joseph. Photograph: Anne Purkiss

While at art school, Denzil Forrester was charged with using insulting language after he was apprehended outside a jewellery shop in London. "They thought I was casing the joint but I was just drawing it. They came over to see what I was doing and my expensive college camera attracted their attention!"

Forrester frequently painted [nightclubs](#) in his early career and says he "only started painting about the police after my friend Winston Rose was killed in 1981. I could never have done [Three Wicked Men](#) without my knowledge of what happened to Winston. I really had to work hard to capture the darkness of that London street."

Born in Grenada, Forrester moved to Britain aged 11. “Everywhere was dark and grey,” he says. “I never painted in the West Indies but I studied painting because my school in Stoke Newington had an art room. It was the only time you were allowed to do what you want. Once I got into art school, I knew there was no stopping me.”

The Blk Art Group disbanded shortly after the second National Black Art Convention in 1984. Most left the West Midlands after their art degrees concluded, primarily heading to London for gallery work or postgraduate study. “It was Eddie’s founding impulse that brought us all together,” says Piper. “When he lost that impulse, we went our separate ways.”

“The YBAs took the DIY strategies we used in alternative spaces and applied them in some of the biggest institutions,” says Marlene Smith. “We were the AYBs – angry young Blacks,” she jokes. Picking up on this theme, Johnson says: “We wanted to be more political than previous generations of Black artists. We used the N-word and were unafraid to reference violence, lynchings and slavery in our collective resistance to the Thatcher government. Sometimes I’m surprised the work still seems to speak to people more than 30 years later, but then the struggles we were articulating are the struggles of many still.”



Tam Joseph: The Sky at Night, 1985.

Says Piper: “We were serious about seizing space and time in the venues that had previously only been open to white artists. But we were also just young kids, egging each other on and having a good time. We were supposed to be talking about the logistics of shows but we’d mostly fight about politics and music – mainly Reggae, Mod, Ska-revival and 2-Tone in those days ... It was a bizarre and multilayered era but a very important one in terms of the consolidation of Black communities in this country.”

Looking back, Piper thinks it was remarkable how fully formed the group’s vision was at the outset: by the time Chambers applied for degree courses, Destruction of the National Front was already under his belt: “I remember him working away in his room, marking up these flags and tearing them to pieces. It’s mad to think he was turned down with that in his portfolio. Now it’s part of the national collection at the Tate.”

This article was amended on 4 January 2022. Piper met Chambers in 1979 while studying at Lanchester Polytechnic, Coventry, which is now Coventry University. An earlier version said the institution was “now Wolverhampton School of Art”.

- Keith Piper’s major solo show is at the New Art Gallery Walsall, West Midlands, from 14 January. Marlene Smith features in Cut & Mix at New Art Exchange, Nottingham, until 8 January. Tam Joseph’s new exhibition, The Face: Portraits, is at Felix & Spear, London until 9 January. Life Between Islands is at Tate Britain, London, until 3 April.
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## Music

Interview

# ‘Elton John listening to us blows my mind’: Yard Act on humour, despair and celebrity fans

[Stevie Chick](#)

The Leeds post-punks make spiky music that’s also warm and funny. ‘We can’t eradicate misery and depression,’ says frontman James Smith



Burning ambition: (from left) Yard Act’s Ryan Needham, Jay Russell, James Smith, Sam Shipstone. Photograph: Publicity image

Tue 4 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

There are few couplets in pop that capture modern life’s seesaw between cynicism and hope as well as this choice gem near the end of *The Overload*, the forthcoming debut album from Leeds group [Yard Act](#): “It’s all so

pointless / Ah, but it's not though, is it?" The line bares the soft underbelly of a band whose bleakly hilarious post-punk clatter channels the interior monologues of some of the country's very worst bigots and bores, before finding unexpected humanity within them. A band who have won comparison to such caustic mavericks as Fontaines DC and [Sleaford Mods](#), at the same time as finding themselves unlikely residents of the Radio 1 playlist and the record collection of one [Elton John](#), who declared himself a fan in [a Guardian interview](#).

"I'm an optimist," insists James Smith, Yard Act's gangly, garrulous frontman, Zooming from his Leeds bedroom and fussing with his mop of mousey hair. He knows a perverse variant of luck is on his side right now. Yard Act were a late-career roll of the dice after his previous band of nine years, Post War Glamour Girls, splintered. Then, almost as soon as Yard Act formed, Covid surfaced and venues shuttered. Still they have thrived against all odds.

Smith's prospects weren't always so sunny. Growing up in Lymm, near Warrington, he was a South Park-obsessed budding animator whose dreams were scotched by art teachers with whom he had "disagreements". But as that door closed, his next youthful obsession, [Gorillaz](#), opened Smith's ears to pop and set him on a wayward path that took in his dad's hip-hop records, the early 21st-century indie renaissance of the Strokes, LCD Soundsystem and Arctic Monkeys, and the poetic growling of Tom Waits.

"My world was small," he remembers. "My ambition was to move to Leeds. I wanted to start a band, and there weren't enough people in my town who understood what I wanted to do." He arrived in Leeds aged 18, and found his home in the city's "nurturing, insular DIY scene", making friends with the other local bands and never dreaming much further than its city limits. "Most bands in Leeds aren't bothered about breaking out, or don't know how to," Smith says. Post War Glamour Girls were a little of both: "We didn't connect, for whatever reason. I was in a dark, miserable place, as most men in their early 20s are when they face life head-on and realise it's not as fun as they thought it was gonna be."

Smith spent his days teaching music and as a support worker for “a lad with a brain injury and cerebral palsy, who I worked with for nine years and is one of my best friends”. His evenings, meanwhile, involved post-work pints with friend Ryan Needham, the bassist in another Leeds band, Menace Beach. The pair bonded over music and more – “I just found him so funny, and I wanted to be around him all the time because he made me laugh so much,” Smith says – and when Needham became briefly homeless, Smith offered his spare room. “My wife was very accommodating and let me play music with my friend for three months and ignore her,” he grins.

It wasn’t time wasted. Smith and Needham formed Yard Act in the image of US lo-fi indie rock greats Guided By Voices. “We were just gonna get drunk, write pop songs, record them on cassettes and give ’em to friends,” Smith remembers. “But Ryan started leaning towards no wave, dance-punk basslines, and encouraged me to explore the style I’ve ended up writing in now.” That style was a spoken-word post-punk hybrid, heavy on narrative. “It’s rap music, but it’s not rap music,” he explains. “A lot of rap is first-person statements and defining who you are. My approach was conversational, and humorous. You’re putting yourself out there when you start cracking jokes. It’s a lot more nerve-racking than being po-faced and mysterious. But mystique’s never been my strong point.” Smith’s new style crystallised on Fixer Upper, Yard Act’s debut seven-inch, self-released in July 2020. An exercise in blackly comedic character observation worthy of Steve Coogan, the track showcased Smith’s new creation Graeme, a charmless, overbearing self-made man with a sideline in low-grade bigotry.

“I’ve become quite defensive over Graeme,” Smith says, adding that for many of Yard Act’s nascent fanbase Graeme was “the embodiment of everything they hate. But he’s just a bit of an idiot, really, with a lot of half-formed opinions he thinks are gospel. He’s an amalgamation of friends’ dads and men in the pub when I was growing up; they’re rife in small towns. Ultimately, if we can’t figure out how to coexist with the Graemes of the world, we’re not going to get anywhere.”



Yard Act at the Portland Arms in Cambridge. Photograph: Antonio Olmos/The Observer

Smith says that with Yard Act he has struck a balance “between the anger and the mellowness that make me up”. That anger grew, he says “post-Brexit referendum”, as he felt “the world get harder and harder”. Perhaps trying to find the good in Graeme is his attempt to make peace with this anger? “The state of this country, and the world, can quickly get you into a spiral of Everything Is Bad,” he nods. “But it’s not. The good moments don’t exist without the bleak shit. We can’t eradicate misery and depression, we’ve got to coexist with it.

“Lately, I’ve been watching series after series of [First Dates](#),” he continues. “People just want to find someone to love and to listen to them. Even the Graemes of the world, even the nasty bastards. And no one’s fully formed, people can change. There’s that Bill Callahan song, [I’m New Here](#), where he says: ‘No matter how far wrong you’ve gone, you can always turn around.’ I try and apply that to everyone I meet.” He pauses. “Of course, if you’re really fucked off with someone, it’s fine to think they’re absolutely shit as well.”

Focusing on the good stuff is his medicine now, and there’s plenty for Smith to be positive about: parenthood, imminent pop stardom of some stripe and

the patronage of a celebrity fan. “Maybe Elton could give Bernie Taupin a few weeks off, and I’ll send him some of my stories for his next record, and see if he can make them cinematic,” Smith grins. “Elton John, eating his breakfast, listening to Yard Act … It blows my mind, I can’t lie.”

- *The Overload is out on 21 January on Island Records/Zen FC.*
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## [China](#)

# Detained, missing, close to death: the toll of reporting on Covid in China

Activists say crackdown is driven by Xi Jinping, who has ‘declared a war on independent journalism’



Police block journalists outside a Shanghai court where journalist Zhang Zhan – who reported on Wuhan's Covid outbreak – was tried in December last year. Photograph: Leo Ramirez/AFP/Getty



Helen Davidson

@heldavidson

Tue 4 Jan 2022 00.30 EST

Chen Kun was living in Indonesia with his wife and daughter when he learned from his brother Mei's boss that he had been "taken away for investigation" by Chinese police.

He immediately suspected it was to do with his brother's website, a citizen news project called Terminus 2049. Since 2018 Mei, his colleague Cai Wei, and Cai's partner – surnamed Tang – had been archiving articles about issues including #MeToo and migrant rights, and reposting them whenever they were deleted from China's strictly monitored and censored online platforms. It was April 2020, and for the last few months Terminus 2049 had been targeting stories about the Covid-19 outbreak and response.

In an interview with the Guardian from his home in France, Chen recalled warning his shy but passionate younger brother about setting up such a website, but thinking the worst case scenario was that Mei would be "invited to drink tea", a euphemism for interrogation by security agencies, not arrested.

Instead Mei and Cai spent almost 16 months in detention. Tang was released in May, when the other two were convicted at a trial which Chen said lasted just 100 minutes. Mei and Cai were sentenced to 15 months jail and released in August on time served. Mei is potentially still under surveillance.

The group is on a growing list of journalists and others who have been arrested and detained by Chinese authorities, often without trial, in a crackdown that appeared to escalate during the pandemic.

In December a report by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) detailed [a worsening “nightmare” for journalists](#) under the rule of Xi Jinping, with 128 known to be behind bars or disappeared. More than 70 are Uyghur journalists, and at least 10 people were arrested for reporting on the Covid outbreak and lockdown in Wuhan.

Chen said it was a sign of how sensitive Chinese authorities were and remain about the pandemic and its origins.

“I’m sure the reason why my brother was arrested was because of Covid,” Chen said. “Before his arrest … they didn’t encounter any problems.”

## **‘A war on independent journalism’**

Mei was formally arrested for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble”, a vague and ubiquitous charge frequently levelled at dissidents, activists and journalists, and sent to residential surveillance in a designated location (RSDL) – China’s increasingly utilised form of secretive and solitary detention where the accused can be held for up to six months and interrogated without charge, or access to lawyers or family.

The rights group Safeguard Defenders estimates between 45,000 and 55,000 people have been sent to RSDL, including about 15,000 in 2020. Among them have been Mei, the Australian CGTN anchor Cheng Lei, the journalist Sophia Huang Xueqin and the activist Wang Jianbing.

Mei and his Terminus 2049 colleagues were freed in August, and he is living at home in China. Chen is still advocating for those still detained,

particularly Huang, and says that neither his brother nor their parents are aware of his campaigning.



A man reading a Communist party newspaper in Beijing. Photograph: Kevin Frayer/Getty Images

As well as reporting on the #MeToo movement and the Hong Kong protests – the latter for which she was detained for three months in 2019 – Huang had also interviewed Chen and written about Mei.

“She was always trying to record the stories and experiences of a lot of people like my brother, about defenders,” Chen said.

The independent investigative journalist has not been seen since she and Wang were arrested in September on the eve of her planned departure to study in Europe. In October her parents were told she had been formally arrested for “subverting state power”.

Also subject to human rights campaigns is [Zhang Zhan](#), a former lawyer turned citizen reporter, who last Christmas was sentenced to four years in jail over 122 videos she posted online and interviews she gave to foreign press during 14 weeks in Wuhan. Deep into a lengthy hunger strike, which no friends or family can convince her to stop, Zhang is close to death, her family says.

While human rights observers, legal groups, and media organisations maintain she should never have been convicted in the first place, an international campaign is urgently calling for her release on any grounds possible, to save her life.

Feng Bin, who like Zhang broadcast reports on YouTube from Wuhan, has not been seen since his arrest in February 2020, and Li Zehu, who [broadcast the police chase](#) which led to his arrest around the same time, was detained for two months. Chen Qiushi, a former human rights lawyer turned citizen journalist, reported from Wuhan's hospitals interviewing families, disappeared at the same time and didn't reappear until September.

In February 2020 Cheng Lei, [an anchor for Chinese state broadcaster CGTN](#), posted on Facebook that she and her friend Haze Fan, a Bloomberg news assistant, had been unsuccessfully lobbying to report from Wuhan. In August Cheng was detained and later charged with “illegally supplying state secrets overseas”. [Fan was detained in December](#). Both remain in detention more than a year later.

Cedric Alviari, RSF’s east Asia bureau director, said the 128 detained journalists and press freedom defenders is the biggest count in five years. It includes 71 Uyghur journalists, and at least 10 who face impending death if not immediately released, according to RSF.

Alviari said the crackdown is driven by Xi, who has “declared a war on independent journalism” after tightening controls on traditional media.

“Everything he and the CCP have been doing over the past eight years ... has been to suppress independent voices.,” he said.

“The Chinese people, like every person on earth, crave information on what’s happening around them.”

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[China](#)

## Chinese city of 1.2 million people locked down after three Covid cases emerge

Public transport halted and cars banned in Yuzhou as China pursues zero-Covid strategy ahead of Winter Olympics

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



A resident undergoes a test for coronavirus in Xi'an in China's northern Shaanxi province. The city of Yuzhou has been locked down after three asymptomatic cases were reported. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

*Helen Davidson and agencies  
@heldavidson*

Tue 4 Jan 2022 03.20 EST

Three asymptomatic cases of Covid-19 were enough for Chinese authorities to lock down a city of almost 1.2 million people on Monday, joining 13 million others in locked down Xi'an, where local authorities have asked for restrictions to be tightened even further.

[Beijing is holding on to its zero-Covid strategy](#) ahead of the forthcoming Winter Olympics next month, and with local officials facing sanctions or sackings over outbreaks, cases have prompted increasingly strict responses.

Authorities in Yuzhou, Henan province, announced the lockdown on Monday evening, ordering all residents to stay inside, and residential communities to post sentries at gates. Different parts of the city have varying rules – some are allowing people to enter but not exit while others allow neither.

Public transport has been suspended and no cars are allowed on the road except for epidemic response vehicles, and all shops, entertainment and leisure venues have been closed. Only businesses that are “guaranteeing the supply of daily life materials” can operate.

Yuzhou's locked down population join Xi'an in Shaanxi province, where a harsh lockdown has been in place for almost two weeks, including the requirement for negative tests before an individual can seek medical care. The city has recorded more than 1,700 cases since early December, and put tens of thousands in quarantine. All positive cases are taken to hospitals for treatment and isolation. While the strict response had drawn some concern and complaints [including about food shortages](#), on Tuesday Communist party authorities demanded local officials “strictly and properly” implement restrictions.

“The various work that needs to be done must only be strengthened,” said Liu Guozhong, the provincial head of the party in Shaanxi, of which Xi'an is its capital.

The epidemic control effort is at a pivotal moment, Liu said. “We'd rather widen our identification of groups at risk than to overlook a single person,”

he was quoted as saying in an article published by the Xi'an government on Tuesday.

He said no one should be overlooked during mass testing in key Xi'an areas and “household doors” should be closely watched in rural parts of the city to make sure people are complying with travel curbs.

The swift and extreme response in Yuzhou drew some concern online, with some commenters questioning the need to go so far over a handful of cases, but others were largely supportive, in line with apparent broad support for China's continued policy of stamping out outbreaks.

While most of the world is open and operating with huge case numbers, including some countries that previously pursued zero-Covid strategies, China has stuck with its policy of keeping the virus at bay, putting increasing pressure on local officials as they battle sporadic outbreaks.

In Xi'an, two senior Communist party officials in the northern city were removed from their posts over their “insufficient rigour in preventing and controlling the outbreak”. In Guangxi, officials paraded pandemic rule-breakers through the public streets, with placards around their necks. And last month, China's disciplinary body announced that dozens of officials were punished for failure to prevent the outbreak in the city.

China reported a further 175 new Covid-19 cases on Tuesday, including five in Henan province and eight more in a separate cluster linked to a garment factory in the eastern city of Ningbo. Officials did not say what variant the outbreak involved.

Although the reported cases are low compared with elsewhere in the world, new coronavirus infections in recent weeks have reached a high not seen in the country since March 2020.

*Additional reporting by Xiaoqian Zhu*

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## Omicron variant

# When will Omicron peak in the UK and is the modelling wrong?

**Analysis:** gloomiest predictions may have not come to pass, but experts caution that we're not out of the woods yet

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



A electronic sign on the A4 in Buckinghamshire encourages people to get their booster dose of the Covid vaccine. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Linda Geddes](#) Science correspondent*

Mon 3 Jan 2022 13.54 EST

The family gatherings have disbanded, the new year's hangovers have lifted. Despite record Covid infection figures over the holiday period, evidence that the rate of increase in cases may be slowing has prompted speculation that London, at least, may be close to reaching "peak Omicron".

Boris Johnson is said to be obsessed with this hypothetical time point, seeing it as crucial to how the Covid variant may play out nationwide. If hospitalisations follow the same trajectory and peak without the NHS being overwhelmed, the prime minister's decision not to impose lockdown-style restrictions before the holiday period may be vindicated.

Johnson is correct that peak Omicron, when it comes, will be an important moment. "The reason it matters when it peaks – and particularly when cases peak in the over-50s – is it's likely that a week later we'll see the peak in hospitalisations, and roughly two weeks later, we'll see a peak in the number of deaths. It's helpful, because it helps us to plan ahead," said Dr Raghbir Ali, a senior clinical research associate at the University of Cambridge's MRC epidemiology unit.

In London, cases appear to have stabilised, or even fallen during the past two weeks. New hospitalisations also appear to have stabilised in recent days, with 319 people admitted with Covid-19 on 31 December, compared with 450 the day before, and 511 the day before that.

"We would guess, based on what case numbers are doing in London, that the peak in hospital admissions should be this week, and nationally, maybe a week later," Ali said.

This is roughly in line with the scenarios outlined in modelling studies, which suggest Omicron cases will peak in early-mid January. However, the magnitude of the peak appears to be significantly lower than some of the worst case scenarios predicted.

For instance, according to modelling data published by the University of Warwick on 30 December, hospital admissions should by now be approaching about 5,000 a day in England. Yet, according to the latest

[figures](#), the number of Covid-19 patients admitted on 1 January was 1,819, down from 2,370 three days earlier.

This does not necessarily mean we should disregard such models, as some hawkish MPs have suggested. Ali said: “Modelling, post-vaccination has become extremely difficult. And trying to predict people’s behaviour, well, they don’t even try to include that in the models, so, inevitably, they’re not going to be able to predict what’s going to happen.”

“Instead, they give a variety of scenarios, which are necessary because we have to have some idea of the range of possibilities. But when the range is so wide, it doesn’t really help policymakers, because the difference between 100 deaths a day and 6,000 deaths a day is just so huge.”

Although the gloomiest predictions may have not come to pass, experts caution that we are not out of the woods yet. Some of the slowing could be a reflection of altered behaviour in the run-up to Christmas, when concern about escalating Omicron cases and a desire to spend the festive period with older relatives prompted many to scale back social activities and behave more cautiously. They may also have been less likely to get tested in the run-up to Christmas – assuming they could access a test.

Now Christmas is over, some of us may have relaxed our behaviour. Whether we will see a surge in cases as a result of new year’s celebrations will not become apparent for about another week, as it takes five to six days on average after exposure to the virus for symptoms to develop, and then a further couple of days for people to seek a test and receive the results.

The return of children to schools this week – many of whom remain unvaccinated – may also lead to a surge in cases owing to increased mixing.

Paul Hunter, a professor in medicine at the University of East Anglia, said: “The Warwick model suggested that cases would peak early January. But it is still impossible to say. We will probably only really know in retrospect a couple of weeks later.

“What we can say is that the rate of increase has slowed dramatically for early mid-December, otherwise we would be seeing several millions of infections a day by now and that would have been impossible.”

“Taking all this together, I don’t think we have peaked yet, but I think we are not that far away – or at least I hope so,” he added.

A further fly in the ointment is that younger age groups accounted for the majority of Omicron cases during early-mid December, but increased intergenerational mixing over Christmas could yet trigger a surge of infections in older adults. Also, because Omicron is better at infecting people who have been vaccinated than Delta, proportionately more vulnerable older people are likely to fall ill.

The good news is that most of these people have now received a booster dose, and their levels of immune protection should remain high for a few months yet – though we will not yet know whether they will require yet another dose.

The ramped-up booster programme has been under way for several weeks, meaning many younger individuals should also soon have additional layer of immune protection, if not already.

The combination of this vaccine-induced protection and so many people having been infected means we will eventually hit peak Omicron, after which cases should begin to fall.

This will be cause for celebration, but for as long as significant numbers of people around the world remain unvaccinated, the global death toll from Covid will continue to rise, and the chances of further variants emerging will remain.

So, although the battle with Omicron may be beginning to turn in the UK’s favour, the wider war against coronavirus continues.

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[France](#)

## French politicians condemn death threats over vaccine pass

Lawmakers say they will not be cowed by threats as they debate bill to tighten rules

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



The French health minister, Olivier Véran, told the National Assembly: ‘The aim of this law is not to curb freedoms ... it is to save lives.’ Photograph: Christophe Petit-Tesson/EPA

*Reuters in Paris*  
Mon 3 Jan 2022 13.45 EST

Lawmakers from France's ruling party have said they will not be cowed by death threats that dozens of politicians have received over a bill that will require people to show proof of vaccination to go to a restaurant or cinema or take the train.

The new law, which would remove the option of showing a negative test result instead of having the jabs, has the backing of several parties and is almost certain to be passed by the lower house in a vote late on Monday or early on Tuesday.

But a tense debate in parliament on Monday highlighted what the government and the opposition described as widespread fatigue with the pandemic and measures to tackle it.

The proposed tightening of the rules has angered anti-vaccination activists and some lawmakers say they have been subject to aggression including vandalism and violent threats.

“We will not yield,” Yaël Braun-Pivet, of the ruling La République en Marche (La REM) party, told parliament, referring to death threats which she said politicians of all stripes had received. “It’s our democracy that is at stake.“

Lambasting what he called the “selfishness” of those who oppose immunisations, France’s health minister, Olivier Véran, said: “The aim of this law is not to curb freedoms … it is to save lives.“

### Cases in France

Last week, the garage of a ruling party lawmaker was set on fire, with graffiti by suspected anti-vaccination protesters scrawled on an adjacent wall.

The interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, has said police will strengthen protections for lawmakers after several, including La REM’s Barbara Bessot Ballot went public with death threats.

She said 52 lawmakers had received messages threatening to kill them for “attacking our freedom“, adding on Twitter: “Those death threats are

unacceptable.“

France has traditionally had more vaccine sceptics than many of its neighbours, but has one of the EU’s highest Covid-19 vaccination rates, at nearly 90% of those aged 12 and over.

For months, people have had to show either proof of vaccination or a negative Covid-19 test at many public venues.

But as infections with the Delta and Omicron variants surge, the government has decided to drop the test option.

It aims for the vaccine pass to enter into force in mid-January after approval by both houses of parliament.

With Monday’s debate set to continue into the night, hard-left lawmaker Jean-Luc Mélenchon said the proposed law, which would allow ID checks by others than the police, would set up a “totalitarian, authoritarian society“.

In tackling the pandemic, “you have been wrong on everything“, he told the government.

A protest was due to be held outside parliament at 5pm.

Large crowds protested against the health pass when it was introduced in the summer, but attendance at the weekend rallies dwindled as acceptance of the vaccine rose.

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## 2022.01.04 - Opinion

- As the Conservatives implode, the red wall suddenly seems in Labour's grasp
- Here's some good news for 2022: this could be the year the pandemic comes to an end
- Bring on the six-hour-long movies – it's grandeur and scale we want now
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OpinionLabour

## As the Conservatives implode, the red wall suddenly seems in Labour's grasp

[Polly Toynbee](#)



The Brexit balloon is bursting, the cabinet is rife with division – and Keir Starmer and co are increasingly appealing to voters



‘Suddenly that online raucousness sounds like voices from the past, fringe noises coming from outside a party that has since transformed itself.’

Photograph: House of Commons/PA

Tue 4 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

“I fucking hate the Labour party, they’re a fucking disgrace … They’ve betrayed the working classes, they’ve betrayed ordinary people.” Thus [spoke](#) Noel Gallagher, the former Oasis guitarist, and out it poured on to Twitter.

Well, he would, wouldn’t he? He long ago [regretted](#) that embarrassing Cool Britannia moment of euphoria when Tony Blair summoned stars to a 1997 Downing Street party.

Gallagher’s purist state of mind is shared by a rump of the left, who feel forever betrayed. In my [last column](#) I looked ahead with a glimmer of optimism that, after 12 wilderness years, Labour might be on the road back to power. The usual below-the-line warfare had broken out, with responses such as: “I left the Labour party. I will not vote for Starmer, his policies or anyone who supports him.” “He has introduced a Stalin-like purge of the membership, the grassroots, the activists.” “They are worse than the Conservatives.” “A clone of the Tory party.” “Tory-lite.” “Cancelled my membership.”

Here's a Twitter trope I get all the time: Polly Toynbee and the Guardian helped put the Tories in power (often accompanied by the hashtag #rightwingmedia). Odd this, as the Guardian (and I) backed Jeremy Corbyn's Labour against the Tories in 2017 and 2019. If only we had such influence, the Tories wouldn't have governed twice as long as Labour all my life.

Sometimes I answer back, other times I retell what Labour achieved when last in power: SureStart, tax credits, civil partnerships, more doctors, nurses and beds that helped reduce long hospital waits, increased school and further education funds, an Equality and Human Rights Commission, free entry to museums, a doubling of foreign aid, free nurseries, lifting more than a million pensioners and more than a million children out of absolute poverty – despite the tragedy of Iraq.

But of course this legacy wasn't enough. It was too easily uprooted, never satisfying the limitless hopes of those of us on the left. Maybe it's admirable to hold out for better, but I will always back whoever I think can best deny the [Conservatives](#) power. Yes, sometimes, that means compromising to win votes.

As our archaic electoral system kills new parties, capturing an existing one is the only viable route for a political cause. Labour has had periods of leftist entryism after losing elections. But suddenly that online raucousness sounds like voices from the past, fringe noises coming from outside a party that has since transformed itself. Labour MPs now find local parties no longer locked in warfare. Over the next weeks they are all up for reselection: expect no upsets. The tail end of the antisemitism trauma is dragging on with expensive court cases: Corbyn stays out [while he rejects](#) the Equality and Human Rights Commission's overall findings on antisemitism. Meanwhile the shadow cabinet is proposing policies such as [wealth taxes](#), a [£28bn green new deal](#) and fair pay deals, all of which refutes the "Tory clone" jibe. The party is inching towards electability.

But look on the other side, where the Tory party is devouring itself, eaten up by the Ukip-inflected extremists who have been selecting its MPs for years. Brexit was their opening salvo but this breed of libertarians are now pushing

other policies – spending cuts and deregulation – that are unsellable. A recent poll of 57 red wall seats in the Mail on Sunday put Labour 16 points ahead of the Conservatives and up five points nationally, with Keir Starmer outscoring Boris Johnson. The paper revealed a litany of lost voter trust, reporting “panic among MPs who fear they are doomed” and a “frenzy of bitching”.

The chancellor’s [rift](#) with the prime minister runs through the party, which summoned a Pied Piper populist to bribe voters but balks at paying for his tune. With Rishi Sunak’s wallet shut, the only thing Michael Gove can magic up for his delayed “levelling up” policy is ectoplasm. With no shine left on Brexit or Johnson, there’s no glue holding that strange north-south voter coalition together.

The months ahead will bring even more problems. April’s cost-of-living collision of rising inflation, energy bills, national insurance and council taxes will punish the government in May’s local elections.

Rarely has Labour ever been quite as out of touch with voters as the brand of libertarianism that is consuming the Tory party. Nearly 100 Conservative MPs voted against Covid precautions despite public backing for compulsory passports. The cabinet took a reckless position on new year clubbing, yet the Sunday Telegraph still complained that “Nannyism has won”. Its recent editorial commanded the Tories to “fulfil [Brexit](#), deregulate, lower taxes” in a country “swollen by regulations and spending”. This crescendo of libertarian demands is the only tune you now hear from the Tories and their press as the party vacates the playing field, just as Labour steps up to re-engage voters.

The right’s “freedoms” of post-Brexit deregulation would have publicly unacceptable consequences. Do they mean dirty food, Dickensian labour and unsafe buildings, unchecked by ridiculed environmental health officers? They never say. Abandoning their tax rise would lead to the NHS and social care collapsing. This new strain of rightwing anarchy is no longer anchored to old conservative interests in business, agriculture or even the City. It’s new to hear industrialists, farmers and financiers angry at damage done by their erstwhile party.

The Tories seem unhinged by Brexit's balloon bursting, with the UK losing £12bn of trade in October alone and the Office for Budget Responsibility estimating Brexit will cause a 4% drop in GDP. It seems unlikely that this out-of-control party will choose anyone who can bring them back to earth before an election. If not, impulsive spending cuts and deregulations will lose them votes, and [Labour](#) will be right there, feet firmly planted on the ground.

Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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## OpinionUK news

# Here's some good news for 2022: this could be the year the pandemic comes to an end

[Raghbir Ali](#)

Reduced hospital admissions, new medicines and stronger vaccines are reasons for real optimism

- Dr Raghbir Ali is a clinical epidemiologist



'The immediate priority must be to ensure that our existing and very effective vaccines are distributed more equally.' Photograph: Vuk Valcic/SOPA Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Tue 4 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

As an epidemiologist and [NHS](#) consultant, 2022 begins much like 2021 did – I’m again analysing data on the impact of a new Covid variant that threatens to put huge pressure on our hospitals. And I’m back on the frontline in A&E, helping my NHS colleagues to deal with that pressure.

But we are actually in a much better position, and there are good reasons to be confident that 2022 will be a much better year than 2021.

Last January was perhaps the darkest time of the entire pandemic in the UK, with tens of thousands being admitted into hospital and thousands losing their lives every week.

Now, with the majority of us well protected with highly effective vaccines, we have a much lower individual risk of ending up in hospital – or worse – if we catch Covid. The combination of vaccines and a better knowledge of how to treat Covid means both hospitalisation and death rates are now much lower, with the [infection fatality rate having fallen by over 80%](#).

And this means that, unlike last year, our children are going back to school this week, retail and hospitality businesses are open and we are able to meet our friends and families.

The immediate priority must be to ensure that existing vaccines are distributed more equally across the globe

Although the NHS is again under massive pressure – [particularly due to staff shortages](#) – the early indications are that we are not facing a repeat of last winter with hospital admissions [rising more slowly and ICU admissions and deaths mercifully still flat](#). The [information from South Africa](#) and the early data from the UK gives us a realistic hope that this wave will be over quicker than previous ones, and with much less loss of life.

There are reasons to be optimistic beyond just this wave, as well. Firstly, the long-promised antiviral medicines have arrived. These [new Covid treatments](#), which have just started being used in the UK, have the potential to [transform the situation](#) as similar medicines have done with HIV and hepatitis C. They can reduce the risk of being admitted into hospital by up to

90%, are effective against all variants, can be taken orally and are much easier to distribute than vaccines. Two are already approved but many others are currently undergoing clinical trials and should be available this year.

Next, new vaccines are in development that will make it easier to manage the coronavirus variants that will inevitably emerge over the coming year. As with influenza, “multivalent” vaccines – which protect against infection from multiple variants – will probably become available later this year.

Other vaccines that target parts of the virus besides the spike protein – parts that don’t mutate as easily – are also on the horizon. There are also vaccines being trialled that can be delivered by nasal spray, inhaler, orally and using skin patches – all of which will make distribution easier and overcome needle phobia.

But the immediate priority must be to ensure that our existing and very effective vaccines are distributed more equally across the globe. We have made huge progress, with 8.5bn doses delivered to date, but far too many – especially those at high risk and frontline healthcare workers in low-income countries – have not even received their first dose.

Vaccinating the whole world in 2022 is a realistic prospect but this will require an end to hoarding in high-income countries and a temporary lifting of patents. And this is in our interests too – we won’t be able to prevent new variants completely but we can reduce the risk by ensuring everyone, everywhere is able to be vaccinated.

Sadly Covid is not going away permanently, but we can be optimistic that 2022 will be the year the pandemic ends and it becomes an endemic disease here and in most countries thanks to the very high levels of population immunity we now have – through a combination of vaccination and natural infection. There are still likely to be seasonal winter peaks, like with flu, and an annual booster jab will probably be needed to deal with new variants and waning immunity.

Like many, I have lost family, friends and colleagues. I have seen countless patients suffer from Covid – as well as from its knock-on effects on our

health services – and from the lockdowns. But the huge loss of life and pain should soon be a thing of the past.

We are certainly not out of the woods yet – cases are at unprecedented levels and rising (though more slowly now) and Covid is still a serious threat to the most vulnerable – so we need to continue following the public health guidance to protect them and to help reduce the pressure on the NHS so we can continue treating all our patients.

But there is a realistic prospect that 2022 will be the year we can begin to live with the virus – and without the fear of both Covid and lockdowns that has haunted us for the past two years.

- Dr Raghib Ali is a clinical epidemiologist at the University of Cambridge and an honorary consultant in acute medicine at the Oxford University hospitals NHS trust
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## OpinionMovies

# Bring on the six-hour-long movies – it's grandeur and scale we want now

[Peter Bradshaw](#)



Avatar director James Cameron says films must expand to compete with TV. It could be the start of a brilliant new era of immersive cinema



Quentin Tarantino, right, with Leonardo DiCaprio and Brad Pitt, left, during the filming of Once Upon a Time in Hollywood. Photograph: Andrew Cooper/AP

Tue 4 Jan 2022 04.00 EST

How on earth are the movies going to compete with all that deliciously seductive #content on streaming services? How do you persuade people to mask up and venture out to the cinema when they can sprawl on the sofa and watch [Succession's gorgeously horrible Roy family](#) for less money and hassle. People will leave their homes for James Bond and Spider-Man. But the grownup movies – the cinema of ideas and character and dialogue and complexity – well, people are increasingly tempted to stay home for those.

James Cameron, director of mighty box-office champs such as *Titanic* and *Avatar* has the answer: six-hour films! Films with the amplitude and the addiction factor of long-form TV. At first glance, that sounds like a buttock-annihilating nightmare, and a six-hour film from the alpha-gorilla Cameron is another worry. Six hours of Cameron's cheerfully macho storytelling? Six hours of military hardware, and people in flightsuits walking into vast hangars with fighter-planes? Or does Mr Cameron have a six-hour cut of *Titanic* up his sleeve?

Actually, that's not really what he's suggesting. What Cameron has in mind is a new integrated theatrical-streaming distribution model in which a six-hour "movie" is shown in a number of episodes for home viewing and then in a shorter, slimmed-down two-hour version for movie theatres. It's not out of the question – and it's been done before. Olivier Assayas's 2010 work *Carlos*, starring Édgar Ramírez as Carlos the Jackal was shown in three TV episodes totalling five-and-a-half hours but in cinemas shorter versions were shown. And for literary adaptations, it could make sense. After all, Granada Television's legendary 11-episode version of *Brideshead Revisited* in 1981 weighed in at almost 12 hours: a different, perfectly plausible 2008 feature film version of the same novel came in at two hours 14 minutes. You could fuse the two concepts ... couldn't you?

Film has traditionally responded to the threat from television by emphasising grandeur and scale. In the decades after the war, and worried about TV, Hollywood gave us epic movies, biblical and sword-and-sandal dramas, often shown in awe-inspiring widescreen mode. The threat to cinema is different here – now it's almost as if television is the bigger form with an almost unlimited running time for its products. So maybe the Cameron model is workable.

The danger is of course that the cinema will just come off looking like second best. Who wants to see the short-change cut version of some sexy new drama in cinemas – which will inevitably also be subtly longer than the comfortable feature-film length – when you can get the real thing at home in full measure, and submit to the deferred, extended pleasure of episodic narrative, which is the whole point of TV entertainment? And of course, it would be the sex and violence that would get chopped for cinemas and bowdlerisation would rule.

Of course, cinema is already giving us "serial" movies. Denis Villeneuve's colossal [new sci-fi Dune](#) is only part one – part two is due to follow. And in the arthouse realm, Joanna Hogg's [autobiographical film The Souvenir](#) came out in two parts. But this isn't quite the same thing. And time is different watching TV – bingeing something for four hours is different from watching a four-hour movie: with the TV show you can bail out at any stage without inconvenience or feeling culturally shallow or disloyal. Not so in the

cinema.

Well, it would be interesting if Netflix or Amazon Prime tried the Cameron model. But what I'd really like – masochistically enough – is a six-hour movie culture that had the courage of its convictions: showing the actual six-hour films in cinemas. A new Bollywood-style sense of scale, to toughen up pampered western movie consumers. Cinephiles dream of finding the original eight-hour cut of the Erich von Stroheim 1924 silent drama *Greed*. I would love to see the [rumoured 20-hour cut](#) of Quentin Tarantino's Once Upon a Time in Hollywood. At all events, I want to maintain the concept of committing to an entire created artwork, in its entirety, all at once, from beginning to end – and the cinema is still the best place for that.

- Peter Bradshaw is the Guardian's film critic
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**OpinionHealth**

# I was feeling smug reading about the odd ways people injured themselves – until I remembered the explosion at our Christmas dinner

[Zoe Williams](#)



The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents have released its list of how people ended up in A&E. Now I just feel lucky I wasn't on it



Risky business ... nearly 1,000 people ended up in hospital having tried to climb a tree. Photograph: The Good Brigade/Getty Images

Tue 4 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

The start of January is not a boom time for lifestyle statistics. It's all resolutions and intentions, all inputs, no outputs. But it's a great time, thanks to NHS Digital and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, to find out [who landed in A&E](#) in the first year of the pandemic.

I pore over these lists, thrilling with schadenfreude. More than 7,000 people in England got bitten or struck by a dog in 2020-21; my dog is mental, but at least he'd never bite me and can't, to my knowledge, use a weapon. More than 2,000 people spilled something hot on themselves, which I haven't done for years. Nearly 1,000 people ended up in hospital having tried to climb a tree ("Accidents are preventable", the RoSPA says, and of course it would say that, wouldn't it, but nothing has ever seemed to me to be so entirely preventable as falling out of a tree). Power tools, hammers and saws, keeping rats, scorpions and venomous spiders – I think of all these ways I've stayed out of hospital, by not doing things I didn't want to do anyway, and feel both completely blessed and unusually civic-minded.

We had one domestic accident, at the signature [Christmas](#) meal, when the table was set for 15, which meant 15 crackers, and – you won’t believe it, but it’s true – 30 glasses, and everything else. Mr Z decided that he wanted beer instead of a regular Christmas drink, but none of the perfectly serviceable bottles of beer would do. Instead, he tried this mini-keg that we’ve had under a table lamp since July, and it exploded. Most of the beer, he claims, ended up in his trousers, but that doesn’t explain how we came to be mopping the ceiling, or that every glass contained a tablespoon of beer, as if I’d laid the table for tiny Vikings, or how the crackers lost their bang, or why the room still smells like a pub a week later which, actually, I don’t mind. All I could think was, oh my, that could have been so much worse. So many ways we could have ended up as an A&E statistic. It would have been such an outlier event, we’d have definitely made it on to the bulletins – something for someone else to feel smug about.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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## 2022.01.04 - Around the world

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[US Capitol attack](#)

## **Capitol attack panel in race against time as Trump allies seek to run out clock**



The House select committee investigating the January 6 attack. Photograph: Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

A barrage of delay tactics as Republicans are expected to do well in 2022 midterms that would give them control to shut down inquiry

*[Hugo Lowell](#)* in Washington DC

Tue 4 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

The House select committee investigating the 6 January attack on the Capitol is facing a race against time in 2022 as Trump and his allies seek to run out the clock with a barrage of delay tactics and lawsuits.

Republicans are widely expected to do well in this year's midterm elections in November and, if they win control of the House, that would give them control to shut down the investigation that has proved politically and legally damaging to Trump and [Republicans](#).

The select committee opened its investigative efforts into the 6 January insurrection, when a pro-Trump mob stormed the Capitol to stop the certification of Joe Biden's election win, with a flurry of subpoenas to Trump officials to expedite the evidence-gathering process.

But aside from securing [a cache of documents](#) from Trump's former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, the select committee has found itself wading through molasses with Trump and other top administration aides seeking to delay the investigation by any means possible.

The former US president has attempted to block the select committee at every turn, instructing aides to defy subpoenas from the outset and, most recently, launching a last-ditch appeal to the supreme court to prevent the release of the most sensitive of White House records.

His aides are following Trump in lockstep as they attempt to shield themselves from the investigation, doing everything from filing frivolous lawsuits to stop the select committee obtaining call records to [invoking the fifth amendment](#) so as to not respond in depositions.

The efforts amount to a cynical ploy by Republicans to run out the clock until the midterms and use the election calendar to characterize the interim report, which the bipartisan select committee hopes to issue by the summer, as a political exercise to damage the GOP.



Republican representative Liz Cheney, center, vice-chair of the Capitol attack committee speaks during a meeting on Capitol Hill on 13 December. Photograph: Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

The select committee, sources close to the investigation say, is therefore hoping for a breakthrough with the supreme court, which experts believe will ensure the panel can access the Trump White House records over the former president's objections about executive privilege.

"I think the supreme court is very unlikely to side with Trump, and part of it is the nature of executive privilege – it's a power belonging to the President," said Jonathan Shaub, a former DoJ office of legal counsel attorney and law professor at the University of Kentucky.

"It's hard to see how a former president could exercise constitutional power under a theory where all the constitutional powers are vested in the current president, so I think Trump is very likely to lose or the court may not take the case," Shaub said.

Members on the select committee note that several courts – [the US district court](#) and the US appeals court – have already ruled that Biden has the final say over which White House documents are subject to executive privilege, and that the panel has a legislative purpose.

A victory for the select committee at the supreme court is important, members believe, not only because it would [give them access to the records](#) Trump has fought so hard to keep hidden, but because it would supercharge the inquiry with crucial momentum.

The select committee got its first break when House investigators obtained from Meadows thousands of communications involving the White House, including a [powerpoint detailing ways to stage a coup](#), and are hoping the supreme court can help to sustain their pace.

“It’s pretty clear that these documents are serious documents that shed light on the president’s activities on January 6 and that may be quite damaging for Trump,” said Kate Shaw, a former Obama White House counsel and now a professor at the Cardozo School of Law.

“They could make a difference to the record being compiled by the committee and thus they could give the process additional momentum,” Shaw said. “That’s probably why Trump is resisting their release as hard as he is.”



The select committee got its first break when House investigators obtained from Meadows thousands of communications involving the White House.  
Photograph: Patrick Semansky/AP

More generally, the select committee says they are unconcerned by attempts by Trump aides and political operatives to stymie the inquiry, since Democrats control Washington and the panel has an unprecedented carte blanche to upturn every inch the Trump administration.

“The legislative and executive branches are completely in agreement with each other, that this material is not privileged and needs to be turned over to Congress,” said congressman Jamie Raskin, a member of the select committee. “Things have been moving much more quickly.”

But the select committee acknowledges privately that they face a longer and more difficult slog with Trump aides and political operatives who are mounting legal challenges to everything from the panel’s attempts to compel production of call records and even testimony.

The trouble for the select committee, regardless of Democrats’ controlling the White House, Congress and the justice department, is that they are counting on the courts to deliver accountability for Trump officials unwilling to cooperate with the inquiry.

Yet Trump and his officials know that slow-moving cogs of justice have a history of doing nothing of the sort. House investigators only heard from former Trump White House counsel Don McGahn this past summer, years after the end of the special counsel investigation.

The House has not even been able to obtain Trump’s tax returns – something Democrats have been fighting to get access to since they took the majority in 2018 – after repeated appeals from the former president despite repeated defeats in court.

Trump and his aides insist they are not engaged in a ploy to stymie the investigation, though they admit to doing just that in private discussions, according to sources close to the former president.

When the select committee [issued its first subpoenas](#) to his former aides Mark Meadows, Dan Scavino, Steve Bannon and Kash Patel, Trump’s lawyers told their lawyers to defy the orders because it would likely serve to slow down the investigation, the sources said.

The result of Trump's directive – [first reported by the Guardian](#) – is that Bannon and Meadows refused to appear for their depositions, and the select committee now may never hear their inside information about the Capitol attack after they were held in contempt of Congress.

It remains possible that Bannon and Meadows seek some kind of a plea deal with federal prosecutors that involves providing testimony to the select committee in exchange for no jail time, but the court hearing for Bannon, for instance, is scheduled late into the summer.

The reality for House investigators is that the cases are now in the hands of a justice department intent on proving it remains above the political fray after years of Trump's interference at DoJ, and therefore indifferent to the time crunch felt by the 6 January committee.

The situation for the select committee may be even trickier with Republican members of Congress involved in 6 January, as they just need to stonewall the investigation only through the midterms, before which the panel hopes to release an interim report into their findings.

A spokesperson for the select committee declined to comment on the outlook for the investigation and their expectations for the supreme court hearing in the case against Trump, which the panel, cognizant of their limited timeframe, has asked to expedite.

Bennie Thompson, the chairman of the select committee, originally aimed to have the final report completed before the midterm elections, but the efforts by the most senior Trump officials to delay the investigation means he could need until the end of the year.

Either way, sources close to the investigation told the Guardian, the select committee is hoping that the supreme court will deliver the elusive Trump White House records – and that it could pave the way for the investigation to shift into yet another higher gear.

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## Xinjiang

# Tesla criticised for opening showroom in Xinjiang despite human rights abuses

Elon Musk and Tesla must consider human rights in the Chinese region or risk being complicit, says Human Rights Watch



Council on American-Islamic Relations says no US company should be doing business in Xinjiang, China, after news emerged Elon Musk's Tesla company was opening a showroom there. Photograph: Hannibal Hanschke/AP

*[Helen Davidson](#)  
[@heldavidson](#)*

Tue 4 Jan 2022 00.38 EST

Tesla has opened a new showroom in the capital of [Xinjiang](#), a region at the heart of years-long campaign by Chinese authorities of repression and assimilation against the Uyghur people.

Tesla announced the opening in Urumqi with a Weibo post on 31 December saying: “On the last day of 2021, we meet in Xinjiang. In 2022 let us together launch Xinjiang on its electric journey!”

The post was accompanied by photos of the opening festivities including people holding placards which read “Tesla [heart] Xinjiang”.

The US has enacted a range of sanctions and regulatory and other measures against [China](#) over its continuing human rights abuses in Xinjiang, including restrictions on US business dealings with local operators and suppliers.

President Joe Biden last month signed the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, and the US government intends to conduct a diplomatic boycott of the upcoming Beijing Winter Olympics.

Uyghur rights groups criticised the opening of the showroom, reportedly Tesla’s 211th in China. The Council on American-Islamic Relations urged its immediate closure, and the cessation of what it alleged “amounts to economic support for genocide”.

“No American corporation should be doing business in a region that is the focal point of [a campaign of genocide targeting a religious and ethnic minority](#),” said the council’s director of national communications, Ibrahim Hooper.

Human Rights Watch’s Australia researcher, Sophie McNeill, said: “Beijing and businesses have long banked on a global willingness to put profits ahead of human rights, even in the face of crimes against humanity, but we must not allow this to continue in 2022.

“Elon Musk and his Tesla executives need to consider human rights in Xinjiang or risk being complicit.”

Tesla has been contacted for comment.

Tesla’s decision drew some support on Chinese social media, and followed revelations a week earlier that US tech company [Intel had requested suppliers](#) not to source goods, services, or labour from the region.

One commenter welcomed Tesla's support for "the development and construction of Xinjiang, unlike some other companies", an apparent reference to multinationals seeking to reduce business links with Xinjiang over the rights abuses.

Last month Intel was accused by state media of offending the Chinese market after it wrote to suppliers requesting they avoid using "any labor or source goods or services from the Xinjiang region", citing restrictions imposed by multiple governments. After a backlash the company published a letter to "[deeply apologise for the confusion](#)", saying the request was a matter of compliance with US law and didn't represent its stance on Xinjiang.

Commercial operations in China have become fraught as international brands come under increasing pressure to cut ties with Xinjiang suppliers if they can't guarantee the absence of forced labour or other abuses.

Companies including H&M and Intel have been widely criticised or threatened with boycotts in China over their decisions to distance the brand from Xinjiang labour and products. Case studies of such mass online reactions have found the nationalistic backlash is often driven or amplified by Chinese state media and state-linked social media accounts.

Xinjiang is the site of a long campaign of forced assimilation by Chinese authorities against ethnic minorities including Muslim [Uyghurs](#). As many as one million people are estimated to have been detained in mass detention and reeducation centres, and the broader population subjected to suppression of religious and cultural activity, intense surveillance and policing, alleged forced labour programs and enforced birth control.

Governments including the US have declared the campaign to be genocide, while several human rights and legal groups have said the actions amount to crimes against humanity.

Beijing denies all accusations of human rights abuses, and says its policies are part of anti-terrorism efforts and poverty alleviation programs.

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**Business live**

**Business**

# Wall Street, European stocks rise to new record highs on Omicron optimism – as it happened

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## [Evergrande](#)

# **Evergrande shares rise as they resume trading after suspension**

China's second-biggest developer halted trading after it was told to demolish 39 buildings in Hainan



A man passes by a map depicting Evergrande's commercial projects in China at a mall in Beijing, China. Photograph: Ng Han Guan/AP

*[Mark Sweeney](#)*

*[@marksweney](#)*

Tue 4 Jan 2022 03.25 EST

Shares in the embattled Chinese property developer [Evergrande](#) rose on Tuesday after they resumed trading on the Hong Kong stock exchange following a suspension.

China's second-biggest developer [halted trading on Monday](#) after receiving an order from authorities at Danzhou city in Hainan on 30 December telling it to demolish 39 under-construction buildings at the Ocean Flower Island project.

Shares in the company, whose market value has plunged almost 90% over the last year, jumped by 10% after they resumed trading on Tuesday and Evergrande announced that the demolition order would not affect the rest of its project at the Hainan resort. However, they later fell back to a rise of almost 2%.

It comes after Evergrande said its sales for 2021 had plunged 39% from the year before to \$69.5bn (£51.6bn).

The developer is struggling to repay more than \$300bn in liabilities by selling assets and shares. Nearly \$20bn of international market bonds were deemed to be in cross-default by ratings firms last month after the company missed payments.

Evergrande missed new coupon payments worth \$255m due last Tuesday, though both have a 30-day grace period.

On Friday, Evergrande scaled back plans to repay investors in its wealth management products, saying each investor could expect to receive 8,000 yuan (\$1,257) a month as principal payment for three months irrespective of when the investment matures.

Altogether, [Chinese property developers owed \\$19.8bn](#) in US dollar-denominated offshore debt in the first three months of 2022, analysts at Nomura said last month. In the second quarter of this year, they must find another \$18.5bn, while also meeting billions of repayments in local yuan debt.

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Other developers at risk of default include Kaisa, which missed a huge repayment in December and which has twice suspended its shares in recent

months. Its stock has lost 75% in value in the past year.

Analysts at S&P have estimated that one-third of Chinese developers could face a liquidity crunch in the next 12 months.

Developers must also find 1.1tn yuan in backdated pay owed to construction workers before the lunar new year starts at the beginning of February.

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## US healthcare

# ‘Seems like a scam’: Americans with diabetes criticize Biden’s insulin proposal

Insurance cap includes loopholes and doesn’t impact individuals who don’t have health coverage in the US



An insulin kit. Photograph: Kerem Yucel/AFP/Getty Images

*[Michael Sainato](#)*

Tue 4 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

Samia Chowdhury of Ontario, California, saw her work hours in the restaurant industry dwindle from full-time to less than 10 hours a week when Covid shutdowns began in the US in March 2020.

But the loss of work was not her only problem. As a someone who has had type 1 diabetes since she was 12, Chowdhury could not afford health insurance after losing most of her work hours and couldn't get on Medicaid through California. Instead, she relied on visiting medical clinics for insulin prescription refills when she could afford to do so and mutual aid from other people with diabetes around the US.

"I could barely scrape together the \$35 for the visit," said Chowdhury. "I could not make ends meet. I was essentially choosing either a roof over my head or my health insurance."

She relied on the clinics for doctor visits, lab work, and had to ration insulin and supplies while struggling to make ends meet with rent and other bills.

"Because I have to take the quick-acting insulin more often when I eat, that would be the only prescription I would pick up. The only way I can describe the effects on someone's body is it feels like your whole body is acidic, but at least you're getting to tomorrow," she added. "I was making a vial last for up to two months."

She also had to go without other supplies, such as testing strips, and reused syringes until they became too dull to use any more. From rationing insulin during the pandemic, to previous periods in her life when she didn't have access to insulin, Chowdhury has experienced significant side effects such as kidney issues and eye issues. In October, Chowdhury was able to afford health insurance again after getting a new job, but still pays co-pays for doctor visits and prescriptions and is working to recover from the credit card debt she accrued while trying to get by through the rest of the pandemic.

As part of the Biden administration's Build Back Better plan the co-pay for insulin would be capped at \$35 for individuals who have health insurance. But the legislation is currently in a perilous limbo in Congress and under serious threat after being blocked by centrist Democrat Joe Manchin. Even if it survives Manchin's opposition, or emerges in a different form, those who depend on insulin say it may not help them enough.

People with type 1 diabetes, who cannot produce any insulin and require it to survive, have criticized the proposal and messaging around it, citing the insurance cap includes loopholes, does not impact individuals who do not have health insurance coverage in the US, and doesn't address the issue of US pharmaceutical companies price gouging the sales price of insulin, while people in other industrialized nations are charged a fraction of US prices.

"It just seems like a big scam for the private insurance companies," said Ginni Correa, a 27-year-old with type 1 diabetes in Jacksonville, Florida. "Our lives are being used for propaganda. Wording is very important. Because when you tell the general public that you're capping the price of insulin, that's deceitful because millions of Americans aren't insured and the majority of diabetics who are insured, they still can't afford the cost and it's going to go to the premiums."

Correa has frequently been forced to ration insulin or insulin supplies since she turned 18 and aged out of a state health plan when she went away to college. It's a constant worry she has to take into account because of health insurance tied to her employment, and the out of pocket costs even with insurance, from deductibles to co-pays for doctor visits, labs, insulin and insulin supplies, and figuring out what insurance companies will cover.

"These are things that aren't addressed when it comes to the Build Back Better plan and the \$35 co-pay cap, because even if you are fortunate enough to have insurance at the time, insurance isn't something that's necessarily stable in this country," she said.

According to the CDC, [34.2 million Americans](#), more than one out of every 10 Americans, has diabetes, with Native Americans, Hispanic and Black people disproportionately affected and [less likely](#) to be covered by health insurance.

[1.4 million](#) US adults aged 20 or older reported having type 1 diabetes and using insulin, in addition to 187,000 adolescents and children under 20 who have type 1 diabetes. This number is [projected](#) to grow to 5 million Americans by 2050.

Individuals with type 1 diabetes require several daily doses of insulin, while those with type 2 require varying dosages, as these individuals are able to produce insulin but cannot rely on it to control their blood sugar levels.

One in four people with type 1 and type 2 diabetes have rationed insulin due to high costs in the US, and according to an American Diabetes Association survey, nearly one-third of people with diabetes have skipped doctor appointments or paying bills in order to afford insulin. Americans with diabetes are faced with 2.3 times greater healthcare costs. American adults and children with type 1 diabetes spend an out of pocket average of \$2,500 annually for healthcare, ranging from high costs of insulin to expensive supplies such as insulin pumps, syringes, and glucose monitors.

It's the most expensive chronic disease in the US.

The price of insulin in the US has soared over the past several decades, and far exceeds costs for the same type of insulin in other countries. One vial of Humalog insulin produced by Eli Lilly was priced at \$21 in 1999; by 2019 it cost \$332, over a 1,000% increase.

The average list price of one unit of insulin in the US is \$98.70, compared to \$12 in Canada and \$7.52 in the UK. The US consists of about 15% of the global insulin market, but accounts for nearly half of the pharmaceutical industry's insulin revenue.

These high costs persist despite the founders of insulin selling the patent for \$1 in 1923 because they viewed it as unethical to profit from a lifesaving drug.

Today in the US, three pharmaceutical companies, Novo Nordisk, Sanofi-Aventis and Eli Lilly control most of the insulin market.

“They’re not actually going after the list price with the pharmaceutical companies. So the rest of that money has to come from somewhere,” said Mindi Patterson of Dayton, Ohio. “It only takes one illness, one car accident, to put people in a position where they have to pay completely out of pocket.”

Her two sons and husband have type 1 diabetes. On Christmas Day in 2018, her family lost her husband's sister, Meaghan Carter, 47, who passed away due to ketoacidosis which occurred due to rationing insulin through a six-month period where she was in between jobs.

During the Covid pandemic, Patterson's family has struggled to afford the medical costs associated with diabetes and her husband's disability, which worsened as his hip replacement surgery was delayed for months, while they were fighting with their health insurance company to try to get coverage for the proper wheelchair her husband needs.

She caught Covid in December 2021 while awaiting surgery to repair a torn meniscus she incurred while working and fought for weeks to process and start receiving short-term disability payments.

"I'm getting half of what my paycheck normally is through short-term disability and almost all of that is going toward medication for my family and supplies. I don't have an extra \$200 or more lying around that I can pay for insurance each month," added Patterson, who noted the insulin co-pay cap would have a minimal impact on her family's healthcare costs. "It's a band aid on an open, majorly gushing wound. It's not enough."

This article was amended on 4 January 2022 to change references to diabetes that did not adhere to Guardian style guidelines.

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## **Headlines thursday 6 january 2022**

- [Kazakhstan Russian paratroopers arrive as unrest continues](#)
- [Australian Open Novak Djokovic to remain in detention during court challenge to visa cancellation](#)
- [Serbia President decries ‘harassment’ of tennis world No 1](#)
- [Coronavirus At least 24 NHS trusts declare critical incidents due to Covid pressures](#)
- [Live UK Covid: plans to tackle 5.8m NHS backlog in doubt as Omicron cases rise](#)

## Kazakhstan

# Russian paratroopers arrive in Kazakhstan as unrest continues

Moscow-led ‘peacekeeping’ alliance enters country amid violent clashes between protesters, police and army

- [Kazakhstan unrest: what are the protests about?](#)

00:45

Gunfire heard during protests in Kazakhstan's biggest city – video

*[Shaun Walker](#) and [Naubet Bisenov](#) in Aktobe province, and agencies*

Thu 6 Jan 2022 03.26 EST

Russian paratroopers have arrived in [Kazakhstan](#) as part of a “peacekeeping” mission by a Moscow-led military alliance to help the president regain control of the country, according to Russian news agencies.

Kazakhstan’s president, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, asked for the intervention from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) – an alliance made up of [Russia](#), Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – late on Wednesday and it was swiftly approved.

It comes as violent clashes continue between protesters and the police and army in Kazakhstan.

There is little reliable information on the number of casualties, but local news agencies quoted a spokesperson for police in Almaty, the country’s largest city, saying dozens of people were killed during attacks on government buildings.

Almaty city authorities said on Thursday that 353 police and security forces personnel had been injured, and 12 killed.

On Thursday morning, shots were fired as troops entered Almaty's main square. Several armoured personnel carriers and dozens of troops moving on foot arrived on Thursday morning, with shots heard as they approached the crowd, Reuters witnesses said.

01:23

Kazakhstan protests: demonstrators storm government buildings – video

State television reported on Thursday that the National Bank of Kazakhstan had suspended all financial institutions. The internet in the country is mostly down as well as mobile phone reception.

On Wednesday, there had been reports of violent clashes and shooting in Almaty and other cities, as well as unverified videos suggesting casualties among protesters.

On Wednesday night, Tokayev asked the CSTO to help him regain control. Armenia's prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, said the alliance would dispatch forces to "stabilise" the central Asian country.



Troops at the main square in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Photograph: Mariya Gordeyeva/Reuters

It is not clear how many troops the CSTO will send or how long they will stay in the country. Russian MP Leonid Kalashnikov told Interfax the troops would stay “for as long as the president of Kazakhstan believes it necessary”. He said they would mainly be engaged in protecting “infrastructure” in the country.

Tokayev had appealed to the bloc for help, decrying the actions of “terrorists” and alleging the country had been the victim of “attacks” by foreign-trained gangs after fuel price rises triggered widespread protests.

On Wednesday, demonstrators took over government buildings and reportedly stormed the airport in Almaty, the country’s commercial capital.

“Almaty was attacked, destroyed, vandalised, the residents of Almaty became victims of attacks by terrorists, bandits, therefore it is our duty ... to take all possible actions to protect our state,” said Tokayev, in his second televised address in a matter of hours.

The Kazakh events come at a time when all eyes have been on a possible Russian intervention in Ukraine. Images of police being overpowered by protesters are likely to cause alarm in Moscow, as another country neighbouring Russia succumbs to political unrest. Kazakhstan is part of an economic union with Russia and the two countries share a long border.

The protests [began in the west of the country](#) at the weekend, after a sharp rise in fuel prices, but have spread quickly and taken Kazakhstan’s authorities and international observers by surprise.

The protests have swelled amid broader discontent with Tokayev, president since 2019, and Nursultan Nazarbayev, the former leader.

“Nazarbayev and his family have monopolised all sectors, from banking to roads to gas. These protests are about corruption,” said 55-year-old Zauresh Shekenova, who has been protesting in Zhanaozen since Sunday.



Security forces in Almaty. Photograph: Valery Sharifulin/Tass

“It all started with the increase in gas prices but the real cause of the protests is poor living conditions of people, high prices, joblessness, corruption.”

Darkhan Sharipov, an activist from the civil society movement Wake Up, Kazakhstan, said: “People are sick of corruption and nepotism, and the authorities don’t listen to people … We want President Tokayev to carry out real political reforms, or to go away and hold fair elections.”

The five former [Soviet Central Asian republics](#) have been largely without protest in their three decades of independence, with the exception of Kyrgyzstan, which has had several revolutions.

Kazakhstan has never held an election judged as free and fair by international observers. While it is clear there is widespread discontent, the cleansing of the political playing field over many years means there are no high-profile opposition figures around which a protest movement could unite, and the protests appear largely directionless.

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## Novak Djokovic

# Novak Djokovic to remain in detention during court challenge to Australian visa cancellation

Australian Open champion is challenging his deportation after the Australian prime minister said officials were ‘following the rules’

- [Why is Djokovic being kicked out of Australia?](#)
- [Lost in the storm: Djokovic’s dreams blown away](#)
- [Get our free news app; get our morning email briefing](#)

01:15

'They're trying to crucify him': Djokovic's father compares him to Jesus – video

*[Royce Kurmelovs](#) and [Emma Kemp](#)*

Thu 6 Jan 2022 03.50 EST

Novak Djokovic is awaiting his [Australian Open](#) fate in a Melbourne immigration hotel as the world No 1 mounts a legal challenge against Australia's a decision to cancel his visa

Djokovic's lawyers succeeded in a bid to stop him from being deported on Thursday with a full hearing in the federal circuit court now scheduled for Monday. The tennis champion spent eight hours detained at Melbourne airport overnight before Australian Border Force officials announced he had been denied entry into the country on Thursday morning. They cited a failure to meet Australia's Covid vaccination exemption requirements.

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It is understood the reigning Australian Open champion was relying on a previous Covid infection as the basis for his exemption to compete – but that is not recognised by the federal government.

After unsuccessfully pleading his case at the airport, Djokovic was [transported to an immigration hotel](#) in the inner Melbourne suburb of Carlton. As the [political and diplomatic ramifications](#) unfurled, Djokovic's lawyers were working to obtain an interim injunction to stop his deportation.

In a snap hearing before judge Anthony Kelly on Thursday evening, it was agreed a full hearing between the player and the home affairs minister would be heard on Monday. Djokovic cannot be deported before that hearing. The parties are due to submit evidence and submissions over the weekend.

The court heard [Tennis](#) Australia had said it would need to know whether Djokovic could compete by Tuesday for scheduling purposes. The judge asked whether Djokovic could be moved to a hotel with a tennis court so he could practice. Kelly said he would try to accommodate the parties to come to a resolution but stressed the court would not be rushed.

“The tail won’t be wagging the dog here,” Kelly said. “If Tennis Australia decides to do what it wants to do in running its enterprise, it will. All I can do is provide every facility available to this court to assist these parties to resolve it in the best way possible.”



Supporters gather outside Park Hotel in Melbourne where Novak Djokovic was taken. Photograph: Diego Fedele/Getty Images

The legal challenge could go all the way to the high court but there are just 11 days before Djokovic is due to start his campaign for a record 21st grand slam title at Melbourne Park.

“People must be fully vaccinated as defined by Atagi [the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation] to gain quarantine-free entry into Australia,” the Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, said on Thursday. “That means people who do not meet the definition will not be approved for quarantine-free entry.

“I am advised that such an exemption was not in place and as a result he [Djokovic] is subject to the same rule as anyone else. This is nothing about any one individual, it is simply a matter of following the rules, and so those processes will take their course over the next few hours and that event will play out as it should.”

00:52

'He knew the conditions': Rafael Nadal short on sympathy for Novak Djokovic – video

The [ABC reported on Thursday night](#) that border force officials were also investigating another tennis player and an official granted medical exemptions by Tennis Australia.

Djokovic's predicament has become the epicentre of a political tit-for-tat between Morrison's federal administration and Daniel Andrews's state government in Victoria.

The Serbian travelled to Australia after receiving an exemption from Tennis Australia and the Victorian government to compete. It was granted following a process that included assessment by two panels of health experts. Djokovic had expected that exemption would – along with his federal government-issued visa – allow him to play at the Australian Open.

On arrival, however, border force officials at the airport said Djokovic was unable to justify the grounds for his exemption.

Morrison said on Thursday that Tennis Australia had been advised several months ago that a recent infection did not meet [the criteria for an exemption](#) to enter Australia unvaccinated.

### [Download original document](#)

Tennis Australia and Victorian government officials said Djokovic, who has won nine titles at Melbourne Park including the last three, received no preferential treatment, adding he was among "a handful" of the 26 people who applied who were approved in an anonymous and independent process.

Later on Thursday, the Victorian health minister, Martin Foley, said Djokovic's visa was not the state's responsibility.

"Someone issued [Novak Djokovic](#) a visa and it wasn't the Victorian government," Foley said. "What the Victorian government has done, what Tennis Australia has done, is acted within the law of the land."

Mary Anne Kenny, an associate professor of law at Murdoch University, said entry into Australia required a visa and an individual exemption as an unvaccinated person.

“Our laws are very byzantine, they’re very difficult to navigate and how they interact is pretty unclear,” Kenny said. “I do think it’s unfortunate it wasn’t sorted out before he got here. The minister has very broad power for [visa] cancellation. They can cancel for all sorts of reasons.”

## Quick Guide

### **Great Britain out of ATP Cup**

#### Show

Great Britain are out of the ATP Cup despite finishing their Group C matches with victory over the United States. Dan Evans and Jamie Murray had kept Britain in with a chance of making the semi-finals of the Sydney event as they battled back from a set and a break down against the US pair Taylor Fritz and John Isner to triumph 6-7 (3) 7-5 10-8. That secured the British team a 2-1 victory in the tie and left them needing Germany to win their later tie against Canada in order to advance. But wins for Denis Shapovalov over Jan-Lennard Struff (7-6 (5), 4-6, 6-3) and then Felix Auger-Aliassime against Alexander Zverev (6-4, 4-6, 6-3) enabled the Canadians to advance instead to a last-four meeting with defending champions Russia.

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Thank you for your feedback.

Carina Ford, an immigration lawyer who has [represented the Biloela family](#), suggested there were three things Djokovic needed to enter the country.

“He needed a visa, he needed a travel exemption at the commonwealth level and he needed a travel exemption from Victoria because of the fact he is unvaccinated,” Ford said. “Victoria might have granted an exemption from hotel quarantine … but the travel exemption is a commonwealth issue.”

The saga, fuelled by domestic political point-scoring about the country's handling of a record surge in new Omicron infections, has created an international incident, with the Serbian president, Aleksandar Vučić, claiming harassment of its star player.

"I've just finished my telephone conversation with Novak Djokovic," Vučić posted on Instagram. "I told our Novak that the whole of Serbia is with him and that our bodies are doing everything to see that the harassment of the world's best tennis player is brought to an end immediately. In line with all norms of international law, Serbia will fight for Novak, truth and justice."

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[Novak Djokovic](#)

## **Serbian president decries Novak Djokovic ‘harassment’ amid reaction to visa cancellation**

Aleksandar Vučić says ‘whole of Serbia’ is backing tennis player as row rages over Australia’s handling of Covid vaccine exemption saga

- [Australia sparks diplomatic row with Djokovic visa cancellation](#)
- [Lost in the storm: Djokovic’s Australian Open dreams blown away](#)
- [Why is the tennis star being kicked out of Australia?](#)
- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#) | See all our coronavirus coverage

01:15

'They're trying to crucify him': Djokovic's father compares him to Jesus – video

[Helen Davidson and Emma Kemp](#)

Thu 6 Jan 2022 11.20 EST

The Serbian president has accused Australia of “maltreatment” of tennis star Novak Djokovic, who was [denied entry to the country](#) after he flew into Melbourne with a medical exemption from coronavirus vaccination rules.

Djokovic was granted a controversial exemption to enter Australia and compete in the Australian Open, but was held up at Melbourne airport by authorities for several hours before his visa was cancelled. The Australian Border Force said he had failed to provide adequate evidence to support his exemption, and the player has now [taken his case to court](#).

Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić said the country had offered support to the world No 1. “I told our Novak that the whole of [Serbia](#) is with him and that our bodies are doing everything to see that the harassment of the world’s best tennis player is brought to an end immediately,” he said in a statement.

Serbian media reported Vučić had summoned Australia’s ambassador in Belgrade and demanded that they immediately release Djokovic to compete.

The Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, rejected the harassment suggestion on Thursday, saying: “Australia has sovereign borders and clear rules that are non-discriminatory as so many countries do … it has to do with the fair and reasonable application of Australia’s border protection laws … all I can say is that the evidence medical exemption that was provided was found to be insufficient.”

In December, Tennis Australia released its Covid vaccination policy for Melbourne’s grand slam which included a process for players seeking medical exemptions to enter Victoria without having to undergo a 14-day quarantine. Djokovic, who is opposed to vaccination, said he had been granted an exemption to compete in the competition although the exact nature of it has not been confirmed.

It is understood the reigning Australian Open champion was relying on a previous Covid infection as the basis for his exemption to compete – but that is not recognised by the federal government.

The head of Tennis Australia, Craig Tiley, said exemption applications were de-identified and rigorously assessed, and that only a handful of other players and officials had been granted exemptions out of 26 applications.



Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić has steadfastly backed Novak Djokovic.  
Photograph: Marko Djokovic/EPA

The [initial approval sparked public outrage](#) before the tennis star had landed, and the cancellation of his visa only added to the furore.

Djokovic's father, Srdjan, told Russian media he was outraged by the treatment of his son. "Tonight they can throw him in a dungeon, tomorrow they can put him in chains. The truth is he is like water and water paves its own path. Novak is the Spartacus of the new world which won't tolerate injustice, colonialism and hypocrisy."

In an interview broadcast by Sky News in the UK, Srdjan Djokovic said that his son was being singled out unfairly. "Novak and his team filed the same documents as 25 other tennis players [who received exemptions] and they didn't have any problems, just Novak. They wanted to humiliate him. They could have said 'don't come Novak' and that would have been OK. But no, they wanted to humiliate him and they're still keeping him in prison.

"He's not in detention, he's in prison. They took all of his stuff, even his wallet, they left him with just his phone and no change of clothes, nowhere to wash his face. Our pride is a prisoner of these idiots, shame on them, the whole free world together with Serbia should rise. This isn't a battle for

Serbia and Novak, it's a battle for billions of people, for freedom of expression, for free speech, freedom of behaviour. Novak didn't break any laws, just as seven billion people didn't break any laws, they want to subdue us and for us all to be on our knees."

Speaking to media on Thursday afternoon, tennis great Rafael Nadal suggesting on Djokovic had to accept the consequences of his apparent choice to not be vaccinated. [Nadal said](#) he thought it was "normal" for the Australia people to feel frustrated over the case given ongoing lockdowns and people's inability to return to Australia.

"The only clear thing for me is if you are vaccinated you can play in the Australian Open and everywhere," he said. "The world in my opinion has been suffering enough to not follow the rules."

US player Tennys Sandgren, an Australian Open quarter-finalist in 2018 and 2020, said Australia didn't deserve to host a grand slam. "Just to be crystal clear here, two separate medical boards approved his exemption. And politicians are stopping it," said Sandgren, who has also opted not to get vaccinated or play in the tournament.

Renae Stubbs, a former Doubles world No 1 and ESPN host, described the situation as "officially a massive shitshow".

"I think ScoMo [Australian prime minister Scott Morrison] made this a moment because the Australian public is so annoyed by Djoker," she said on Instagram. "I would be ropeable [furious] if I was [Djokovic]. Also the other lesson is, get vaccinated."

Morrison on Thursday confirmed Djokovic's visa was cancelled, saying "rules are rules" and praising federal Covid policies, a day after saying such exemptions were a matter for state governments. "Our strong border policies have been critical to Australia having one of the lowest death rates in the world from Covid, we are continuing to be vigilant," he said.

Australian tennis legend Rod Laver earlier told the Herald Sun newspaper that Djokovic should reveal the medical exemption he was granted. "Yes,

you're a great player and you've performed and won so many tournaments, so, it can't be physical. So what is the problem?"

World No 1 Ashleigh Barty said it had been difficult for Australians, and Victorians in particular, during the pandemic but that she had "no interest in speaking about Novak's medical history". She added: "I understand why they may be frustrated with the decision [to grant Djokovic an exemption]."

The coach of 17-year-old Indian tennis player Aman Dahiya, who was denied an exemption to play the Australian Open junior championships, also accused Australian and tennis authorities of double standards over Djokovic's early approval. Dahiya was denied entry because he was unvaccinated, because India has not yet allowed people under the age of 18 to receive a vaccine.

His coach, Jignesh Rawal, said they had offered for Dahiya to find a dose and quarantine but were refused, and he said Dahiya was allowed to become "collateral damage" of Australia's policies but Djokovic – initially – was not.

"It shouldn't be different," he said. "The circumstances don't matter. The rule is if you don't have two vaccine doses you cannot enter," he said. "Djokovic can have special treatment on the court (like centre court priority) but the entry point has to be the same."

Morrison, who is under fire over his refusal to make rapid tests free or affordable to address major shortages and huge PCR wait times as the country struggles with its worst ever outbreak, had strong words for Djokovic on Wednesday.

At a press conference he said Djokovic would be "on the next plane home" if he was unable to provide proof of his medical exemption.

On Thursday morning Djokovic was reportedly taken to a quarantine hotel ahead of potential deportation but his lawyers have launched legal to obtain an injunction.

In a snap hearing before Judge Anthony Kelly of the federal circuit court of Australia, it was suggested a full hearing could be heard on Monday.

The court heard [Tennis](#) Australia said it would need to know whether Djokovic could compete by Tuesday for scheduling purposes. The court was also asked whether Djokovic could be moved to a hotel with a tennis court so he could practise.

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**NHS**

## At least 24 NHS trusts declare critical incidents due to Covid pressures

Cabinet minister acknowledges ‘very real pressures’ of Omicron variant on health service in England

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Declaring a critical incident means a trust has reached an alert level signalling priority services may be under threat. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

*Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent  
@breeallegretti*

Thu 6 Jan 2022 04.55 EST

More than one in six NHS trusts across [England](#) have declared a critical incident due to Covid pressures, a cabinet minister has revealed, saying the Omicron variant was putting “very real” pressure on the health service.

The transport secretary, [Grant Shapps](#), said ministers were trying to find the right compromise between imposing further restrictions and not allowing hospitals to be “overrun” given new cases of the virus have reached historically high levels.

Of England’s 137 [NHS](#) trusts, at least 24 have declared a critical incident, Shapps said, meaning they have reached an alert level signalling priority services may be under threat.

He added it was “crazy” some people were still not getting vaccinated given the increased protection a booster jab offers against the Omicron variant, but that the government would not take the “draconian approach” of making vaccines mandatory.

Shapps told Sky News it was “not entirely unusual” for NHS trusts to “go critical over the winter – often with things like the flu pandemic”, but conceded “there are very real pressures which I absolutely recognise”.

Plan B, which [came into force last month across England](#) with a return to work-from-home advice, face coverings and the introduction of Covid passes, was still the right way forward, Shapps said.

He faced down criticism that England is out of step with the three other UK nations, which all imposed tougher restrictions in the light of the more transmissible variant.

Shapps said: “What we want to do is steer the country through the Omicron wave, and I think plan B has so far been shown to be the right way forward – not shutting down the country yet again with all the costs to people’s mental health and elsewhere.”

Hospitalisations have been slower to rise than Covid cases, with ministers buoyed by the booster rollout. A further 967 people went into hospital with

the virus, according to the latest daily figure published on Wednesday, taking the total to 17,276 – the highest since last February.

However, the issue has been compounded further by NHS staff being among the hundreds of thousands of people self-isolating due to the rapidly increasing number of Covid cases. A further 194,747 infections were reported on Wednesday, one of the highest on record since the pandemic began.

Jon Ashworth, the shadow work and pensions secretary, said it was vital key workers – including NHS staff – got access to lateral flow tests that enable double-vaccinated people to end their isolation early from day seven if they test negative twice.

He said there had been “problems with the supply” and added: “Ministers have really got to get a grip of that.”

Some restrictions on travel have been lifted, with the requirement for all those arriving in England to get a pre-departure PCR test now scrapped.

Shapps said travel restrictions were always temporary and that PCR-testing everyone who entered the country to check if they had Omicron was no longer necessary, given it is now the dominant variant in the UK and spreading fast in many other parts of the world.

He said the previous testing rule had “effectively outlived its usefulness when it comes to travel”.

This article was amended on 7 January 2022 to remove a graphic.

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**Politics live with Andrew Sparrow**

**Politics**

# **Labour claims new evidence shows Boris Johnson did break ministerial code – as it happened**

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## 2022.01.06 - Spotlight

- 'I have moments of shame I can't control' The lives ruined by explicit 'collector culture'
- 'I kept saying – don't worry Luma, we see you' Andrea Arnold on her four years filming a cow
- Jurors see the bigger picture Activists who were cleared in court
- Your work is not your god Welcome to the age of the burnout epidemic

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## **‘I have moments of shame I can’t control’: the lives ruined by explicit ‘collector culture’**



‘My ex had assured me they’d all been deleted ... I had no reason to think he’d ever do this’ Illustration: Susanna Gentili/The Guardian

The swapping, collating and posting of nude images of women without their consent is on the rise. But unlike revenge porn, it is not a crime. Now survivors are demanding a change in the law

*Anna Moore*

Thu 6 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Ruby will never forget the first time she clicked on the database AnonIB. It is a so-called “revenge porn” site and in January 2020, a friend had texted her for help. Ruby is a secondary school teacher, used to supporting teenagers, and her friend turned to her for advice when she discovered her images were on the site.

“She didn’t send the thread that she was on,” says Ruby, 29. “She was embarrassed, so she sent a general link to the site itself.” When Ruby opened it, “I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. I couldn’t believe that such an infrastructure existed: something so well organised, so systematic, fed by the people who lived around us.”

AnonIB was categorised by country – the US has the most entries, the UK is next – but then broken down by region, city and local area. “And when I say ‘local’, it wouldn’t be ‘London’ or ‘Birmingham’, a city of any size would have smaller, specific categories, like ‘Birmingham University students’,” says Ruby. The thread for Ruby’s town (population 55,000) stretched to 16 pages and with each intimate image of women and girls, there were comments with as much identifying information as possible by local users – names, surnames, the schools they had attended, who their relatives were. There were also lots of “requests” for pictures of certain women – often called “wins” (“Any wins on XXXX?” “There must be more of this slut out there.” “I can now look her boyfriend in the eye knowing I’ve seen his missus naked.”)

Ruby was horrified. “I was in shock. Disgusted that it existed, but also confused,” she says. “How could it be allowed?” But worse was to come. Four months later, she found her own pictures had been added to the site.

AnonIB has used various names over the last few years – always some kind of variation of “image board” and “anonymous”. It was shut down by Dutch police, but has since reappeared and is currently hosted from a Russian domain. In the past few months, it has gone behind a paywall.



Sites such as AnonIB post pictures searchable by users' locality.  
Photograph: JGI/Tom Grill/Getty Images/Tetra images RF/Posed by model

Yet the site is not a one-off. It is just one example of what a [report](#) last month by the [Revenge Porn Helpline](#) (RPH) has termed “collector culture” – something the RPH identifies as “an emerging trend”, “increasing at pace”. In this case, collecting means posting, collating and trading intimate images of women.

“It’s one of the most dehumanising aspects of intimate image abuse that we see,” says Zara Ward, senior helpline practitioner at RPH. “Women are prizes to be passed around, shared and traded like a dystopian version of Pokémon. We often don’t know how these people gained the images in the first place – it could be exes, friends, or hackers – but this isn’t a place where women would consensually upload themselves. All we see on the comments is women consistently and aggressively objectified, humiliated and exposed.”

This happens on multiple platforms: Mega, Dropbox, Discord, anywhere groups can share. On Reddit, anonymous users post images of (likely oblivious) women with captions such as “trading my gf nudes” and “trading gf. Have bj videos too”. Interested parties are then usually directed to personal accounts on [Snapchat](#) or the messaging app Kik.

Although it is impossible to know how common this is, the evidence suggests it’s widespread. (When Ruby was added to the AnonIB thread in May 2020, she was image number 72,000.) One general [study](#) of intimate image abuse across Australia, New Zealand and the UK suggests one in five men have been perpetrators, and during lockdown – when online activity replaced real-life interactions – calls to the RPH doubled. (Its figures show that women are five times more likely than men to have their intimate images shared.)

“Traditionally, we think of ‘revenge porn’ as someone posting your images on Pornhub and sending you the link, or sending pictures and videos to all your friends and family to hurt and humiliate you,” says Elena Michael from the campaigning group [#NotYourPorn](#). And, in fact, this is what current law nominally protects against. Section 33 of the 2015 Criminal Justice and Courts Act makes it illegal to disclose “private sexual photographs and films with intent to cause distress”.

Yet, says Michael, that is only one form of such abuse. “The truth is that most intimate image abuse is clandestine. It’s done without consent, but also, often, with no intention of the survivor ever finding out.”

Despite media attention focused on revenge it’s more commonly related to sexual gratification or impressing online peers

*Professor Nicola Henry*

Sophie Compton, who also campaigns against intimate image abuse with the organisation [My Image My Choice](#) believes “collector culture” could make up the bulk of cases. “I’ve been talking to survivors for 18 months and it’s huge – maybe more prevalent than any other form,” she says. “I’ve looked at the sites and the forums and the casual misogyny, the vile language, is absolutely chilling. The posters genuinely aren’t seeing victims as human,

just stocks and shares to be traded. They could be anyone and everyone – and on sites like AnonIB which categorise by location, it could be the person standing next to you in Sainsbury's."

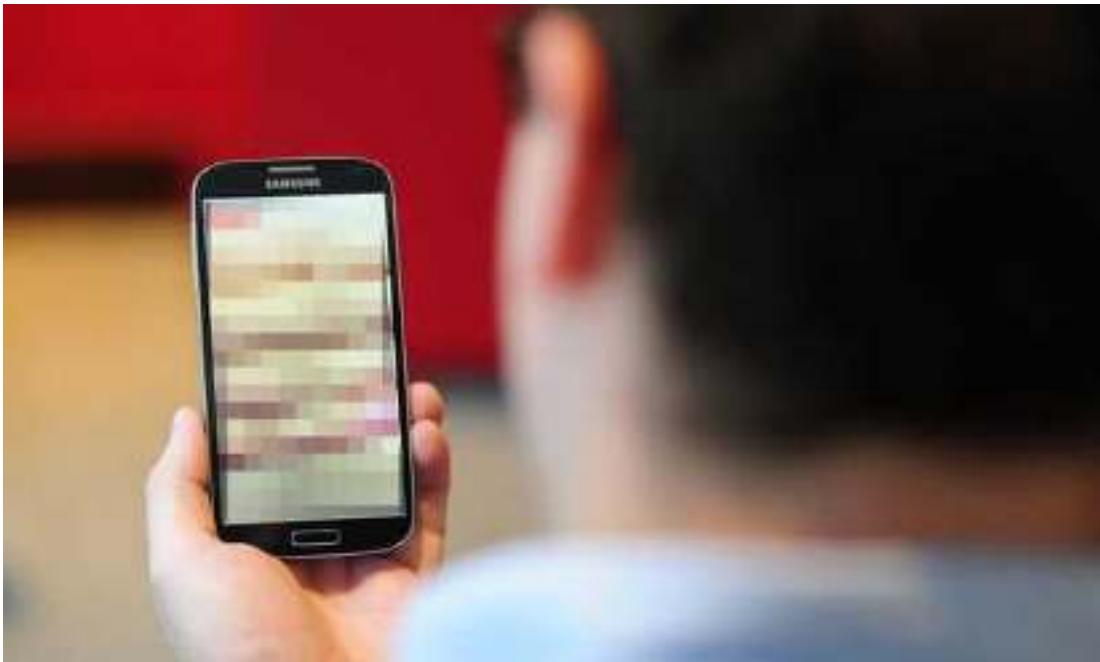
Clare McGlynn, professor of law at Durham University, says this is the "hardest message". "People would rather think perpetrators of intimate image abuse are either perverts or an extremely malicious 'other' type of person," she says. "The truth is that it's everyday men and boys. Closed groups, lad chats, bonding over explicit images and 'banter' has become absolutely ubiquitous."

Sometimes, it leaks out and the wider world gets a glimpse. McGlynn points to the [rugby group](#) at Oxford Brookes University that challenged players to get as many "Brookes girl" nudes as possible to share and rate. There is the ["men-only" private Bristol Facebook group](#) set up to share images of partners and ex-partners that gained 7,000 members in a matter of days.

Professor Nicola Henry, socio-legal scholar at RMIT University Australia, has studied the motives of perpetrators, looking at 77 platforms, image boards, community forums and blogging sites where images are shared and traded, and interviewed perpetrators.

"Despite a lot of media attention focused on revenge against an ex-partner as the key motivation, it's more commonly related to sexual gratification or impressing online peers," she says. "For instance, on some sites, images of wives and girlfriends are shared to get positive feedback from other users." ("It might have been a bit of showing off," said one perpetrator she interviewed. "After I'd built up quite a collection, I started to kind of take this pride in it," said another.)

Whatever the motivation, the impact can be devastating. Ruby learned that her images were on AnonIB when a former schoolmate sent her a message breaking the news. The pictures were taken when she was 17, on a girls' holiday. In one, she had been sunburned, and was lying topless on her front while a friend rubbed aftersun on her back. In the other, she was demonstrating the size of the hotel towels, not big enough to cover her.



Women are five times more likely to be victims of intimate image abuse.  
Photograph: PA/Posed by model

“On the scale of things, they were not that explicit – although in the context of that website, they looked suggestive,” she says. “I’d uploaded them for about three weeks after the holiday in a private [Facebook](#) album. I probably had about 400 Facebook friends at the time so whoever posted them was one of those people. I’ve resigned myself to never knowing who.”

But as a local teacher, she had to inform her employer; she has no idea if her students have seen the pictures. And in the immediate aftermath, she found herself bolting from a post office queue simply because the teenagers outside suddenly made her feel uncomfortable. She formed a WhatsApp group for other local victims from the thread; in her small town, news travels fast and friends share their stories. “It has been far worse for some of them,” she says. “Their images were often far more explicit. Some haven’t been able to tell family or friends. Some were pregnant and so distressed they had to make emergency visits to hospital.

“One girl wanted to pursue a career in the performing arts but she has put it off. She deferred her place at drama school because in that industry, image is everything. She didn’t know if she could cope with the anxiety of being Googled.”

I was happy I had a confession. But his claim of not wanting to hurt me was what protected him from any prosecution

### *Helen*

For Helen, 28, it feels as if she is an entirely different person from the one she was before her intimate images were shared in an encrypted chatroom. This spring, she received an anonymous “tipoff” on her Facebook account that explicit pictures of her had been gathered in a Google Drive folder and posted online. The informer – who was later traced to Australia – attached some of the pictures and said they thought she would like to know.

She remembers collapsing on to her bed in shock; going for a run, dropping to the ground to cry, running again, then dropping again. The images in the message had been created in the course of a five-year relationship that had ended two years previously. “My ex had assured me they’d all been deleted,” says Helen. “We’d been speaking as friends right up until weeks before this happened. I had no reason to think he’d ever do that.”

More than 18 months on, she still struggles. “I’m single,” she says, “and dating is really tough. I used to be open, confident, proud of my sexuality. It has damaged something I loved about myself, made it something I have to fight for again.

“I have moments of shame I can’t control, moments when this fear arises that I can’t predict. I’ve had times when flirting with someone suddenly seems to cross a boundary I can’t understand. I’ve largely avoided intimacy as it’s too terrifying to really give that trust to another person.”

Helen has tried to find out as little as possible about what was posted and where. “I’ve kind of chosen not to know,” she says. “It could be a lot. I was with that person a long time.” Her ex-partner was interviewed by police and also sent her a message admitting to sharing the images, but adding he had “never meant to hurt her”. He said he did it for his own “kink”.

“As painful as it was to have it confirmed, I was happy that at least I had a confession the police could use,” she says. “Then it transpired that his claim

of not wanting to hurt me was precisely what protected him from any prosecution.”

Collecting digital trophies is becoming part of being a boy and a man – that’s what we need to change

*Professor Clare McGlynn*

Ruby and the other victims in the WhatsApp group from her local town have also found no recourse in law. She reported her case to police who gave her a crime reference number and referred her to Victim Support. Others in her group heard nothing back. In one case, one woman said, the officer actually yawned and said it was the 20th AnonIB report of the day. It took a lot of collective pressure for their cases to be referred as cybercrime to the Regional Organised Crime Unit. There has been no update since.

“We really felt the police didn’t support us, but the law doesn’t support the police,” says Ruby. “Yes, there’s the website, the infrastructure: why are we allowing access to it in the UK?

“But there’s also the local element. Some of the images on the thread were FaceTime screen shots. The image in the corner of the man on the calls could clearly be seen. We positively IDed at least two of them. We know who they are, where they live and told the police – but they didn’t even knock on their doors. Perpetrators have so many admissible defences. ‘I did it for a laugh and didn’t think she’d see.’ ‘I was paid a tenner to upload pictures of girls in my area.’ Doing it for sexual gratification is an admissible defence. We’re campaigning to remove the motive element from the law. Sharing intimate images without consent is the bottom line and that’s what should be illegal.”

There are signs that things will change. The Law Commission review of the laws around intimate image abuse began in 2019; the final report this spring is expected to make nonconsensual sharing an offence. However, warns McGlynn, changing the law is a very slow process – and only part of the solution.

“It also comes back to culture change, education, work in schools,” she says. “Evidence from studies shows that just as teenage girls are pressured to send nudes, teenage boys are also feeling pressure to get nudes and share them, to gain kudos. Collecting digital trophies is becoming part of being a boy and a man – that’s what we need to change.”

In the meantime, Ruby is not sure that it’s worth knowing that your images are online, passed between others, traded, shared, collected and commented on by friends and strangers.

“It’s really difficult,” she says. “On the thread for our town, there are girls I recognise, who I haven’t spoken to since I was 16. You feel a sense of moral obligation. Do I tell them – even when I know nothing is going to come of reporting it and there’s nothing they can do? Is it better that they don’t know or is it better that they do know and are as distressed as we were? I’ve decided I’m not going to pop up and derail their life. Maybe ignorance is bliss.”

- *Some survivors’ names have been changed.*
- 

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Interview

## **‘I kept saying – don’t worry Luma, we see you’: Andrea Arnold on her four years filming a cow**

[Simon Hattenstone](#)



Andrea Arnold: ‘I can’t bear seeing people be cruel or violent’ Photograph: Antonio Olmos/The Observer

The Oscar-winning director’s new documentary explores warmth, joy and anger through the eyes of a farmyard animal. She reveals what it taught her about life



Thu 6 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Andrea Arnold’s films are known for their spare dialogue, and in her first documentary it is more pared-backed than ever: [Cow](#) consists of 94 minutes of moos, with the odd off-camera interjection from farmhands. It is hardly a thriller (though the ending is pure Tarantino). But it is one of the most beautifully crafted and tender portraits of a life you are likely to see.

Arnold, who started her professional life as a rollerskating TV presenter on the children’s Saturday show [No 73](#), began thinking about documenting an animal’s life nine years ago. Eventually she settled on a cow. “I thought a cow would be interesting because they work so hard, getting pregnant and giving milk their entire lives. It’s a huge job they do.” She chose Luma because she was told she had a big personality and was feisty. Arnold and her team spent four years, on and off, filming her. Why did she make Cow?

“I wanted to show a non-human consciousness. I was intrigued as to whether we would be able to see her consciousness if we followed her long enough.”

Her friends have told her Cow is the most personal film she has made. “One friend said there was nowhere for me to hide in a documentary; it was more raw and I was more exposed, she said.” But what is she exposing? “Well, things to do with my childhood, I suppose. But I don’t talk about all that because it’s too complicated. It’s extremely messy, so I can’t really.”

We meet at a cafe in south London, where she has lived for 27 years. Arnold is a youthful 60, dressed in jeans, beret, and a fake fur coat “made of real teddy bear”. She is warm and engaging but fiendishly private. She admits to having a 27-year-old daughter, and being one of four children brought up by a single mother, but declines to answer most questions about family. However, she does it with such charm that the sparring becomes enjoyable. Bits and pieces gradually emerge, from which we can piece together a partial jigsaw.

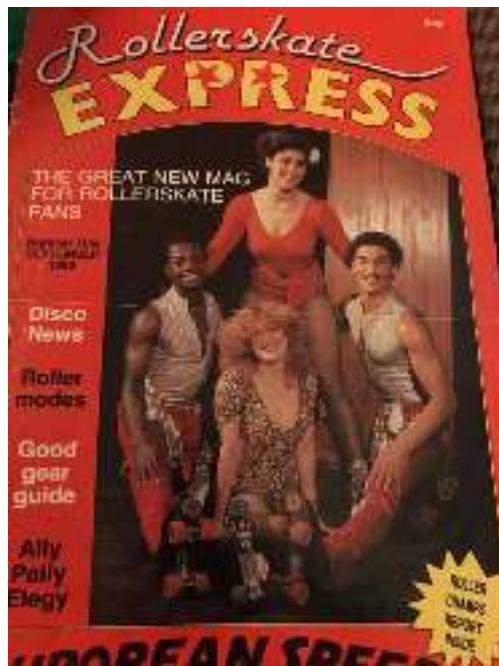
Her films are like this, too: composed of fragments, open to different interpretations. In the autobiographical [Wasp](#), which won the Oscar for best live action short in 2004, a single mother of four is asked out for the first time in years. She pretends she is looking after the kids for a friend and leaves them outside the pub to play without telling her date, which results in all kinds of chaos.

Arnold’s narratives are rarely linear and usually elliptical, leaving us to fill in the missing details. In her first full-length work, [Red Road](#), we only begin to understand towards the end of the film why protagonist Jackie has been stalking a newly released prisoner. After it finishes, we find ourselves rewinding the film in our head, reinterpreting all that has gone before – or simply watching it again.

At one screening people were crying, one person fainted, somebody was sick, somebody had a panic attack

Astonishingly, three of her four movies – Red Road, Fish Tank and American Honey – have won the Jury prize at the Cannes film festival. In Fish Tank, which tells the story of a 15-year-old girl finding her way in the world, there is no mention of her absent father because he's an irrelevance. In American Honey, a road movie about a group of disadvantaged youngsters crossing America and trying to get by flogging magazines, she pretty much does away with backstory. As for her Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights, he barely utters a word – it's all about the unspoken emotion. Arnold is a wonderful film-maker. Her movies are beautifully written (or under-written), nuanced and gorgeous to look at, even when the world they depict is brutal. They are often unbearably tense, her characters invariably living on the brink of violence or betrayal.

Although Cow is a documentary, it still feels very much like an Arnold film. It starts with Luma giving birth. In a lovely extended scene she licks her baby clean of amniotic fluid and the calf starts suckling. Luma really is luminous in the pitch-black cowshed – stills from the film look like bovine Rembrandts. While Cow never anthropomorphises Luma, it does allow us to see the world from her perspective. It's impossible to watch without imagining what is going on in her head.



Get your skates on ... Arnold makes an early appearance on a magazine cover in 1980. Photograph: courtesy of Andrea Arnold

There are recurrent themes in Arnold's films – single mums and struggling children, chaotic lives, sexual and commercial exploitation. Cow fits perfectly into this pattern. Luma is the ultimate single mother, constantly pregnant, separated from her children, milked for all she is worth. Arnold's work could easily be a misery-fest, but it isn't because she is also alert to all that's good in life – the intensity of youth, the first flushes of love and lust, dancing yourself to oblivion, the power of resilience. Her characters may not thrive but they are survivors. Again, Cow is consistent with that vision. We experience the purity of the mother-child bond in the first few hours after birth, the joy of the cows at spring turnout when they are let loose in the fields, the literal and metaphorical fireworks as cattle mate on Bonfire Night. As in all her work, music plays a large part. Some songs are piped into the cowsheds from Radio 1 to keep cattle and farmhands happy; others are handpicked by Arnold.

Although animals are not the subject of her other films, they feature prominently. In Red Road, Jackie, who works as a CCTV security camera operator, frequently zooms in on a man with a dog – without saying a word, Arnold conveys Jackie's sense of longing. In [Fish Tank](#), 15-year-old Mia suffers so much trauma in silence, and it's only when she hears her friend's horse has been put down that she cries. And Arnold's short Dog features one of cinema's most disturbing animal scenes. A teenage girl and boy are having sex. As usual, we witness the scene from the girl's perspective. While the boy thrusts away, the girl sees a dog steal his stash of dope and eat it. She laughs – at what she has just witnessed, not the boy. But the boy feels humiliated and takes a terrible revenge on the dog.



‘Every film changes me’ ... on location shooting American Honey.  
Photograph: Rachel Clark

Animals have played a huge part in Arnold’s life. When she was young, the family home on a low-rise estate in Dartford, Kent, was full of waifs and strays – numerous cats and dogs, guinea pigs and gerbils, and a sheep who lived in the garden but would wander in for the occasional chat. “I remember Mum going absolutely mad when we got back with the lamb.” Her mother, who was only 16 when Arnold was born, died a couple of years ago. Were they close? “I’m not going to talk about it,” she says in a sing-song voice.

Fish Tank is about the troubled and competitive relationship between Mia (an aspiring dancer, as Arnold was) and her mother. They even compete over her mother’s boyfriend Conor, played with a chilling brilliance by Michael Fassbender. At times Mia is ferocious (she headbutts a fellow schoolgirl without compunction, and abducts Conor’s daughter in a terrifying scene) yet we are always aware of her vulnerability.

I ask Arnold if she could headbutt her way out of trouble as a teenager. She laughs. No, she says – she has never had a scrap in her life. “But I’ve stopped fights. I can probably count 20 fights I’ve stopped in the last few years. I’m very good at reading that kind of situation and I’m not frightened of it. It’s probably why I’m a film-maker. I’m vigilant and able to read

people. I've got some skills from my childhood that have served me well as a film-maker." Did she stop fights as a kid? "I tried to sometimes. But that's difficult to talk about because; that's a lot to do with my ..." She trails off. "I can't talk about this stuff. It involves too many people."

So instead she tells me how she stopped a fight in a pub in Essex. "One of the blokes had the guy on the ground and was kicking his head against the gutter. And everyone was just watching. The guy who was kicking him suddenly got tired, stopped and was panting and I saw there was a moment to get in there. Also because I'm a female I feel they're not going to turn on me." She pauses. "Though I have stopped fights and they have turned on me. I stopped a boy hitting his girlfriend. He was punching her in the street and nobody was doing anything and I got in between them. The girl ran away, and he just went mad at me. He got hold of my hair, pushed me on the ground and spat at me. Then my friend had to try to get him off me."



'A kind of toughness' ... Arnold, left, on the set of her first feature, Red Road. Photograph: Holly Horner

What makes her intervene? "I can't bear seeing people being cruel or violent to other people." Has she always been fearless? "I've always been fearless, but I'm not tough." She thinks about what she's just said. "Actually fearlessness is a kind of toughness."

The young Arnold was a bright girl, who rarely got the opportunity to excel. She left her comprehensive school at 16 to take up hairdressing, hated it, and returned to the sixth form. At 18, she auditioned to be a presenter for No 73, and got the job. She looked so cool – rollerskating, glamorous, carefree – but she says she was always uncomfortable in front of the camera. “I think I look terrified. It was live so it *was* terrifying. Everyone I was with had done some training and I hadn’t done any whatsoever.” After seven years, when No 73 finished, she decided to reinvent herself as a director. She realised she could turn the stories she had been writing into films. Arnold disappeared from view and has rarely been seen on TV again. She was so determined to make a new start that she swapped continents to retrain at the American Film Institute of Los Angeles.

In 1998, she made her first short film, Milk, about a traumatised woman who has given birth to a stillborn baby and addresses her grief by having sex with a man young enough to be her son, who ensures her breast milk doesn’t go to waste. Whatever Arnold’s protagonists have been through, they are never simple victims; they still have “lots of lights on” as she says. The same can be said of Luma. She has endured the toughest of lives, but there is never any sense of her giving up. Towards the end of the film, her udder ligaments have ruptures, she can barely be milked, and she drags her teats painfully along the floor. But, Arnold says, the more she struggled, the more stoic she became. “I sensed this huge sense of service for us. She was still doing this thing she’s been taught to do.”



A bovine Rembrandt ... Luma in Andrea Arnold's documentary *Cow*.  
Photograph: Kate Kirkwood

The longer she spent with Luma the more she was able to read her moo music. As the animal got older, and was separated from more calves, she also seemed to become angrier, Arnold says. She is convinced Luma felt compassion for the other pregnant cows, aware of what they were about to lose. "They say the difference between humans and animals is that we can see the past and think about the future, but I could see Luma knew what's coming when she's pregnant. She got particularly mad when she saw the farmer taking away a calf from another cow."

Every time she does a Q&A with an audience about *Cow*, Arnold is amazed by the response. "We had a screening at the London film festival. People were crying, one person fainted, somebody was sick, somebody had a panic attack. Somebody said to me it made them think women's bodies are not their own; somebody said 'It makes me think of infertility and how hard I've tried for a baby'; somebody said 'It's made me feel about my mother and the relationship we've never had'; somebody talked about the relationship with a mother she *did* have, and somebody said it made them think about how our lives are managed."

As for Arnold, more than anything Cow has made her think of the importance of being seen. “I kept saying involuntarily during the edit: ‘I’m seeing you, Luma. Don’t worry Luma, we see you.’ I’m not sure any farm animal really feels seen. And I wondered what that meant in terms of her existence.”

Has making the film changed her? “Every film changes me. I take a long time making every film, and each one is like a massive growth for me.” She returns to the idea of being seen. “I wonder how much we see not just other animals but each other. Do we really take on board each other and listen and react to people – our families, our friends, our partners, the person on the street?” She knows she’s just made a film about a cow, but to her it feels more elemental. “It’s made me feel a lot about how we’re all connected. I think all living things feel the kindness or cruelty of other living things, so all the decisions we make about how we behave with animals, with plants, with somebody getting on the bus, are so important.”

Cow is in cinemas in the UK and Ireland from 14 January and exclusively on MUBI from 11 February

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## Protest

# Jurors see the bigger picture: activists who were cleared in court

Cases have included climate, environment, human rights and anti-war protests where damage to property was not denied



In 2001, Lord Melchett, seen here being arrested in Norfolk, was cleared of causing criminal damage, along with 27 others, despite admitting to destroying a trial crop of genetically modified maize. Photograph: Nick Cobbing/Rex Features



*Haroon Siddique Legal affairs correspondent*

Thu 6 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

The acquittal of four people charged with criminal damage for toppling the statue of the slave trader Edward Colston during a Black Lives Matter protest in Bristol is the latest in a series of cases in which juries have cleared protesters despite there being no question of their having carried out the actions for which they were tried.

Most recent examples related to the environment, with those on trial arguing that their deeds were a proportionate response to the climate crisis. Here are some examples.

- Roger Hallam, co-founder of Extinction Rebellion, was cleared by a jury in 2019 despite not denying causing criminal damage worth £7,000 when he sprayed the walls of Kings College London, with the words “divest from oil and gas” in protest against the institution’s fossil fuel investments. Hallam, who was acquitted along with another activist, said it showed “ordinary people, unlike the judiciary, are able to see the broader picture”.

- In April 2021 [six Extinction Rebellion protesters](#) were cleared of causing criminal damage to Shell's London headquarters despite the judge directing jurors that those on trial had no defence in law. Protesters poured fake oil, glued themselves to windows and doors, broke glass, climbed on to a roof and sprayed graffiti as part of wider demonstrations across the capital. Before reaching their verdicts, the jury had asked to see a copy of the oath they took when they were sworn in. Thanking the jurors, the judge said it had been “an unusual case”.
- [Six climate crisis activists](#) whose protest halted the Docklands Light Railway, which serves London’s financial district, were acquitted by a jury in December 2021. Five of the Extinction Rebellion protesters climbed on top of the train with banners that read “Business As Usual=Death” and “Don’t Jail the Canaries” while a sixth glued herself to a train window. They were charged with obstructing trains or carriages on the railway and acknowledged their roles in the protest but successfully argued that their action was a lawful protest against government inaction on the climate crisis.
- While there has been a flurry of cases involving Extinction Rebellion recently, there have been previous examples of acquittals by juries concluding that ostensibly criminal actions were motivated by good intentions. In 2008 [six Greenpeace climate change activists were cleared of causing £30,000 of criminal damage](#) at Kingsnorth power station, Kent. The activists admitted trying to shut down the coal-fired station by occupying the smokestack but argued they were legally justified because they were trying to prevent climate change causing greater damage to property around the world. It was the first case in which preventing property damage caused by climate change had been used as part of a “lawful excuse” defence in court.

- In 2001 Lord Melchett, then executive director of [Greenpeace](#), and 27 other supporters [were cleared by a court of causing criminal damage despite admitting destroying a crop of genetically modified maize](#). The defendants said that they acted to prevent pollen from the maize from polluting neighbouring organic crops and gardens.
- There have also been a string of acquittals in cases of sabotage of military equipment. In 2007, [two anti-war campaigners](#), Toby Olditch and Philip Pritchard, [who broke into RAF Fairford Gloucestershire](#), to sabotage US bombers at the outbreak of the Iraq war, were cleared of conspiring to cause criminal damage after they argued the B52s would have been used to commit war crimes in Iraq.
- In 2000, [two anti-nuclear protesters who entered a dockyard planning to disarm one of Britain's Trident submarines with an axe](#) were cleared of conspiracy to cause criminal damage. Sylvia Boyes and River (formerly known as Keith Wright) admitted that they plotted to damage HMS Vengeance while it was docked at Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, in November 1999, but claimed their actions were justified because nuclear weapons were immoral and illegal under international law.

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## Your work is not your god: welcome to the age of the burnout epidemic



‘According to the modern work ethos, dignity and purpose are available to workers if only they engage with their jobs.’ Photograph: Malte Mueller/Getty Images/fStop

The reason why so many of us are at the end of our rope? We allowed work to be what gave our lives meaning

*Jonathan Malesic*

Thu 6 Jan 2022 04.00 EST

The rich are irrational when it comes to work. Out of everyone in our society, they have the least need to earn more money, but they work the most.

Billionaire tech-industry titans brag about their hundred-hour work weeks, even though *their* labor isn't what boosts their companies' stock prices and enriches them further. Americans with advanced degrees have the highest average earning power, but typically work more and spend less time on leisure than people with less formal education. The children of rich parents are [twice as likely](#) to have summer jobs as poor kids are. And many older American professionals with plenty saved for retirement keep showing up at the office.

I am irrational too. I earned a middle-class salary as a tenured college professor but became increasingly exhausted by and frustrated with the work. Eventually, I quit. Even though teaching played a leading role in my burnout, I felt so aimless without it that, less than two years later, I became a part-time adjunct instructor making just a few thousand dollars a course, a fraction of what I had made before. I needed structure in my days. I needed to exercise my hard-won pedagogical skills. Above all, I needed someone to count on me to show up and do a decent job.

All of this is evidence that we don't only work for the money. Many people – volunteers, parents and starving artists among them – don't get paid at all for their labor. Even workers who aren't rich, who really do need every cent of their paycheck, often say there's more than money at stake. They're doing their jobs for love, or service or to contribute to a collective effort.

Worsening labor conditions, including more emotional intensity and less security than mid-20th-century work, only tell half the story of why burnout

is so prevalent in our society. Burnout is characteristic of our age because the gap between our shared ideals about work and the reality of our jobs is greater now than it was in the past.

Textile mill workers in Manchester, England, or Lowell, Massachusetts, two centuries ago worked for longer hours than the typical British or American worker today, and they did so in dangerous conditions. They were exhausted, but they did not have the 21st-century psychological condition we call burnout, because they did not believe their work was the path to self-actualization. The ideal that motivates us to work to the point of burnout is the promise that if you work hard, you will live a good life: not just a life of material comfort, but a life of social dignity, moral character and spiritual purpose.



A young worker at Eckersley's cotton mill in Wigan, Greater Manchester, UK, 1939. Photograph: Kurt Hutton/Getty Images

I wanted to be a professor because my own college professors seemed to be living the good life. They were respected, they seemed to be people of good judgment, and their work had the clear and noble purpose of gaining knowledge and passing it on to others. I knew virtually nothing of their lives outside the classroom, or the private demons they battled. Two of my

mentors were eventually denied tenure and had to find new jobs. A third died of a heart attack a few years after taking on a major administrative role.

I made no connection between their misfortune and my own career prospects. How could I? I was blinded by my trust in the American promise: if I got the right kind of job, then success and happiness would surely follow.

This promise, however, is mostly false. It's what the philosopher Plato called a "noble lie", a myth that justifies the fundamental arrangement of society. Plato taught that if people didn't believe the lie, then society would fall into chaos. And one particular noble lie gets us to believe in the value of hard work. We labor for our bosses' profit, but convince ourselves we're attaining the highest good. We hope the job will deliver on its promise, and hope gets us to put in the extra hours, take on the extra project and live with the lack of a raise or the recognition we need.

Hard work is arguably what American society values most. In a Pew Research Center poll conducted in 2014 that asked people about their personalities, 80% of respondents described themselves as "hardworking". No other trait drew such a strong positive response, not even "sympathetic" or "accepting of others". Only 3% said they were lazy, and a statistically insignificant number identified strongly as lazy.

We all know that more than a few of us are genuinely lazy. Think about your co-workers. How many of them are slackers? And how many of them would say they're anything but? By and large, we aren't *all* laboring diligently all day, straining over our reports and sweating through meetings with clients. Rather, we say we're hardworking because we know we're supposed to think of ourselves that way.

According to the modern work ethos, dignity, character and purpose are all available to workers if only they *engage* with their jobs. Employee engagement is also supposedly good for the bottom line. Gallup, which surveys workers on engagement, describes engaged workers in heroic, even saintly terms:

*Engaged employees are the best colleagues. They cooperate to build an organization, institution, or agency, and they are behind everything good*

*that happens there. These employees are involved in, enthusiastic about, and committed to their work. They know the scope of their jobs and look for new and better ways to achieve outcomes. They are 100% psychologically committed to their work. And, they are the only people in an organization who create new customers.*

“One hundred per cent psychologically committed to their work.” Who is like that?

About a third of US workers are, according to Gallup. To managers who accept the survey’s findings, the two-thirds of workers who are not engaged are a serious problem. One business writer claims that disengaged employees cost employers an additional 34% of their salary through absenteeism and lost productivity. Another describes them as “silent killers”. Gallup warns that unproductive, complacent workers might even be lurking, unnoticed, in upper management. The actively disengaged will even destroy others’ time and accomplishments. “Whatever the engaged do,” Gallup asserts, “the actively disengaged try to undo.” In short, they are villains, bent on undermining our heroes’ mission.

Such rhetoric is not just laughably absurd; it’s also inhumane. The fact is, American workers are more engaged than those in every other rich country, by Gallup’s own measure. Their level of engagement may indeed approach the human limit. (In Norway, the engagement rate is half the level it is in the US, and yet Norwegians are among the richest and happiest populations on earth.)

But here’s another way to look at the issue: a worker who is unengaged with work is not necessarily suffering from burnout. She might simply have found a way to keep her ideals for work in line with the reality of her job, possibly by keeping her expectations for work relatively low. If she is only 80% psychologically committed to the job but is nevertheless reasonably competent, then one has to ask: what’s the problem?

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What about those of us who genuinely feel fulfilled by their work? Some of my friends who are doctors, editors and even professors work hard, love their jobs, and flourish. Some professions, such as surgery, seem to promote

flourishing more than others. Although all physicians are prone to burnout, surgeons receive not only some of the highest salaries of any workers but also high job satisfaction and high levels of meaning. When they step back and think about what they do, surgeons *ought* to feel good about their work.

Engagement is not about stepping back, though. It's about immersion. When performing a procedure, surgeons do work that lends itself to the experience of "flow". As the late psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi described them, people in flow states shut out the world and their own bodily needs, forgoing food and sleep as they do something that seems good for its own sake. It's a state of engagement that video game designers try to foster, because it makes the game hard to quit.

Csikszentmihalyi, though, thought flow occurred most readily at work. In his book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Csikszentmihalyi pointed to a welder named Joe Kramer as an example of the "autotelic" personality – that is, someone who readily gets into a flow state at work, which then becomes an end in itself. Though Joe only had a fourth-grade education, he could fix anything in the railroad-car plant where he worked. Joe personally identified with broken equipment in order to repair it. Because Joe made the tasks of his job into an autotelic experience, his life was "more enjoyable than that of people who resign themselves to life within the constraints of the barren reality they feel they cannot alter."

Joe's co-workers all agreed he was irreplaceable. His boss claimed the plant would top the industry if he just had a few more guys like Joe. Despite his rare talent, Joe refused promotions.

The system that gives esteem to engaged employees also creates anxiety only quelled through working more intensively

The promise of greater productivity without greater cost: *that's* why engagement and flow are such appealing concepts to management in the postindustrial age. Employees are a liability, according to [current business doctrine](#). Hiring another one is risky. So why not see if you can get a little more effort out of the ones you already have? And why not convince them, through surveys and workshops and airport-bookstore bestsellers, that if they

commit themselves totally to their jobs, they will be happy? More than that, they will, like Joe Kramer, be numbered among the blessed, the communion of work saints.

In 2022, it is hard for any worker to know if they have the value Joe had to his employer. Good workers can be let go with little warning, if management's favor turns against them. The system that gives esteem to engaged employees also creates anxiety only quelled through working more intensively. The cure is also the poison. To calm our anxiety, we work too much without adequate reward, without autonomy, without fairness, without human connections, and in conflict with our values. We become exhausted, cynical, and ineffective.

Work anxiety is built into capitalism. That's a key premise in Max Weber's 1905 book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which still perfectly captures the mindset that sustains our work ethic today. Weber shows how European Protestants created a mode of thinking about money, work and dignity that we, to this day, cannot escape. It is our "iron cage".

The Protestant ethic, Weber argues, derives from the theology of John Calvin, the sixteenth century Christian reformer noted for his doctrine of predestination, which means God chooses, or "elects", some people for salvation, with the rest destined for eternal death. Only God knows who has been chosen and who hasn't, but humans understandably want to find out.

Good works, in Calvinist theology, cannot *earn* you salvation, but they can be *signs* of election. That is, God's elect will perform good works as an outgrowth of their blessed status. So if you are curious about your election, examine your actions. Are they saintly? Or sinful?

To gain assurance of your election, then, you need to know you are being productive, enriching yourself and your community through labor.

Weber saw capitalism as "a monstrous cosmos". In his view, capitalism was an all-encompassing economic and moral system, one of humanity's most marvelous constructions. We who live in the system can rarely see it. We take its norms for granted, like the air we breathe. Everything you do, from going to the "right" preschool to laboring in a productive career to receiving

medical care on your deathbed, you do because somewhere, someone thinks they can make money from it. The capitalist cosmos imposes a choice on you: adopt its ethic, or accept poverty and scorn.

As an academic, Weber was not involved in industrial commerce. But he was nevertheless as caught in the iron cage as any businessman. Prior to writing *The Protestant Ethic*, he spent five years dealing with “nervous exhaustion”. He went through several cycles of intense teaching and research, followed by physical and mental collapse, treatments, and leaves of absence to restore him. Then he would go back to work, and inevitably his condition would deteriorate.

His wife, Marianne, later wrote that during this time he was “a chained titan whom evil, envious gods were plaguing”. He was irritable and depressed and felt useless; any work, even reading a student’s paper, became an unbearable burden. He ultimately took a two-year leave of absence from his university, after which he resigned and became an adjunct professor, loosely attached to academia, at age 39.

I’m no Weber, but I take personal encouragement from his story. His professional collapse was not the last word. After he quit his job, he undertook his most influential work.

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Secular, 21st-century residents of wealthy countries don’t worry much about whether we’re God’s elect. But we’re still trapped in the Calvinist cage. We are anxious to demonstrate to potential employers, and to ourselves, that we are work saints. Like divine election, this type of status is an abstract condition that we cannot assign to ourselves, but one we hope others will recognize.

When our status anxiety wells up, we reach back into our culture’s religious heritage for a balm: hard, disciplined work. For example, Tristen Lee, a millennial-generation British public-relations worker, [tells](#) a too-familiar story of how long hours, lack of sleep, no real time off, and excessive rent keep her in the grind. “I throw my absolute heart and soul into” work, she writes. “I am so obsessed with reaching some notable level of success and hitting my financial targets, that I’ve forgotten how to actually enjoy life.”

Lee says she feels as if she has “something to prove – but to who?” To herself, Weber would say.

Lee’s experience is the 21st-century echo of 16th-century Calvinist theology. She has internalized the all-seeing judgment of a society that values her only insofar as she works, so she feels a need to assure herself of her worth. But there can never be enough assurance; in the present-day work ideology, your accomplishments matter less than your constant effort toward the *next* accomplishment.

“What is the end result?” Lee asks. “When does the constant agonizing stop? At what point do we reach satisfaction in life and think ‘fuck yeah, I’m really proud of what I’ve achieved and how far I’ve come?’”

Well, never. That’s what it means to be in an iron cage.

[The End of Burnout: Why Work Drains Us and How to Build Better Lives](#) is out now

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## **Omicron may be less severe but not ‘mild’, says WHO – as it happened**

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[China](#)

## China fires hospital officials after pregnant woman loses baby due to Covid lockdown rules

The woman was allegedly denied entry to a hospital in the city of Xi'an because her negative Covid test was four hours too old

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Two hospital officials have been fired in the Chinese city of Xi'an after a pregnant woman allegedly lost her baby after being turned away from a hospital. Photograph: VCG/Getty Images

*Helen Davidson*

*@heldavidson*

Thu 6 Jan 2022 00.52 EST

Chinese hospital officials have been fired after a pregnant woman lost her baby after she was denied entry at a Xi'an hospital due to coronavirus lockdown restrictions.

On the night of 1 January a woman in labour was denied entry to the Xi'an Gaoxin hospital because her negative test result was four hours too old. She began bleeding heavily while waiting outside, and was eventually admitted but the baby died.

The woman's story and an accompanying video went viral on social media, and was reported by local Chinese media. A related hashtag on Weibo was viewed 600m times.

On Wednesday, the Shaanxi Province and Xi'an Municipal Health Commission said it had launched an investigation and determined the baby's death was an "accident caused by negligence". Two hospital officials were fired and a manager suspended.

The head of the Xi'an health commission also received a formal warning from the Chinese Communist party for mishandling emergency care in the city.

Xi'an, a city of 13 million in Shaanxi province, is two weeks into a strict lockdown that has kept residents inside their homes and shut down entertainment venues, shops and public transport. Authorities say the lockdown has allowed them to get on top of the outbreak of Covid cases, which they said were now trending downwards. However, [there have also been concerning reports](#) of food shortages and delayed or blocked access to medical care. Strict vaccine and testing requirements for anyone seeking medical care appeared to cause confusion and prevent some people from accessing emergency treatment.

In a statement reported by state media, the hospital in the woman's case said it had done "everything that should be done".

"Now the Health Commission and the Women's Federation are investigating. They paid much attention to it, and they were more than fair."

The hospital has been ordered to apologise to the public, improve its processes, and ensure all patients can access emergency care. Epidemic prevention and control were not grounds for preventing a patient's treatment, authorities said, and new "green" channels would be opened for patients with acute and critical illnesses to access treatment.

On Wednesday officials also said cases were trending down in Xi'an, with most new cases detected in quarantine or closed areas. More than 42,000 people have been put into quarantine centres, according to state media. Xi'an has recorded about 1,800 cases since 9 December.

[China's continued commitment to zero Covid](#) has apparent general public support in a country that has recorded far fewer cases than many other nations despite the virus first being detected there. However, there are growing concerns about the impact of continued restrictions, which are getting stricter as local officials strive to prevent and respond to outbreaks or face potential punishment.

*Additional reporting by Xiaoqian Zhu*

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/06/china-fires-hospital-officials-after-pregnant-woman-loses-baby-due-to-covid-lockdown-rules>

## Business

# UK firm goes from debt to £20.5m thanks to lucrative Covid test deals

Disruptive Nanotechnology acts as middleman between the UK government and US firm Innova, which makes lateral flow tests



Disruptive Nanotechnology describes itself as the exclusive UK and EU distributor for tests made by Innova. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

*[Rob Davies](#)*

*[@ByRobDavies](#)*

Wed 5 Jan 2022 13.34 EST

Two entrepreneurs with no apparent background in healthcare have made £20m – and could make tens of millions more – after landing roles as middlemen between the UK government and a US firm that won £3.7bn of contracts to supply lateral flow tests.

Charles Palmer, whose background is in property, and Kim Thonger, a former shoe retailer, are the co-owners of Disruptive Nanotechnology, a business that had just £85 in the bank and debts of £3,592 at the end of 2019.

Accounts filed at Companies House last month show that the firm's net assets soared to £20.5m during the year to 31 December 2020, including the first nine months of the coronavirus pandemic.

Disruptive Nanotechnology, trading as Tried&Tested, describes itself as the exclusive UK and EU distributor for rapid antigen and antibody tests made by California-based Innova Medical Group.

Palmer's wife, Dr Rachel Limbrey, is the chief medical adviser at Tried&Tested, as well as working as a respiratory consultant at University Hospital Southampton.

Innova has won nine contracts worth a combined £3.7bn to provide tests, thanks in part to Operation Moonshot, the plan by Boris Johnson's former adviser Dominic Cummings to roll out mass daily testing to reduce the need for strict Covid restrictions.

Innova's chief executive, Daniel Elliott, [has said that](#) Disruptive Nanotechnology co-owner Thonger, who founded the company in 2016, "worked tirelessly" to help Innova win the first of its contracts.

Elliott said UK officials were "very surprised" by the quantities Innova could supply during discussions that took place in August 2020.

"I think that was the 'A-ha!' moment for them because they were tasked with what felt like an impossible task," he said. "We had multiple calls within a 24-hour period. And they kept asking: can you really do this?"

A leak of confidential documents in September 2020 revealed the existence of Operation Moonshot, which a briefing paper described as the "only hope" of avoiding a second national lockdown.

Launching Moonshot shortly afterwards, Johnson described the plan as giving people the "freedom to mingle" and return to normal.

Within weeks, Innova had its first contract, for five shipments between September and early October worth £103.6m. As that one ended, a second, much bigger contract was signed for £496m. They did not go out to tender because of the “extreme urgency” and global demand, according to the [contract notice](#). On 18 December, a third UK contract was published with Innova for £226m.

Disruptive Nanotechnology, based in Harrow, north-west London, reportedly receives “a few pennies” for each test supplied by Innova, an arrangement thought to be the reason for the £20m increase in its net assets, first reported by the Daily Mail.

But this year could prove even more lucrative. The combined value of Innova’s contracts for 2020, the year in which Disruptive Nanotechnology enjoyed its increase in assets, is £978.5m.

Innova has won more than £2.7bn of new testing contracts since then, while the company says it has also provided tests to the public sector, indicating it could be in line for an increase in assets of tens of millions of pounds this year, amid high demand due to the Omicron variant.

While the UK government has embraced Innova’s lateral flow tests, regulators in the company’s domestic market, the US, have not. The US Food and Drug Administration recalled Innova’s tests last year, citing concerns about their reliability.

Innova has said that the tests are effective.

Neither Thonger nor Palmer, who appear to have been instrumental in securing the supply of Innova’s tests, has a background in health or medicine.

Thonger worked in marketing and branding for a series of shoe companies, including Dr Martens and Dune, for more than 20 years. Palmer was a chartered surveyor who started his own property company.

Thonger founded the business in 2016 but it has never published full accounts due to its tiny size. It previously marketed a technology called

LightCleanse that it claimed could be used to clean bacteria and viruses in the air and on surfaces, using nanoparticles of titanium dioxide.

It is unclear whether LightCleanse is still functioning but a mobile number listed on the website is no longer active.

Palmer became a director of Disruptive Nanotechnology in June 2020, shortly before it began talks with the government, and took a 50% stake in the company at some point during that year.

A spokesperson from Disruptive Nanotechnology said: “Disruptive Nanotechnology provides goods and services to hundreds of clients, across many sectors, including vital national infrastructure, oil and energy, education, finance, healthcare, manufacturing, events, sport, retail and media.

“Our terms of business with those clients are generally commercially sensitive, therefore we do not comment, except to say it is certain that the Guardian staff and readers benefit at some point during their day from those clients being open and active.

“Partly due to our efforts, LFTs [lateral flow tests] have been widely available in the UK since September 2020. We know, and are proud, that lives and livelihoods have been saved as a result.”

The Guardian has approached Thonger and Palmer for comment.

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## Vaccines and immunisation

# Will the UK's Covid booster campaign pick up speed in January?

Almost 60% of over-12s have had their booster or third dose, but the drive has experienced a slowdown since Christmas

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



People need to wait 28 days after testing positive for Covid to be eligible for vaccination. Photograph: Robin Utrecht/REX/Shutterstock

*Hannah Devlin* Science correspondent  
[@hannahdev](https://twitter.com/hannahdev)

Wed 5 Jan 2022 11.47 EST

Official data shows the number of people getting boosted in the UK fell to just over 100,000 on Sunday, compared with highs of more than 900,000 before Christmas when on some days people were queueing for hours to get vaccinated. Asked about the slowdown, the government's vaccine minister, Maggie Throup, said the Christmas break and public holidays were key factors. So will this week see higher numbers coming forward or are there other factors at play?

## **What proportion of people are eligible for a booster?**

Almost 60% of over-12s have had their booster or third dose. But only half of the remaining 40% have had their second dose and it is notable that there wasn't a dramatic uptick in the number of people coming forward for first and second doses in the pre-Christmas vaccination campaign. Since a three-month gap is needed between doses, the ceiling for boosters will remain at 80% of over-12s well into the spring.

## **How many people have had to wait because they've tested positive for Covid?**

People need to wait 28 days after testing positive to be eligible for vaccination. So the huge surge in cases – 2 million were estimated to have had Covid in the week before Christmas – will have inevitably meant a large number of people postponing their booster. Figures on how many people this affected are not available. But the highest rates of Covid, with one in 15 people aged 25 to 35 estimated to be infected in England last week, also coincide with the age group that would be roughly due for their booster if they had their previous vaccinations on schedule.

## **What happens if you get boosted while not realising you have Covid?**

The general guidance, not just for Covid, is not to have a vaccination if you're running an infection. Clinical trials automatically discount people who test positive, so there is not much evidence on exactly how the immune

system responds to an infection and a booster at the same time. There aren't any known harms associated with the combination, aside from the obvious one of putting health professionals at risk if you attend a clinic while infectious. Since infection also boosts antibody levels, there is likely to be less benefit to getting a booster at the same time. It is possible that the side-effects of a booster, on top of mild Covid symptoms, might feel a bit worse, but there is no suggestion that this would be a clinical concern.

## **With the move to lateral flow tests (LFTs), how will positive results be recorded if people don't have to get a follow-up PCR?**

From 11 January [in England](#), and from 6 January [in Scotland](#), people who receive positive LFT results will be required to self-isolate immediately and won't be required to take a confirmatory PCR test. In theory, all LFT results, including negative ones, are already supposed to be reported via the government's test-and-trace system and feed into daily case numbers. In practice, a much smaller proportion of LFT results are reported compared with PCR results, which are automatically entered into the system when processed in the laboratory. However, cases are already running far above the numbers being confirmed by PCR testing and the UK is already relying on other methods, such as the Office for National Statistics Infection Survey, to assess levels of prevalence.

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## 2022.01.06 - Opinion

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## **Republicans are laying a path back to power – and paving it with lies**

[Rebecca Solnit](#)



Despite having fled the mob on 6 January, many congressmen are openly fleeing the truth about what happened that day



Pro-Trump rioters storm the Capitol on 6 January. Photograph: Lev Radin/Pacific Press/REX/Shutterstock

Thu 6 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

When the insurrectionists of 6 January rampaged through the Capitol, congressman Andrew Clyde of Georgia helped barricade a door, and he fled when the rest of Congress did. [A photograph](#) shows him looking panicky, mouth wide open and arm gesticulating wildly, behind what appears to be a security team member with a gun drawn, defending him. But a few months later he [declared](#): “Watching the TV footage of those who entered the Capitol and walked through Statuary Hall showed people in an orderly fashion staying between the stanchions and ropes, taking videos, pictures. You know, if you didn’t know the TV footage was a video from 6 January, you would actually think it was a normal tourist visit.”

Clyde’s account of 6 January might be a little more preposterous than those of his fellow Republican legislators. But they all joined him in pretending nothing much had happened and objecting to the investigation of the day’s events. After all, they were partly responsible, most of them. It was elected Republicans who supported and spread the earlier [lies](#) that Donald Trump had won the election, the lies that fed the insurrection; and then they lied some more about their own words and actions before, during and after. In

the immediate aftermath, the then Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell, was angry and shaken, [declaring](#): “The mob was fed lies. They were provoked by the president.” Then he too began the project of walking it all back.

What has ensued is a cover-up in plain sight. When Trump took office in 2016, [Republicans](#) faced a crisis: their party had won, but only by ushering to a minority victory one of history’s most extravagantly dishonest men. They had to stand with him or against him, and most chose to stand with him. Others chose to fade away by resigning or going home when their terms were up.

Almost none of them stood up against him. The famously vindictive Trump punished any signs of disloyalty, so they were loyal. And to be loyal meant joining him in corruption and lies. “If we nominate Trump, we will get destroyed ... and we will deserve it,” Lindsey Graham tweeted in the spring of 2016, before becoming one of Trump’s most grovelling sycophants.

In a way, the sycophants got stronger: if truth restrains us and links us together, they unchained themselves. We make contracts with each other with words; we share information, make agreements and commitments, hold each other accountable and show who we are. Lies are broken contracts, in which words misrepresent what the speaker knows; they aim to delude, exploit and divide. The liar may get stronger, but the social fabric gets weaker. That strength is precarious, so lies have been piled atop lies to keep accountability at a distance.

Of course, politicians of all stripes are notoriously shifty, and the Republican party had no great reputation for honesty previously. Many of their campaigns long before Trump could politely be called misleading. But after 2016, they clustered around the gaslighter-in-chief like bugs around a streetlight. I often think of what Trump did as disinhibition: the pallid, bashful untruths of yore were replaced by baldfaced outrages. They lost any compunction about openly contradicting themselves, and did so often, never more than with the insurrection of 6 January.

As the mob was smashing its way into the building, congressman Jim Jordan had been on the house floor accusing election officials in six states of

corruption. A week later he declared: “I’ve never said that this election was stolen.” But, as CNN [noted](#): “Jordan claimed in October that Democrats were working to steal the election and spoke at a Stop the Steal rally in Pennsylvania two days after the election. In December, he said he didn’t know how he could be convinced that ‘Trump didn’t actually win’ the election.”

During the hours when the mob rampaged through the US Capitol building, House minority leader Kevin McCarthy called up Trump, reportedly furious. “The president bears responsibility for the attack,” he said shortly thereafter. Then he devoted himself to winning back Trump’s favour and playing down what had happened. “Pressed on whether he regretted working to overturn President Biden’s 2020 victory, Mr McCarthy took the position that he did no such thing,” the New York Times [reported](#) in April.

Then he worked hard to sabotage the investigation into what had happened, by trying to put two congressmen most loyal to the big lie, Jim Banks and the ever-disruptive champion shouter Jim Jordan, on the committee. The house majority leader, Nancy Pelosi, blocked their appointment. Banks was [later caught](#) sending out letters, seeking information from government agencies, claiming he was the ranking Republican on the 6 January committee, of which he was never in fact a member.

By September, McCarthy was full team cover-up: the Guardian’s Hugo Lowell [noted](#) that McCarthy “threatened to retaliate against any telecommunications company that complied with the records requests” of the congressional committee investigating the 6 January insurrection. That’s not technically lying, but it’s certainly an attempt to prevent the truth from being known. There’s a lot to cover up, especially if you don’t want the committee to find out the extent to which Congress itself was involved in the attack on Congress.

The politicians who fled in fear thereafter threw themselves into denying the threat and protecting its chief instigator. No one did so more slavishly than the then vice-president, Mike Pence, who was pressured before and during 6 January to violate the law and exercise a power he did not possess to change the election outcome. “If Vice President @Mike\_Pence comes through for us, we will win the Presidency,” Trump had [tweeted](#) early that day; and then,

“Mike Pence didn’t have the courage to do what should have been done to protect our Country and our Constitution”. At Trump’s instigation, the mob was chanting: “Hang Mike Pence!”

Pence trivialised the event when [he told](#) the Christian Broadcasting Network: “I’m not going to allow the Democrats to use one tragic day in January to distract attention from their failed agenda and the failed policies of the Biden administration.” Capitol police officer Aquilino Gonell, who was seriously injured defending the politicians, [told](#) NPR: “That one day in January almost cost my life. And we did everything possible to prevent him [Pence] from being hanged and killed in front of his daughter and his wife. And now he’s telling us that that one day in January doesn’t mean anything. It’s pathetic. It’s a disgrace.”

One of the first lies to explode out of the insurrection was that somehow the attack on the Capitol was the work of Antifa. The very idea of Antifa, as they used it, was an older lie, a transformation of scattered individuals and impromptu groups of antifascists into a cohesive sinister gang that could be blamed for pretty much anything, anywhere. The New York Times [described](#) how on 6 January the right was claiming that the insurrection had been led by Antifa, not Trump supporters.

By the end of the day, Fox was promoting it, the claim was all over Twitter, and: “Representative Matt Gaetz of Florida had stood on the ransacked House floor and claimed that many rioters ‘were members of the violent terrorist group antifa’.” The claim, the Times added, “has hardened into gospel among hard-line Trump supporters, by voters and sanctified by elected officials in the party”

That is, they took the position that the riot, which at the time Republican legislators begged the president to stop, was instead a riot by an essentially imaginary leftwing organisation with no conceivable motive to prevent the confirmation of Biden’s victory. Now the investigation is closing in on the role that many in Congress played in the attack on Congress. Having fled their own mobs, they are now trying to flee the truth, and relying on the fact that a significant portion of the country prefers the lies.

The Republicans who helped the failed coup along and then dismissed its import are preparing to do it better next time. The Democratic senator Brian Schatz [tweeted](#) on Tuesday: “They are organizing the next one, not as a secret conspiracy, but as a central organizing principle for the next election.” The Senate majority leader, Chuck Schumer, [said](#): “Donald Trump has infected, and that’s the appropriate word, the Republican party with his big lie and with his desire to stop democracy. We have no choice but to move forward,” by which he meant overturn the filibuster to pass voting rights legislation. 6 January was one confrontation; there’s another one coming. The lies may implode at some point, but the liars have to be defeated.

- Rebecca Solnit is a Guardian US columnist. Her most recent books are *Recollections of My Nonexistence* and *Orwell's Roses*
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## OpinionNew year

# Why new year resolutions can just cause you more stress

[Vishvapani Blomfield](#)

Focusing on a more mindful life instead of chasing targets creates space to reflect and be curious, even while jogging



‘Meditation is by no means the only way to settle the mind, but it’s popular.’  
Photograph: track5/Getty Images

Thu 6 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

The evidence for whether new year resolutions are effective [is mixed](#). Make them Smart – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely – and they can be a spur to effective action. But vaguer resolutions such as “get fit”, “lose weight” or “stop wasting so much time” often conceal a deeper self-criticism that undermines our intentions.

The underlying approach is that we must simply try harder – sometimes at everything at once – and that sets us up to fail. We binge on diets, then binge on food and, finally, binge on guilt.

I've found that apps that help turn my unfocused intentions into a Smart plan really work. A Couch to 5K programme got me running, and I liked having a clear objective. It feels good to be fitter. You might see a bald bloke running with a waddling gait, but I see goals met and targets smashed – and a 10K in my sights.

But there's a downside to resolutions, even when they're effective and we achieve them. The focus on results has got me checking my Google Fit stats a little too often, introducing an element of data-driven compulsiveness to the simple activity of exercising my body. It reminds me of the impulse I sometimes feel to check my Facebook likes and Twitter followers. I sense it fits with a wider cultural current: the strain coming from the constant effort to keep up, be productive and get ahead is a source of stress, not its cure.

Recognising this, part of me wants to simply ditch my phone and forget the targets. I'm a Buddhist, I've taught mindfulness for 15 years, and that part of me wants to be unproductive and turn, as we say on our courses, from doing mode to being mode.

My favourite exponent of such non-utilitarian living is John Keats, who advocated “delicious diligent indolence” in [a letter written to a friend](#) in 1818: “Let us not,” he writes, “go hurrying about and collecting honey, bee-like buzzing here and there for a knowledge that is to be arrived at, but let us open our leaves like a flower, and be passive and receptive.”

Keats's word “diligent” signals that, by indolence, he doesn't mean inertia. Maintaining an alert receptivity requires what [Buddhism](#) calls practice – a conscious effort to develop it over time, which should be undertaken with “balanced effort” – a middle way between wilful or compulsive striving and self-indulgence.

The Buddha's image of this was of a musical instrument whose strings must be tuned neither too loosely nor too tightly.

Drawing on my experience as a mindfulness teacher, I have some suggestions for middle-way practices that foster the alert receptivity Keats recommends. The first is learning to settle the mind. [Meditation](#) is by no means the only way to do this, but it's popular because it offers simple methods for shifting attention from the flow of thoughts to something calming, like the breath. If you've tried it for yourself you'll know that the thoughts don't just stop, and you sometimes feel uncomfortable. But settling the mind and stepping into a different kind of awareness is actually a fairly straightforward process.

That's a start, but the value of doing this is the "mental space" that opens up by freeing yourself from mental strain and clutter. So it's important that we don't just fill the space up again with more input. Buddhism has always spoken of the need to "guard the gates of the senses" – to manage what we expose our minds to, if we want them to develop. And that takes on fresh importance when, with a few clicks, we can access an effectively unlimited supply of movies, music tracks, websites and just about any other diversion we can imagine.

There's not much point in achieving a goal like getting fit or losing weight if it becomes a new source of stress. What I'm really seeking as I run is a sense of flourishing and vitality, and that can only happen by being fully present and aware in each moment, not just when I reach 10K.

A more mindful way of living values simplicity over consumption and allows space between activities. It focuses on doing one thing at a time and doing it fully. We need time to reflect and to be curious.

These things can be practices, and perhaps you can frame them as Smart resolutions. But in the end we don't just need to be smart. We need to be wise.

- Vishvapani Blomfield is the Buddhist contributor to BBC Radio 4's Thought for the Day and leads meditation on the RoundGlass app

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Opinion[Keir Starmer](#)

## Starmer the lawyer is back – and this time Johnson has nowhere to run

[Zoe Williams](#)



The Labour leader has blocked every exit for the Conservatives, who are stuck with a duff prime minister and a broken party



Keir Starmer delivers his speech in Birmingham: ‘Everybody has a right to be valued.’ Photograph: Jacob King/PA

Thu 6 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

“Security. Prosperity. Respect.” Keir Starmer appeared in Birmingham on Tuesday to [lay out his offer](#) to the country. It is always, if you care about the Labour party, nerve-racking to hear its leader make an account of its core values, though nothing will ever match the dispiriting moment before the 2015 leadership election, when it named one of its core values as “having strong values”.

Shelving, very briefly, the question of who is and who isn’t centrist enough for the country, values are like an octave, or a deck of cards: they are fixed in number, at least the acceptable ones; they are always the same. “Another C sharp, another jack of diamonds,” you think. “Big wow.” It’s only once you’re in the middle of a game that any of them become precious or meaningful, and for far too long the [Conservatives](#) have been writing the rules. “Labour values” such as equality were effortlessly lifted, to become “levelling up”. The progressive party flailed to adapt – what next, are we all leveller uppers now? Do we level down? – not realising that the rules were always changing, and now jokers were wild in play too. The way to win against the Conservatives was not to find better, different, newer, or more

traditional, or more decisive, or more interpretable values. It was to divest the Conservatives of the legitimacy of their rulebook.

So Starmer's offer in this speech was more of a placeholder: he vowed that "if we work hard, we should have a right to job security". I would have preferred a more radical promise, that if we work hard, we should be relatively confident that we can feed and house ourselves, then a side order of support if by circumstance we can't work hard. He asserted, too, that "everybody has a right to be valued for who we are and what we do". It's a laudable idea but quite hard to measure. Yet if you connect those two thoughts – we have workplace rights, and we all have value – it represents a significant break with the last 12 years of economic reality and political discourse.

The transfer of power from the worker to the employer that, with zero-hours contracts and poverty wages, has seemed inexorable, would not survive this meaningful reassertion of workplace rights. And the many cruelties of austerity have only endured this long thanks to the underpinning narrative that hardship was self-inflicted and that some (millions of) people simply had less value than others.

This is an optimistic interpretation of the speech; the counterpoint, that it simply didn't say enough about Labour's policy intentions, is also fair. Its driving purpose was to establish the party as the dynamic vessel of, rather than a moaning participant in, anti-Conservative feeling.

Boris Johnson's critique of his opposite number has, of course, always been that he's a lawyer – combining the insults boring, technical, elitist, an observer rather than an actor, "Captain Hindsight". Starmer's speech, perhaps for the first time since he became leader, performed a jujitsu move: yes he is a lawyer, and Johnson could have at it. He conveyed this explicitly, his patriotism mediated through his hinterland as the "country's leading prosecutor". He also did so implicitly, framing his relationship with voters as a "contract" – about as lawyerly as it comes. And he laid a very simple, yet nevertheless lawyerly trap for Johnson: the prime minister himself is unfit for office, yet the problem is with the entire party, not just one man.

The Conservatives care so little about the country that they're "gearing up for a leadership fight" precisely when we most need stability. It was a systematic, rather obvious, block of each exit: they can't keep Johnson because he's bent; another candidate won't stop the rot, because the party is spent; if they ignore the problem and forge on with their leader, it will merely be a depressing illustration that "they've been in power too long"; if they try to replace him, they indicate their lack of seriousness and civic duty. These points lay out a foundational principle, without which Labour will always be on the back foot: the Conservative rulebook is no longer legitimate.

Later the same day, Johnson gave [a press conference](#) of his own, in a move that cynics, which is now all of us, read as attempting to draw attention away from Starmer's speech. Problematically for Johnson, that press conference was drivel: repetitive, chaotic, and largely devoid of substance. Any that there was, was immediately contradicted by the look on the face of the man (Chris Whitty) standing right next to him. Johnson is getting to a place where, every time he opens his mouth, he makes his opponent's point for him. Lawyers, huh?

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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**OpinionFamily**

# My teenage son is so sensible that it's making me feel thrillingly irresponsible

[Emma Beddington](#)



While his dad and I worked our way through the festive booze he brewed herbal teas and nagged me about watching trashy TV. Where will this end?



‘Where are the pulses, mum?’ … another Christmas dinner fail. Posed by models. Photograph: RgStudio/Getty Images

Thu 6 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

The three weeks with my 19-year-old back from his first term at university has been a joy. We missed him, of course, but also, as the only member of our family to have done anything novel over the past year, he seems thrillingly exotic. We badgered him with questions like medieval peasants welcoming a knight returned from the crusades. “You went bowling?” we whisper in wonder. “You sat in a library! With strangers!”

But his return has also revealed to me how worryingly far along the road of role reversal we have already gone. His is a [sweetly sensible generation](#) and I often feel grossly irresponsible around them. So far, he has told me off for not drinking enough (well, any) water, not taking weight-bearing exercise, and looking forward to *The Apprentice* (him: “It’s just trashy reality TV”; me: “That’s the point?”). As his father and I experimented with various festive alcohols and artery hardeners, he brewed his own herbal teas from whole spices, ground in the pestle and mortar he requested for Christmas, and bemoaned the lack of a tofu press in our house. Yesterday, he urged me, the person who views any meal that takes more than 15 minutes to prepare as a personal affront, to soak my own pulses.

Most evenings he works or reads something improving while we sit gormlessly in front of yet another iteration of MasterChef, picking biscuit crumbs from our cleavage (me) or sleeping (spouse). Last week things came to a head when he distributed copies of a paper he had read on the [deleterious effect](#) of “media multitasking” (basically, looking at our phones while watching TV) on memory.

It will never stop being delightful to see your child become an adult, but this is dangerous. If I can now relinquish responsibility for behaving like a grownup, where will this end? Will I blow the mortgage on 90s fashions on Depop, or get a mate to give me a septum piercing? When he comes back at Easter, I might have to download TikTok and finally find out what a “[milk crate challenge](#)” is.

- Adrian Chiles is on holiday
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## 2022.01.06 - Around the world

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## US Capitol attack

# Capitol attack: Biden to stress Trump's 'singular responsibility' on anniversary

President will lead sombre commemorations in Washington of deadly assault on US democracy



Trump supporters clash with police and security forces as they push barricades to storm the US Capitol in Washington DC on 6 January 2021.  
Photograph: Roberto Schmidt/AFP/Getty Images

*David Smith* Washington bureau chief  
[@smithinamerica](https://twitter.com/smithinamerica)

Wed 5 Jan 2022 20.00 EST

It was a day that shook America. Joe Biden will lead sombre commemorations on Thursday to mark one year since [the US Capitol insurrection](#) that left five people dead and the nation's democracy wounded,

and is expected to lay out the “singular responsibility” that Donald Trump has for the “chaos and carnage” of that day.

In a speech, Biden will directly address the former president’s role in the attack and his attempts since to distract from or downplay events, the White House said.

“At this moment we must decide what kind of nation we are going to be,” the president will say, according to an excerpt released by the White House. “Are we going to be a nation that accepts political violence as a norm? Are we going to be a nation where we allow partisan election officials to overturn the legally expressed will of the people?

“Are we going to be a nation that lives not by the light of the truth but in the shadow of lies? We cannot allow ourselves to be that kind of nation. The way forward is to recognise the truth and to live by it.”

Biden has been “clear-eyed” about the “threat the former president represents to our democracy”, the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, said in a briefing on Wednesday. Biden has repeatedly stated that Trump “abused his office, undermined the constitution and ignored his oath to the American people in an effort to amass more power for himself and his allies”, Psaki said.

“President Biden will lay out the significance of what happened at the Capitol and the singular responsibility President Trump has for the chaos and the carnage that we saw,” she added. “He will forcibly push back on the lies spread by the former president in an attempt to mislead the American people and his own supporters, as well as distract from his role in what happened.”

The president is also set to praise the bravery of outnumbered police officers on the scene and outline the unfinished work that America needs to do to heal, the White House said.

Defeated in the 2020 presidential election, Trump incited his supporters to storm the Capitol and interrupt certification of Biden’s victory. Scores of

police were beaten and bloodied and congressional offices were ransacked in the worst ever domestic attack on the seat of US government.

Trump this week [cancelled](#) his own anniversary event – a press conference at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida that had been scheduled for the evening of 6 January – reportedly at the urging of advisers.

A year on from the attack, polls show Americans are still divided in their perceptions of what unfolded and why. The anniversary offers Biden, who promised to bring the nation together, an opportunity to reassert a fact-based account. He and Vice-President Kamala Harris will speak on Thursday morning at the US Capitol.

“The president is going to speak to the truth of what happened, not the lies that some have spread since, and the peril it has posed to the rule of law and our system of democratic governance,” Psaki [told reporters on Tuesday](#).

Biden will put an extra spotlight on the role of Capitol police and others on the scene, Psaki said. “Because of their efforts, our democracy withstood an attack from a mob, and the will of more than 150 million people who voted in the presidential election was ultimately registered by Congress.”

Psaki was asked at the press briefing what the president’s message will be to the many Republicans who believe Biden stole the election from Trump, despite overwhelming contrary evidence.

“What he’s going to continue to do is speak to everyone in the country. Those who didn’t vote for him, those who may not believe he is the legitimate president, about what he wants to do to make their lives better,” the spokesperson replied.

Other events at the Capitol on Thursday will include a moment of reflection with staff on the House of Representatives floor, a moment of silence on the House floor, a conversation with the presidential historians Doris Kearns Goodwin and Jon Meacham, testimonials from members of Congress and a prayer vigil.

Four people died on the day of the riot and one Capitol police officer died the day after. Four officers have since taken their own lives. The crowd called for the then vice-president, Mike Pence, presiding over the electoral college vote count, to be hanged.



Trump supporters left damage in their wake inside the US Capitol building.  
Photograph: Olivier Douliery/AFP/Getty Images

But Trump, fellow Republicans and rightwing media personalities have pushed false and misleading accounts to downplay the attack, calling it a non-violent protest or blaming leftwing activists. Even Pence has dismissed it as “just one day in January”.

Congressional Republicans are expected to keep a low profile or stay away from Thursday’s events. Trump had been expected to create a split-screen moment by pushing his counter-narrative at a televised press conference, but he abruptly scrapped the plan on Tuesday.

In a statement, the former president criticised a House select committee investigating the 6 January insurrection, which continues its work and on Tuesday issued a letter seeking the cooperation of the Fox News host Sean Hannity, who exchanged messages with Trump and his chief of staff, Mark Meadows, in the days leading up to the attack.

Trump said that he was cancelling his conference “in light of the total bias and dishonesty of the January 6th Unselect Committee of Democrats, two failed Republicans, and the Fake News Media”, and would address the issue instead at a rally in Arizona on 15 January.

The ex-president was reportedly talked out of holding a press conference by allies. Senator Lindsey Graham [told the Axios website](#) that he discussed the subject with Trump over a weekend golf match in West Palm Beach, Florida, arguing that “there could be peril in doing a news conference ... Best to focus on election reform instead.”

Separate from the House investigation, the justice department is leading the prosecution of rioters who invaded the Capitol. More than 700 people have been charged so far in one of the biggest criminal investigations in American history. More than 30 have received jail sentences.

Trump was kicked off Twitter after the Capitol attack for statements encouraging violence. He was impeached by the House but acquitted by the Senate, leaving the way open for him to seek the White House again in 2024.

A Washington Post-University of Maryland [poll found that](#) 72% of Republicans say Trump does not really bear responsibility for what happened, 58% of Republicans believe Biden’s election was not legitimate and 40% of Republicans and independents say violence against the government is sometimes justified.

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## Global development

# Ethiopia lifts five-month suspension of Norwegian Refugee Council's aid work

NRC, which was accused of spreading 'misinformation', says it will struggle to reach those in need as Tigray conflict enters third year



Some of the roughly 500,000 Ethiopians displaced by the Tigray civil war wait for aid. The NRC said the government had warned it over its advocacy on aid needs. Photograph: Nashon Tado/NRC

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Kaamil Ahmed](#)

Thu 6 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

Ethiopia has lifted a five-month suspension of the Norwegian Refugee Council's aid work after it cleared the organisation of [allegations of spreading "misinformation"](#).

The government ordered the NRC, along with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), to stop work for three months in July, including operations in the [Tigray conflict zone](#). Both organisations were ordered to stop their humanitarian work in July but while MSF's suspension was lifted in October, the NRC's was extended.

“It is heart-breaking that we were unable to reach our target of serving more than half a million in need across Ethiopia in 2021,” Jan Egeland, [NRC secretary general, said in a statement](#).

“Now that we have to restart, it will take time to again reach as many people as we did before the suspension. We have lost many of our staff. We urgently need permits for our international staff to return, and we need to be able to pay our suppliers.”

NRC said it was given a “strict warning” from the government over future advocacy on humanitarian needs.

## Q&A

### **Who is fighting the war in Ethiopia?**

Show



### **Ethiopian National Defence Forces**

Ethiopia's national military is one of the biggest standing armed forces in Africa, with an estimated 140,000 personnel. Its air force has fighter jets and armed drones.

The ENDF has considerable battle experience, fighting wars with Eritrea, quelling rebellions and confronting Islamist militants in Somalia.

### **Tigrayan rebels**

The TPLF dominated the political alliance that ruled Ethiopia for nearly 30 years until anti-government protests swept Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to power in 2018.

At the outset of fighting the TPLF had a large paramilitary force and well-trained local militia possibly numbering 250,000 men in total.

They were battle-hardened, having led the struggle that toppled Ethiopia's autocratic regime in 1991 and fighting a brutal border war with Eritrea.

### **Oromo fighters**

The Oromo Liberation Army, an insurgent group bent on overthrowing Abiy, has linked up with the TPLF on the battlefield. Ethiopia declared the TPLF and OLA terrorist organisations in May, helping nudge the historic foes towards an unlikely military pact against their common enemy.

The OLA broke off from the Oromo Liberation Front, an opposition party that spent years in exile but was allowed to return to Ethiopia after Abiy took office.

Believed to number in the low thousands, it is fighting for self-determination for the Oromo, Ethiopia's largest ethnic group. OLA combatants have longstanding grievances with ethnic Amharas, and Abiy's government has accused the OLA of massacres.

### **Amhara forces**

Regular and irregular combatants from Amhara have been a major ally of government forces since the war began. These militias occupied areas of southern Tigray and seized the region's fertile west, which ethnic Amharas consider part of their homeland.

Over the last year, ethnic Amharas have been returning to western Tigray and occupying abandoned homes and farmland in a state-backed campaign the United States has described as "ethnic cleansing".

Amharas claim western Tigray was stolen from them decades ago when the TPLF ruled the country. Their involvement in the conflict has fanned ethnic hostilities.

As the TPLF has advanced further into the region, Amhara leaders have warned their very existence is at stake and urged locals to join the fight.

## Eritrea

Tigray borders Eritrea, whose leader Isaias Afwerki is close to Abiy and a sworn enemy of the TPLF, which ruled Ethiopia when both countries fought their border war.

For months, Addis Ababa and Asmara flatly denied the presence of Eritrean troops in Tigray, despite persistent eyewitness testimony to the contrary. Abiy finally acknowledged their presence in March and said their departure was imminent. But they remain in Tigray and it is unclear whether Abiy could make them leave - or afford to let them go. **Agence France-Presse**

Photograph: Ben Curtis/AP

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NRC had been providing food, clean water, shelter, education and legal help to 25,000 people when it was ordered to suspend its operations.

At the time, the UN called the bans “dangerous” and said Ethiopia needed evidence to back up its claims that the aid groups were spreading misinformation.

MSF was banned in the Tigray, Gambella, Amhara and Somali regions. Along with spreading misinformation, the organisation was accused of bringing in satellite communication equipment without authorisation and not getting the correct permits for employees.

In September the organisation said the suspension had forced it to discharge patients from clinics at short notice, and meant it could not help people affected by the Tigray conflict, refugees from South Sudan and people suffering from neglected tropical diseases.

MSF said that while the three-month suspension had been lifted in late October, it had been difficult to restart operations.

“Although we are permitted to resume our work, it has not been possible to restart those medical programmes, mainly due to the current security

situation and administrative obstacles,” the spokesperson said.

In November, MSF was forced to suspend work in some parts of the country for safety reasons.

“Despite the significant scale of humanitarian needs faced by the Ethiopian people in many regions of the country, MSF considers it difficult to restart and expand its response to address those needs.”

MSF said it was talking with the government and other parties to find ways to continue providing medical services.

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## Germany

# German police dogs sent off duty after ban on ‘pulling collars’

Method used to control dogs while making arrests illegal under new animal rights law



A Berlin police officer pulls a dog off a demonstrator during a protest.  
Photograph: Clemens Bilan/EPA

*[Kate Connolly](#) in Berlin*

Thu 6 Jan 2022 00.00 EST

Berlin police dogs trained to attack perpetrators have been put on an enforced break, along with their handlers, over contradictions between the methods used to control them and a new law to prevent cruelty to dogs.

The use of pulling collars to channel a police dog’s aggression towards an agitator or potential criminal contravenes the law, introduced by the former

agriculture minister, which came into force on 1 January.

Police said that about 49 dogs, out of about 130 used for operations from arresting perpetrators to drug and explosives detection or locating missing persons, were suspended from duty until a solution was found that would not involve officers breaking the law.

A police spokesperson, Thilo Cablitz, said: “We are currently unable to deploy a section of our service dogs due to changes in the animal protection act governing dogs.” Those suspended include dogs working alongside special forces, the SEK, and those used to protect people as well as to arrest offenders.



A sniffer dog leaves a home after a police raid in Leverkusen, Germany, in June 2021. Photograph: Thilo Schmülgen/Reuters

The training of “Schutzhunde”, or protection dogs, involves being able to control when a dog ends an attack, by tugging briefly on a “pulling collar” to restricts the animal’s airway. The logic is that if a dog’s aggression, considered necessary for the apprehension, is not controlled, it could cause serious injury or death to the perpetrator.

Under the new ordinance, brought into law by the former agriculture minister Julia Klöckner, the use of such punitive stimuli is no longer allowed

when training dogs. While primarily introduced to improve standards of dog ownership in [Germany](#), the rules are intended to apply to all German dogs, including guard dogs.

The agriculture ministry has said its decision was based on scientific studies showing that punitive stimuli “contradicts the concept of animal welfare”.

Included in the act are rules governing the all-round care and upkeep of dogs, from the size, temperature and ventilation of their kennels, to breeding practices. Dog owners are obliged to take their [pets for regular walks](#), to spend time with them and to ensure they have contact with other dogs. Chaining dogs, except under certain circumstances and conditions, pinch collars and other equipment or practices considered to induce pain, are forbidden.

Klöcker has said the need for an update to existing legislation was long overdue but had become urgent during the pandemic, as increasing numbers of people with no experience of owning pets had bought dogs, and cases of abuse were rife. Pet shop owners and breeders should also carry more responsibility for dogs’ welfare, she said.

The law change has been known about for months but its effect on the daily workings of police attack dogs seems to have taken police and politicians by surprise.

Stephan Kelm, the vice-chair of the Berlin branch of the police union, GdP, said a solution needed to be found, as the dogs’ suspension would have “severe consequences for domestic security”, and the union had asked for the federal interior minister, Nancy Faeser, to intervene. He said the act affected forces across Germany. “We are completely open to innovative training methods, in which it is not necessary to inflict pain. But right now we don’t know of any,” he said.

Cablitz said police were having discussions with Berlin’s interior ministry. “We are in dialogue with the ministry in order to find a solution,” he said. The interior ministry has not yet commented.

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[China](#)

## China faces shortage of PE teachers amid school exercise drive

Only two PE teachers available to coach 2,600 students in one school, according to Chinese media



Students exercise at an elementary school in Nanning, capital of Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Vincent Ni](#) China affairs correspondent*

Thu 6 Jan 2022 00.00 EST

Tan Lili, the principal of Shanghai's Baoshan No 2 central primary school, has been wrestling with a problem in recent months: her school does not have enough physical education teachers.

She is not alone. Since [China](#) embarked in 2021 on a nationwide campaign to reduce academic pressures on children and increase the amount of active

time they spent outdoors, primary and middle schools across the country have been struggling. In one school, according to Chinese media, only two PE teachers are available to coach 2,600 students.

One key law was passed in October, [to reduce the “twin pressures”](#) of homework and off-site tutoring on children, and drove [many profit-driven education companies into bankruptcy](#).

According to the official Xinhua news agency, the legislation asks parents to arrange their children’s time to account for reasonable breaks and exercise, thereby reducing pressure and avoiding internet overuse. Around the same time as seeking to reduce academic pressure, China has promoted policies for schools to help students exercise more.

“We have 11 full-time PE teachers, but there are 43 classes ... we are seriously lacking PE teachers,” Tan said in a recent interview with Shanghai TV. “The demand for PE teachers has now increased dramatically.”

Some schools are encouraging PE teachers to pass on tips to parents about teaching personal fitness to their children. But still, Sun Dong, who leads the PE group at Beijing’s prestigious 101 Middle School, complained that “some of our teachers have to teach 21 classes a week”.

PE teachers had for years played a minor role in the country’s education system: classes were mandatory in many provinces, but as students and their parents overwhelmingly focused on passing crucial exams, PE was rarely a top priority.

A “proposal to prevent the feminisation of male adolescents” from the education ministry earlier last year also led to an increased focus on PE from primary schools to universities.

Schools have been on a hiring spree in recent months. Tan’s Shanghai school recently added five professional coaches, ranging from football to badminton to fencing. And late in October, a senior official from the country’s General Administration of Sport said that he and his colleagues were exploring the possibility of allowing retired athletes to work as PE teachers part-time at schools.

“I’ve been teaching PE for 20 years, and this is the very first time I have the opportunity to speak in front of you, at the school’s teacher-parents conference,” a Shanghai PE teacher said in a September post that went viral on China’s social media.

China has had a long history of attempts to reduce students’ academic burdens, issuing its first directive in 1955. In the last 20 years, Beijing repeatedly promoted a nationwide “burden alleviation” campaign but critics said that without properly reforming the competitive national Gaokao exam system, it was only a slogan.

But the new policy has not been equally received by parents across the country.

“I’m sure the authorities’ starting point was good, but education is a whole-of-a-society issue. By simply asking schools to cut academic work and increase outdoors activity won’t necessarily help address the fundamental problem,” said one Shanghai schoolteacher and a parent, who prefers to remain anonymous. “That is: education inequality.”

Mr Li, a quality control manager in Zhenzhou in the central province of Henan, said despite all the new regulations, his 6th grade daughter at Zhengzhou Ruiding primary school still has a lot of work to do. “The students are still under great pressure … After school, they spend most of their time studying and doing homework, and their spare time is still very tight.”

*Additional reporting by Xiaoqian Zhu.*

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## North Korea

# North Korean hypersonic missile hit target in test firing, says state media

Launch was detected by militaries in the region, and was criticised by South Korea, Japan and the US



A news broadcast showing file footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul on 5 January. Photograph: Jung Yeon-Je/AFP/Getty Images

*Reuters in Seoul*

Wed 5 Jan 2022 17.49 EST

North Korea test fired a “hypersonic missile” this week that successfully hit a target, state news agency KCNA reported on Thursday, as the country pursues new military capabilities amid stalled denuclearisation talks.

The [launch on Wednesday](#) was the first by North Korea since October and was detected by several militaries in the region, drawing criticism from governments in the United States, South Korea, and Japan.

North Korea first tested a hypersonic missile in September, joining a race headed by major military powers to deploy the advanced weapons system.

Unlike ballistic missiles that fly into outer space before returning on steep trajectories, hypersonic weapons fly towards targets at lower altitudes and can achieve more than five times the speed of sound – or about 6,200 km per hour (3,850 mph).



A U-2S Dragon Lady spy plane of the US Air Force lands at Osan air base in Pyeongtaek, 70 km south of Seoul, South Korea on 5 January after completing a reconnaissance mission following North Korea's apparent ballistic missile launch toward the East Sea earlier in the day. Photograph: Yonhap/EPA

“The successive successes in the test launches in the hypersonic missile sector have strategic significance in that they hasten a task for modernising strategic armed force of the state,” the KCNA report said.

In Wednesday’s test, the “hypersonic gliding warhead” detached from its rocket booster and manoeuvred 120 km (75 miles) laterally before it

“precisely hit” a target 700 km (430 miles) away, KCNA reported. It said the test also confirmed components such as flight control and its ability to operate in the winter.

The missile demonstrated its ability to combine “multi-step glide jump flight and strong lateral manoeuvring,” KCNA said.

More manoeuvrable missiles and warheads are likely to be aimed at being able to overcome missile defences like those wielded by South Korea and the United States, analysts have said.

“My impression is that the North Koreans have identified hypersonic gliders as a potentially useful qualitative means to cope with missile defence,” said Ankit Panda, a senior fellow at the US-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Photos of the missile used in Wednesday’s test suggest it is a different version from the one tested last year, and was probably first unveiled at a defence exhibition in Pyongyang in October, he added.

“They likely set up at least two separate development programmes,” Panda said. “One of these was the Hwasong-8, which was tested in September. This missile, which shares a few features in common with the Hwasong-8, is another.”

The US state department said the test violated multiple UN security council resolutions and poses a threat to North Korea’s neighbours and the international community.

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## **Headlines saturday 8 january 2022**

- [\*\*'Funds for favours' Geidt pressed to reopen investigation into PM's flat\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Novak Djokovic Tennis star relied on December Covid infection for vaccine exemption, court documents reveal\*\*](#)
- [\*\*US Three white men sentenced to life in prison for Ahmaud Arbery's murder\*\*](#)
- [\*\*'Devastated' Family members pay tribute to Ahmaud Arbery at sentencing of killers – video\*\*](#)

**Boris Johnson**

## **‘Funds for favours’: Geidt pressed to reopen investigation into PM’s flat**

Emergence of ‘great exhibition’ messages seems to undermine ethics adviser’s finding, says Labour



Christopher Geidt concluded that David Brownlow had ‘altruistic and philanthropic motives’ for paying for the refurbishment of the No 11 Downing Street flat. Photograph: Max Mumby/Indigo/Getty Images

*Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent  
@breeallegretti*

Sat 8 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Boris Johnson’s ethics adviser has been accused of failing to investigate a potential “funds for favours” scandal after the prime minister was cleared of rule-breaking over his Downing Street flat refurbishment.

Christopher Geidt shut his investigation without commenting on Johnson seeking funds for the works from a Conservative donor while [promising to consider plans](#) for a “great exhibition”. Expectations also faded that another inquiry, led by parliament’s standards commissioner Kathryn Stone, would go ahead.

However, it emerged that the UK’s data watchdog has launched an investigation into the Cabinet Office after a complaint that it failed to release WhatsApp messages exchanged between Boris Johnson and the Tory peer who financed his flat renovation, David Brownlow.

Pressure on Lord Geidt to reopen his investigation mounted on Friday night when [Angela Rayner](#), Labour’s deputy leader, said his decision to close the case “raises a number of serious concerns and questions”.

She claimed the original finding that Lord Brownlow had “altruistic and philanthropic motives” for paying for the flat refurbishment, and that there was “no reasonably perceived conflict”, appeared undermined by the WhatsApp messages.

The existence of the messages emerged as part of a probe by the Electoral Commission that concluded in December but their contents were only published on Thursday.

They showed Johnson told Brownlow parts of his No 11 flat were a “tip” and he was keen for his decor designer to “get on with it”, asking if he could put her in touch “for approvals”. The prime minister added: “PS am on the great exhibition plan Will revert.”

In his reply, Brownlow said he would “get it sorted” and “approval is a doddle as it’s only me and I know where the £ will come from”, adding: “Thanks for thinking about GE2.”

The great exhibition plan was backed by Brownlow, who several weeks later met to discuss it with the then culture secretary, Oliver Dowden. On Friday, Johnson’s spokesperson confirmed that No 10 passed on an inquiry about the suggested event to Dowden’s department.

Johnson was forced to offer a “humble and sincere apology” for not recalling the messages, and blamed “security issues” – thought to relate to when his personal phone number was posted online – for not having access to the phone they were on.

Rayner said it was “irrelevant” whether Brownlow’s motives were altruistic, and added: “The issue is that a reasonable person could surely perceive that his financial relationship with the prime minister has provided him with privileged access to government, and that relationship was undeclared at the time.”

Rayner accused Geidt of holding Johnson to a “far weaker” standard for potential conflict of interests than that set out in the MPs’ code of conduct, adding: “This suggests that you will hold ministers to a lower standard of transparency than backbench MPs.”

She called on Geidt to publish a new or amended report, but senior Whitehall sources downplayed such a possibility. “It’s probably not going to get anywhere,” said one. “I’m sure Lord Geidt will issue a polite reply.”

While Stone was waiting for the Electoral Commission and Geidt’s inquiry to conclude before proceeding, the standards commissioner was said to be unlikely to launch an investigation of her own. This is because Johnson’s flat was used by him in a ministerial capacity, meaning any potential wrongdoing would need to be judged against the ministerial code.

Rayner called on 9 December for Stone to launch an investigation into whether Johnson broke the rule that MPs have to be honest, given the non-disclosure of the texts with Brownlow. However, even if Stone dismisses it, Labour could make a separate complaint based on the new evidence that emerged this week.

The MPs’ code of conduct makes clear that ministers are bound by the ministerial code, which is not enforced by the standards commissioner. But it adds allegations about “failure to abide by the rules on lobbying for reward or consideration” are within Stone’s scope.

In further criticism of Geidt's inquiry, Labour's lawyers wrote to him on 4 January after stories appeared in the press suggesting Johnson would be cleared of breaching the ministerial code. The solicitors' firm Edwards Duthie Shamash said the "apparent failure" of Geidt's investigation to obtain the WhatsApp messages was "more than unfortunate".

Geidt was accused in the letter of "failure to ask the searching questions necessary to get to the truth of this matter and that such failures should not allow the prime minister to escape the consequences of apparent breaches of the ministerial code".

The lawyers added: "The recent briefings have done little to restore my client's faith in the processes over which you preside." Geidt did not respond, but his office said in reply to another letter sent several weeks previously that it "is not generally appropriate" for him to "engage in legal correspondence in respect of the discharge of his functions".

Separately, the Cabinet Office is being investigated after it was asked in a Freedom of Information request for all correspondence between Johnson and Brownlow but claimed there was nothing to hand over.

The data watchdog, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), received a letter from Rayner in December raising "concerns" because the Electoral Commission report had unearthed texts exchanged between Johnson and Brownlow. "We are now conducting inquiries about the handling of this request," a senior official at the ICO confirmed in response, saying it was a "live case".

Sajid Javid, the health secretary, defended Geidt, saying he was "very well respected and has a very fiercely independent role".

Downing Street said Brownlow was given no special treatment. "Ministers have a range of ideas and proposals put to them by various people – through MPs, through other parties," Johnson's spokesperson said.

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[The Observer](#)[Novak Djokovic](#)

## Djokovic pictured maskless at public event one day after positive Covid test

- Positive test used as basis of medical exemption into Australia
- [Craig Tiley privately praises staff for ‘unbelievable job’](#)



On 17 December Novak Djokovic posted this image of himself receiving his own stamp at the Serbian National Postal Service on 16 December.  
Photograph: @DjokerNole/Twitter

[Tumaini Carayol](#) and [Christopher Knaus](#)

Sat 8 Jan 2022 16.20 EST

Novak Djokovic faced fresh controversy over his attempt to enter Australia to take part in the Open tennis tournament after [pictures emerged on social media](#) of his appearances at public events after a positive Covid test was

recorded in mid-December, which allowed him an exemption from the country's strict Covid rules.

Djokovic has spoken against vaccine mandates but has always refused to say what his own vaccination status is.

He has been kept in a Melbourne hotel since Thursday [after his visa was cancelled](#) due to problems with the medical exemption from vaccination granted by the organisers of the Australian Open.

Djokovic faces decision day on Monday as his appeal against the cancellation of his visa gets under way, after which he could be deported from the country.

According to court documents released on Saturday ahead of the hearing, Djokovic's Covid-19 infection was recorded by the Institute of Public Health of Serbia on 16 December, which provided the basis for the medical exemption he received from the [Tennis](#) Australia and Victorian state government medical panels. He was granted his exemption on 30 December.

However, pictures on social media of Djokovic attending indoor events without a mask shortly after his Covid-19 test was recorded raise questions about Djokovic's infection.

On 16 December, Djokovic attended an event [commemorating his own personal stamp](#). Pictures were posted of Djokovic a day later at the [Tennis Association of Belgrade for an award ceremony](#).

Djokovic was additionally [pictured on the streets of Belgrade](#) on 25 December despite Serbia's rules requiring 14 days of self-isolation.

It is not clear if he knew he had Covid when the earlier pictures were taken.

Djokovic [had attended a Euroleague basketball match between Red Star and Barcelona](#) in Belgrade in the days before, during which numerous people present tested positive for Covid-19.

Djokovic's PR team have told Serbian journalists that they will not be making any statements until after his case.

Since his visa was revoked in the early hours of Thursday morning and he was ordered to leave Australia, Djokovic has been detained in the Park hotel – an immigration detention hotel in Melbourne – as he awaits his hearing.

An honor to receive my very own Serbian stamp. Thank you to my generous country for this rare gift! I'm humbled!! Excited to share we'll partner with the Serbian National Postal Service on [@novakfoundation](#) projects for every child to have the opportunity to attend preschool  [pic.twitter.com/Ww8Zma95NU](https://pic.twitter.com/Ww8Zma95NU)

— Novak Djokovic (@DjokerNole) [December 17, 2021](#)

The federal government control the Australian borders and the border force decided that Djokovic had not satisfied entry requirements.

In his submission to the federal circuit court, Djokovic says he was granted a temporary visa to enter Australia on 18 November, and received a letter from the chief medical officer of Tennis Australia on 30 December recording he had a “medical exemption from Covid vaccination” on the grounds he had recently recovered from the virus.

On New Year’s Day, Djokovic had also received a document from the home affairs department about his Australian travel declaration, which told Djokovic “[his] Australia travel declaration [had] been assessed” and that “[his] responses indicated that [he met] the requirements for a quarantine-free arrival into Australia where permitted by the jurisdiction of your arrival”.

Djokovic claims that he was denied access to his legal team during parts of the eight hours of interviews he endured upon his arrival at Melbourne Airport on Wednesday night.

L'Equipe, the French sports newspaper, reported on Saturday that Djokovic gave a long interview to one of its writers on 18 December, for its Champion

of Champions award, two days after his positive Covid-19 test. Djokovic was masked during the interview but then unmasked during the photoshoot.

Meanwhile, Renata Voracova, the Czech doubles specialist who had initially passed Australia's border checks with the same medical exemption as Djokovic, has been deported from the country following her own subsequent detention.

Voracova was pictured leaving the Park hotel on Saturday afternoon and in an interview [with Czech publication iDNES.cz](#) she explained that she had planned to vaccinate herself in the off-season before catching Covid-19.

Voracova had competed in one tournament in Melbourne before she was detained and then she chose to voluntarily leave the country.

“Apparently the Australian Tennis Association has misled us, which is annoying. I wanted to focus on tennis, not visas, quarantine. It’s really weird that I spent a week here, played a match … and then they came for me,” she said.

The Australian health minister, Greg Hunt, on Sunday said the investigation of [Australian Open](#) visas had been finalised and Voracova and one official had left the country.

“My advice from border force is their assessment of any visas relating to the Australian Open has now been completed and two other individuals have now voluntarily left the country,” Hunt told reporters.

Earlier on Saturday, a leaked video obtained and published by News Corp showed Craig Tiley, the Tennis Australia boss, sending a video to his staff explaining his silence since Djokovic's detention and commending their work.

“We’ve chosen at this point not to be very public with it … simply because there is a pending lawsuit related to entry into Australia. Once that has run its course, we’ll be able to share more with you,” Tiley said.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/jan/08/novak-djokovic-relied-on-december-covid-infection-for-vaccine-exemption-court-documents-reveal>

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## [Ahmaud Arbery](#)

# Three white men sentenced to life in prison for Ahmaud Arbery's murder

Judge rules William ‘Roddie’ Bryan can seek parole after 30 years while Travis and Gregory McMichael cannot



Travis McMichael, left, speaks with his attorney during the sentencing in Brunswick, Georgia, on 7 January. Photograph: Reuters

*Guardian staff and agencies*

Fri 7 Jan 2022 16.54 EST

A judge in Georgia sentenced Travis McMichael, Gregory McMichael and William “Roddie” Bryan to life in prison on Friday for the murder of [Ahmaud Arbery](#), a Black man who was running through their mostly white neighborhood in February 2020 when they chased him down and killed him.

Under [Georgia](#) law, murder carries a mandatory life sentence unless prosecutors seek the death penalty. For the judge, Timothy Walmsley, the main decision was whether to grant father and son Greg McMichael, 66, and Travis McMichael, 35, and their neighbor, Bryan, 52, a chance to earn parole.

Arbery's family had made powerful statements, asking Walmsley to show no leniency.

Before sentencing, Walmsley said: "Ahmaud Arbery was hunted down and shot, and he was killed because individuals here in the courtroom took the law into their own hands."

Walmsley said Arbery left his home for a jog and ended up running for his life for five minutes as the men chased him in pickup trucks then cornered him. The judge paused for a minute, to help drive home a sense of what that time must have been like for Arbery.

"When I thought about this," he said, "I thought from a lot of different angles. I kept coming back to the terror that must have been in the mind of the young man running through Satilla Shores."

The McMichaels will spend the rest of their lives in prison. Walmsley ruled that Bryan could seek parole after 30 years, the minimum sentence allowed.

02:14

'Devastated': family members pay tribute to Ahmaud Arbery at sentencing of killers – video

Arbery's mother said she suffered an intense loss made worse by a trial where the men's defense was that Arbery made bad choices.

"This wasn't a case of mistaken identity or mistaken fact," Wanda Cooper-Jones said.

"They chose to target my son because they didn't want him in their community. They chose to treat him differently than other people who

frequently visited their community. And when they couldn't sufficiently scare or intimidate him, they killed him."

Cooper-Jones rebutted a point made by a defense lawyer that caused outrage. During the trial in November, Laura Hogue made a reference to Ahmaud Arbery's appearance many found egregious and racist.

Hogue said: "Turning Ahmaud Arbery into a victim after the choices that he made does not reflect the reality of what brought Ahmaud Arbery to Satilla Shores in his khaki shorts, with no socks, to cover his long dirty toenails."

On Friday, Cooper-Jones said her son was sometimes messy.

"He sometimes refused to wear socks or take good care of his good clothing. I wish he would have cut and cleaned his toenails before he went out for that jog that day. I guess he would have if he knew he would be murdered."

Marcus Arbery Sr, Ahmaud's father, also addressed the court. He said: "When I close my eyes, I see his execution in my mind, over and over. I will see that for the rest of my life.

"Not only did they lynch my son in broad daylight, they killed him while he was doing what he loved more than anything: running. That's when he felt most alive, most free, and they took all that from him."

Arbery's sister, Jasmine Arbery, described her brother as a positive thinker with a big personality. Weeping, she told the judge her brother had dark skin "that glistened in the sunlight" and "thick, curly hair and an athletic build".

"These are the qualities that made these men assume that Ahmaud was a dangerous criminal and chase him with guns drawn," she said. "To me, those qualities reflect a young man full of life and energy who looked like me and the people I loved."

00:30

Ahmaud Arbery's mother responds to defence lawyer remarks about 'long dirty toenails' – video

Prosecutor Linda Dunikoski asked the judge for life without parole for the McMichaels and the possibility of parole for Bryan. But she said all deserved that mandatory life sentence.

The McMichaels grabbed guns and jumped in a truck to chase Arbery, 25, after spotting him running on 23 February 2020. Bryan joined the pursuit and recorded video of Travis McMichael firing close-range shotgun blasts.

The killing went largely unnoticed until two months later, when video was leaked, touching off a national outcry. The Georgia bureau of investigation arrested all three men.

The attorney Robert Rubin argued that Travis McMichael deserved the possibility of parole as he fired only after “Mr Arbery came at him and grabbed the gun”.

“This was not a planned murder,” Rubin said. “This was a fight over a gun.”

Hogue, for Greg McMichael, said her client “did not view his son firing that shotgun with anything other than fear and sadness”.

Bryan’s lawyer said he showed remorse and cooperated with police.

Next month, the McMichaels and Bryan face a second trial on federal hate crime charges. Prosecutors will argue that the men targeted Arbery because he was Black.

On Friday, Ben Crump, a leading civil rights attorney, said: “These brutal crimes nearly went unpunished because of the deep corruption that pervades so many of our systems.”

He added: “The tragic murder of Ahmaud Arbery must not be in vain. America, we are showing progress. Now is not the time to retreat. We must continue to demand better from law enforcement, from our justice system and from our society as a whole.”

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**Ahmaud Arbery**

## 'Devastated': family members pay tribute to Ahmaud Arbery at sentencing of killers – video

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/video/2022/jan/07/ahmaud-arbery-family-members-tribute-sentencing>.

## 2022.01.08 - Spotlight

- Gemma Chan on the truth about her father's life at sea 'He knew what it was like to have nothing'
- ERG out, CRG in The Tory factions Boris Johnson is struggling to appease
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## Gemma Chan on the truth about her father's life at sea: 'He knew what it was like to have nothing'



Gemma Chan: 'My relationship with my dad hasn't always been easy.'  
Photograph: Matt Doyle/Contour by Getty Images

The actor knew her father had served in the merchant navy, but it wasn't until she read about Britain's mistreatment of Chinese seamen in the 40s that she understood just how much his experiences had shaped her family

*Gemma Chan*

Sat 8 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

“Take the rest of the noodles and the pak choi and you can have it for your lunch tomorrow.” My dad pushed the takeaway containers and their remaining contents across the table towards me.

“I’ve got loads of food at mine, why don’t you and Mum keep it?” I protested. I knew he’d insist I take the leftovers with me. This routine would always play out at the end of family dinners once I’d left home and, this time around, it felt both familiar and oddly comforting – because it had been a while since our last dinner.

Well, more than a while. It was spring, last year, and the pandemic had meant that, for months, like most families, we’d only seen one another through our screens. This was the first time in a long while that we’d been able to get together for a meal. We were even legally allowed to hug (if we exercised “care and common sense”!). I had brought champagne to celebrate, and we ordered from the local Chinese takeaway. I’d like to say it was a bid to support an Asian business that had been struggling, like many others, during the pandemic, but – in truth – it was sheer laziness. We’d talked and gorged ourselves on crispy aromatic duck with pancakes, stir-fried king prawns with peppers in black bean sauce, and chow mein with beansprouts. My childhood favourites.

My dad worked for years on ships, at sea for months at a time, and sent money home to pay for his siblings’ school fees

“OK, I’ll take them,” I said, “but my bag’s too small to carry the boxes.” My dad got up from the table and went to the hallway to retrieve his rucksack. He rummaged around inside for a moment and then pulled out a neatly

folded plastic bag. Opening it out, he offered it to me. I reached for it and then my hand paused in mid-air as I gawped in disbelief.

“How long have you had this?” I asked in amazement. He shrugged. This was no ordinary plastic bag. Indeed, the bag was not of this millennium.

It was vintage Marks & Spencer, made from thick white polythene emblazoned with St Michael QUALITY FOODS in blue lettering, the St Michael logo in a distinctive handwritten style. If you shopped in M&S in the 90s, you may remember it. It’s a classic. I’ve since found out that the [St Michael brand was phased out](#) in the year 2000, making this bag at least 20 years old.



Gemma Chan's father in 1975, during his time in the merchant navy.  
Photograph: Courtesy of Gemma Chan

My dad isn't a man of many words, but that night he'd had a few glasses of wine. He told us that he used the bag regularly, despite its pristine appearance, and that the last time he'd used it in the local M&S the cashier had shrieked, “Oh my lord, I haven’t seen one of these in *years*,” and made the other members of staff gather round to take a look. This moment perfectly encapsulated what I would describe as Dad’s Golden Rule No 1: nothing goes to waste, which applies equally to food, clothes, household

items, cars – everything really. Things will be used until they break, if they can be mended they will be mended, but rarely will anything be thrown away. This was established in his childhood out of necessity, but even now, in relative comfort, he still treats everything with such care and hates wastefulness.

A couple of weeks later, I came across [an article written by the journalist Dan Hancox in the Guardian](#). I had thought I was pretty familiar with the long history of anti-Asian racism and discrimination in the UK and elsewhere; the shifting stereotypes, the scapegoating, Yellow Peril and the like, and the erasure of the contributions of the 140,000 men of the Chinese Labour Corps who risked their lives carrying out essential work for the allies in the first world war. But this was a story I had never heard before.

In the aftermath of the second world war, Britain forcibly deported hundreds of Chinese seamen who had served in the merchant navy, deeming them an “undesirable element” of British society. These men had helped keep the UK fed and fuelled on highly dangerous crossings of the Atlantic (approximately 3,500 vessels of the merchant navy were sunk by German U-boats, with the loss of 72,000 lives).

Many of the surviving men had married and started families with British women in Liverpool. However, they were secretly rounded up without notice and shipped back to east Asia. Many of their wives never knew what happened to them, and their children grew up believing they had been abandoned.

The fact that this story is only now coming to light, with no official acknowledgment or apology, may not be surprising, but it is still heartbreakingly enraging. By the time I finished reading the article, I was in tears. I realised that this had struck a deep chord because my own father had served for years in the merchant navy before he settled in the UK.



Gemma Chan's father in 1975: 'He told me how hard and lonely those years at sea were, how much he missed his family, and how dangerous it could be.  
Photograph: Courtesy of Gemma Chan

My dad grew up as one of six kids in a poor, single-parent household in [Hong Kong](#). He was the third child and the oldest son. My ah-ma (his mother: barely 5ft tall, very fierce, could out-haggle anyone) worked three jobs to support her children. One was as a seamstress, with long hours bent over a sewing machine in a sweatshop, earning the equivalent of less than £1 a day. Initially my dad's family lived in a shack on a hillside, with no running water. Then they moved into a block where they had one room, sharing a bathroom with 30 other families on the same floor. At one point they were made homeless when the block of flats burned down.

After leaving school, my dad worked for years on ships – mostly oil tankers – at sea for months at a time, and sent money home to pay for his siblings' school fees. Only after they had all finished school could he save enough to pay for his own degree, coming to the UK to study engineering at the University of Strathclyde, where he would meet my mum (her own family's tumultuous journey to the UK is a story for another time).

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list of our weekly highlights

During my childhood, my dad was the most selfless and diligent father. His love for my sister and me was expressed not through words but through small acts of devotion: always cutting fresh fruit for us; making sure we drank two full glasses of milk each day so our bones would grow strong (milk being a luxury they rarely had in Hong Kong); patiently teaching us how to swim (Golden Rule No 2: learn how to swim). However, when I was younger, there were some things about him that I found hard to understand: his obsession with education, his aversion to waste of any kind, his insistence that we finish every bit of food on our plates; and his constant reminders not to take anything for granted. It was because he knew what it was like to have nothing.

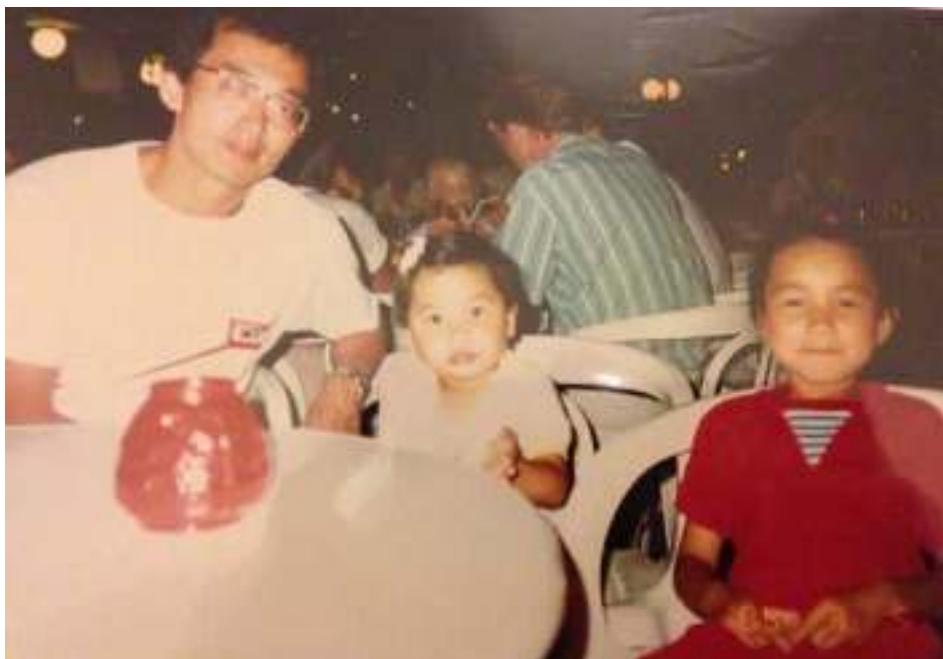
After I sent him the article about the Chinese seamen, we had a long conversation on the phone. He doesn't often speak about his past, but we talked about his time in the merchant navy. Some things I remembered him telling me long ago: how hard and lonely those years at sea were, how much he missed his family, and how dangerous it could be. On his third voyage, his ship, a chemical tanker, was sailing between Taipei and Kobe when they were caught in the tail end of a typhoon. The chief officer went out on deck to help secure the cover of the anchor chain locker, which was filling up with water, and was killed when a large wave dashed him against the ship. He was buried at sea.

It's a precarious business simply to stand up for your rights, especially if you are poor or a person of colour

But other details were new. I found out that, after seven continuous months at sea on his first voyage, my dad had noticed that the white British officers and crew spent six months at sea at most, with some serving four-month contracts before getting tickets to fly home to be with their families. This was in contrast to the Chinese crew, who usually had to serve long periods of nine months.

While some of his fellow junior engineers were apprehensive about being seen to be causing trouble, he represented other Chinese crew members on

board and took it up with the shipping company's superintendent. He found out that the British crew were employed under Article A (better pay, shorter sea time, paid study leave, etc), whereas the Chinese crew were employed under Article B (less pay, longer sea time, fewer benefits). The company told my dad he was the first person to complain. Dad told them he just wanted equal treatment. As a result, he and the others who protested were allowed to fly back home with holiday pay. They had docked in Trinidad, so he flew from there to Toronto, on to Vancouver, then Honolulu, then Tokyo. Finally, after three days of flying, he was reunited with his family in Hong Kong.



Gemma Chan, right, with her father and sister in 1987. Photograph: Courtesy of Gemma Chan

When I heard this story, it was impossible not to think again of the deported Chinese seamen. One of the reasons they were considered "undesirable" was because they had gone on strike to fight for an increase in their basic pay (originally less than half that of their British crew mates) and for the payment of the standard £10-a-month "war risk" bonus.

It's a precarious business simply to stand up for your rights, especially if you are poor or a person of colour; and it unfortunately remains the case that

those in power usually don't appreciate being held to account. I hope that one day there will be an official acknowledgment of this terrible act of state-sanctioned racism and of the wrong done to those men and their families. I hope that the surviving children get the answers and justice they deserve, and that they can find peace.

My relationship with my dad hasn't always been easy – as is often the case, it's possible to derive both pain and gratitude from the same place – but I know how lucky we are to have him. And I will be forever thankful for the sacrifices he made for our family and for the things he taught me: the value of hard work, never to look down on those who have less, to stand up for others, and that a Bag for Life truly means life.

This essay appears in East Side Voices, edited by Helena Lee, published by Hodder & Stoughton on 20 January at £14.99. To support The Guardian and Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](https://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply.

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Boris Johnson on the campaign trail in 2015 with Craig Mackinlay, who now chairs the Net Zero Scrutiny Group. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

## **ERG out, CRG in: the Tory factions Boris Johnson is struggling to appease**

Boris Johnson on the campaign trail in 2015 with Craig Mackinlay, who now chairs the Net Zero Scrutiny Group. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

PM relied on party factions to get into No 10, but amid Covid and climate crisis is finding them difficult to contain

- [What are the different Conservative factions?](#)

by [Peter Walker](#) Political correspondent

Sat 8 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

Conservative factions are nothing new, as Theresa May learned to her cost with Brexit and [Boris Johnson](#) saw in a mass rebellion on Covid rules. But Johnson is facing significant pressure from well over 100 of his MPs to change course on a number of fronts including green policies.

Conservative backbenchers say an [ever-growing number of factions](#) – most with their own acronym, and with significant crossover when it comes to their members – hold sway within the party, a process helped by WhatsApp-based organising and a perception the prime minister's authority has eroded.

“I’m on so many WhatsApp groups it’s like Ben-Hur – there’s a cast of thousands,” one MP said. “I can’t keep track of them all. It doesn’t mean I believe in everything, but I like to keep track of people’s views.”

### [graphic](#)

MPs feel empowered by the groups. “It’s often said that with first past the post, coalitions exist within parties rather than between parties,” another MP said. “Under Thatcher we used to have the wets and the drys. It can be a good counterbalance to the executive.”

John Major struggled endlessly with Eurosceptics he termed “bastards”, while May’s nemesis was the European Research Group, or ERG, the longstanding alliance of [Brexit](#) ultras.

What is different now is that – unlike Major and May – Johnson has a significant Commons majority. Nonetheless, before Christmas he still had to rely on Labour votes to pass new coronavirus restrictions [amid a 101-MP rebellion](#) instigated by the Covid Recovery Group (CRG), which is sceptical about new pandemic rules.



Boris Johnson listening as Labour's Keir Starmer speaks in the Commons.  
Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK Parliament/AFP/Getty Images

Unlike the ERG, which has membership levies and a formal structure, CRG backers say it is little more than a WhatsApp forum with occasional in-person meetings. There is significant crossover, not least with Steve Baker, a former ERG chair who is vice-chair of the CRG.

The ERG receded into the background after Johnson delivered the Brexit its members wanted, and the CRG could likewise call off hostilities if the Omicron wave subsides and rules are eased.

Even then Johnson will not be in the clear. His parliamentary party's internal groupings, while varied in core aims, often share certain views and some of the same members. These tend disproportionately to be former Brexiteers, and common aims centre around a desire to push Johnson away from what they see as overly statist, high-tax policies – ones they believe the UK should abandon outside the EU.

"It feels particularly important now, as we've had two years of a Conservative government and for some of us it hasn't especially felt like a Conservative government," one backbencher said. "We're all facing re-

election in a year or two, and we just want to gently nudge the government back to a virtuous path.”

Some blocs, such as the Northern Research Group (NRG), are more geographic than ideological. But others, such as Blue Collar Conservatism and the culture war-focused Common Sense Group, have beliefs that include opposition to current elements of tax-and-spend.



Esther McVey launches Blue Collar Conservatism at the Houses of Parliament in 2019. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

The Net Zero Scrutiny Group (NZSG), which claims many more supporters than the 18 Tory MPs who [signed a letter](#) this week seeking an end to VAT and green levies on fuel bills, looks set to become increasingly influential in coming months as Johnson faces pressure over the cost of living.

Some critics have argued the NZSG flirts with denial, citing its pledge to consider research from Nigel Lawson's controversial [Global Warming Policy Foundation](#) thinktank.

Craig Mackinlay, the South Thanet MP who chairs the group, rejects the characterisation. He says: “This isn’t an argument about climate change or any of that. This is about: is this affordable and technologically achievable, what will it do particularly for the lower paid, and is there a better way?”

There are repeated echoes of Brexit, and not just because many of the MPs involved cut their factional teeth inside the ERG.

One backbencher, a member of several groups, says: “We know one reason people voted for Brexit was they felt elites were telling them how to live their lives. And I think there’s some similarities when they’re told: don’t have an old-fashioned boiler, don’t drive a 15-year-old car or van even though you can’t afford another one. It’s the same with Covid – officials in London telling them what to do.”

Some MPs crop up time and again. The Lincoln MP, Karl McCartney, for example, is in the CRG, NZRG and Common Sense Group, as well being on the executive of the 1922 Committee of backbench Tories.

The Wealden MP, Nusrat Ghani, is vice-chair of the 1922 Committee and involved with the CRG, while the former minister Esther McVey is linked to the CRG and NZSG and founded Blue Collar Conservatism.

Much as Johnson succeeded May by positioning himself to Tory MPs and the party membership as the man to deliver a muscular, immediate Brexit, those now hoping to follow him, such as Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak, will look to the groups for ideological pointers.

In the meantime, Johnson must try to keep them on side, mindful they have the ability to cause significant trouble. “You don’t throw yourself on the barbed wire every time there’s a vote,” noted one Tory MP, a member of several groups. “But you have a greater opportunity to get in front of ministers and argue the case – because they know you’ve got some cards in your pocket.”

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## Conservatives

# What are the different Conservative factions?

More than a quarter of Tory MPs are aligned to one or more internal movements. Here are the key groups

- [The Tory factions Boris Johnson is struggling to appease](#)



Mark Harper of the Covid Recovery Group. Photograph: Jonathan Hordle/Rex/Shutterstock

*Peter Walker*  
[@peterwalker99](#)

Sat 8 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

Well over 100 of the Conservatives' 361 MPs are aligned with one or more of a [string of internal pressure groups](#). Here are the main ones:

## **Covid Recovery Group**

Led by the former chief whip Mark Harper and the former Brexit minister Steve Baker, the CRG's size and [opposition to new Covid rules](#) is essentially the reason why England has notably fewer restrictions than other UK nations. While informal in structure, the CRG has organised and disciplined messaging, employing an external PR consultant. Support estimated at 80 to 100 MPs.

## **Net Zero Scrutiny Group**

Set up in the lead-up to the Cop26 climate summit, its members insist they are not climate emergency sceptics but believe policies such as emissions targets and the phasing out of conventional cars have not been fully thought out and will adversely affect poorer Britons. The NZSG has 18 MPs as public supporters and claims "many" more.

## **Common Sense Group**

Partly based around culture war issues, and what its chair, the Tory backbencher John Hayes, terms a struggle against "subversives" such as Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion, its [136-page policy booklet](#) sets out ideas on everything from immigration to the legal system and family life. Sixteen MPs contributed to the booklet.

## **Blue Collar Conservatism**

Originally launched by Esther McVey in parallel with her brief leadership bid to succeed Theresa May, with policies including redirecting foreign aid to domestic priorities, it [boasts 159 MPs](#) as official supporters including several cabinet ministers. However, it is less active in terms of openly agitating for policy change.

## **Northern Research Group**

Led by the former Northern Powerhouse minister Jake Berry, this is a [geographical faction](#) aimed at boosting spending and investment in the north of England, north Wales and Scottish borders. More than 50 members.

## All-party group on fair fuel

Very low key, and not officially a party faction, as it has two Labour members and one from the DUP. But it is Tory-dominated, and is arguably the most financially significant pressure group anywhere in the UK. It has been central to parliamentary and media efforts to keep fuel duty frozen for 11 years and counting, a policy that has cost the Treasury somewhere north of £100bn.

## European Research Group

The model for the other factions. Set up in 1993, gradually moving from being the voice of Euroscepticism to that of hardline Brexiters. Hugely influential in the Commons revolts that saw off May's limited [Brexit](#) compromises, and then ejected her from Downing Street. Largely quiet now, in part as many members have moved on to other pressure groups.

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## The Q&AMarie Kondo

Interview

# **Marie Kondo: ‘My greatest achievement? Organising the world’**

[Rosanna Greenstreet](#)

The decluttering queen on Japanese comfort food, learning to take breaks and her love for a black bear



Marie Kondo: ‘What do I owe my parents? The items I threw out without them knowing.’ Photograph: Matt Baron/Shutterstock

Sat 8 Jan 2022 04.30 EST

Born in Tokyo, Marie Kondo, 37, was 19 and studying sociology at Tokyo Woman’s Christian University when she launched a consulting business to help people declutter and organise their homes. In 2014, she published her first book, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*; it has been translated into 44 languages and sold more than 13m copies worldwide. She was

named one of Time magazine's 100 most influential people in 2015 and has a hit Netflix show, Tidying Up with Marie Kondo. Her latest book is [Joy at Work: Organising Your Professional Life](#). She is married with three children and lives in Los Angeles.

**What is your earliest memory?**

Welcoming my younger sister into the family, around the age of three.

**What would your superpower be?**

Helping people to find joy in their lives.

**What is your guiltiest pleasure?**

I got a call several years ago from the Japanese publisher of The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up telling me that sales had exceeded 100,000 copies. I went to a high-end market in Tokyo and bought the most expensive eggs, soy sauce, rice and nori seaweed, and cooked eggs over rice. It's Japanese comfort food, but I made it with the best ingredients available to celebrate. To this day, it is still my guiltiest pleasure.

Sign up to our Inside Saturday newsletter for an exclusive behind the scenes look at the making of the magazine's biggest features, as well as a curated list of our weekly highlights.

**What do you owe your parents?**

The many items I threw out without them knowing.

**Which words or phrases do you most overuse?**

"Kawaii", which means cute in Japanese.

**What does love feel like?**

Warm and fuzzy.

**If not yourself, who would you most like to be?**

At one point, I was interested in being a farmer. I love growing organic vegetables, especially carrots.

**When was the last time you changed your mind about something significant?**

Around 2015. I had just given birth to my second child, and I was so busy

travelling internationally to promote my book that I forgot to take care of myself. I was too busy to even realise that I needed a break. Since then, I have been mindful about my work-life balance.

**What do you consider your greatest achievement?**

It's still a work in progress, but I would have to say, organising the world. With all the KonMari consultants around the world, and those that read my books or watched the Netflix shows, we are definitely making a difference.

**How would you like to be remembered?**

Tidying fanatic.

**What is the most important lesson life has taught you?**

Keep only the items that spark joy.

**Who is your celebrity crush?**

I love Kumamon. He is a big black bear with red cheeks – a mascot for Kumamoto prefecture in Japan.

**What did you want to be when you were growing up?**

Housewife and mother of three, which I am now.

**Would you choose fame or anonymity?**

I want tidying and organisation to be spread throughout the world, but for me, personally, I am OK with anonymity.

**What has been your biggest disappointment?**

In elementary school: I opened my lunchbox and it was empty. I was devastated.

**If you could edit your past, what would you change?**

I don't have anything that I want to change. I'm sure I did in the past but I can't recall, which means it wasn't that big a deal.

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## 2022.01.08 - Coronavirus

- [Live Covid live: UK government plans for ‘one in four’ teachers to be off; record 26,458 cases in Philippines](#)
- [Covid Fourth jab not yet needed, JCVI says, as booster is protecting older people](#)
- [Cases UK reports 178,250 new Covid cases as weekly total tops 1.2m](#)
- [Hong Kong Dozens of officials in Covid quarantine after birthday party](#)

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[Coronavirus](#)

# **Coronavirus live – as it happened: UK passes 150,000 officially recorded Covid deaths; Sweden's crown princess tests positive**

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## Coronavirus

# Fourth Covid jab not yet needed, JCVI says, as booster protecting older people

Latest figures show protection against hospitalisation for over-65s at 90% three months after third jab

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



The JCVI has recommended the government continues to prioritise the third jab booster drive for all adults for now, rather than beginning to provide a fourth vaccine dose to vulnerable groups such as the over-80s or care home residents. Photograph: Maureen McLean/REX/Shutterstock

*[Jem Bartholomew](#)*

Fri 7 Jan 2022 15.01 EST

A fourth Covid vaccine shot is not yet needed, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has said, as booster shots are still providing strong protection against severe disease from Omicron in older people.

Latest figures show that, for the over-65s, protection against hospitalisation remains at about 90% three months after the third jab, according to the UK Health Security Agency.

Protection against severe disease from only two doses of the vaccine drops to about 70% after three months and 50% after six months.

It means the JCVI has recommended the government continues to prioritise the third jab booster drive for all adults for now, rather than beginning to provide a fourth vaccine dose to vulnerable groups such as the over-80s or care home residents.

It marks the UK's departure from Israel's vaccination strategy, which is pursuing fourth shots for the over-60s and medical staff.

"The current data show the booster dose is continuing to provide high levels of protection against severe disease, even for the most vulnerable older age groups," said Prof Wei Shen Lim, the JCVI's chair of Covid-19 immunisation.

"For this reason, the committee has concluded there is no immediate need to introduce a second booster dose, though this will continue to be reviewed."

He added the data is "highly encouraging" and emphasises the value of a booster jab.

"With Omicron continuing to spread widely, I encourage everyone to come forward for their booster dose, or if unvaccinated, for their first two doses, to increase their protection against serious illness."

The data is based on a UK Health Security Agency study looking at booster doses in the over-65s, among the first to be eligible for a booster from the campaign's launch in mid-September.

Data on booster protection from mild symptomatic infection shows it is less long-lasting, however, dropping to about 30% by about three months.

The JCVI said the main aim of the vaccination campaign is to prevent severe disease – not prevent all infections, which would require an unsustainable level of repeated vaccinations.

It comes after the UK on Friday reported 178,250 new infections, a 47% climb on the 121,371 new cases reported on Friday two weeks ago. (Reported figures tended to be lower over the holiday period.)

A further 229 Covid-related deaths were recorded on Friday, a 67% rise on the 137 deaths reported on Friday two weeks ago.

Omicron continues to put huge stress on the NHS, with the health service in England experiencing the highest number of Covid absences since the vaccine rollout, with more than [40,000 staff](#) unable to attend work on two days in the past week. This has led to claims hospitals are “simply not safe”.

The percentage of the eligible population vaccinated with a third or booster dose is now 61%, according to government [data](#), compared with 90.2% for at least one shot and 82.8% for two doses.

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## Coronavirus

# UK reports 178,250 new Covid cases as weekly total tops 1.2m

Omicron variant continues to fuel wave of infections with 149,405 new cases in England alone

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



Omicron has spread rapidly in the UK since it was first detected in November. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

*[Nicola Davis](#) and [Severin Carrell](#)*

Fri 7 Jan 2022 11.24 EST

The UK has reported a further 178,250 Covid cases as the Omicron variant continues to fuel a wave of infections.

The latest figures, which reflect infections picked up by testing, bring the UK total for the past seven days to 1,260,535, up 20% compared with the total for the week before. However, the daily figure is lower than those recorded in recent days, with 179,756 cases reported on Thursday and 194,747 on Wednesday.

The true number of infections is estimated to be substantially higher as not all infections are captured by the testing programme. The figure also does not include reinfections for most of the countries in the UK, and reflects cases by date reported rather than by specimen date.

In England alone, 149,405 new cases were reported on Friday, compared with 152,306 the day before. A further 229 deaths in the UK within 28 days of a positive Covid test were reported, while hospitals around the country remain under pressure.

According to updated figures, there were 18,015 Covid patients in hospital in the UK on Wednesday, rising to 18,454 on Thursday.

In England there were 16,163 Covid patients in hospital, a 30% increase on the Friday before, while in Scotland there were 1,323 Covid patients in hospital, a rise of 54%.

New data from Public Health Scotland (PHS) based on sampling in NHS Grampian and Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHS GGC) shows the proportion of Covid-positive patients in hospitals who were admitted for another reason is higher than when the Delta variant was dominant last year.

The NHS GGC sampling, carried out over two days this month, found 43% of patients with confirmed Covid had not been hospitalised because of the virus. Based on six days sampling by NHS Grampian, which includes Aberdeen, it was 40%. In August last year, when Delta was dominant, PHS data showed 32% of patients with Covid had been admitted for another medical reason.

PHS said this data was useful in helping to decide whether to relax or tighten Covid controls. Opposition parties in Scotland have questioned whether the

strict controls introduced by Nicola Sturgeon may be unnecessarily onerous.

The PHS figures also show elderly people made up a far greater proportion of those hospitalised because of the virus, suggesting younger adults are less likely to be severely ill with Omicron.

More detailed figures released for NHS England show 37% of Covid-positive patients in hospital on Tuesday 4 January were primarily being treated for another condition. The percentage has gradually risen as Omicron has spread: on Christmas Day the proportion stood at 31%, and on 1 December it was 26%.

Experts [have warned](#) that having high numbers of patients admitted to hospital for other conditions who also test positive for Covid puts extra pressure on services as they can require more care, can pass the virus to others and may mean non-Covid bed space is reduced so surgeries are postponed or cancelled.

Since Omicron was detected for the first time in the UK on 27 November, it has spread rapidly. According to the latest [figures from the Office for National Statistics](#) (ONS), one in 15 people in England had Covid in the week ending 31 December, rising to one in 10 in [London](#). For Scotland and Wales the figure was one in 20, and for Northern Ireland it was one in 25.

The data also shows that the percentage of people testing positive has continued to increase across all age groups, although there are hints of a change among secondary school children and people aged 25 to 49.

“This may mean that infections are no longer increasing among these age groups, but it is currently too early to suggest if this is a continuing change in trend,” the ONS said.

Similarly, while infection levels have risen in all regions of England, the trend for the final few days of 2021 suggests infections may no longer be increasing. “But it is currently too early to suggest if this is a continuing change in trend,” the ONS report states.

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## Coronavirus

# Dozens of Hong Kong officials in Covid quarantine after birthday party

Chief executive orders an investigation into the conduct of 13 bureaucrats who attended the gathering

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



People line up to get tested for coronavirus on Friday at a temporary testing centre in Hong Kong. Photograph: Vincent Yu/AP

*[Vincent Ni](#)*

Fri 7 Jan 2022 11.21 EST

Dozens of senior officials and legislators in [Hong Kong](#) have been sent into a 21-day quarantine after they attended a birthday party despite the

government's own pandemic warning.

The embarrassing incident came as the city's new "patriots only" legislature is scheduled to hold its first meeting next week. Concerns had been raised in recent weeks after a number of Omicron cases were identified in Hong Kong. Health officials say they cannot rule out hidden clusters in the community.

Hong Kong's chief executive, [Carrie Lam](#), said it was a "deep disappointment" that her bureaucrats ignored the government's own advice on avoiding large gatherings in the middle of an Omicron outbreak. On Friday, Lam ordered an inquiry into the behaviour of 13 senior government officials who attended party.

In a statement, she ordered "detailed" investigations "as to whether the attendance of officials at the banquet constitutes any breach of discipline".

The party, held at a Spanish tapas restaurant earlier in the week, was to celebrate the 53rd birthday of Witman Hung Wai-man, a local delegate to China's top national legislature. The well-connected politician invited a long list of the city's political establishment, ranging from the home affairs secretary to the security chief.

At least 19 members of the 90-seat legislative council, who were sworn in this week, were also among the 170 attendees. One of the lawmakers, Junius Ho, travelled to Shenzhen two days after the party and met a top Beijing official there.

"I am very disappointed, because this anti-pandemic work has persisted for so long, so many of us have been working so hard to fight against the pandemic, so as principal officials of the administration, we should lead by example and refrain from taking part in private events," Lam said on Thursday.

Lam tried to distance her administration from the incident. She said the officials had failed to follow the rules by attending "clearly a private event, and not a function required by public duty".

On Friday, one of the affected officials, Au Ka-wang, the city's immigration director, offered his apology to the public and said he had "reflected on this incident and shall be more vigilant in future". Last year, Au was fined for breaching social distancing rules at a hotspot dinner.

Critics say this incident is likely to further dent the public's trust in Lam's administration, which is already at a low point since the mass protests in 2019. [A recent poll](#) showed that less than a quarter of those surveyed in Hong Kong approved of the government's performance.

Days before the incident, Lam summoned top officials from Cathay Pacific airlines and said they must take responsibility for their aircrew breaching self-isolation rules even if "they may not know their employees' every act".

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## 2022.01.08 - Opinion

- Another day, another great exhibition of elite justice by career liar Boris Johnson
- There's a particular joy to being bad at things
- Dear Nadhim Zahawi, your praise for teachers is just hooey if you don't make schools safer
- The Trump menace is darker than ever – and he's snapping at Biden's heels

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

## **Another day, another great exhibition of elite justice by career liar Boris Johnson**

[\*\*Marina Hyde\*\*](#)



The case of ‘accidentally withheld’ messages to a Tory donor has been convincingly closed via strongly worded letter



Carrie Symonds and Boris Johnson at 10 Downing Street, May 2020.  
Photograph: Andrew Parsons/10 Downing Street/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 7 Jan 2022 08.49 EST

There were many excruciating bits in the exposure of Boris Johnson's affair with cray-cray model-slash-infosec-entrepreneur Jennifer Arcuri (who I can't help but retain a soft spot for, even if she has been fully red-pilled these days). One of the worst, though, was when Arcuri found herself, in the eye of the media storm, being ghosted by Johnson. The one time she successfully got through to him on his mobile to ask him how to handle it, she found herself being mocked by someone "pretending to speak in a Chinese accent". Or rather, "someone". I cannot believe that this someone is now involved in further phone-related shithousery – but I guess you never really know anyone.

Still, like me, you probably cannot get enough of brilliant prime ministerial investigator Lord Geidt, whose ability to piece together highly complex cases such as "who paid for this £840 roll of wallpaper and why?" marks him out as one of the most fascinatingly unconventional detectives of the era. You'd stop just shy of comparing Geidt with Sherlock Holmes, perhaps – but in the decorative mystery of the Downing Street flat refurbishments, his lordship was certainly Ideal Holmes. Only Ideal Holmes would somehow

be able to conclude absolutely nothing from the fact that in the very message in which the prime minister asked for a huge sum of money from a Tory donor, Johnson felt moved to add, apparently ingratiatingly, “PS am on the great exhibition plan Will revert”. Nor from the fact that in the very message in which the Tory donor told the prime minister the money was on the way, he replied – apparently ingratiated – “Thanks for thinking about GE2”.

This reboot of the Great Exhibition seems to have been something of a [pet project](#) for Lord Brownlow, who [initially met £112,549](#) of Johnson’s decor bills himself. Less than two months after the above WhatsApp exchange, according to official ministerial records, Brownlow was – according to official ministerial records – meeting the then culture secretary, Oliver Dowden, “to discuss plans for Great Exhibition 2.0”. Just one of those weird instances of Jungian synchronicity that attend this government’s way of doing business, I guess. Something branded Festival UK is now happening instead, and Downing Street yesterday simply refused to say precisely how that event differs from the Great Exhibition 2.

Either way, the whole saga is certainly a great exhibition of British establishment accountability. After the Electoral Commission discovered these “accidentally withheld” WhatsApp messages in its own probe into the affair, Lord Geidt was forced to reopen his original investigation, but has now concluded once more that career liar Johnson did not intend to mislead. Or to put it in strictly procedural terms, his lordship has taken a second dive into the [barrel of tits, and still come up sucking his thumb](#). The case has been closed via strongly worded letter – my favourite type of elite justice. I think all punks have to ask themselves: did he fire off six pieces of headed notepaper or only five? Do I feel lucky? Well, DO I?

I think most of us would take our chances, let’s face it. Indeed, it’s hard not to laugh at the entire concept of Boris Johnson having a “standards adviser” – it’s like discovering Mark Zuckerberg has a stylist. Or, indeed, a standards adviser. Anyway, now the “Great Exhibition” angle is being queried, you’re probably wondering if the investigation could be reopened by Johnson’s corruption tsar. And you’re probably forgetting that Johnson’s corruption tsar is the guy married to [Dido Harding](#). Take a moment. I needed one too.

As for the still-undead Downing Street decoration saga, what's not to enjoy in these new glimpses of Johnson trying to come off as aesthetically sensitive? In the messages to Brownlow, the prime minister explains that the flat is a "bit of a tip". Strong words, coming from the lovechild of Uncle Fester and Cousin Itt. Whatever transformation the interior designer Lulu Lytle eventually wrought on the place, I imagine it is by now enhanced by red wine stains and bits of Stilton trodden into the carpet. Takeaway wrappers down the back of the sofa: model's own.

Of course, the real driving force behind the refurb was not Johnson but his wife, Carrie. I know she bangs on about rented dresses and stuff, but her financial positioning is starting to feel a bit "Kate in the streets, Meghan in the 500-thread-count sheets". John Lewis furniture and fittings would be right at the upper end of what most British people would ever feel able to afford – and yet, I don't think we're in John Lewis any more, Toto.

Speaking of which, I used to think the only person I wanted to read on the Johnsons' flat saga was chief justice of interiors, Nicky Haslam. Regrettably, however, Nicky has been bumped down my wishlist by previous No 10 occupant Theresa May, who was famously [pictured at home](#) in this very well-appointed dump. "FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, BREAK YOUR SILENCE, MRS MAY" are not words I ever expected to type, but here we all are. I desperately, desperately want to hear a defence of the tip by the no-nonsense tastemaker who created it – ideally at pamphlet length, but would settle for a 3,000-worder.

Failing that, can the Great Exhibition/Festival UK include some of these absolute prize human exhibits? We could have a whole pavilion dedicated to Chancers, Chisellers and Chintz-grifters, and never have to leave a single street in Westminster to fill it.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist

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## OpinionAllotments

# There's a particular joy to being bad at things

[Nell Frizzell](#)



Keeping an allotment has reminded me that in order to master a new skill, you have to try. And that's the best part



Best foot forward ... ‘To learn how to do something new, you have to spend a while being really, truly rubbish at it.’ Photograph: Mode Images/Alamy

Sat 8 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

My boyfriend and I are standing on a pile of manure-smelling, clay-thick earth, tentatively licking a plant root.

“Is that peppery?” I run my tongue over my teeth. “I think it might be peppery?”

“I can’t taste anything,” my boyfriend says, treading on a courgette seedling.

“Let’s take it home, anyway,” I reply, wiping muddy hands down my thighs. “We could always just boil it.”

It’s easy to be good at things: the praise, the sense of instant satisfaction, the positive reinforcement. It’s harder, and altogether more rewarding, to be bad at things.

I am really quite bad at having an allotment. We took on our 10 poles’ worth (I am told that this is a standard allotment size, dating back to Anglo-Saxon times) last winter. We weren’t the only ones. Unsurprisingly, interest in

allotments soared during the first lockdown. According to the National Allotment Society, [40% of English councils](#) reported a “significant uplift” in applications, while it experienced a 45% increase in requests for information through its website. But growing vegetables – if you haven’t done it much before – isn’t always terribly easy.

My boyfriend and I planted a couple of tomato seedlings during a hot spell in April. They were effectively burned to death in less than three days. I hadn’t thought to water them each evening, being somewhat preoccupied by watering my three-year-old son. We planted a gooseberry bush atop a red ants’ nest: tending it was both spicy on the knees and pretty pointless: the ants soon infested the root system. I cut back a grapevine left by the previous owner as the sap was rising, possibly killing off large sections. Our *pièce de résistance* has been the free shed a saintly member of the allotment committee members provided us. At the time of writing, the shed lists, its roof wrapped in tarpaulin and its door nailed shut in order to stop it swinging open.

There’s a guy who owns a plot two down, who got his allotment at the same time as ours. He’s already ploughed it over, producing mountains of sweetcorn, tomatoes, chard and potatoes. He built a series of metal structures, like an electricity substation, to grow beans and peas along, and scored out verges so straight you could tear paper on them. We, by contrast, have put up a large plastic children’s slide, found a rats’ nest under a pile of wood, and at one point were watering the whole thing with a child’s beach bucket.

During late summer, when we were made temporarily homeless by the madness of the British housing system and delays in a chain, we managed to grow eight pumpkins. It’s a strange thing to have no fixed abode – to be sleeping on your dad’s kitchen floor – while simultaneously owning a patch of huge orange pumpkins. We started to leave them behind as thank-you presents for people who let us house-sit. My aunt took one back to London sitting on the passenger seat of her car like a cultivated squash co-pilot.

But the thing is, I love it. I love it precisely because we’re bad at it. Everything is new; everything is an experiment; everything is hard physical

work, and therefore rewarding. As I sit on an upturned bucket, drinking coffee from a vacuum flask, looking out across the tangle of weeds, I feel utterly content. Even when I'm failing. I love the pitying looks other allotment owners give us as they slowly walk past, on their way to their unbelievably fecund sites. I love that our allotment neighbours – an elderly couple who shout at each other in Urdu from either end of their plot – give us pity bunches of coriander. I love that my son can entertain himself for a few hours doing nothing more productive than cutting grass with a pair of scissors. I love it because it's good to be bad at things sometimes. In order to learn how to do something new, you have to be rubbish at it first. You make mistakes, lose heart, forget your plans and see what works. And then, plough on.

- Nell Frizzell is the author of [The Panic Years](#)
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## Letter from a curious parentSchools

# Dear Nadhim Zahawi, your praise for teachers is just hooey if you don't make schools safer

[Michael Rosen](#)



You offer 7,000 air filters against Covid and expect retired teachers to put themselves in harm's way. Who are you kidding?

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



The advice or help from government has repeatedly been confusing, wrong or inadequate. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

Sat 8 Jan 2022 03.30 EST

On 2 January you [tweeted](#): “Teachers and support staff across the country have put in a Herculean effort over the past 18 months and more, and I know we can count on their steadfast support in the coming weeks as we weather this storm.” I’m a great fan of metaphors but when it comes to pandemics, we have to be pretty careful to choose appropriate ones. Is a Covid pandemic a “storm”? I’ll put it like this: we breathe on each other. That’s how we get Covid. Storms come from up there in the clouds. We don’t breathe storms on each other.

More on metaphor and analogies later. In the meantime: on both parts of that sentence, you’re absolutely right. It has been a Herculean effort and we can all count on teachers in the future. So it’s annoying to reflect how little teachers have been helped or praised by your government for their hard work throughout the pandemic. Partly as a result, insults and idiotic comments have appeared about them being [workshy or having it easy](#).

[You also wrote](#): “I have asked former teachers who have either left the profession or retired to come forward to temporarily support workforces for

the new term. I know many have stepped forward and it's this blitz spirit that will be essential in turning the tide on Covid."

Have you read the responses to this tweet? I'll summarise the points that people make, while saving you from the anger. They remind you that people who retire are among the most vulnerable to Covid on account of their age. Though you've introduced the requirement that secondary school students wear masks, primary schools are largely mask-free zones. What's more, schools have many unventilated places that are often full of people very near to each other. These specific conditions are what are sometimes called "super-spreaders".

What is the government's problem with ventilation? Once scientists had explained to your government that this was an airborne virus, you could have figured out that one way to hinder it from circulating in the atmosphere surrounding a group of people would have been to do all you could to enable fresh and/or filtered air to circulate instead.

You appear to know this, because the government has now offered to provide [7,000 air cleaning units](#) for education settings. This number was of course greeted with hysterical and derisory laughter. Many took the figure of 7,000 as a cue to do some arithmetic. It went like this: how many classrooms are there in England? A common estimate seemed to be around 300,000, though some came in at quite a few more, and I don't know. But whatever the real answer is, it's clearly not 7,000, or anything like it. I'll leave you to do the percentages on how many classrooms will be reached by your offer.

So what was this announcement for? Who was supposed to be fooled by it? Teachers? Other school staff? Children? Older school students? Parents? Or the British public who don't have a sense of how many classrooms there are? Did you think that the vast majority of the population would say to themselves: "7000? Wow, this government is really rolling up its sleeves and fighting the virus now!" Did you?

Let's go back to the first tweet I quoted. It's full of praise. But if you can only come up with 7,000 air filters, the praise is just hooey, isn't it? And

asking retired teachers to go into schools without one of the 7,000 air filters is both unkind and dangerous.

Then you invoked the “blitz spirit”. Do you really want to make an analogy between a living human enemy trying to kill us and a virus that has no human intentions?

Our main source of help to curb the numbers killed or maimed by Covid is medical science, not self-sacrifice – if that’s what you mean by the blitz spirit. The advice or help from government has repeatedly been confusing, wrong or inadequate – . So whatever this blitz spirit was, how will it be “essential” in “turning the tide” on Covid?

My parents told me about the blitz: like getting into shelters that couldn’t withstand a hit. Come to think of it, that could be a bit like you sending retired teachers into unventilated schools. My mother told me that she did try to follow government instructions. One time when she was out and heard a doodlebug in the sky, she knew that the guidelines were to find a gutter and lie in it. She did just that. It was by White City station. If it was the blitz spirit that made her lie down in the gutter, I’m not sure that her doing it turned back the Nazi tide – if that was the tide you were talking about.

So, I’ll sign off this letter with:

**Yours, annoyed, worried, but mostly confused, Michael Rosen**

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[Opinion](#)[US Capitol attack](#)

## The Trump menace is darker than ever – and he's snapping at Biden's heels

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



The Republicans who once denounced him are beginning to accept Trump's election lies. But where will voters go in the midterms?



A vigil near the US Capitol on the anniversary of the 6 January 2021 attack on the Capitol by supporters of former President Donald Trump.  
Photograph: Probal Rashid/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Fri 7 Jan 2022 12.20 EST

The problem with coverage of [this week's anniversary](#) of the events of 6 January 2021 is that too much of it was written in the past tense. True, the attempted insurrection that saw a violent mob storm Capitol Hill in order to overturn a democratic election was a year ago, but the danger it poses is clear and present – and looms over the future. For the grim truth is that while Donald Trump is the last US president, he may also be the next. What's more, the menace of Trumpism is darker now than it ever was before.

This grim prognosis rests on two premises: the current weakness of [Joe Biden](#) and the current strength of his predecessor. Start with the latter, evidence of which comes from the contrast in how Trump's fellow Republican politicians talked about 6 January at the time and how they talk – or don't talk – about it now.

At the time, they were clear that the outgoing president had [crossed a line](#), that he was "[practically and morally responsible](#)" for the rioters who had marched on Congress and built gallows for those politicians who stood in

their way. Many of those Republicans had pleaded with Trump, sending text messages begging him to call off the mob. Now, though, they either say nothing – refusing even to show up for a moment’s silence in memory of those killed on 6 January – or they rush to apologise for having, rightly, branded that day a “violent terrorist attack”.

That’s because they fear Trump and they fear his supporters. In order not to rouse their fury, they have to mouth the new shibboleths: they have to accept the big lie that the 2020 presidential election was stolen and accept that political violence is not to be condemned but indulged when it comes from your own side.

It means that Trump’s tactics, his authoritarianism, have not shamed or repelled Republicans – as some hoped might be the result of 6 January – but infected them. What was once the eccentric stance of the lunatic fringe – that Trump won an election that more than 60 different court judgments ruled he had lost – has become the required credo of one of America’s two governing parties, believed by two-thirds of Republican voters.

More alarming still, surveys show 30% of Republicans say that “true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country.” Word the question slightly differently, and that figure rises to 40%. Not for nothing did the editor of the New Yorker this week ask if a second American civil war is coming.

You might imagine that all this should secure Biden’s position. Surely the majority of the US electorate will rally to the message he set out so trenchantly in a speech on Thursday taking direct aim at Trump and the “web of lies” he had spread to soothe his own “bruised ego”. Surely they will recoil from a Republican party that is breaking from the fundamentals of democracy. Surely they’ll turn away from the party of Trump and flock to the Democrats as the only reliable democrats. But that is not how it’s playing out.

Biden has the lowest approval rating of any US president at this stage of his term, barring Trump himself. He is trailing especially badly with the independent voters who decide elections. Polls suggest that Democrats will lose seats in November’s midterm contests, thereby losing control of the

House of Representatives and perhaps the Senate too. That will leave Biden paralysed, unable to pass any legislation at all without Republican approval.

Which is why 2022 is the make-or-break year for the Biden presidency. If it breaks, the ground will be laid for the return of Trump in 2024. Except this will be a Trump with fewer restraints than held him back before, one who now openly espouses the autocrat's creed that elections are illegitimate unless he wins them, that he alone should hold office and that violence is justified to maintain his power.

Republicans are working hard to unlevel the playing field in Trump's favour. Republican-run states are [rewriting electoral law](#) to make it harder to vote – curbing the early or postal balloting often used by low-income and minority voters – and handing Republican-controlled state legislatures [extra powers](#) over the running of elections. They want to remove one of the safety mechanisms that ensured the integrity of the 2020 contest: fair-minded election officials. To that end, they are setting about filling those all-important positions with Trump loyalists. Put simply, they want fewer people voting and their people counting.

Current Republican strength is a combination, then, of both the resilience of public support, despite the party's submission to Trumpism, and its ability to game the system in its favour. But it is also a function of Biden's weakness. It's worth recalling here how shaky the president's position was from the start, seeking to govern with a diminished, razor-thin Democratic majority in the House and a 50-50 deadlocked Senate. Despite that, he has passed some major bills and made some big, even transformative moves. As the former speechwriter to George W Bush David Frum [puts it](#): "In 11 months, Biden has done more with 50 Democratic senators than Barack Obama did with 57."

And yet, it's not enough. Biden passed a vital infrastructure bill, but his larger package of social spending and action on the climate crisis is stalled. His poll ratings took a hit with the speed of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan after August's chaotic US withdrawal. And his [4 July declaration](#) that America could celebrate its "independence from Covid-19" now looks horribly premature.

You can make a strong case that none of these things is Biden's fault. His spending bill is stalled thanks to [two Democratic senators](#) who simply refuse to get on board. (Given their politics, Biden probably deserves credit for getting them to back him as often as they have.) The withdrawal from Afghanistan was under a deal agreed by Trump; indeed, Trump's exit would have come earlier. As for Covid, what could any president do when more than a quarter of the country – [overwhelmingly Trump supporters](#) – refuse to get vaccinated?

But politics is an unforgiving business. Voters are used to blaming the man in the White House, especially when they face rising bills and daily costs as they do now. To turn things around, Biden can start with passing that key spending bill, even if it means stripping it of some cherished, and necessary, programmes. Voting rights legislation, to block those continuing Republican efforts to load the dice yet further in their own favour, is also a must. One way or another, Democrats have to go into the autumn midterms with a record to run on. Defeat would not guarantee the return of Trump two years later, but it would make it much more likely. That is a prospect to chill the blood of all those who care about America – and democracy.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
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## 2022.01.08 - Around the world

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## US Capitol attack

# Capitol attack panel investigates Trump over potential criminal conspiracy

Messages between Mark Meadows and others suggest the Trump White House coordinated efforts to stop Joe Biden's certification



Insurrectionists loyal to Donald Trump rioted at the US Capitol on 6 January 2021. Photograph: José Luis Magaña/AP

*Hugo Lowell in Washington*

Sat 8 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

The House select committee investigating the Capitol attack is examining whether [Donald Trump](#) oversaw a criminal conspiracy on 6 January that connected the White House's scheme to stop Joe Biden's certification with the insurrection, say two senior sources familiar with the matter.

The committee's new focus on the potential for a conspiracy marks an aggressive escalation in its inquiry as it confronts evidence that suggests the former president potentially engaged in criminal conduct egregious enough to warrant a referral to the justice department.

House investigators are interested in whether Trump oversaw a criminal conspiracy after communications turned over by Trump's former chief of staff [Mark Meadows](#) and others suggested the White House coordinated efforts to stop Biden's certification, the sources said.

The select committee has [several thousand messages](#), among which include some that suggest the Trump White House briefed a number of House Republicans on its plan for then-vice president Mike Pence to abuse his ceremonial role and not certify Biden's win, the sources said.

The fact that the select committee has messages suggesting the Trump White House directed Republican members of Congress to execute a scheme to stop Biden's certification is significant as it could give rise to the panel considering referrals for potential crimes, the sources said.

Members and counsel on the select committee are examining in the first instance whether in seeking to stop the certification, Trump and his aides violated the federal law that prohibits obstruction of a congressional proceeding – the joint session on 6 January – the sources said.

The select committee believes, the sources said, that Trump may be culpable for an obstruction charge given he failed for hours to intervene to stop the violence at the Capitol perpetrated by his supporters in his name.

But the select committee is also looking at whether Trump oversaw an unlawful conspiracy that involved coordination between the "political elements" of the White House plan communicated to Republican lawmakers and extremist groups that stormed the Capitol, the sources said.



Trump supporters clash with security forces as they storm the US Capitol in Washington DC on 6 January 2021. Photograph: Joseph Prezioso/AFP/Getty Images

That would probably be the most serious charge for which the select committee might consider a referral, as it considers a range of other criminal conduct that has emerged in recent weeks from obstruction to potential wire fraud by the GOP.

The vice-chair of the select committee, the Republican congresswoman Liz Cheney, referenced the obstruction charge when she read from the criminal code before members voted unanimously last November to recommend Meadows in contempt of Congress for refusing to testify.

The Guardian [previously reported](#) that Trump personally directed lawyers and political operatives working from the Willard hotel in Washington DC to find ways to stop Biden's certification from happening at all on 6 January just hours before the Capitol attack.

But House investigators are yet to find evidence tying Trump personally to the Capitol attack, the sources said, and may ultimately only recommend referrals for the straight obstruction charge, which has already been brought against around 275 rioters, rather than for conspiracy.

The justice department could yet charge Trump and aides separate to the select committee investigation, but one of sources said the panel – as of mid-December – had no idea whether the agency is actively examining potential criminality by the former president.

A spokesperson for the select committee declined to comment on details about the investigation. A spokesperson for the justice department declined to comment whether the agency had opened a criminal inquiry for Trump or his closest allies over 6 January.

Still, the select committee appears to be moving towards making at least some referrals – or alternatively recommendations in its final report – that an aggressive prosecutor at the justice department could use to pursue a criminal inquiry, the sources said.

The select committee is examining the evidence principally to identify legislative reforms to prevent a repeat of Trump's plan to subvert the election, but members say if they find Trump violated federal law, they have an obligation to refer that to the justice department.

Sending a criminal referral to the justice department – essentially a recommendation for prosecution – carries no formal legal weight since Congress lacks the authority to force it to open a case, and House investigators have no authority to charge witnesses with a crime.

But a credible criminal referral from the select committee could have a substantial political effect given the importance of the 6 January inquiry, and place pressure on the attorney general, Merrick Garland, to initiate an investigation, or explain why he might not do so.

Internal discussions about criminal referrals intensified after communications turned over by Meadows revealed alarming lines of communication between the Trump White House and Republican lawmakers over 6 January, the sources said.

In one exchange released by the select committee, one Republican lawmaker texted Meadows an apology for not pulling off what might have amounted to

a coup, saying 6 January was a “terrible day” not because of the attack, but because they were unable to stop Biden’s certification.

The select committee believes messages such as that text – as well as remarks from a Republican on the House floor as the Capitol came under attack – might represent one part of a conspiracy by the White House to obstruct the joint session, the sources said.

In referencing objections to six states, the text also appears to comport with a memo authored by the Trump lawyer John Eastman that suggested lodging objections to six states – raising the specter the White House distributed the plan more widely than previously known.

Bennie Thompson, the chairman of the select committee, added on ABC last week that the investigation had found evidence to suggest the events of 6 January “appeared to be a coordinated effort on the part of a number of people to undermine the election”.

Counsel for the select committee indicated in their [contempt of Congress report](#) for Meadows that they intended to ask Trump’s former chief of staff about those communications he turned over voluntarily, before he broke off a cooperation deal and refused to testify.

Thompson has also suggested to reporters that he believes Meadows stopped cooperating with the inquiry in part because of pressure from Trump, but the select committee has not opened a separate witness intimidation investigation into the former president, one of the sources said.

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## Myanmar

# Cambodian PM Hun Sen's visit with Myanmar military chief sparks protests

Critics fear Hun Sen's meeting with military ruler Min Aung Hlaing gives legitimacy to the ruling junta



Cambodian prime minister Hun Sen greets Myanmar's military ruler Min Aung Hlaing, left, in the first visit by a head of government since the army seized power. Photograph: AP

*Reuters*

Fri 7 Jan 2022 23.00 EST

Cambodian prime minister Hun Sen has met Myanmar's military ruler Min Aung Hlaing, amid criticism of the first visit by a head of government since the army seized power from an elected government last year.

Hun Sen was greeted by an honour guard and red carpet when he arrived on Friday, just as protests by coup opponents broke out in other parts of the country over fears his trip will provide more legitimacy to the ruling junta.

Myanmar state television later showed images of the two leaders bumping elbows and sitting down for talks in gilded chairs.

Hun Sen's two-day visit was the first by a head of government since the army [overthrew the civilian administration](#) of Aung San Suu Kyi on 1 February last year, sparking months of [protests and a bloody crackdown](#).

The Cambodian leader, who has been criticised over crackdowns on his political opponents at home, has said he was making the visit to press a Myanmar peace plan sponsored by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean).

Cambodia is current chair of the 10-member Asean, which adopted a five-point “consensus” peace plan in April.

Some other Asean countries including Indonesia have expressed frustration at the junta's failure to implement the plan, including allowing an envoy to meet Suu Kyi, who has been in detention since the coup.

In Myanmar, opponents of military rule have said Hun Sen, who seized power in Phnom Penh in a 1997 coup, is backing the junta by making the trip.

In Depayin, about 300 km north of the capital, Naypyidaw, protesters burned a poster of the Cambodian prime minister and chanted “Hun Sen don't come to Myanmar. We don't want dictator Hun Sen”, photographs on social media showed.

There were also reports of protests in the second city of Mandalay and the Tanintharyi and Monywa regions.

In a speech on Wednesday before his trip, Hun Sen called for restraint from all sides in Myanmar and for the peace plan to be followed.

“Brothers in Myanmar, do you want your country to fall into a real civil war or want it solved?” he said.

After a phone call this week with Hun Sen, Indonesian president Joko Widodo said in messages on Twitter if there was no significant progress on the peace plan, then only non-political representatives from Myanmar should be allowed at Asean meetings.

In October, junta leader Min Aung Hlaing was barred from attending an Asean summit for his failure to cease hostilities, allow humanitarian access and start dialogue, as agreed with Asean.

But in a further sign of divisions in the 10-member bloc, Hun Sen last month said junta officials should be allowed to attend Asean meetings.

Min Ko Naing, a leading activist in Myanmar, said in a social media post that Hun Sen would face big protests over his visit, which would hurt Asean.

Hun Sen is one of the world's longest serving leaders and western countries and human rights groups have long condemned him for crackdowns on opponents, civil rights groups and the media in Cambodia.

Amnesty International’s deputy regional director for research Emerlynne Gil said the trip risked sending mixed messages to Myanmar’s military leader and Hun Sen should instead lead Asean to strong action to address the country’s “dire human rights situation”.

US-funded Radio Free Asia cited a junta spokesperson as saying Hun Sen would not meet Suu Kyi, who has been detained since the coup and is on trial, facing nearly a dozen cases that carry a combined maximum sentence of more than 100 years in prison.

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[China](#)

## At least 16 killed after office canteen explosion in China

Rescue workers in Chongqing searched the debris into the night after Friday's blast with one survivor in a critical condition



Firefighters search for survivors in the rubble of a collapsed canteen. The blast was triggered by a suspected gas leak. Photograph: China News Service/Getty Images

*Associated Press*  
Sat 8 Jan 2022 00.20 EST

A lunchtime explosion at an office canteen killed 16 people in southwest [China](#) and injured 10 others, authorities said.

A gas leak is the suspected cause of the blast on Friday, the Chongqing city government said in an online statement.

The canteen collapsed, trapping victims inside. Rescue workers searched the debris into the night and all the bodies were recovered by midnight, the official Xinhua news agency said.

The Ministry of Emergency Management dispatched a team to of more than 600 personnel to the scene, state broadcaster CCTV said.



Rescuers search at the scene of the explosion on 7 January 2022.  
Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

One of the survivors was in critical condition, Xinhua said.

The 12.10pm blast happened at a government subdistrict office in Wulong District, which is about 75 km west of the Chongqing city centre and known for its scenic karst rock formations.

An eyewitness told state-run Phoenix TV that the blast was “very scary ... our windows have all been blown to pieces”.



A gas leak is the suspected cause of the blast. Photograph: Huang Wei/AP

Gas leaks and explosions are not uncommon in China, due to weak safety standards.

In June, 25 people were killed in a gas blast that ripped through a residential compound and struck a busy two-storey building packed with shoppers.

Eight suspects, including the general manager of the company that owned the gas pipe, were detained after the government said “the company’s safety management system was unsound”.

The same month, 18 people were killed and more injured when a fire broke out at a martial arts school, with state media reporting that all the victims were boarding school pupils.

*With Agence-France Presse and Reuters*

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## [Haiti](#)

# Haiti: two journalists killed by gang members in latest surge in violence

Attack on media denounced as police say bodies of two Haitian reporters had ‘large-caliber bullet wounds’



Police patrol after recovering the bodies of two slain journalists in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on Friday. Photograph: Odelyn Joseph/AP

*AP in Port-au-Prince*  
Fri 7 Jan 2022 16.35 EST

Two Haitian journalists have been killed by gang members while reporting in a conflictive area south of Port-au-Prince, as a [surge in violence](#) continues to shake the Caribbean nation.

One of the journalist's employers and some media reports said the men had been shot then burned alive, but police did not confirm this. A police

statement said only that the bodies had “large-caliber bullet wounds”.

Radio Ecoute FM said journalist John Wesley Amady was killed by “armed bandits” on Thursday in Laboule while he was reporting on security issues in the gang-plagued area.

“We condemn with the utmost rigor this criminal and barbaric act, which constitutes a serious attack on the rights to life in general, and those of journalists in particular to exercise their profession freely in the country,” said the station’s general manager, Francky Attis.

Police released a statement confirming the deaths of Amady, 30, and Wilguens Louissaint, 22. Initial reports were that three journalists went to the scene and two were killed, while the third escaped.

“The Almighty Gangs struck again in [Haiti](#) at the start of 2022,” said Godson Lebrun, president of the Haitian Online Media Association. “I bow to the remains of these fellow journalists who were killed just because they wanted to INFORM. I demand an investigation and may justice be granted!”

In New York, a UN spokesman, Stéphane Dujarric, said, “This is just one more example of what journalists the world over face and sadly, we may expect the impunity with which they are murdered for just trying to tell the truth.”

The Haitian prime minister, Ariel Henry has vowed to crack down on gangs that authorities blame for a spike in kidnappings and for blockages at gas distribution terminals that caused a severe fuel shortage in recent months. The insecurity has prompted the US and Canada to urge their citizens to leave [Haiti](#).

Only days ago, Henry was forced to flee the northern city of Gonaïves following [a shootout between his security guards and an armed group](#) that had warned him not to set foot in the city.

The 7 July assassination of President Jovenel Moïse has left a power vacuum that has deepened the violence and a growing humanitarian crisis in the impoverished Caribbean nation.

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## Montana

# Record number of Yellowstone wolves shot after roaming outside park

Twenty animals hunted in recent months, the most in a season since the animals' reintroduction to the area



A wolf from the Wapiti Lake pack silhouetted by a nearby hot spring in Yellowstone national park. Photograph: Jacob W Frank/AP

*Guardian staff and agencies*

Fri 7 Jan 2022 15.27 EST

Twenty of Yellowstone national park's renowned gray wolves roamed from the park and were shot by hunters in recent months – the most killed by hunting in a single season since the animals were reintroduced to the region more than 25 years ago, according to park officials.

One pack – the Phantom Lake pack – is now considered “eliminated” after most or all of its members were killed over a two-month span beginning in October, according to the park.

Now, only an estimated 94 wolves remain in Yellowstone. But with months to go in Montana’s hunting season – and wolf trapping season just getting under way – park officials said they expected more wolves to die after roaming from Yellowstone, where hunting is prohibited.

The park superintendent, Cam Sholly, has urged Montana’s Republican governor, Greg Gianforte, to shut down hunting and trapping in the area for the remainder of the season.

But Gianforte, who himself [trapped and killed a Yellowstone wolf](#) last year, [violating state hunting regulations](#), has not been receptive to the request, according to a letter in response to Sholly obtained by the Associated Press.

“Once a wolf exits the park and enters lands in the State of Montana it may be harvested pursuant to regulations established by the [state wildlife] Commission under Montana law,” Gianforte wrote on Wednesday.

Park officials said in a statement to the AP that the deaths marked “a significant setback for the species’ long-term viability and for wolf research”.

The Trump administration ended federal endangered species protections for the gray wolf in late 2020, sparking an outcry from advocates who called the decision [“premature” and “reckless”](#), and leaving wolves subject only to state and local protections.

Urged by Republican lawmakers, Montana wildlife officials last year loosened hunting and trapping rules for wolves statewide. They also eliminated longstanding wolf quota limits in areas bordering the park. The quotas, which Sholly asked Gianforte to reinstate, allowed only a few wolves to be killed along the border annually.

The original quotas were meant to protect packs that draw tourists to Yellowstone from around the world for the chance to see a wolf in the wild.

Under new rules, Montana hunters can use bait such as meat to lure wolves for killing and trappers can now use snares in addition to leghold traps.

“Allowances for trapping and especially baiting are a major concern, especially if these tactics lure wolves out of the park,” a Yellowstone spokesperson, Morgan Warthin, said.

Fifteen of the wolves were shot after roaming across the park’s northern border into Montana, according to figures released to the AP. Five more died in Idaho and Wyoming.

Marc Cooke, with the advocacy group Wolves of the Rockies, predicted a backlash against Gianforte and the state for not doing more to shield wolves leaving Yellowstone.

“People love these animals and they bring in tons of money for the park,” Cooke said. “This boils down to the commercialization of wildlife for a small minority of special interest groups.”

Montana’s efforts to make it easier to kill wolves mirror recent actions by [Republicans and conservatives in other states](#) such as Idaho and Wisconsin. The changes came after hunters and ranchers successfully lobbied to reduce wolf populations that prey on big game herds and occasionally on livestock.

As many as [one-third of Wisconsin’s gray wolves](#) probably died at the hands of humans in the months after the federal government announced it was ending legal protections, according to a study by University of Wisconsin scientists released in July.



A gray wolf, a member of the Nez Perce pack, seen north of Old Faithful in Yellowstone. Photograph: Adam Messer/AP

In September, the US Fish and Wildlife Service said it would examine whether [federal endangered species protections](#) should be restored for more than 2,000 wolves in northern US Rockies states including Montana, Idaho and Wyoming.

A representative of the Montana hunting industry said outfitters and guides supported the preservation of wolves inside Yellowstone. But once the animals crossed the boundary, sustainable hunting and trapping should be allowed, said Mac Minard, executive director of the Montana Outfitters and Guides Association.

Minard questioned whether the 20 wolves killed so far this year after leaving Yellowstone should even be considered “park wolves”.

“That just doesn’t make sense,” he said. “Why aren’t they ‘Montana wolves’ that happened to go into the park?”

The wolf Gianforte killed last February was six to seven years old and had been born in Yellowstone national park. It was fitted with a radio collar to track its movements in 2018, Warthin said.

Trappers have the option to release radio-collared animals so they can continue to be used for research. A certification course for wolf hunters that Gianforte neglected to take, violating state hunting regulations, includes instruction on the importance of radio-collared wolves to monitor the population and manage wolf pack attacks on livestock.

“A wolf that’s been wearing a radio collar is going to be a terrible trophy, because those collars mess up the fur around their neck,” Carter Niemeyer, a former wolf recovery coordinator for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, told the AP in March. “And then symbolically, you’ve got a wolf that researchers spent thousands of dollars on, and then to have somebody thoughtlessly kill that animal when they could have released it back to research – that’s a lot of poor judgment.”

Gianforte trapped and shot the male wolf on 15 February about 10 miles (16km) north of the park, on a ranch owned by Robert E Smith, director for the conservative Sinclair Broadcasting Group and a Gianforte campaign donor, according to the Mountain West News Bureau, which first reported the violation.

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## **Headlines friday 7 january 2022**

- [Exclusive England Covid testing changes could hit low-paid workers, leaked memo warns](#)
- [Live UK Covid: military on standby to extend hospital support beyond London](#)
- [London Military deployed in hospitals due to Omicron staff shortages](#)
- [England Schools ‘teetering on the edge’ with staff Covid absences](#)

## Health policy

# England Covid testing changes could hit low-paid workers, leaked memo warns

Exclusive: Health Security Agency chief set out risks of PCR test requirement for £500 isolation payment in December

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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A member of NHS test and trace collecting a sample at a drive-through test site in Bournemouth. Those seeking £500 support payments for isolation will still need to get PCR tests. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

*[Rowena Mason](#) and [Josh Halliday](#)*

Fri 7 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

The head of the UK Health Security Agency raised concerns about low-paid workers being disadvantaged by changes to the Covid testing regime in [England](#), as they would still need a PCR test to access financial support for isolation, a leaked internal memo shows.

The memo from Dame Jenny Harries, the chief executive of the UKHSA, also highlighted a greater risk of false negatives for those on lower incomes forced to go to a testing centre to ensure they received the £500 Covid test-and-trace support payments.

Under [the changes](#) made this week, most people who are asymptomatic can rely on positive lateral flow results to self-isolate, without having to take a confirmatory PCR test. But those seeking £500 Covid support payments for isolation will still need to get PCR tests because of government concerns about potential fraudulent claims if people are allowed to claim the support payments based on self-reported lateral flows.



Dame Jenny Harries. Photograph: Reuters

In the note written before Christmas, Harries flagged concerns that low-paid workers seeking access to financial support payments would have a higher chance of falsely being told they were negative for Covid.

Harries wrote: “In higher prevalence periods, the abandonment of confirmatory PCR would mean that the people most likely to receive a false negative and therefore potentially become ill and then seek hospital care later and therefore more likely to die would be more likely to be those from lower socioeconomic groups who also have higher risk of underlying health conditions as additional risk factors.”

The government made the changes this week, partly to ease pressure on the PCR testing system while Covid case numbers are at an unprecedented level, and to allow people to start the clock on isolation periods earlier.

However, there were also concerns among public health officials that a confirmatory PCR was counterproductive because of the risks of false negatives. Some experts have previously highlighted that there is still a reasonable chance of a person having Covid if they have a positive lateral flow followed by a negative PCR, with the PCR missing a positive result around one in 20 times.

It is understood that data prepared for the health secretary, Sajid Javid, this month contained estimates that about 9,000 out of 195,000 confirmatory PCR tests taken in November in England were false negatives. This suggested that 45% of all negative PCR results after a positive lateral flow result were false.

Because of concerns about potentially fraudulent claims, the decision was made by the government to continue to ask for a confirmatory PCR from those who want to claim a test-and-trace support payment, currently worth £500 per isolation.

However, the UKHSA flagged worries that this put lower socioeconomic groups at higher risk of false negatives than the general population, particularly when there is high prevalence of Covid in the community.

This means those people are potentially being wrongly told not to isolate and not getting support payments, and are at risk of false reassurance and passing it on to contacts.

In Wales, support payments are given out for self-reported tests without the need for a confirmatory PCR.

It is difficult to quantify the number of people affected, but the House of Commons Library found about 370,000 support payments had been made by November. Around 1 million applications are likely to have have been made because, based on previous data, the success rate is estimated to be about a third. The level of payments is also likely to have risen again substantially during the latest wave of Covid.

The UKHSA declined to comment on the leaked memo.

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**Politics live with Andrew Sparrow**  
**Coronavirus**

# **UK Covid: more than 178,000 cases reported amid 229 further deaths – as it happened**

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## Coronavirus

# Military deployed at London hospitals due to Omicron staff shortages

Support, which includes 40 army doctors, shows ministers can no longer ignore scale of understaffing, union leaders say

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



NHS chiefs welcomed the help from the military but said the need for it demonstrated how serious the health service's staffing problem is.  
Photograph: MoD/Crown Copyright/PA

*[Denis Campbell](#), [Dan Sabbagh](#) and [Hannah Devlin](#)*

Thu 6 Jan 2022 19.01 EST

The armed forces are being deployed to help hospitals in London deal with a surge in Covid patients because the [Omicron variant](#) is leaving so many staff sick and unable to work.

Of the 200 military personnel involved, 40 are doctors who will help [NHS](#) staff look after patients. The other 160 personnel, who have no medical training, will check in patients, ensure stocks are maintained and would also be “conducting basic checks”, the Ministry of Defence said.

Some have already started work and they are expected to support the NHS in the capital until the end of the month.

The announcement comes two days after [Boris Johnson](#) said he hopes England can “ride out” the current wave of Covid-19 without further restrictions, but did acknowledge parts of the NHS would feel “temporarily overwhelmed” by Omicron.

Health union leaders, although grateful for the help, have said this latest move means the government can no longer be “dismissive” of concerns about “delivering safe care”.

Thousands of NHS staff have been off work each week in [London](#), which last month became the first part of the country to see a huge wave of Covid cases caused by the new strain, leaving hospitals struggling to cope with unprecedented levels of staff absence.

Chris Hopson, the chief executive of hospitals group NHS Providers, welcomed the assistance from personnel from what is thought to be all three armed forces. But he said that their arrival underlined the extent of NHS understaffing.

“Trust leaders will welcome the support of colleagues from the armed forces during what continues to be an incredibly challenging time for the NHS in London.

“The fact that we need to call upon army medics and general duty personnel at all underlines the sheer scale of the workforce challenges the NHS is facing.

“The experience of the pandemic makes plain underlying issues which need resolution – the need for a national long-term plan for the health and care workforce, ongoing challenges with vacancies and recruitment pre-dating the pandemic by a number of years.”

Hospitals elsewhere in England, which are seeing dramatic increases in Covid admissions, may also seek military aid, Hopson added.

The news came as the UK reported a further 179,756 Covid cases on Thursday, with the number of people infected with the [Omicron variant](#) continuing to increase rapidly.

The latest figures – which reflect infections picked up by testing – bring the UK total for the past seven days to 1,272,131, up 29% on the week before. The true number of infections is estimated to be substantially higher as not all infections are captured by the testing programme.

The data also showed that in England there are 17,988 Covid patients in hospital, up from 15,659 the day before, with a further 231 deaths within 28 days of a positive Covid test reported in the UK on Thursday.

Military personnel have helped out in hospitals in previous waves of the pandemic and continue to assist the ambulance services in Wales and Scotland and have also been helping the booster programme.

The Royal College of Nursing said the deployment proved that the NHS is [critically short of staff](#) and asked for assurances that those involved have the skills to help look after patients.

“The government can no longer deny the staffing crisis in the NHS. The prime minister and others can no longer be dismissive of questions about the ability of NHS staff to deliver safe care,” said Patricia Marquis, its nursing director for England.

“Once the military has been brought in, where does the government turn next in a bid to ‘ride out’ the wave rather than deal with it?

“Nursing staff might welcome any extra help at work right now, but we need to know that the government isn’t compromising patient and professional

standards in any way.”

Hopson earlier said soaring infection rates in the north of England mean that one NHS trust expects to have 30% more Covid cases next week than it had at the last peak.

He fears that hospitals outside the capital will not be as able to cope with the new wave of admissions as those in London. He said this was because they had deeper staffing problems, higher levels of sickness and absence, older populations and in some cases worse social care provision.

Some trusts outside London have as many as 19% of their staff absent because of Covid, much higher than the 10% off sick or isolating that other NHS organisations have been reporting, he added.

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## Schools

# Schools in England ‘teetering on the edge’ with staff Covid absences

One in 10 heads in survey say more than 20% of their staff were off for Covid reasons on first day of term

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One out of every 25 headteachers has been forced to send classes or year groups home for online learning. Photograph: Anthony Harvey/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Sally Weale](#) Education correspondent*

Fri 7 Jan 2022 01.01 EST

Schools in England are “teetering on the edge” with more than a third (36%) struggling with staff absence rates in excess of 10%, according to a snap poll by a headteachers’ union.

Almost one in 10 heads (9%) who took part in the survey said more than 20% of their teaching staff were absent on the first day of term for Covid-related reasons.

The staffing situation is already so critical in some schools that 4% of heads have had to send classes or year groups home for online learning, while almost 7% have combined classes or year groups in response to teacher absence.

Half of school leaders said they were already dependent on supply teachers to cover classes, and more than a third (37%) were unable to source the supply staff they need, even via agencies – almost certainly because of high demand.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), said the results of the poll painted a worrying picture.

The findings are based on nearly 2,000 headteachers’ experiences on the first day of term this week. The vast majority who took part were primary school leaders (76%), 5% were from secondary schools and the rest were made up of nursery, infant, all-through and middle schools.

More than a quarter (27%) had in excess of 10% of their teachers off on the first day of term for Covid-related reasons. Nearly all of those surveyed (95%) reported pupil absences, and three in 10 (29%) were missing 10% of their pupils.

“Staff absence on the first day of term was considerable and school leaders have been doing what they can to redeploy teachers and other support staff to avoid being forced to combine classes or send groups home,” Whiteman said.

“Given that this is a snapshot of just the first day of term, this is a very worrying picture. Infection rates – and therefore absence due to illness –

could very likely rise as the term progresses, and already half of schools are having to turn to supply staff, with many finding they cannot secure suitable cover.

“Many schools are teetering on the edge and the next few weeks at least will undoubtedly continue to be an incredibly challenging time.”

The shadow education secretary, Bridget Phillipson, said: “These stark figures reveal the extent of the government’s failure to plan for school staff absences this term.

“Again and again our children have been treated as an afterthought by Conservative ministers, seemingly unable to act until it’s too late. It is incompetent, complacent and inadequate.”

Elsewhere, there were reports of resistance among some [pupils to masks](#) and lateral flow testing. Damien McNulty, a national executive member of the NASUWT teaching union, [told the BBC](#) that in one Lancashire school, just 67 out of 1,300 pupils had agreed to have a lateral flow test and wear a mask.

Teachers also remain concerned about ventilation in schools. In a separate NASUWT survey, more than half (56%) of the 2,000 who responded said they did not have access to a CO<sub>2</sub> monitor in their classroom, despite government promises that all schools and colleges would be provided with monitors from the start of the current academic year. Of those who do have a monitor, 9% said it was not working properly.

The government has said it wants schools to remain fully open despite soaring infection rates. The education secretary, [Nadhim Zahawi](#), conceded in the Commons on Wednesday that schools were already seeing staff absences and these were likely to get worse in the coming weeks, exceeding last term’s 8% peak.

A Department for Education spokesperson said: “We’ve supported schools to continue classroom learning for pupils through encouraging former teachers to step in and extending the Covid workforce fund for schools that are facing the greatest staffing and funding pressures.

“We’ve also asked schools to have contingency plans to maximise attendance and minimise disruption to learning, should they have high rates of staff absence, and are working with the sector to share case studies of flexible learning models to support the development of those plans.”

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## 2022.01.07 - Spotlight

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'I feel like expanding into something different' ... Tilda Swinton.  
Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

## **Tilda Swinton: 'My ambition was always about having a house by the sea and some dogs'**

'I feel like expanding into something different' ... Tilda Swinton.  
Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

The actor opens up about her queer years with Derek Jarman and her latest clutch of films, and reveals her plans for a career change. And all while taking her five spaniels for a walk

by [Simon Hattenstone](#)

Fri 7 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Tilda Swinton is waiting for me when I land at Inverness airport. She's smiling, and says she's got a surprise. We head off towards her car, Swinton marching ahead imperiously. In the car there are four springer spaniels in the back and a fifth, the eldest, Rosy, is in the front passenger seat.

Last time I interviewed Swinton at home in the Scottish Highlands it was 2008, Rosy was a puppy and she spent the whole time sitting on my knee. Swinton lifts her out of the front passenger seat of the Volvo to make way for me – then plonks her on my knee.

In the 14 years since, quite a lot has changed. Rosy has had puppies of her own and become an award-winning film star – at Cannes, she and her sister Dora and grandson Snowbear (both of them sitting in the back with two of Rosy's puppis, Louie and Dot), won the Palm Dog for their appearances in The Souvenir Part II, the follow-up to Joanna Hogg's semi-autobiographical coming-of-age drama.



Swinton at Kingsteps Beach, with her Springer Spaniels Snowbear, Dora and Rosy. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

As for Swinton, at 61 she is freakishly unchanged – still gorgeous and unearthly; a doppelganger for David Bowie circa 1976. In The Souvenir films, she is the privileged mother of Julie, an aspiring film-maker

(Swinton's daughter Honor Swinton Byrne, giving a lovely guileless performance). In the first film, Julie falls in love with Anthony, a mysterious older man who proves to be a heroin addict and compulsive liar. In the sequel, Julie investigates her former relationship with Anthony while grieving for her lost love. Swinton's supportive but emotionally repressed mother looks old enough to be Julie's grandmother. In real life, she could pass as Honor's rebellious older sister.

We're here to talk about the films, but Swinton doesn't like interviews and rarely does them. She'd rather chat with journalists than talk at them so she's planned a road trip to Loch Ness (she lives on the other side of Inverness, in Nairn). It's weird, she says, how people assume that you have something profound to say just because you've been in a few movies. "I don't have anything to say. I don't know anything. One thing I do know is I don't want to even pretend I know anything. So let's go for a walk with the dogs instead."

Swinton is an extraordinary shape-shifter – smouldering in A Bigger Splash, drab in We Need to Talk About Kevin, ancient in The Grand Budapest Hotel, grotesque in Snowpiercer. As the eponymous Orlando, in Sally Potter's film, she shifts between sexes and centuries. Perhaps most audacious of all is the distinguished elderly Dr Klemperer in Suspiria. She occupies a unique place in cinema, sprinkling mainstream films with indie credibility, and indie films with mainstream viability. Swinton is the queen of indie-stream.



Swinton as Madam D in Wes Anderson's 2014 film *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. Photograph: Fox Searchlight Pictures/Allstar

Her films tend to come in batches, often labours of love that take an eternity to realise. Next week *Memoria* is released, 15 years after it was first discussed by Swinton and the brilliant Thai film-maker [Apichatpong Weerasethakul](#). An eerie meditation about a woman haunted by a sound that only she can hear, *Memoria* is at times so slow you think you're looking at a photograph; the next minute you're jumping out of your seat. It's like nothing else – a neo-realist, time-travelling thriller that leaves you with a heightened sense of sound and a diminished sense of life's certainties.

It's 36 years since Swinton made her film debut in Derek Jarman's [Caravaggio](#). She became Jarman's muse, and he her mentor. Jarman's work was experimental, collective and challenging – perfect for the young Swinton, who had no formal training, and felt technically disadvantaged for much of her career. Sometimes Jarman used her more as a model or presence than a conventional actor, which she loved.

Swinton certainly never wanted to be a star. "I only ever intended to do one film," she says. Really? She nods. "I like seeing people for the first time in a film. It's one of the reasons I love documentary. I love seeing *people*, I'm

not interested in seeing actors at all. And the best way if you're an actor to avoid that annoyance for the audience is just to do one film; then they've seen you, they've met you, you were interesting and new and they never have to see you again."

She ended up making nine films with Jarman, and since then has won an Oscar for her dyspeptic lawyer in [Michael Clayton](#) and has worked regularly with the world's most gifted directors – four films each with Jim Jarmusch and Wes Anderson (including the upcoming *Asteroid City*), on to her third with Joanna Hogg, and two each with Bong Joon-ho and the Coen brothers. She says it's like having different families, and that working consistently with different people is a way of keeping herself fresh.

Last year, the great Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar made his first English-language film – a half-hour, [one-woman adaptation of Jean Cocteau's The Human Voice](#), starring Swinton. She first met Almodóvar at a pre-Oscar party in 2008. They bonded, she says, because they were outsiders having the time of their lives. "He and I have this lovely long history of meeting at Hollywood events and being the two shy ones – both shy and tickled pink and pinching ourselves and looking forward to telling people at home, but not confident enough to step in and talk to, say, Angelina Jolie."

We reach Loch Ness. Rosy and Dora hobble out of the car to stretch their legs. Neither are up for a full walk, so they get back in the car while Dot, Louie and Snowbear jump out. The air is fresh, the leaves are crunchy, the dogs ecstatic.

Katherine Matilda Swinton was born in London to an aristocratic Anglo-Scots military family that can trace its lineage to the middle ages. At 10, she was sent to boarding school; a year ahead of her peer group, she was bullied for her brains and barely talked for five years. She went to Cambridge University with the intention of becoming a poet, then never wrote another poem once she got there.

"This is the shame of my life," she says. "I am a proper capital F failure." I assume she's joking, but she means it. "I was supposed to go for one thing

and dropped the ball immediately. There is a real dark shame attached to it.” Did she really never write poems again? “Very, very sporadically and privately.”

After giving up poetry, she began to perform with fellow students who were more driven than her. It made her feel a fraud. “I was embarrassed about my lack of ambition. As a child, my ambition was always about having a house by the sea, a kitchen garden, children, some dogs and lots of friends. I wanted to make work with friends. It didn’t matter what, it could be a wool shop. Those were my ambitions and they still are, and I just want all of that to keep going.”

Why did she find that embarrassing? “Because it felt like such a dilettante thing to want. One of the reasons I say I find it difficult to describe myself as an actor is because at university the first people I met who wanted to be actors were very serious about it and some of them went on to do very well.” One of her peers was Simon Russell Beale. “They were focused and professional, very clear about taking part in a tradition and a profession. I was very aware I was not like that.”



Swinton in her first role in Derek Jarman’s 1986 film Caravaggio.  
Photograph: Bfi/Allstar

For Swinton there is still a link between stopping writing poetry and starting to perform. “I’ve got a hunch that I’ve got to stop performing and then I’ll write again.” She pauses. “Let’s go and have some lunch.” Does she want to stop performing? “Yeah. Oh yeah. I’ve always wanted to stop.” I bet most people would rather have your career than be a poet, I say. “Well, possibly, which makes me even dumber in that I don’t know a good thing when I see it.”

We pass a man with three poodles. Swinton stops to chat. Dot starts barking at one of the dogs. “Dot! Don’t use that language!” she chides in disappointed-mother mode. “I’m so sorry,” she says to the poodle owner. This is why Dot is the only one of the five springers not to have a movie career so far, she says. “Dot is a free radical. She’s not inclined to do take after take of anything. She is above all this. She is much too evolved.”

As we stroll on, she looks around in awe – at the skyline, the loch, the trees. “This is why I live here.” She opens her arms wide. “Because of *this*. And to have a blether with a man with some poodles!”

She leads me to the Dores Inn on the edge of Loch Ness. Haggis, neeps and tatties for me, five-bean curry for Swinton. She tells me she’s entering a new stage of her life. The twins have now left home – Xavier is working in film props, Honor is in her third year at university in Edinburgh.

Over lunch, Swinton talks about how her first family of film will always be the Jarman gang with whom she made nine films in nine years. It was a fantastic time – she made so many friends, discovered so much about herself, lived in a squat in Chelsea’s World’s End, and went on demos every weekend, whether in support of the miners or against clause 28 and the Gulf war. But it also left terrible scars.



With Matthias Schoenaerts in *A Bigger Splash* (2015). Photograph: Frenesy Film Company/Allstar

Like most of her friends back then, she identified as queer, but for Swinton it was more about her place in the universe than her sexuality. “I lived through my 20s in a whole queer environment and it was just at the point when queer was being reclaimed because it had always been a term of abuse. It just so happened I’d also been a queer kid – not in terms of my sexual life, just odd. People said I was queer, like she’s a queer fish.” She had never quite fitted in anywhere, and for the first time she felt she did.

But there was a traumatic postscript to the Jarman years. “Derek died in 1994 and that year I went to 43 funerals, all Aids-related deaths. The one person who really understood what I was going through was my grandmother, who lived through two world wars, and she said: ‘This is your generation’s war.’”

She mentions Russell T Davies’s *It’s a Sin*, about a group of young male friends caught in the Aids epidemic. In the series, the character Jill, who lives with the boys, visits them in hospital. She holds their hands as they are dying, a surrogate for absent parents who are ashamed of their children’s illness. “I was that girl,” Swinton says. “That was very much my experience. That was the atmosphere of my late 20s and early 30s. What was so tragic

was the breakdown of the blood family support. Lots of people couldn't go home so they stayed with us and we looked after everyone as best we could."



Swinton with Quentin Crisp as Elizabeth I in *Orlando* (1992). Photograph: Allstar Picture Library Ltd./Alamy

By the end, London and its association with lost friends became too painful, and she left. "The collective way we lived broke down because of people getting ill and dying or going home or leaving the country. I came up here to the Highlands when my babies were born and never went back. I still find it difficult to go back to London. I can count on three hands the times I've spent longer than a night there." At the same time as the Aids epidemic, British culture was being eviscerated by Thatcherism, she says – a topic that is addressed in *The Souvenir Part II*. "The way in which films were funded were changed. If you wanted to make a film you had to write five pages of forms saying this is how I can prove my film will make a profit."

I lived through my 20s in a whole queer environment, just at the point when queer was being reclaimed

At times, the tabloids have depicted Swinton living a life of swinging decadence in the Highlands. The father of her 24-year-old twins is her

former partner, the artist and writer John Byrne. Back in 2008, she was the subject of lubricious stories about a menage a trois with Byrne and her artist lover [Sandro Kopp](#), who is 39 years younger than Byrne. The truth was more mundane, Swinton says – she and Byrne had separated but were happily co-parenting, while Kopp was her partner (and remains so today).

Over the past decade she has experienced another prolonged period of grief. In 2018, Swinton's father died, seven years after her mother. "My experience of grief is a kind of emptying," she says. "All the stories stop, there is no road in front of you. It all just goes black, and it takes a long time to get over it."



In a scene from *Memoria*, directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul.  
Photograph: © Kick the Machine Films, Burning, Anna Sanders Films,  
Match Factory Productions, ZDF-Arte and Piano, 2021

Swinton says her brain has also emptied in another scary way. She is still recovering from long Covid. For three weeks in August, she couldn't get out of bed. "I was coughing like an old gentleman who smoked a pipe for 70 years, and had nasty vertigo. I got off relatively lightly, but the worst thing is how it affected my brain.

“I did two films that I had to learn a lot of text for. One was the Wes Anderson and he likes you to speak like a speeding train. I’m normally quite quick at studying, and picking stuff up, but this was like chewing a really big piece of gum. I couldn’t remember my lines.” Is she coping now? “More or less, but I’m still forgetting things. I have to work my brain.”

But, she says, there has also been a positive emptying that has resulted from bringing all sorts of long-term projects to fruition, ranging from the all-consuming (seeing her children grow into “kind, connected and engaged” adults) to the mere 15 years she spent on *Memoria*. Swinton mentions another project that has been particularly important to her. “We had this campaign to buy Derek’s cottage in Dungeness and turn it into an artists’ retreat, which we managed to do in lockdown. Just before lockdown, a lot of us kids from Jarmania came together to raise funds for Prospect Cottage. All of us coming together was so wonderful.”

I ask if she’s planning to slow down. “No, if anything I feel like expanding into something different.” Is she serious about wanting to stop stopping acting? “Yes, I’m thinking of retraining as a palliative carer,” she says out of the blue. She talks about witnessing the loving support her parents received from professional carers at the end of their lives, and the impact it had on her.



Starring in *The Souvenir Part II* with her daughter Honor Swinton Byrne (left). Photograph: AP

The idea of Tilda Swinton as a palliative carer sounds so unlikely, but then so many of the things she has done have been. When the twins graduated from their Steiner school at 14, she co-founded a secondary school based on the same principles to complete their education. (Every one of the students who applied to further education was accepted without having taken exams.) When she thought the Highlands would benefit from a film festival, she created a travelling one with the film-maker Mark Cousins. It's the kind of quixotic fantasy you might find in a Werner Herzog movie, but they made it a reality.

Has she looked into palliative care as a career option? "I have a bit, because during lockdown there were all sorts of people in our village who needed looking out for, not only in the care homes but the sheltered housing and those living by themselves. There's a lady who hasn't been over the door for two years. It's not that she's unable to move, it's that she's frightened and she's become detached from the possibility." Swinton is aware she couldn't do something like this on a whim. "I've looked into retraining and I would need a good two to three years clear and I haven't got that yet."



‘This is why I live here ...’ Swinton and her dogs at Kingsteps beach, Nairn.  
Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

It’s late afternoon and getting dark. The skyline has turned a magnificent silver-black.

Swinton points out the sights as she drives me back to the airport. “This is where they have the RockNess music festival,” she says. “Isn’t that a great name? Can you imagine RockNess in this field? I *love* festivals.” She tells me about a charity in Inverness called [Spokes for Folks](#) that provides bikes with double buggies for elderly and disabled people. “It’s like a rickshaw, and they go around to the care homes and give people a spin. I want to see if they’ll come to Nairn just to get some of the people over the door and out to the sea.” It would be great for the woman who hasn’t been out for two years, I say. “Exactly! That’s what I was thinking.”

She looks at Rosy. “I can tell she is very comfortable with you. She’s sunk into you like melted cheese.” I tell her I’d be happy with all five dogs on my knee. “When Sandro is not here, I sleep with all of them in bed. It is the most indulgent thing. Such hugs.”

I’m thinking about her plans for the bike rides for the elderly, films such as *Memoria* that wouldn’t get made without her tenacity, the school she built for her kids, the mobile film festival, and it strikes me that Swinton is one of life’s great hands-on doers. She laughs. “If we’re going to find a word for it, I have actually been producing always, and I love producing. I’ll always want to go on producing; not necessarily being in the film, but being at the side of the ring with a sponge and a bucket and a towel round my neck. I’ve done that from the beginning.”

It’s not just film I’m thinking of. She may well be producing in an entirely different arena in future. The one thing we can be sure of is that she will still have the sponge in her hand and the towel around her neck.

*Memoria* is released in the UK on 14 January, *The Souvenir Part II* on 4 February.

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## You be the judgeSex

# You be the judge: should my sister stop bringing strangers back to our shared flat?

They have very different boundaries – we air both sides, and ask you to deliver a verdict

[If you have a disagreement you'd like settled, or want to be part of our jury, click here](#)



Illustration: Joren Joshua/The Guardian

*Interviews by [Georgina Lawton](#)*

*[@georginalawton](#)*

Fri 7 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

## The prosecution: Mafalda

*I'm not against my sister going out and having fun, but she's also got to respect my boundaries*

Before Mariana, my older sister, moved in last summer, I had my own space and routine in this flat. I was nervous because she's such an extrovert and I knew our lifestyles were different. Mariana loves going out, meeting new people and having parties, whereas I'm really not into any of that.

We established rules right away, one of which was that we couldn't have strangers here. I knew that when my sister lived at university she had parties that got out of control, so I said: "Only friends and friends of friends, no strangers." She didn't like it, and said whatever she does in her room should be her business, but I argued that it's a shared space and I want to feel safe. Mariana is a lot more free than me, sexually and socially, but I told her she needed to compromise and eventually she agreed.

Mariana loves going out, meeting new people and having parties, whereas I'm really not used into any of that

The first night I left her alone, Mariana had a huge party with a band she met at a club. There were loads of people in our flat when I got back, and the floor was sticky. The morning after, Mariana was apologetic, saying things just got out of hand; she seemed so sorry I let it go.

But then about two months later she brought a random guy back for the night. She had called at 2am that night to warn me and told me he was a friend of a friend who had lost his keys. She said he'd be stranded if we didn't let him crash so I'd agreed. But when I started chatting to them, it quickly became clear the story didn't add up.

I was stewing all the next morning; then Mariana confessed she'd made up the story because she'd wanted him to stay over. We got into a huge fight. Mariana thought I'd overreacted but she broke my trust over a random guy, so what did she expect?

Since then, Mariana hasn't brought anyone back (that I know of). I'm not against her dating casually, but she needs to respect my boundaries. I also

think it's better if she gets to know someone before bringing them home. This rule isn't about controlling her; it's about protecting her and our shared space – why can't she see that?

Sign up to our Inside Saturday newsletter for an exclusive behind the scenes look at the making of the magazine's biggest features, as well as a curated list of our weekly highlights.

## The defence: Mariana

*I've had a few fights with my younger sister about my love life – I'm offended she doesn't trust me*

My sister is particular about having boys in the flat. She's younger than me, still at university, and has less experience with relationships. But I'm in my mid-20s, and the rule makes a big difference to my life. Before living with Mafalda, I lived with a friend and we did what we wanted. I'm sexually comfortable and used to bringing people to my space.

After my sister and I agreed on the rule, I was still really defensive. I said it was my room and my space.

When I had the party that first time, Mafalda wasn't even there for most of the night. There wasn't much to apologise for as I cleaned up the mess. I had planned on inviting just a few people but loads turned up at the door. I knew most of them though.

Mafalda once said that I shouldn't be having casual sex, which annoyed me – it's not her business

We've had quite a few fights about my love life. Mafalda said if I had been dating someone for a while, she would be OK with it, but if it was the first or second date, she wouldn't want them around. She would feel uncomfortable. I was offended that she doesn't trust my judgment. Does she think I go for terrible, dangerous guys? She once said I shouldn't be having casual sex, which annoyed me – it's not her business. I tried to explain that I

would never bring someone back who would put me in a dangerous situation, much less her.

That one time I brought a guy back and lied to her was stupid. Mafalda bought into it for a while but we were clearly drunk and lying. Afterwards, she and I had a huge fight and she didn't talk to me for days. I tried to apologise but she got really angry. Mafalda kept reiterating that I had no consideration for her wellbeing. She blew it out of proportion, especially when I'm the one cleaning the house and cooking dinners – she forgot about all that.

After a few days we had a long conversation. Now, ideally, if I want to bring a guy home I'll prepare Mafalda and make sure she's heard of him before so it's not a surprise. But there may be times when this doesn't work or she doesn't approve, and I can't stop living my life to suit her.

## **The jury of Guardian readers**

### **Should Mariana stop bringing strangers back to the flat?**

Mariana is guilty of renegeing on the agreement she made with Mafalda. If Mariana feels the terms are proving too restrictive, she should either attempt to reach a new compromise or look for somewhere else to live.

**Julia, 67**

Mariana should be allowed to bring randoms back to her room and, when her sister's out, be allowed parties if she cleans up afterwards. Mafalda should realise that it's safer for Mariana to bring random men back to her place than going to theirs.

**Poppy, 38**

Mariana appears to have been forced into accepting a rule which doesn't suit her needs. The time when she lied about the guy's keys is a natural reaction – we break the rules we don't agree with and didn't make.

**Alex, 35**

Of course Mariana wants to have fun in her twenties, but not bringing strangers back to the flat is a small compromise to make. She is also being

naive if she thinks she can identify a “dangerous guy” on a first meeting.  
**Miranda, 22**

For all the talk of compromise, the rule is Mafalda’s, and Mariana’s “rule breaking” since makes clear this was no negotiation and no agreed truce. Perhaps the seeds of a true compromise lie in Mariana’s final statement – fair warning as often as possible, and trust where not.

**Richard, 39**

## You be the judge

So now you can be the judge, click on the poll below to tell us: should Mariana stop bringing strangers back to the flat?

We’ll share the results on next week’s You be the judge.

**The poll will close on Thursday 13 January, 9AM GMT**

## Last week’s result

We asked if Roland [should pay more of the rent](#), as he earns more than his boyfriend, James.

**53%** of you said no – Roland is innocent

**47%** of you said yes – Roland is guilty

[Have a disagreement you’d like settled? Or want to be part of our jury?](#)  
[Click here](#)

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## Economic policy

# The UK faces an energy bill crisis. What options does it have to tackle it?

A VAT cut and a windfall tax on oil and gas profits are just two of the routes the government could take



A protester highlights excess winter deaths caused by fuel poverty, outside Downing Street in November 2021. Photograph: Daniel Leal/AFP/Getty Images

*[Phillip Inman](#) and [Miles Brignall](#)*

Fri 7 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

The business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, is considering how to reduce the impact of [rising energy costs](#) on Britain's households.

Since October [the market price for natural gas](#) has jumped from £2.50 a therm to £4.50 before dropping back to £1.70. In recent days it has begun to

tick up again and on Wednesday it hit £2.23 a therm. To give a measure of the shock to the economy from rising energy prices, in January 2021 the price was about 50p a therm.

The last price cap increase, in October, pushed bills to an average of £1,277 a year for a dual-fuel bill. The next review is expected to push bills up by 50% to nearer £2,000.

Kwarteng said he [wanted to ease the pain](#) on businesses and households, but he is [up against a chancellor](#) keen to maintain a tight hold on public finances.

The government has options, but all have [political and financial costs](#).

## VAT cut

At a cost of £2bn, Rishi Sunak could cut the 5% VAT rate on household energy. It was a move [promised in the Brexit campaign by Boris Johnson](#) among others as a mark of independence from EU VAT rules, and would help about 20m to 23m households. But the cut would offset only £75 to £100 of the expected £700 rise in bills. Labour has supported calls for a cut as a first move to supporting all those affected by the rising cost of living. Johnson has recently distanced himself from making the change, calling it a “blunt instrument”.

## Reversing the national insurance hike

A [1.25% rise in national insurance contributions](#) for employees and employers from April, labelled the health and social care levy, will raise £14bn for the exchequer. The leader of the House of Commons, Jacob Rees-Mogg, a low-tax campaigner, told his cabinet colleagues this week it would be bad politics to impose such a large burden on the workforce at a time of rising living costs. But a decision to scrap the reduction would benefit the better off as well as those on lower incomes, making it another blunt instrument.

## Tighter energy price cap

The regulator Ofgem could limit the rise in the [energy price cap](#) when it conducts a six-month review in April. If the government comes forward with a loan scheme for the industry, it would allow energy suppliers to smooth out the recent rise in costs over several years. The suppliers could borrow cheaply from the Treasury over the coming months and then repay loans from bills over subsequent years. It would mean that retail prices do not fall when wholesale prices drop, and would bake in higher energy prices for years to come.

## Expanding warm homes/winter fuel allowance

The [warm homes discount](#) (WHD) will need an overhaul if it is to come close to filling the expected £700-a-year increase in domestic gas and electricity bills due in April. Currently, households on a low income and in receipt of certain benefits receive £140 off their electricity bill, a sum that has not increased in nine years.

Pensioners in receipt of pension credit automatically receive the money paid directly to their supplier. In December the charity AgeUK said more than 900,000 eligible pensioners were missing out on pension credit payments because they had not applied.

Another group – those on low incomes and in receipt of a small number of benefits mostly open to people with disabilities or a child under five – are also eligible for WHD, but they have to apply for the money and hope their energy supplier is still accepting applications.

Only suppliers with at least 250,000 customers are required to make the payments, and a number of the big firms including EDF, Scottish Power and Utility Warehouse have now closed their schemes for 2021-22. It leaves applicants having to switch suppliers to receive the money.

## Universal credit

Last year the government [cut universal credit payments by £20 a week](#), saving the Treasury £6bn. The move took payments back to their pre-pandemic level and was offset by a lower marginal taper rate that allowed 2

million of the 6 million claimants on higher, though still modest, incomes to keep more of their benefits, at a cost of £2bn. A reinstatement of £10 a week would boost the incomes of the lowest paid by £600 a year at a cost of around £3bn to the Treasury.

## Windfall tax on oil and gas profits

A [windfall tax](#) would aim to recoup some of the estimated £20bn spent by energy retailers on buying oil and gas at higher prices over the last year. But which firms should be targeted when so much oil and gas is sourced from overseas?

If the 40% provided by North Sea gas producers fills the Treasury's vision, some also play a part in government-backed carbon capture projects, probably triggering a backlash. When prices are volatile, determining the size of tax could also prove difficult.

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Erica, 40, rests on her bunk.

[The Guardian picture essay](#)

## The women filling jails in Argentina for drug offences – a photo essay

Erica, 40, rests on her bunk.

Nearly half the female prisoners in Argentina are serving time for drug possession. Photographer Magalí Druscovich visited the Unit 47 prison in Buenos Aires to find out their stories

by Magalí Druscovich

Fri 7 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

Paola left her home when she was 13 to escape abuse and violence. She lived on the streets for five years until she became pregnant. Her boyfriend

left her when he found out. Without work and food, Paola agreed to deal drugs for a neighbourhood kingpin.

She only had to deliver the drugs when her boss's clients appeared on a street corner. With the money she made in the first few months, she was able to rent a room and live there with her newborn son. With a new partner and her family's basic needs covered she felt she could abandon her dealer job.

What I earned in a month with drugs I earned in six months cleaning houses

*Paola*





- Top, Paola, 35, cooks fried cake for relatives who come to visit. Above, Sonia, 38, puts on makeup in her cell. She is detained, accused of dealing drugs, without a final sentence. Right, a count of female prisoners in ward two in Unit 47. Far right, Sharon, 38, waits inside her cell for the officers to enter to count the prisoners





She had two more children and life seemed to be on the mend. But her partner left and Paola began again selling drugs to feed her three children. Again, the work seemed easy and money began to flow: “What I earned in a month with drugs I earned in six months cleaning houses.”

A pattern is developing in Latin America: aggressive drug policies are filling the region’s prisons with women, many of whom are forced into the drug business because they have no other alternatives to support their families.





- Top, Yanet, 28, imprisoned for selling drugs, celebrates her birthday with her children during a visit. Above left, Giuliana, 20, imprisoned for selling marijuana, kisses her mother during a visit. Above right, Nahir, 19, plays with Estela, 30, whom she considers her big sister in jail

In [Argentina](#) 43% of female prisoners are serving time for drug possession, according to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. It is, by far, the leading cause of imprisonment for women in Argentina. As a comparison, the second leading cause of incarceration – theft – represents only 9% of convictions.

Sábado Saturday 18

Este dia es <sup>25/3/2023</sup>  
muy especial  
para mi porque  
converti en mama  
de un varon que  
hoy tiene 7 años

aldy <sup>Domingo Sunday 19</sup>

Julio						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Martes Tuesday 21

Espero con ansias  
mi libertad y  
poder estar con  
mi familia otra  
vez, esta vez  
para siempre!

LARA NAIMID  
TRIAS  
21 abril 2023

- Inmates' diary pages. Above left, 'This day is very special for me because I became the mother of a boy who today is seven years old.' Above right, 'I look forward to my freedom and being able to be with my family again, this time for ever!'

Escaping the drugs trap is hard for women in poor neighbourhoods. For many, drugs have been a permanent presence in their lives since their early years. Nahir, 19, in prison in Buenos Aires, takes care of her black hair and always keeps a long smile intact. She first tried cocaine when she was 15 years old. Having an addict mother, it was an almost natural thing to do. The powder was there on the bed, and she and her boyfriend tried it casually.



- Maria, 20, talks with her cellmate Aldana, 20, who was separated due to an argument with another inmate

Nahir became ensnared by drugs. She became addicted and, having no money, started stealing to buy more. One day, the police chased her in the narrow alleyways of a shantytown when she went to buy drugs. She escaped and hid in an abandoned house and fell asleep for an entire day. One week, she consumed 45 grams and stole 10,000 pesos. It could only end in two ways: a prison cell or a coffin. She got jail. “Thank God,” she says. “I got caught. I lost the most precious thing: freedom; but I stopped using it and I’m still alive.”

I got caught. I lost the most precious thing: freedom; but I stopped using it and I’m still alive

*Nahir*



- Nahir, 19, imprisoned for drug possession, is part of a group of inmates who inaugurated the young-adult ward in Unit 47

Selling drugs is a survival strategy for women in Latin America. They are the most visible face – and the most exposed – of the region’s drug trade. They are also, in most cases, the product of their circumstances: violence, lack of education, poverty, asymmetric power relations, and inequity.



- Above, Yamila, 22, sunbathes on the patio of her prison ward. Right, the prisoners in the courtyard outside their cells to which they have access from 8am to 5pm



Alejandro Corda, a lawyer and researcher in criminal law on drugs, says: “We have a failed strategy, there is a criminal policy aimed at the petty

dealers, it is a habitual practice that shows results by arresting as many as possible. Those petty dealers are women, they are the weakest link in the chain, to catch them doesn't require research or development. But those women are not the leaders of the drug trade.”



- Inmates play rugby as a regular activity





The incarceration of women for drug-related offences in the region has increased dramatically in the past two decades, and it has grown at a much higher rate than the imprisonment of men, according to the Washington Office for Latin American Affairs.





- Above left, prisoners study and share a moment inside their cells. Above right, prisoners watch TV in their cell. Below, Yamila, 22, talks to her relatives in jail. Since the beginning of the pandemic, it has been accepted that all prisoners have a mobile phone



Paola is now serving a four-year sentence in the Unit 47 prison in Buenos Aires. She is one of the 22,000 women convicted for drug offences. Inside jail, Paola is an exemplary student, studying at primary school level. She does her homework, asks her companions for help when she does not know something, cooks for the women in the ward, and helps her children with school over the phone. Paola does not know what she is going to do when she is released; she does not want to go back to jail but recognises that drug dealing is an easy and tantalising alternative.

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## 2022.01.07 - Coronavirus

- [Live Covid: France's Omicron wave expected to peak in 10 days; Germany to debate further restrictions](#)
- [US California prosecutor who campaigned against vaccine mandates dies of Covid](#)
- ['Nonsense' PM condemns anti-vaxxers but jabs will stay voluntary](#)
- [Covid First wave raised UK adult risk of death by 40% – study](#)

[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

## Covid live: no need for fourth jab yet, UK advisers say; Germany toughens hospitality restrictions – as it happened

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## [California](#)

# California prosecutor who campaigned against vaccine mandates dies of Covid

Kelly Ernby, who recently ran for the state assembly, was unvaccinated at the time of her death, husband says



Kelly Ernby. Photograph: Courtesy Kelly Ernby for Assembly Campaign

*[Gloria Oladipo](#) in New York*

*[@gaoladipo](#)*

Thu 6 Jan 2022 14.22 EST

A deputy district attorney from [California](#) who regularly spoke out against vaccine mandates has died of complications from Covid-19.

Kelly Ernby, 46, a prosecutor from Orange county, southern California, who recently ran for the state assembly, died after contracting the virus, her family and friends have said.

According to Ernby's husband, Axel Mattias Ernby, Kelly Ernby was unvaccinated at the time of her death.

"She was NOT vaccinated. That's the problem," Axel Ernby [said](#) on [social media posts](#).

A month before her death, Kelly Ernby spoke out against vaccine mandates at a rally outside Irvine city hall. The protest was organized by chapters of Turning Point USA, a conservative youth organization, representing members at California State University, Fullerton and University of California Irvine.

"There's nothing that matters more than our freedoms right now," Ernby said, according to [the Daily Titan](#), a student newspaper.

On her personal Facebook, Ernby also spoke out against Covid vaccine mandates, writing in August that "the vaccine is not the cure to Covid, and mandates won't work".

Before the pandemic, Ernby also denounced vaccine mandates. [At an online town hall in 2019](#), Ernby said she opposed a new state law that would tighten vaccine rules for California school children.

"My fundamental belief is that government should be very small and I don't believe in mandates," said Ernby then.

"I don't think that the government should be involved in mandating what vaccines people are taking," she said. "I think that's a decision between doctors and their patients ... If the government is going to mandate vaccines, what else are they going to mandate?"

News of Ernby's death has gained widespread attention online, [underscoring tensions](#) between those who oppose vaccine mandates as a form of government overreach and others who see it as critical protection against Covid and the way to end the pandemic.

Among the posted condolences to Ernby's friends and families, some online commenters blamed Ernby for her own death and posted replies about Ernby's anti-vaccine-mandate stance.

Ernby lived in Huntington Beach, California, an hour outside of Los Angeles, where [a number of anti vaccine-mandate rallies](#) have taken place.

She had worked in the district attorney's office since 2011 and specialized in environmental and consumer law, [according to a statement](#) posted by the Orange county district attorney, Todd Spitzer.

"Kelly was an incredibly vibrant and passionate attorney who cared deeply about the work that we do as prosecutors – and deeply about the community we all fight so hard to protect," said Spitzer in the statement following Ernby's death.

In 2019, Ernby ran for the California state assembly and lost in the 2020 primary to fellow [Republican politician Diane Dixon](#).

Ernby later was elected as an Orange county GOP central committee member in 2020 but died halfway through her four-year term.

Vaccine mandates have continued to receive pushback, [despite soaring cases of the Omicron variant](#).

The Mayo Clinic, the non-profit medical center, fired about 700 out of 70,000 employees who refused to comply with the mandatory vaccination policy, [reported NBC news](#).

Employees were told to receive their first dose of the vaccine by Monday or get a medical or religious exemption. Staff who had already received their first jab were told to not delay getting their second shot.

"While Mayo Clinic is saddened to lose valuable employees, we need to take all steps necessary to keep our patients, workforce, visitors and communities safe," said the clinic in a statement, also confirming that 99% of Mayo Clinic employees across all locations complied with the mandate.

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## Vaccines and immunisation

# Johnson condemns anti-vax ‘nonsense’ but Covid jabs will stay voluntary

England won’t follow other European countries by coercing people to get vaccinated, says PM

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



Boris Johnson made his comments during a visit to a vaccination centre in Northampton. Photograph: Peter Cziborra/WPA Rota/AFP/Getty Images

*Peter Walker* Political correspondent  
[@peterwalker99](https://twitter.com/peterwalker99)

Thu 6 Jan 2022 11.46 EST

Boris Johnson has criticised anti-Covid vaccine activists for spreading “nonsense” on social media, while stressing that he does not support moves to overtly pressure people into getting vaccinated.

“I want to say to the anti-vax campaigners, the people who are putting this mumbo jumbo on social media: they are completely wrong,” Johnson told broadcasters on a visit to a vaccination centre in Moulton Park, Northampton.

“You haven’t heard me say that before, because I think it’s important we have a voluntary approach in this country and we’re going to keep a voluntary approach.”

While some [other European countries](#) were trying “coercion”, the prime minister said, this would not happen in England.

But he added: “What a tragedy that we’ve got all this pressure on the NHS, all the difficulties that our doctors and nurses are experiencing, and we’ve got people out there spouting complete nonsense about vaccination.

“They are totally wrong, and I think it’s time that I, the government, call them out on what they’re doing. It’s absolutely wrong, it’s totally counterproductive, and the stuff they’re putting out on social media is complete mumbo jumbo.”

In an interview published on Wednesday, the French president, [Emmanuel Macron, explained that](#) it was his overt plan to make life difficult for unvaccinated citizens. Macron said he wanted to put them “in the shit” – using the verb *emmerder*, a vulgar slang term derived from *merde* (shit) – by “limiting as much as possible their access to activities in social life”.

Macron said: “We have to tell [the unvaccinated] … you will no longer be able to go to a restaurant, you will no longer be able to go for a coffee, you will no longer be able to go to the theatre, you will no longer be able to go to the cinema. We will continue to do this, to the end. This is the strategy.”

Johnson’s approach for [England](#) – health policy is devolved between UK nations – is different, although he has introduced Covid passports, requiring

proof of double-jabbed status or a recent negative test, for access to nightclubs and larger venues such as sports grounds.

Even this was notably unpopular with Tory MPs, 101 of whom [rebelled in a Commons vote](#) in December, leaving him reliant on Labour support for the measure to pass.

While the rollout of booster vaccinations, seen as key to protecting people against the Omicron variant, started rapidly, progress now appears to have stalled slightly, with almost 9 million eligible adults not yet having had one.

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## Coronavirus

# First Covid wave raised UK adult risk of death by 40%, study finds

Level increased regardless of health but virus ‘picks on’ those already at risk of illness or death



A woman pauses at the national Covid memorial wall outside St Thomas' hospital, London, dedicated to those who have died from coronavirus.  
Photograph: WIktor Szymanowicz/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Ian Sample](#) and [Nicola Davis](#)*

Thu 6 Jan 2022 14.00 EST

Britain's first wave of coronavirus raised the risk of death by more than 40% for most adults regardless of their underlying health and other factors, research suggests.

Scientists examined medical records for nearly 10 million people aged 40 and over and found that, whatever a person's risk of dying before the pandemic, it rose 1.43 times on average as the virus spread between March and May 2020.

The finding means that Covid amplified people's pre-existing risks by a similar amount, leading those most vulnerable before the pandemic to bear the brunt of the deaths.

"Covid-19 seems to have multiplied the death rate by a similar amount for most adults in the UK," said Dr Helen Strongman, an epidemiologist on the study at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. "It really exploits any frailty or health or demographic risk factor. It picks on people who are already at risk of ill health or death more than other people in the population."

The researchers compared relative rates of all-cause mortality before and during the first wave, taking into account the impact of 50 different medical conditions and other characteristics, such as where people lived, their body mass index and ethnicity.

While the first wave of Covid multiplied the risk of death by a similar amount for most people, there were stark exceptions. Mortality rates for those with dementia and learning disabilities rose from three times higher than background levels to five times higher. Meanwhile, the death rates for people of colour and people living in London, which were lower than those of white people and people living outside the capital respectively before the pandemic, increased during the first wave.

Strongman said the work, which is published in Plos Medicine, reinforced the importance of protecting the most vulnerable. "No one is completely detached from someone who is frail or in poorer health and therefore at higher risk," she said.

In a separate UK study, researchers found that countries with high levels of trust generally fared better than others at bringing Covid infections and deaths down from their peak levels.

As the Covid pandemic took off, countries brought in measures to tackle rising infections and deaths, with many resorting to lockdowns. The measures quickly brought down such levels in some countries, but not in others.

“Even if they’re the same measures, they’re not always being obeyed to the same degree in different places,” said Prof Tim Lenton, the director of the global systems institute at the University of Exeter and a co-author of the study.

The research, [published in Scientific Reports](#), looked at more than 150 countries’ resilience to Covid – the rate at which daily cases or deaths fell from peak levels – in 2020. It also explored the stringency of government measures in the countries, based on the Oxford Covid-19 government response trackers, and levels of trust using the World Values Survey.

The results show higher resilience to Covid in countries where the stringency of government interventions increased from a low background level in the face of a new wave of Covid, and the level of trust in each other was high – in other words there was a strong “social contract”.

Lenton said that in every country where trust is about 40% or higher the peaks were reduced to very low levels of cases and deaths, including in the UK, where trust is near that threshold.

“The UK is not a roaring success … and yet once we had managed to peak-out and we got on the decline curve, we actually are a case where we seem to have just enough trust to have really successfully brought the waves down,” he told the Guardian.

“Success with this awful pandemic appears to be more hinging on trust in each other than trust in government, which is probably a damn good thing given where we’re at with trust in government,” he added.

Stephen Reicher, a member of the Sage subcommittee on behavioural science and a professor of psychology at the University of St Andrews, said the findings fit with evidence that a sense of community identity is a key

determinant of adherence to measures such as mask wearing, testing and social distancing.

“People, even if they don’t feel personally at great risk, are doing it for ‘us’. And a sense of shared identity – of ‘us-ness’ – is a critical antecedent of trust,” he said.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/06/first-covid-wave-raised-uk-adult-risk-of-death-by-40-study-finds>

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## 2022.01.07 - Opinion

- The NHS was already collapsing long before the arrival of Covid
- The world feels fragile, but we can recover from the blows we've suffered
- Photographing breastfeeding mothers? It's the mark of a truly misogynistic society
- I'm one of the Colston Four. Our victory took the nation closer to racial justice

OpinionNHS

## If deploying the army to hospitals isn't proof of an overwhelmed NHS, what is?

[Polly Toynbee](#)



The service was already collapsing long before the arrival of Covid, and there is little sign of it receiving funding it needs



‘TV news may need images of stretchers laid out on winter pavements, but ambulances were already queuing for hours outside A&Es before the pandemic.’ Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Fri 7 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

When is the NHS overwhelmed? When the army is called in. The military has been summoned to deal with chronic staff shortages. Some will be doctors; others will greet patients and keep stocks maintained. But this is only the latest distress flare from our austerity-stricken and staff-starved health service. Is it “overwhelmed” now the NHS is running out of lateral flow tests for its own staff, the latest government procurement disaster?

Boris Johnson wisely says: “I won’t provide a definition of what being overwhelmed would constitute”. But for Alastair McLellan, editor of the Health Service Journal, the NHS is long past the point where words can describe the state it’s in. “We’ve run out of language,” he says. “We’ve exhausted the adverbs and adjectives. The thesaurus has run dry.”

TV news may need images of stretchers laid out on winter pavements, but ambulances were already queueing for hours outside A&Es before the pandemic. We hear of ambulance services telling patients with heart attacks and strokes to get a lift to hospital. Even during the winters before Covid,

we'd grown used to trolleys lined up in corridors and 12-hour admission waits. GP appointments had long grown scarce. Cancer delays are the [longest on record](#). Expect no tipping points: "This is the new normal," a London teaching hospital medical director warns me.

The admirable NHS "copes". It triages and triages again, treating people according to available beds and who is nearest to death. That's rationing, a word politicians shun. Waiting used to be the traditional rationing mechanism in a financially capped system. There's no mystery as to why this is happening: waiting lists rise and fall according to the level of funding. Seasoned observers used to assume queueing was a permanent function, until New Labour all but abolished waiting times, ensuring everyone was [treated within 18 weeks](#) from GP to hospital. During the post-2010 austerity years, funding increases fell behind the country's growing, ageing population. By 2017, [waiting lists](#) had risen to just over 4 million.

Let's hope that despite the record infection rates we've seen in recent days, hospitalisations stay low enough so that the [NHS](#) still "copes". If so, Johnson will get away with his high-risk plan B, with its new year pubbing and clubbing in the face of scientists' concerns. But you wouldn't praise someone for surviving a dash across the M1 with their eyes shut, especially if we all had to run across with him.

Covid may calm to a low permanency within months, but what then for the NHS? In the trail of the pandemic is a fast-rising, [6 million-strong waiting list](#) – Sajid Javid even warns of [far higher](#). Nigel Edwards, the Nuffield Trust's chief executive, along with anyone else you ask, warns of exhausted staff and rising vacancies, with people quitting and retiring early, while long Covid and untreated illnesses add to the burden. According to the Royal College of Nursing, half of nurses are over 50, one in five leaves during training, one in three in their first year, while social care is even more bereft.

A new report from the health and social care select committee [blames the government](#) for refusing to build a future workforce strategy. Perversely, former health secretary Jeremy Hunt's amendment to the health and care bill, calling for a regular independent assessment on workforce estimates, was knocked down by the government [in November](#), and Hunt's demand for

one kicked away again at PMQs this week. Staffing costs take up [70% of the NHS budget](#), so the Treasury knows that putting numbers on the needs of the next decade will expose severe underfunding.

It takes 10 years to train a consultant and four years to train a nurse, but their training was one of the first things [to be cut in 2010](#): more nursing places have been added since, but entire cohorts are still missing. The NHS England (NHSE) [People Plan](#) last year offered kindly advice on retaining staff, but the Treasury banned it from adding hard numbers for future needs. Health Education England held out for training funds, a sum that has still not been fixed, but the body has been punished and demoted, merged into NHSE and losing its voice to speak out.

On Christmas Eve, NHSE produced [10 goals](#) for the year, a wish list to send up the chimney asking for everything: “outstanding care”, “tackling the elective backlog”, “growth” in mental and community services – and much more. (There was no mention of Covid lessons or the need for permanent emergency preparation for the next contagion.) There will be no money for anything but bare-bones “coping”. The Financial Times’ [annual poll of 100 economists](#) predicts we will trail other rich countries in economic recovery this year. John Appleby, chief economist at the Nuffield Trust, warns that although the government promises the NHS [£5.4bn in extra funding](#), hospitals have already overspent by £4-5bn, so much of that funding will vanish in repaying debts. Covid emergency money stops in April.

The big question – for government and voters – is how much more they want to spend on health. Labour proved it’s not a “bottomless pit”, but you get what you pay for. Forget the groundswell of calls for “reform” from ignoramus Tory voices who imagine French and German “insurance” schemes magic up more private money. The only major difference from our national insurance is that they pay more and get more per head – beds, doctors, nurses and results. In this forever undertaxed country the tax revenue is 33% of GDP, while the 14 EU states pay [an average 39%](#), according to the IFS.

Would we pay that EU average? A bigger question: should we really spend such a high proportion on the NHS and care, weighted towards the last years of people my age, while education suffers? Teachers have seen their pay [cut](#)

by 8% since 2007, while FE and schools are miserably threadbare, denuded of arts and sports.

The unavoidable answer is yes, voters will put the NHS first: once the emergency passes the government will face angry patients. The sobering experience of Labour's years, says Ben Page of Ipsos Mori, is that people waiting for hip and knee surgery notice no cut in waiting times until they drop right down to three months; anything above is unacceptable. But after the years of underfunding, restoring the NHS to its 2010 state is unthinkable: that's another 10-year project that requires high funding. The government itself may feel "overwhelmed" when public complaints at its decade of damage swell into an NHS political crisis, too late for any easy solutions.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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## OpinionReligion

# The world feels fragile, but we can recover from the blows we've suffered

[Rowan Williams](#)

Science, art – and religion – can all help us build towards a new conception of humanity in the wake of the pandemic

- Rowan Williams is a former archbishop of Canterbury



‘For the foreseeable future, we shall have to get used to this fragility.’ A nurse checks the weight of a child in a settlement near Herat, Afghanistan, December 2021. Photograph: Mstyslav Chernov/AP

Fri 7 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Rather more than half of the population of Afghanistan is facing [levels of food shortage](#) not seen for decades. Just under [1,500 people](#) died in the

Mediterranean during 2021, attempting to flee to a safer environment. The [likelihood of wildfires](#) is predicted as a risk comparable to severe flooding in parts of the UK in the coming decades. About [one person in 1,000](#) in the Democratic Republic of Congo has received full vaccination against Covid-19. And the challenge of the pandemic worldwide, the continuing background of loss and fear, still casts an enormous shadow.

Statistics – not simply unconnected – that give a little flesh to the overall sense of 2021 having been a sombre year – on top of the low-level anxiety, the unexpected personal losses and the sheer confusion experienced by everyone caught up in the pandemic. The human story is not looking much like a smooth record of upward progress just now. We are more fragile than we had been led to assume. And this means that we are also less different from our ancestors than we normally like to think – and that the more secure and prosperous members of the human race are less different from their fellow-human beings than they find comfortable.

Our ancestors, right up to the modern age, knew they were fragile. A brief period of dazzling technological achievement combined with the absence of any major global war produced the belief that fragility was on the retreat and that making our global environment lastingly secure or controllable was within reach. But the same technical achievements that had generated this belief turned out to be among the major destabilising influences in the material environment. And the absence of major global conflict sat alongside the proliferation of bitter and vicious local struggles, often civil wars that trailed on for decades. But perhaps it is only in the past two decades that we have quite caught up with the realisation that global crises are indifferent to national boundaries, political convictions and economic performance. The vulnerability cannot be neatly cordoned off.

For the foreseeable future, we shall have to get used to this fragility; and we are going to need considerable imaginative resources to cope with it. In the past, people have found resources like this in art and religion. Today it is crucial to learn to see the sciences as a resource and not a threat or a rival to what these older elements offer. It is more than high time to forget the phoney war between faith and science or art and technology. Belittling the imaginative inspiration of authentic science is as fatuous as the view that

sees the arts as just a pleasant extra in human life, or religion as an outdated kind of scientific explanation. Just because inflated claims are made for science, and unrealistic hopes are raised, it is dangerously easy to forget why and how it matters, and to be lured into the bizarre world in which the minority report in science (about climate, pandemics or whatever) is given inflated importance just because we have been disappointed about the utterly unqualified certainty that we thought we had been promised.

And what matters about scientific research is that it is not undertaken to prove an existing view correct, and so to reinforce the existing power or advantage of some over others. People rightly look with deep scepticism at research purporting to show that racial, social or sexual privilege is somehow grounded in the natural order. Ideally, what scientific discourse offers is not the guarantee of indisputable results that will simply tell us what to do, but a method of meeting each other in a shared exploratory conversation that will not be derailed by the presence in the room of non-negotiable convictions about the natural world that would make discussion on an equal footing impossible.

Science helps us live with our fragility by giving us a way of connecting with each other, recognising that it is the same world that we all live in. We have to forget our self-protective habits in order to discover our shared challenges. But what science alone does not do is build the motivation for a deeper level of connection. We act effectively not just when we find a language in common to identify problems, but when we recognise that those who share these challenges are profoundly like us, to the extent that we can to some degree feel their frailty as if it were ours – or at least, feel their frailty impacting directly on our own, so that we cannot be secure while they remain at risk.

This is where art comes in. Like the sciences, it makes us shelve our self-oriented habits for a bit. Listening to music, looking at an exhibition, reading a novel, watching a theatre or television drama, we open doors to experiences that are not our own. If science helps us discover that there are things to talk about that are not determined just by the self-interest of the people talking, art opens us up to how the stranger feels, uncovering connections where we had not expected them.

What religion adds to this is a further level of motivation. The very diverse vocabularies of different religious traditions claim not only that the Other is someone we can recognise but that they are someone we must look at with something like reverence. The person before us has a claim on our attention, even our contemplation, and on our active generosity. The religions of south and east Asia question the very idea of a safe and stable self with a territory to protect against others; while for Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the claim of the stranger is grounded in the conviction that every human beings is a vehicle of God's presence and God's glory – "made in God's image".

Being more deeply connected will not take away the fragility of our condition, but it will help us see that it is worth parking the obsessions of tribes and echo chambers so that we can actually learn from and with each other; that it is worth making what local difference can be made, so as to let the dignity of the human person be seen with greater clarity. "Our life and death are with our neighbour," said one of the saints of early Christian monasticism. That is the humanism we need if we are not to be paralysed by the fragility we cannot escape.

- Rowan Williams is a former archbishop of Canterbury
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## OpinionBreastfeeding

# Photographing breastfeeding mothers? It's the mark of a truly misogynistic society

[Chitra Ramaswamy](#)



A change to the law to stop creepy voyeurs in England and Wales can't come quickly enough



'Babies need to be fed. And a woman's breasts are her own.' Photograph: Thanasis Zovoilis/Getty Images

Fri 7 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

During five years of breastfeeding, I have fed my babies on buses, trains and park benches, in cinemas, cafes and restaurants. I have a vivid memory of feeding my son, perched like an Elizabethan lady riding sidesaddle, on a fallen log in Richmond Park in London while my dad stood beside me, his eyes respectfully skyward, as I felt all the feelings known to humankind. A few years later, I breastfed my one-month-old daughter on stage at a book festival in Scotland while discussing Anne of Green Gables, which was like some divine coalescence of all my favourite things. Afterwards, the audience, mostly made up of women of a certain age, lined up to congratulate me and shake the newborn's tiny hand. They would never have been able to do such a thing in their day, they said. What progress we have made.

I look back on all this now and feel lucky that no one took a photo of my breasts mid-feed. At least not as far as I know. This is a strong indicator of how low the bar remains for us undervalued and oversexualised mothers: that one is genuinely pleased not to have been sexually harassed while feeding one's baby. Had someone taken out an SLR camera, attached a

telephoto lens, taken closeup photos, and, when approached, refused to delete them on the grounds that it's a public place and therefore his right, I wouldn't have been able to do a thing about it.

This is exactly what happened to Julia Cooper when she [breastfed her baby](#) in a Manchester park. She reported the incident to the police and was told no crime had been committed. The Voyeurism Act, passed in 2019, banned the taking of non-consensual photographs of genitals or buttocks (upskirting) but did not cover photographs of the upper body. Which itself tells a short, grim story about how the law, and the world it enshrines, delineates women's bodies. Bit by bit. First buttocks, then breasts.

Thanks to Cooper, who took the matter to her Labour MP, Jeff Smith, as well as Labour MP for Walthamstow Stella Creasy, people who photograph or film women breastfeeding without consent now face being put on the sex offender register and [jailed for up to two years](#). This is welcome and, like most incremental changes, bigger than it looks. In a more reasonable world you might even think the home secretary, Priti Patel, would thus be inclined, for the sake of consistency if nothing else, to take another look at, say, her [nationality and borders bill](#), which will have a devastating impact on female survivors of violence. But this is not the world in which we live, nor the direction Tory U-turns tend to take.

The proposed change to the law around breastfeeding in public follows a reform campaign led by Creasy and Smith to criminalise the behaviour under the slogan Stop The Breast Pest. Breast pest, unfortunately, is one of those catchphrases that the warped British brain can't help but visualise as a mildly titillating tabloid headline. I don't need a trivialising end-of-the-pier rhyme to give a damn about breastfeeding voyeurism. Can't we just stop objectifying breasts instead?

Creasy was [also photographed](#) while breastfeeding her baby, in her case by a "laughing" teenage boy on a train in north London. She spoke about the "horror" of it months before she was reprimanded for bringing her [baby in a sling to a parliamentary debate](#). The two incidents together form a perfect microcosm of how mothers and their babies are treated in this country. Not

welcome in the mother of parliaments. Not safe on a train. Or, for that matter, a plane. (Yes, [KLM, I'm looking at you.](#))

For those who haven't experienced the joys and hardships of breastfeeding, it's like riding a bike: really hard until it's really easy. Mostly, the stage at which we do it out and about is when the baby is small, needs feeding at least every two hours (or is that two minutes?), and we're still learning on the job. Going on a bus is an exploit of Everest-sized proportions. Nipple shields, creams and soul-destroying wrestles with muslins in an attempt at "discretion" might be involved, not to mention the baby in her infernal nest of buckles and straps. Then there's the worst pain of all: the scorn of society, should your milk project on to the back of a stranger's neck or, worse, your baby cry. The vulnerability factor is off the scale.

For all this to coincide with the possibility of being stared at, laughed at, photographed and harassed, can be stressful to the point of off-putting. For some it [means feeding in a toilet cubicle](#) while trying not to bang your baby's head on the loo roll holder. For others, it means not going out at all. The unending fetishisation of breasts, in whatever context they happen to be, is the mark of a misogynistic society that still hasn't got to grips with the most basic facts of life. Babies need to be fed. And a woman's breasts are, like the rest of her body, her own.

- Chitra Ramaswamy is a freelance journalist based in Edinburgh. She is the author of *Expecting: The Inner Life of Pregnancy*
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[Opinion](#)[Black Lives Matter movement](#)

## I'm one of the Colston Four. Our victory confirms the power and value of protest

[Rhian Graham](#)

We have been accused of erasing history – but that's impossible. All we did was shine a light in places people don't want lights to shine



'It's not about statues at all: it's about that statue, in this city, at this time.' The plinth where the statue of Edward Colston stood, Bristol, 6 January 2022. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Thu 6 Jan 2022 12.19 EST

On 7 June 2020, I was part of a group of protesters who pulled down a statue of the slave trader Edward Colston and [threw it into the Bristol harbour](#). I have never felt and will never feel that what we did was wrong, and I have never thought I was a criminal. But it's a beautiful thing that a jury has sat through all the evidence, and [come to the same conclusion](#).

I had a good feeling about the trial throughout, but I had to prepare for both outcomes – it could have gone either way. Our defence rested on the argument that we had indeed pulled down the statue during a Black Lives Matter protest, but that given Colston’s role in the Royal African Company, which enslaved tens of thousands and was responsible for the deaths of an [estimated 19,000 people](#), this wasn’t a case of criminal damage.



Rhian Graham, far right, with (from left) Sage Willoughby, Jake Skuse and Milo Ponsford outside Bristol Crown Court, 5 January 2022.

Obviously I don’t think that this verdict means we should start pulling down all the statues in the UK. Really, it’s not about statues at all: it’s about that statue, in this city, at this time. It really is a very particular backdrop, and the jury obviously came to an understanding of that nuance. The legacy of all the people who have protested against the statue and campaigned to end the “cult of Colston” in Bristol gave us legs to stand on – groups such as [Countering Colston](#) and [Bristol Radical History Group](#). Without all those who have dug deep into history, we wouldn’t have stood a chance – our actions would have been seen as criminal damage by the jury.

My barrister Blinne Ní Ghrálaigh said that jury trials are one of the backbones of our democracy, and of the legal system, because they allow for decisions like this. However, there already seems to have been a direct

government response to the Colston statue toppling in the form of a clause in the new police, crime, sentencing and courts bill, which states that if you pull down a monument you can get up to 10 years in prison, as opposed to the previous three months maximum. The bill as a whole will allow police to shut down protests on the basis of noise or “serious annoyance”, and will make it easier to convict protesters. Even under our current laws people charged with rioting are facing time in prison that seems completely disproportionate to their actions.

Our case has demonstrated the value and power of protest. One of the arguments made by our legal team was that the cultural and historical value of the statue has actually increased since it was taken down. And something they weren't allowed to mention to the jury, but which an art valuer confirmed for us, was that its monetary value has increased by up to 50-fold since we pulled it down. In that sense, how can it be said that we damaged anything? That statue is a far more useful tool for history and learning than it ever was before, which negates any of the arguments made about us “erasing history”. You can't erase history. What Colston and the myths around him have done is shroud history by deeming him – as the statue's plaque says – “one of [Bristol's] most virtuous and wise sons”. We are trying to shine a light in places people don't want lights shining.

I hope this outcome has given a platform to the people in Bristol who have been fighting this battle far longer than I have. The city has a clear duty now to reckon with its past and set up memorials or museums to the slave trade, and recognise that so much of the prosperity enjoyed today in the UK and Bristol comes off the back of historical atrocities. But Colston represents something even wider than that. Wealth disparity and inequality affects all races. You hear some counter-arguments to Black Lives Matter that the white working class lose out because Black British people get some kind of special treatment, but that's just not the case. One of the main lessons from all this is to remember that just because someone else is struggling and you have empathy for their struggles, it doesn't invalidate your own. We all need to have empathy for one another.

This verdict is not about me, it's not about Sage Willoughby or Milo Ponsford or Jake Skuse – the other members of the so-called Colston Four

who stood trial with me. It's about Bristol, and it's a win for the people of Bristol. It's another step along the way towards racial justice.

- Rhian Graham is a stage manager and facilitator and was one of four people who stood trial for the removal of the statue of slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol
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## US Capitol attack

# Biden condemns Trump's 'web of lies' a year on from deadly Capitol assault

- President blames predecessor for role in violence of 6 January
- 'The lies that drove the anger and madness have not abated'
- [Biden denounces Trump in anniversary speech – follow live](#)

01:43

Joe Biden blames Donald Trump's 'web of lies' for US Capitol attack – video

*[Lauren Gambino](#) in Washington  
[@laurenenegambino](#)*

Thu 6 Jan 2022 16.03 EST

Joe Biden on Thursday forcefully denounced [Donald Trump](#) for spreading a "web of lies" about the legitimacy of the 2020 election in a desperate attempt to cling to power, accusing the former president and his allies of holding a "dagger at the throat of American democracy".

The US president condemned his predecessor's efforts to overturn the 2020 election as a "failed" pursuit, but one that continues to imperil American democracy one year after the [6 January insurrection at the US Capitol](#), when a violent mob of Trump loyalists breached the Capitol in an effort to stop the [certification](#) of Biden's presidential [election victory](#).

In a speech from the Capitol marking the first anniversary of the deadly assault, Biden was unsparing in his assessment of the harm caused by the "defeated former president" whose "bruised ego matters more to him than our democracy or constitution".

“For the first time in our history, the president had not just lost an election, he tried to prevent the peaceful transfer of power as a violent mob reached the Capitol,” Biden said, never mentioning Trump by name. “But they failed.”

And yet the falsehoods and conspiracies that were a precursor to the violence still persist, Biden warned. He asked Americans to recommit to the protection of the nation’s 200-year-old system of government.

“At this moment we must decide: what kind of nation we are going to be?” Biden said, speaking from the National Statuary Hall in the Capitol’s inner sanctum, one of several spots overrun and defiled by rioters on 6 January. He warned: “The lies that drove the anger and madness we saw in this place, they have not abated.”

Trump originally planned to hold a news conference from his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida on Thursday evening, but canceled amid pressure from [Republicans](#) and conservative allies who worried it would be a harmful distraction.

But that did not prevent Trump from issuing a series of furious statements in which he continued to perpetuate the “big lie”, claims that were rejected by dozens of courts, Republican election officials and members of his own administration.

“They got away with something, and it is leading to our country’s destruction,” Trump wrote in one such salvo that made no mention of the violence that occurred in his name that day.

Four people died in the chaos of the hours-long siege, as rioters overran police barricades, wielding flagpoles and fire extinguishers to break windows and battle law enforcement officers. One US Capitol police officer, Brian Sicknick, died a day after being attacked by rioters and 140 police officers were injured.

Most Republicans were physically absent from the Capitol on Thursday, with many of party’s senators, including the Senate minority leader, Mitch

McConnell, traveling to Georgia for the funeral of their former colleague Johnny Isakson, who died in December.

In a statement, McConnell called the attack “antithetical to the rule of law” and said he supported efforts to hold accountable those who broke the law.

But he did not denounce Trump as he and many Republicans did in the aftermath of the attack. But a year on, the shock and revulsion have dissipated, and Trump remains the most powerful and popular figure in a Republican party, and questions about the legitimacy of Biden’s election have become a litmus test for candidates seeking the former president’s endorsement.

Biden’s speech opened a day-long program of events on Capitol Hill to mark the anniversary.

Throughout the day, members grew emotional as they recounted their memories of the insurrection – the sound of pounding fists at the door of the chamber, the whirring of the escape hoods, the shock of a Confederate flag in the hallowed halls.

Others recounted quiet moments of grief and acts of heroism – the bravery of the police officers who defended the Capitol and the aides with the presence of mind to carry to safety the wooden boxes containing the electoral votes.

Presiding over the House floor on Thursday, Speaker Nancy Pelosi declared that democracy had prevailed when members returned to the Capitol after the riot to ratify Biden’s electoral victory.

“The Congress, because of the courage of all of you, rose to honor our oath and protect our democracy,” she said, before leading members – all Democrats with the exception of congresswoman Liz Cheney – in a moment of silence.



Biden wipes away a tear as he listens to Kamala Harris's speech.  
Photograph: Drew Angerer/AFP/Getty Images

Speaking just before Biden, vice-president Kamala Harris, a former California senator who was in the Capitol on the morning of 6 January last year, said the rioters not only defiled the building but assaulted “the institutions, the values, the ideals that generations of Americans have marched, picketed and shed blood to establish and defend”.

In their comments, Harris and Biden called for the protection of voting rights. Harris urged lawmakers to pass the voting rights bills currently stalled before Congress.

The insurrection was the last desperate attempt by Trump to overturn the results of the 2020 election, after a series of legal challenges and a pressure campaign failed.

On that day, a mob of his supporters stormed the Capitol after Trump encouraged them to “fight like hell” as Congress convened to certify the election result. But lawmakers who had initially fled for their lives during the siege returned to the chamber, shaken but resolved, to make Trump’s electoral defeat official.

In the year since the attack, elected officials, historians and democracy advocates have warned that the threat of future violence remains high. Trump and his allies have spent the past months rewriting the history of January, downplaying the violence and shifting the blame.

It was the worst attack on the Capitol since it was burned by British forces in 1814.

Much of Biden's speech was devoted to establishing fact from fiction about the events of 6 January, as a revisionist history of the attack, promoted by Trump and his allies, takes root.

"That's what great nations do: they don't bury the truth, they face up to it," he said. "We must be absolutely clear about what is the truth and what is a lie."

"This wasn't a group of tourists. This was an armed insurrection. They weren't looking to uphold the will of the people, they were looking to deny the will of the people," Biden said.

All the while, Biden charged, Trump watched the violence unfold on TV from the private dining room near the Oval office. "He can't accept that he lost."

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## Dementia

# Number of adults with dementia to exceed 150m by 2050, study finds

Experts describe data from first study of its kind as shocking and warn of ‘rapidly growing threat’



Experts say dementia presents ‘a major and rapidly growing threat to future health and social care systems’. Photograph: Cultura Creative RF/Alamy

*[Andrew Gregory](#)* Health editor

Thu 6 Jan 2022 18.30 EST

The number of adults living with dementia worldwide is on course to nearly triple to 153 million by 2050, according to the first study of its kind.

Experts described the data as shocking and said it was clear that dementia presented “a major and rapidly growing threat to future health and social care systems” in every community, country and continent.

US researchers said the dramatic rise from an estimated 57 million cases in 2019 would be primarily due to population growth and ageing. However, several risk factors for dementia – including obesity, smoking and high blood sugar – would also fuel the increase, they said.

Improvements in global education access are projected to reduce global dementia prevalence by 6.2 million cases by 2050. But this will be countered by anticipated trends in obesity, high blood sugar and smoking, which are expected to result in an extra 6.8 million dementia cases.

The Global Burden of Disease study is the first to provide forecasting estimates for adults aged 40 and older across 195 countries worldwide. The findings are published in [the Lancet Public Health](#).

Dementia cases will rise in every country, with the largest growth in north Africa and the Middle East (367%) and eastern sub-Saharan Africa (357%). The countries projected to record the largest rises worldwide are Qatar (1,926%), the United Arab Emirates (1,795%) and Bahrain (1,084%).

The smallest estimated increases are in the high-income Asia Pacific (53%) and western Europe (74%), the study suggests. Japan is expected to have the smallest increase in the world at 27%.

In the UK, the number of dementia cases is projected to increase by 75%, from just over 907,000 in 2019 to almost 1.6 million in 2050.

Hilary Evans, the chief executive of Alzheimer's Research UK, who was not involved in the study, said the figures “lay bare the shocking scale of dementia across the world”.

She said: “We need to see concerted global action to avoid this number tripling. Dementia doesn’t just affect individuals, it can devastate whole families and networks of friends and loved ones. The heartbreaking personal cost of dementia goes hand in hand with huge economic and societal impacts, strengthening the case to governments across the world to do more to protect lives now and in the future.”

Dementia is already one of the major causes of disability and dependency among older people globally, with costs in 2019 estimated at more than \$1tn (£750bn).

Although dementia mainly affects older people, it is not an inevitable consequence of ageing. A Lancet commission in 2020 suggested up to 40% of cases could be prevented or delayed if exposure was eliminated to 12 known risk factors: low education, high blood pressure, hearing impairment, smoking, midlife obesity, depression, physical inactivity, diabetes, social isolation, excessive alcohol consumption, head injury and air pollution.

The researchers behind the new study called for more aggressive prevention efforts to reduce dementia risk through lifestyle factors such as education, diet and exercise, alongside research to discover effective disease-modifying treatments and new modifiable risk factors to reduce the future burden of disease.

The lead author, Emma Nichols, from the Institute for [Health](#) Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, said: “To have the greatest impact, we need to reduce exposure to the leading risk factors in each country. For most, this means scaling up locally appropriate, low-cost programmes that support healthier diets, more exercise, quitting smoking, and better access to education.”

The authors acknowledged their analysis was limited by a lack of high-quality data in several parts of the world and by studies using different methodologies and definitions of dementia.

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[Peru](#)

## Peruvian statue's giant penis thrills tourists but vandals are turned off

Visitors stop for selfies with 9ft representation of fertility symbol from pre-Columbian Mochica culture but phallus already damaged



The statue in Moche, the district named after the ancient culture. The vandals reportedly fired shots in the air as they fled. Photograph: AP

*[Dan Collyns](#) in Lima*

*[@yachay\\_dc](#)*

Fri 7 Jan 2022 04.30 EST

The newly erected statue of a grinning man with an enormous phallus has prompted delight and rage in an archaeological hotspot in northern [Peru](#) where it has been on show since the beginning of the year.

Although perhaps not anatomically correct, the crimson fibreglass structure is a faithful representation of a ceramic vessel from Peru's pre-Columbian Mochica culture, whose people lived in the region between 150 and 700 AD.

A 15-minute drive from the centre of the regional capital, Trujillo, the statue has already proved hugely popular with passers-by and tourists who pose beneath the 1.5-meter member for selfies.

But despite its historical fidelity, the 9ft-tall fertility symbol has already been attacked by vandals who smashed a hole in the statue and reportedly fired shots in the air as they fled.

Arturo Fernández Bazán, the mayor of Moche, the district named after the ancient culture, told local media: "At two in the morning three hooded criminals held a knife to the security guard's neck to keep him from reacting or calling his colleagues on the radio, and two of them damaged the phallus."

The roadside monument to the ancient pre-Inca culture renowned for its sexually explicit ceramics has also drawn tourists, as the statue stands on the route between the imposing adobe temples of the sun and the moon, or the Huacas del Sol y la Luna.

Fernández Bazán said he plans to erect up to 30 more statues representing the Mochica culture – about a third of them representing erotic acts or childbirth – along the archaeological circuit.



The roadside monument has drawn tourists, as the statue stands on the route between the adobe temples of the sun and the moon. Photograph: AP

“In our Mochica culture, these types of ceramics vessels were not considered erotic but represented the Godhead,” Fernández Bazán, who worked as a gynaecologist before entering local politics, told local media.

“The [Ancient] Greeks had another type of representation. We have been more aggressive and more direct with our feelings,” he added.

The statue has provoked diverse reactions posted on the Moche municipality Facebook page, some saying that they found the statue offensive or that it should not be viewed by children.

Gisela Ortiz, Peru’s culture minister, said: “The idea that children shouldn’t see it or it’s too offensive belongs to the time of obscurantism.”

She told the Guardian. “As Peruvians, we should all feel proud of our diverse heritage, including the sexual or erotic part, which is inherent to the human being.”

She added that while “nothing justifies the violence against the security guard”, greater efforts to explain the cultural significance of the statue to the

local population could help avert further controversy.

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## Women's rights and gender equality

# Taliban stop Afghan women from using bathhouses in northern provinces

Decision to close public hammams – most people's only chance for a warm wash – sparks anger in light of country's mounting crises



Men and boys at a hammam in Herat, Afghanistan. As well as providing washing facilities lacking in most homes, they allow Islamic ritual cleaning to take place. Photograph: Majid Saeedi/Getty

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[Stefanie Glinski](#)

Fri 7 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

The Taliban sparked outrage this week by announcing that women in northern [Afghanistan](#) would no longer be allowed to use communal bathhouses.

The use of bathhouses, or hammams, is an ancient tradition that remains for many people the only chance for a warm wash during the country's bitterly cold winters.

Women, who regularly use the bathhouses for ritual cleaning and purification required under Islamic law, said this was another example of the [Taliban](#) tightening its grip and infringing their basic rights. They fear the ban will be extended to other parts of the country.

On Monday, Sardar Mohammad Heydari, from the provincial branch of the Taliban's Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, said women would be banned from bathhouses in Balkh and Herat provinces.

However, another Taliban commander, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told the Guardian that he did not support the decision, adding that Afghanistan's new leaders should focus on "bigger struggles".

The [Taliban's takeover](#) in August has plunged Afghanistan into a [humanitarian crisis](#). Millions of people are facing hunger and most are unable to afford firewood or coal for heating during the colder months. The majority of households do not have direct access to water, instead having to rely on public pumps or water trucks.

The UN predicts that 97% of Afghans could be [living below the poverty line](#) by the middle of the year. Even the 40 afghani (about 30p) entrance fee to the hammam is difficult to find, but many women have been scrambling to do so anyway.



A hammam in Herat. Water supply in the area is poor, and many people use the hammam to bathe. Photograph: Jalil Rezayee/EPA

Women in the north-western city of Herat, where only 39% of neighbourhoods have adequate access to water and sanitation, reported that some bathhouses had already closed.

Winuss Azizi, from the non-profit organisation Visions for Children in Afghanistan, said most households in Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif did not have

the capacity or the facilities to heat large quantities of water.

“That’s why people rely on hammams in winter,” she said, adding: “Islam requires religious cleansing after menstruation, giving birth and sexual intercourse, which many visit bathhouses for. I have regularly seen women performing their purification prayer rituals at the hammam.”

Lina Ebrahimi, 26, who lives in Herat, said: “We have a small house with no space for a full bathroom with heated water; that’s why I used to go to the hammam. Other families might have no bathing facilities at all and fully depend on public bathhouses for cleaning. This opportunity is now taken from them.”

Women were barred from using public hammams during the Taliban’s 1996–2001 rule. Many of the ancient bathhouses were neglected for years and revived only after the 2001 US-led invasion.

Heather Barr, Human Rights Watch’s associate director of women’s rights, said she was “enraged” at “the cruelty of denying women the only relief from the cold for no reason at all”.

She said: “They seem to have the intention to want to meddle in every aspect of women’s lives. We heard warnings from Afghan women from the start, saying that the situation will get worse. Today, we’re seeing evidence that they were right.

“Why are they thinking of [stopping] women going to the hammam when people are starving?” said Barr.

This week, the Taliban also ordered shopkeepers to remove the heads of all mannequins, calling them unIslamic.

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## US news

# China scientist pleads guilty to stealing trade secret from Monsanto

Xiang Haitao admitted to stealing software developed by the agribusiness giant to take to China, says justice department



Xiang Haitao pleaded guilty in Missouri, where Monsanto is based, to one count of conspiracy to commit economic espionage on behalf of China.  
Photograph: Michael B Thomas/AFP/Getty Images

*Agence France-Presse*  
Thu 6 Jan 2022 21.52 EST

A Chinese national has pleaded guilty to conspiring to steal a trade secret from American agribusiness giant Monsanto, the US justice department said.

Xiang Haitao, 44, was employed as an imaging scientist by Monsanto and its subsidiary, The Climate Corporation, from 2008 to 2017, the department

said in a statement.

Xiang pleaded guilty on Thursday in Missouri, where Monsanto is based, to one count of conspiracy to commit economic espionage on behalf of [China](#), it said.

According to the justice department, Xiang stole proprietary software developed by Monsanto to help farmers improve crop yields.

“Despite Xiang’s agreements to protect Monsanto’s intellectual property and repeated training on his obligations to do so, Xiang has now admitted that he stole a trade secret from Monsanto, transferred it to a memory card and attempted to take it to the People’s Republic of China for the benefit of the Chinese government,” assistant attorney general Matthew Olsen said.

“Mr Xiang used his insider status at a major international company to steal valuable trade secrets for use in his native China,” said US attorney Sayler Fleming for the Eastern District of Missouri. “We cannot allow US citizens or foreign nationals to hand sensitive business information over to competitors in other countries.”

Xiang is to be sentenced on 7 April. He faces a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison and a potential fine of up to \$5m.

A Chinese foreign ministry, speaking in 2019 at the time Xiang was charged by US authorities, said Washington was trying to use the case to back its accusations that China steals technology from US companies.

“We resolutely oppose the US side’s attempts to use the case, which we regard as an ordinary, isolated incident, to hype up claims of China’s organised and systematic attempts to steal intellectual property from the US,” spokesman Geng Shuang said.

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## Headlines monday 3 january 2022

- [Coronavirus Just refresh webpage, UK minister tells people trying to get tests](#)
- [Live Covid news: ‘nothing in the data’ to suggest more restrictions needed in England, says minister; South Korea reports first Omicron deaths](#)
- [Health Lockdown hobbies led to thousands of injuries in England, NHS data suggests](#)
- [Scotland Western Isles looks to end stigma of being country's only all-male council](#)

## Coronavirus

# Just refresh webpage, UK minister tells people trying to get Covid tests

Nadhim Zahawi says supply of lateral flow tests increased to 300m a month and English schools to receive stock

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

01:42

Minister tells people trying to get Covid tests to 'just refresh webpage' – video

*[Jamie Grierson](#)*

*[@JamieGrierson](#)*

Mon 3 Jan 2022 04.21 EST

People struggling to get lateral flow tests for Covid “should just refresh” their webpage, the education secretary has suggested, as concerns mount over the impact of the [Omicron variant](#) on the country’s workforce.

Nadhim Zahawi told Sky News he had organised a separate supply of tests for schools in England ahead of [children’s return to the classrooms](#), amid requests they take at least two a week.

But when it was put to the cabinet minister that shortages of tests were still being reported intermittently across the country, he said: “If people feel that they can’t get a supply they should just refresh their webpage.”

Zahawi said supply had been increased to 300m a month and delivery capacity trebled to 900,000 a day.

In addition to testing, the government will ask secondary students in England to [wear masks in classrooms](#) once again. And it was announced that an additional 7,000 air cleaning units will be provided to schools, colleges and early years settings to improve ventilation in teaching spaces.

Classes [could be merged](#) if the number of school staff off sick grew too high, the education secretary has said.

He told Sky News: “The priority is to keep schools open. The testing, the staffing support we’re putting in place, and of course the ventilation is going to make a big difference to schools this year. The most important thing is to keep them open.

“We monitor staff absenteeism, I just said to you we’re running at about 8% last year. If that rises further then we look at things like merging classes, teaching in bigger numbers.”

But Zahawi repeated the government line that “there’s nothing in the data” to suggest further coronavirus measures will be needed later this week.

He told BBC Breakfast that [plan B measures](#) would be reviewed on Wednesday, but added: “There’s nothing in the data that gives me any concern that we need to go beyond where we are at.

“There’s some really good data from London that it looks like the infection rates are plateauing, if not yet coming down. But we are seeing leakage into the over-50s in terms of infections, and it’s generally the over-50s who end up with severe infection and hospitalisation.”

Zahawi moved to reassure patients that the NHS was “very good at being able to move staff around”, amid fears over shortages in the health service.

He said the NHS was used to dealing with staff being off over the winter and during “big flu viruses”.

He told BBC Breakfast: “The NHS is very good at being able to move staff around within the system. They have an infrastructure to do that. We now

have 10,000 more nurses and 3,000 more doctors than we had last year working in the NHS.

“But the NHS is very good at sort of making sure that staff shortages are monitored and dealt with pretty well. They’ve done it over many years in winter when we’ve been, you know, have big flu viruses around.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/03/just-refresh-webpage-uk-minister-tells-people-trying-covid-tests>

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[\*\*Coronavirus live\*\*](#)

[\*\*Coronavirus\*\*](#)

# **Ontario announces new curbs after ‘tsunami’ of infections; Scottish parliament to be recalled – as it happened**

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## Health

# Lockdown hobbies led to thousands of injuries in England, NHS data suggests

Hospital admissions figures show extent of accidents as people turned to cooking, DIY and other pursuits

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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More than 2,700 people in England were admitted in 2020-21 after an accident with a non-powered hand tool such as a hammer or a saw.  
Photograph: Izel Photography - IP3/Alamy

*[Jessica Murray](#)*

Mon 3 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Popular lockdown pursuits such as cooking, DIY and buying pets led to thousands of people needing hospital care for injuries, figures suggest.

Analysis of hospital admissions in England by the PA Media news agency showed that thousands were treated for injuries sustained as a result of activities that surged in popularity as people were confined to their homes.

The data from [NHS](#) Digital for 2020-21 showed that more than 5,600 people attended hospital after coming into contact with a powered hand-tool, and more than 2,700 were admitted after an accident with a non-powered hand-tool such as a hammer or a saw.

Figures also showed that 349 people were admitted after injuring themselves with lawnmowers. More than 5,300 people were admitted after falling from playground equipment, with the average age of patients being nine and a half years.

However, some parents and grandparents were involved as well, with dozens of people over the age of 30 admitted after falling from playground equipment, including eight people over the age of 90.

Data showed that 962 people were treated in hospital for injuries sustained while climbing trees.

Lockdowns also [triggered a “pet baby boom”](#) with data from the Pet Food Manufacturers’ Association in March showing that 3.2m households in the UK had acquired a pet since the start of the pandemic.

These new animals did not always bring joy, however, as 7,386 people were admitted to English hospitals after being bitten or struck by a dog, along with 47 people suffering a rat bite, and 60 people who had come into contact with a venomous spider. Four people were admitted after coming into contact with a scorpion.

Many people turned their hand to improving their cooking skills, and admissions data showed that 2,243 needed to be admitted after coming into contact with hot drinks, food, fats and cooking oils.

Although many were grateful for the sunny weather in the first lockdown, 153 people were admitted to hospital with sunburn.

The figures only include people who were admitted to hospital, and many more injuries would have been dealt with by A&E doctors and GPs. The figures for most accidents and injuries were lower than in previous years as people generally spent more time indoors.

A spokesperson for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents said: “The publication of hospital admission figures always serves to remind us of the breadth of accident types that can result in an injury so severe that admission to hospital is required. In among the stranger entries in the database are some worrying trends that serve to highlight the accident challenges that we face. Accidents are preventable.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jan/03/lockdown-hobbies-led-to-thousands-of-injuries-in-england-nhs-data-suggests>

## [Scotland](#)

# Western Isles looks to end stigma of being Scotland's only all-male council

Officials plan workshop to persuade more women to stand – but some say ‘it doesn’t look like a safe space’



‘This isn’t wholly representative’: Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, or the Western Isles council, after the 2017 election. Photograph: Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

*[Severin Carrell](#) Scotland editor*

*[@severincarrell](#)*

Mon 3 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

An appeal has been issued for women to stand as councillors in the Western Isles in 2022 in an effort to end the Hebridean islands’ unwelcome status as the only Scottish authority with an all-male council.

Islanders and equality campaigners were stunned in 2017 when none of the seven women who stood were elected for the Western Isles. Only one, an incumbent, came close to winning a seat in the 31-member authority.

Alarmed officials on *Comhairle nan Eilean Siar*, Gaelic for the Western Isles council, are staging [an online workshop in January](#) to persuade more women to stand in May's elections, in concert with [Elect Her](#), a group specialising in combating gender inequalities in government.

Nearly 20 women have signed up for the workshop, and for many involved it has raised deeper questions for the authority, its leadership and the community as a whole.

Western Isles has been the only all-male council in [Scotland](#), and possibly the UK, for nearly five years. "It's always concerning when a large sector of the population is unrepresented," said Malcolm Burr, the council's chief executive. "When our all-male *comhairle* was elected in 2017, we thought: this isn't wholly representative of the community, what should we do about it?"

Paradoxically, voting rates for Western Isles council elections are among the highest in Scotland. [Women](#) are prominent and influential leaders in community and business life, yet only a handful ever win seats. The peak was five in 2007. Few stand for election.

One barrier is the ban on council employees being elected to the same authority, to prevent conflicts of interest. On the mainland, councillors can work for a neighbouring authority; in the Outer Hebrides, that is impractical. Western Isles council is the largest employer, with 2,185 staff for a population of 26,500; in many roles, most employees are women.

Burr said the rules now allowed a council employee to stand for election. But they would have to quit their council job if they won, exchanging the security of a career, fixed hours and a public-sector salary for the £18,604 a councillor earned, with no guarantee of re-election.



‘If you’re being paid as a councillor, there’s more asked of you,’ said Zena Stewart, seen near her home at Bayble in Point. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Zena Stewart, a former councillor who topped her ward’s election in 2012, only stood after retiring from the Nicolson Institute, the secondary school for Lewis, partly for that reason. “If you’re being paid as a councillor, there’s more asked of you,” she said. “I had to attend every meeting unless there was an obvious reason why I couldn’t.”

Katie Laing, a part-time teacher, journalist and vice-convenor of Stornoway community council, said that was a significant obstacle, in particular for women with children.



‘Speaking personally, being a councillor doesn’t look to me like it’s a safe space’: Katie Laing at Cuddy Point in Stornoway. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

In addition, a large majority of Western Isles councillors traditionally stand as independents, limiting the scope for positively discriminating in favour of female candidates – a strategy routinely used by political parties in mainland elections. Campaigners say that amplifies the importance of already powerful institutions such as the church – candidates known to local congregations have a ready-made electorate, and men dominate many Hebridean churches.

Stewart said councillors connected to churches often won because they had earned respect; the same could apply to golf club leaders.

Agnes Rennie, a community leader who also won election in later life, said councillors were expected to be present at key community events, involving long distances and late evenings away from home. For women with families, that burden could be onerous. “You are measured against whether you’re there or not,” she said.



Agnes Rennie of the Galson Estate Trust. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

For some women, there was the perception council life was unjustifiably combative and toxic, said Laing, particularly in a small island community where conformity could be harshly policed.

Rennie said much greater emphasis on flexible meeting times, video conferencing and policies allowing absences for those with family responsibilities was needed. So, too, were visible role models so “women can imagine themselves in that role. It’s a big step for many people,” she said.

A long tradition of community leadership and voluntary work meant women “have tremendous skills and experience that would bring so much to the role; I have no doubt women bring a different perspective”, she said.

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## 2022.01.03 - Spotlight

- 'I want Mickey by Toni Basil played at my funeral' Sophie Ellis-Bextor's honest playlist
- New year's resolutions How to get into the habit of saving
- Environment 10 beautiful winter birds to spot in UK towns and cities
- What's new, pussycat? How feline film stars are trained to perform

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[Honest playlist](#)[Sophie Ellis-Bextor](#)

## ‘I want Mickey by Toni Basil played at my funeral’: Sophie Ellis-Bextor’s honest playlist



‘In 2020’s lockdown, we did Kitchen Discos’ ... Sophie Ellis-Bextor.  
Photograph: Richard Jones

The singer loves a bit of disco on the dancefloor and Prince in the bedroom, but when it comes to karaoke, she keeps faith with George Michael



[Elle Hunt](#)

Mon 3 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

### **The first single that I ever bought**

Our House by Madness. I was four, so the actual purchase was instigated by my father. He was such a big music fan and wanted to make sure that I knew this was the first song I was buying. I still adore it. In 2020's lockdown, we did [Kitchen Discos](#): I sang on my Instagram with the kids. After 10 weeks, I chose to close the whole thing with Our House. It celebrates the glory and chaos of family life.

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### **The song that is my karaoke go-to**

I used to sing Shoop by Salt-N-Pepa, and it's really fun to do the rap – but when you do a karaoke version, the backing track is quite slow, so you get people looking a bit concerned for you as you trip your way through it. Basically, what you want is a people-pleaser. The one I go to is Faith by George Michael. It just always works.

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### **The song I've streamed the most**

In the days of having an Alexa, the ruler of the roost is my little one, Mickey. He's two, and he will get a passion for a song and just play it over and over. For a while it was Let's Get Loud by Jennifer Lopez; now we've progressed to In Da Getto by Skrillex and J Balvin. He likes his heavy dance and his reggaeton as well. It could be a lot worse.

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### **The best song to play at a party**

If you want something a bit slinky, Grace Jones – Pull Up to the Bumper. But if you're trying to entice people to the dancefloor, then I'd probably go disco. Thelma Houston's Don't Leave Me This Way is very seductive.

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### **The best song to have sex to**

For music that's got that undercurrent of "the man singing wants you to get saucy", it's got to be Darling Nikki by Prince – you're not reading between the lines with that one. Kiss has got lots of flirtation, too. Gett Off would be my top one.

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### **The song I want played at my funeral**

The one that I've said since I was really small is Mickey by Toni Basil – which, I grant you, is going to be quite weird. It came out when I was about two, and it made a big impression on me. It's got such urgency and passion and it's a little bit off-kilter. It's probably not one of the Top 100 hits for funerals, but I think of it as "one of my songs".

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### **The song I pretend to hate that I secretly like**

I'm not really afraid of saying what I like. I don't believe in guilty pleasures. The things I say are my favourites *are* my favourites. There's a song that came out by [Rufus Wainwright](#) song, Peaceful Afternoon, that's just so beautiful. I like Everything Now by Arcade Fire, Harmony Hall by Vampire Weekend.

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## **The song that is my actual favourite**

It depends what mood you're in. But some songs are just pretty perfect. Something like Wichita Lineman [by Glen Campbell], it's a very beautiful song – just glorious. It sounds wistful and captures the purity of wanting to find that connection with someone: you're sending out your message to them. That's all of us, isn't it? Hoping that someone's on the line.

*Sophie Ellis-Bextor's Kitchen Disco* is available on BBC Sounds.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/jan/03/i-want-mickey-by-toni-basil-played-at-my-funeral-sophie-ellis-bextors-honest-playlist>

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## New year's resolutions: how to get into the habit of saving



To save more you need a goal to aim at. Illustration: Jamie Wignall

From building up a nest egg by earning interest on small change, to using an app for budgeting



Rupert Jones

Mon 3 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

## **Pay off costly debts first**

There is no point trying to save if you are burdened by costly debts.

The average easy access savings account offers less than 0.2% interest, while on some borrowing you could be paying in excess of 20%. Aim to pay off expensive credit card, store card or overdraft debts before you think about putting money aside.

## **Start a rainy-day fund**

Everyone should aim to have some cash in an easily accessible savings account to provide a financial safety net if the worst happens.

Essential expenses should include items such as housing costs, money for food and important bills

“We all need robust savings to cope with the nasty surprises life tends to throw at us,” says Sarah Coles, a personal finance analyst at the investment firm Hargreaves Lansdown. “We should be working towards three to six months’ worth of essential expenses in an easy access account.”

Essential expenses should include items such as housing costs, money for food and important bills. Do not be put off by how much this comes to – anything you can put away towards it will help if things do go wrong.

## Have a goal

Beyond rainy-day savings, you may want to put aside other cash – and having a purpose will motivate you. “Setting a goal and giving it a name can help keep you on track,” says Annabelle Williams, a personal finance specialist at the investment firm Nutmeg. “By attaching meaning to your savings goals, such as a new home, a specific trip, or big purchase, you’re more likely to stick to your savings habit.”

## Make it a regular habit



Could you do more with your savings? Photograph: Viktoria Rodriguez/Getty Images

Regular savings accounts are a good option for those new to saving. You put aside money each month – usually via a standing order from your current account.

These accounts offer some of the best interest rates out there, although the maximum you can tuck away often isn't that high.

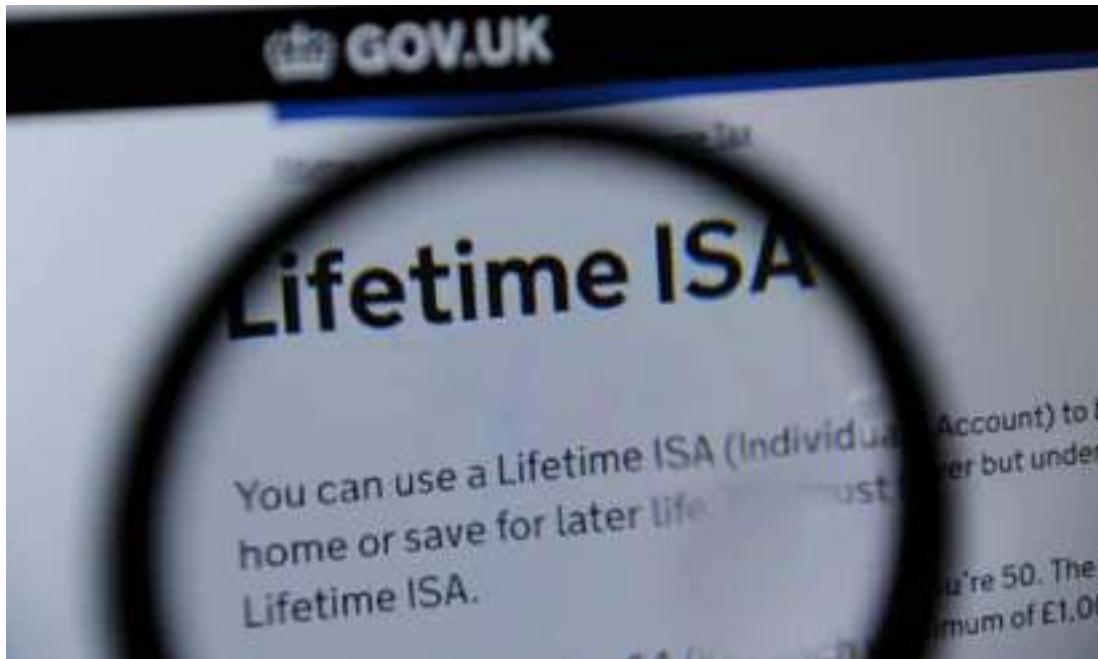
If you have a NatWest current account, you can take advantage of its Digital Regular Saver account, which pays a market-leading 3% interest and is, it says, designed to help customers with little or no savings develop a savings habit and build financial capability.

However, you can only pay in up to £50 each month. TSB's Monthly Saver pays 2% and lets you save between £25 and £125 a month – again, you need to have a current account with the bank to open one.

Most regular savings accounts run for a year, and the interest is paid at the end of the period. You will then need to shop around for a new account for your lump sum.

## Get some help

For those on a low income, the government's [Help to Save](#) account is definitely worth considering. It lets certain people on working tax credit, or receiving universal credit, get a bonus of 50p for every £1 they save over four years. You can put in between £1 and £50 each month, and the most you can earn in four years is £1,200 in bonus money. But paying into this account could affect some people's eligibility for benefits and how much they get, so read the details carefully before you commit.



You can put away up to £4,000 each year until you are 50 in a lifetime Isa.

Photograph: Louisa Svensson/Alamy

Then there's the [lifetime Isa](#), which lets people save for a property or retirement. You can put away up to £4,000 each year until you are 50, and the government will add a 25% bonus to your savings, up to a maximum of £1,000 a year. To open one you must be aged 18 to 39.

## Round up your spending ...

Several banks are making saving easier by getting you to do it whenever you pay for something.

Lloyds Bank has Save the Change. When you buy something with your debit card, if your account is in credit it will round up the amount spent to the nearest pound, and transfer the difference into a nominated Lloyds savings account. "If a purchase is £2.20, the bank will transfer 80p, which could see someone save £5.60 in a week if this is spent every day," says Rachel Springall at the financial data provider Moneyfacts.

The digital bank Chase does the same and deposits the small change into a separate account where it will earn interest at 5% for 12 months.

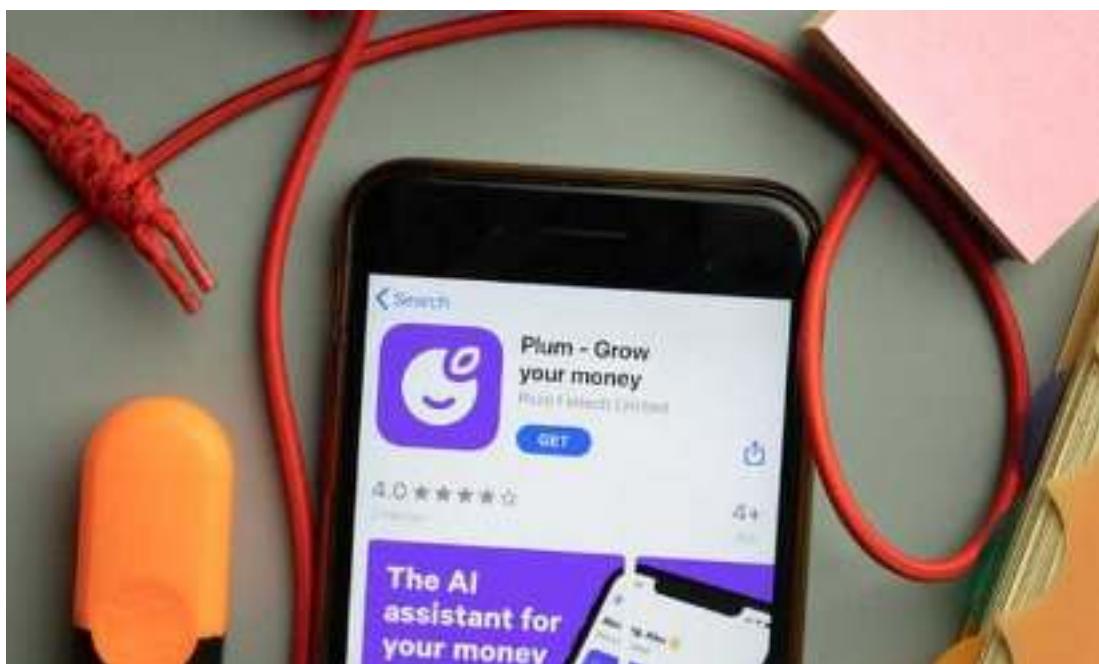
## **... or round it down**

Another technique is to log into your current account, look at the balance and mentally “round it down”, Williams says. “If you have £221.60 until payday, round it down to £210 and move £11.60 into savings. It all adds up over time.”

## **Use an app**

Chip and Plum are just two of the apps that offer “auto-save” features. Every few days the tech does the maths and automatically transfers some of your money into another account, which little by little adds up.

Plum’s free option includes auto-saving, while Chip is changing its pricing in mid-January so that standard membership will be free.



You can use a money management app such as Plum to help make the most of your finances. Photograph: Postmodern Studio/Alamy

A budgeting app could also help. Springall suggests Money Dashboard, which automatically categorises spending into “buckets”, such as household bills and groceries – this lets you see what you can afford to save once the essentials are covered.

Another budgeting app to check out is Emma, which analyses transactions across accounts and classifies them into spending categories. “Great budgeting starts with careful planning and reliable insights,” its website promises.

## Fix for a better return

Some of the best interest rates are offered by fixed-rate savings accounts, where you typically tie up your money for a year or more.

Of course, that won’t suit everyone. At the time of writing, you could get about 1.3% on a one-year fixed-rate bond, about 1.6% on a two-year bond, and about 2.1% on a five-year bond.

For the latest rates, keep a close eye on Moneyfacts’ tables.



You can receive rewards if you switch banks. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

## Switch current account

If your current account isn’t cutting the mustard, you can get some free cash – enough, perhaps, to kick off a nest egg – by moving it to a new provider.

Many banks pay £100-plus if you move to them.

Nationwide will give you up to £125 if you are a member and switch to its FlexDirect current account. If you are not yet a member, it is £100.

Meanwhile, HSBC is offering £150 if you move to its Advance or Premier accounts. Typically, the money is paid into the current account you have switched to, shortly after the move has been completed. You can then use this cash to start a new savings account or boost an existing one.

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## 10 beautiful winter birds to spot in UK towns and cities



Most of these 10 species can be seen close to or close to towns and cities in most parts of the UK. Composite: Alamy/Getty

From the streetwise crow to the colourful goldfinch, the co-founder of Flock Together reveals the birds he loves to look out for in winter

*Nadeem Perera*

Mon 3 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

As a co-founder of [Flock Together](#), a London-based birdwatching collective for people of colour that organises walks across the south of England all year round, the question I am asked most often is: “Are there even any birds in winter?”

It’s fair enough. Birdsong declines sharply in winter, as birds do not need to attract mates outside the breeding season; many summer visitors will have left, and there is less need to mark territory, so there is more space. However, birds wintering here are frantically looking for food. This, along with leafless winter trees, means plenty of opportunities for good sightings, wherever you are.

Here are some of my favourite birds to watch in winter. Some are in the UK year-round, others migrate in for the season, and the good news is that they are all widespread in the UK – even if you live in a city, you shouldn’t have to go far to see them.

## **Carrion crow**



Photograph: Tim Grist Photography/Getty Images

### **Absolutely all over**

My favourite bird to watch! Gangs of these glossy all-black birds rule the streets. Living in numbers helps them ward off competitors and establish strongholds. An “everyday” bird? Yes. Unimpressive? Absolutely not.

### **Wren**



Wren Photograph: Gary Chalker/Getty Images

### **Woodland, hedgerows and gardens**

This tiny brown bird can be identified by its cocked-up tail. They often hide under thick hedges, singing their loud, melodic song. I like to spot them in Hackney Marshes but they can be seen everywhere.

### **Grey heron**



Photograph: lumenetumbra/Getty Images

### Near bodies of water

Grey herons exude a pterodactyl-like energy in flight – especially when they let out their loud squawks. Standing by water, hunting for amphibians and fish, they can sometimes be so still that you question whether you’re looking at a statue. We once received a video of one spinning a rat by its tail.

### Long-tailed tit



Photograph: Dominic Cram/Getty Images

### **Woodlands, hedgerows and gardens**

These crazy cute, pink, black and white birds are so tiny that you might miss them – but their long tails make them easy to recognise. They are hardly ever seen alone and flocks will hop from one garden to the next, looking for hanging feeders.

### **Short-eared owl**



Photograph: Andrew Sproule/Getty Images

### **Coastal marshlands, fields and wetlands**

These owls hunt by day, so you might spot them flying low above open ground. Lots arrive from Scandinavia and show themselves for the winter year after year. I like to watch them at the RSPB Rainham Marshes reserve in Essex, but they can be seen in suitable habitats from Scotland to Cornwall.

### **Redwing**



Photograph: Arterra Picture Library/Alamy

### **Parks, gardens, and fields**

A true winter bird of the UK, this is a type of thrush distinguished by a red patch under its wings and an eyestripe. Thousands arrive in the UK from colder climates in late October. They feed mainly on berries and worms. The ones on my balcony came for the sliced oranges and apples I left out.

### **Kestrel**



Photograph: Mark Hughes/Getty Images

### **Parks, moors and fields**

This falcon can be seen above any open grassland where there are nearby woods. Spot them hovering as they scan the ground for prey.

### **Jay**



Photograph: Helen Davies/Alamy

### **Woods, parks and gardens**

Another favourite of mine, these colourful smaller crows are famous for burying acorns to eat during winter – forgotten acorns can sprout into trees.

Sign up to our Inside Saturday newsletter for an exclusive behind the scenes look at the making of the magazine's biggest features, as well as a curated list of our weekly highlights.

### **Goldfinch**



Photograph: Brian Pollard/Alamy

### **Parks, gardens, heathland, fields and hedgerows**

Easily identifiable with its yellow wing-flash and red, black and white head, this small bird is often seen on TV aerials and buildings under three storeys. We spotted them at our first Flock Together Academy for underprivileged kids – they were a big hit.

### **Buzzard**



Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

### **Rural habitats mostly but can sometimes be seen over green spaces in cities**

This majestic, mostly brown bird of prey is usually seen soaring high above open land. We were lucky enough to see one on a Flock Together walk: when it displayed its impressive wingspan and wedge-shaped tail, everybody gasped!

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## What's new, pussycat? How feline film stars are trained to perform



Benedict Cumberbatch and Claire Foy in The Electrical Life of Louis Wain.  
Photograph: © 2021 STUDIOCANAL SAS – CHANNEL FOUR

From Stuart Little and Pet Sematary to new movie The Electrical Life of Louis Wain, cats can be scene-stealers. But how do you get such fickle and

independent creatures to behave on camera?



[Ann Lee](#)

[@\\_ann\\_leee](#)

Mon 3 Jan 2022 04.00 EST

Cats have been effortlessly stealing scenes from their human co-stars for decades. Who could forget Audrey Hepburn's adorable marmalade tabby in Breakfast at Tiffany's? Or Jinx, the toilet-flushing Himalayan in Meet the Parents? Behind every famous film cat, there is a dedicated trainer patiently teaching them to obey a command, making sure they're happy on set, and grooming them fastidiously to maintain their fluffy good looks.

The film-makers behind [The Electrical Life of Louis Wain](#), a British period biopic about the Edwardian artist and illustrator who became famous for his surreal portraits of cats, were adamant they didn't want to use CGI for the shoot, so animal trainer Charlotte Wilde was brought in with 40 feisty felines. "It was organised chaos," she says. "They had their own green room and were treated like royalty."

Wilde, who has also worked on [Fighting With My Family](#) and [Bohemian Rhapsody](#), runs a [London agency](#) that provides animals for film and TV.

Felix, her 10-year-old black and white moggie (“a very cheeky chap!”), was cast as Peter, Wain’s furry best friend, who inspires his first sketches.

Cats, of course, are notoriously fickle and independent – but that doesn’t mean they can’t be trained like dogs to behave and do tricks on screen. Wilde says she uses positive reinforcement with plenty of snacks on hand to dish out as rewards. “We teach our cats to go to mark,” she says. “They’ll walk in and they’ll know where to stop. We train them so they run to the sound of a buzzer. We’ve got some that can roll over. A couple can retrieve. They’ll lie down, rub against people’s legs, walk alongside someone. We show them what they’ve got to do. Then we try to make that happen on the take.”



Snowbell in *Stuart Little*. Photograph: Photo 12/Alamy

A clicker is used as encouragement. “You might have a moment in between a couple of lines where we can get a click in, just so the cat [knows]: ‘You’re doing really well. Wait. Food is coming.’ Obviously, that’s really distracting for actors. They’re probably sick of the sound of a clicker by the end of the film!”

Mark Harden, an animal trainer based in Los Angeles, was in charge of the five snowy white Chinchilla Persians who played Snowbell in [\*Stuart Little\*](#),

and looked after 40 cats on the set of [Catwoman](#) including several rare Egyptian Maus. With cats, he says, it's all about getting into their mindset. "They're a predator but they can also be skittish. They've got a very strong flight reaction. The most important thing with a cat is desensitising them to strange environments. A movie set is a very strange environment."



Sick kitty ... a zombie cat in Pet Sematary. Photograph: Paramount Pictures/Allstar

Canadian animal trainer Melissa Millett has a novel way of desensitising the cats she works with: she stages mock film shoots at home. For the [Pet Sematary](#) reboot, she recruited five Maine Coons from rescue shelters to play Church, who is transformed into an aggressive zombie cat. This meant gradually acclimatising them to wearing makeup and being wet. The whole process took two months. "We started with a catnip party in the bathtub. A little bit of water on the cat while it's eating. Then we worked up to a full bath. Separately, we would start with a bit of egg white and then work our way up. All the products had to be edible."

Expectations for cat actors tend to be much lower than for dogs, says Harden. "People are more in awe of you when you have a good working cat. I guess they expect the cat to be scared." Even so, animal trainers can teach cats to do the kind of tricks that would easily outshine Lassie. Millett has a

talented Bengal named Sashimi, who can ride a scooter. Wilde taught one of her [moggies](#), [Leicester](#), to pretend to play the harmonica, while Harden trained Cairo, an Egyptian Mau, to pick up a mobile phone with his teeth and run off with it.

But it's not all cats being cute and cuddly on cue. Being bitten accidentally is an occupational hazard. Then there's the cat hair that gets everywhere. "You certainly don't wear your best clothes to work!" says Wilde. "You have to get up extra early because you've got to get the animals ready. You go to bed later because you've got to put them to bed. They come first no matter what. I'd say it's a way of life rather than a job. It's incredibly rewarding. They give you so much."

*The Electrical Life of Louis Wain* is out in UK cinemas on 1 January.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/jan/03/whats-new-pussycat-how-feline-film-stars-are-trained-to-perform>

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## 2022.01.03 - Coronavirus

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## Coronavirus

# What impact will Omicron have on UK children and schools?

As the term begins and masks return to England's classrooms, schools rely on vaccines, testing and hygiene

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



Llanishen high school in Cardiff. Schools in Wales, Scotland and NI already require masks in class. Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images

*Nicola Davis* Science correspondent  
[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Sun 2 Jan 2022 10.39 EST

As a new term is set to start for schools across the UK and the government announces masks will return for secondary pupils in England's classrooms, we take a look at the potential impact of Omicron on children.

## How prevalent is Covid among children?

According to case data for the week to 27 December 2021 – which is based on infections picked up by testing – rates are currently highest among young adults. However, rates per 100,000 people are also high among children, at 1,126.5 for those aged 10 to 14, and 836.2 for those aged five to nine.

Further insights come from the [latest data from the Office for National Statistics](#), based on swabs collected from randomly selected households, revealing that in the week ending 23 December infection levels in England were highest among those aged two to Year 6 and those aged 25 to 34, at about one in 15 people for both groups.

An estimated one in 20 of secondary school-aged children to Year 11 in England had Covid in the same week, compared with one in 45 of those aged 50 to 69 and one in 100 of those aged 70 and over.

## Is Omicron more dangerous to children?

Early reports from South Africa [raised concerns that may be the case](#). However, a preliminary [analysis by the UK Health Security Agency](#) (UKHSA) based on the situation in England has suggested a lower risk of hospitalisation among Omicron cases in school-age children compared with Delta cases.

While the findings are good news, [experts have stressed](#) some children can still become sick from Covid [and require hospital care](#), while there are also concerns about the potential impact of long Covid.

## Which children are eligible to be vaccinated against Covid?

Two doses of the Covid jab have been [recommended for all those aged 12 to 17](#) in the UK, with some offered an additional jab, for example if they are severely immunosuppressed. A [booster dose has recently been announced](#) for all 16- to 17-year-olds and some children aged 12 to 15, such as those who are in a clinical risk group.

Last month the UK's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) said that two Covid jabs would also be made available [for clinically vulnerable five- to 11-year-olds](#), as well as those living with someone who is immunosuppressed. The doses will be a third of the quantity used for adults.

## What about testing?

Educational staff and secondary school pupils in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England are asked to take two lateral flow tests a week, while [in Wales they have been asked to take three](#).

“Testing remains voluntary but is strongly encouraged,” [guidance from the Department for Education states](#), adding that secondary schools should also retain capacity to carry out asymptomatic testing on-site for pupils who are unable to test themselves at home.

Concerns have been raised about [the availability of lateral flow tests](#), with those attempting to request kits online in recent days having repeatedly been faced with messages stating [“no home delivery slots left”](#), and some [pharmacies also running out](#). However, the education secretary, Nadhim Zahawi, has said [schools will have their own supplies](#) of lateral flow tests.

## What other measures are in place in schools?

This varies from country to country. However, there are common approaches, including an emphasis on hygiene and sanitation.

On Saturday it was announced that secondary school [pupils in England should return to wearing masks](#) in classrooms, not just communal areas, a measure already in place in the [other countries of the UK](#).

While Robert Halfon, the chair of the House of Commons education select committee, has raised concerns, including saying that there is very limited evidence of the efficacy of masks in educational settings, [others have backed the measure](#), pointing out that while masks are not perfect, and their effectiveness depends on their quality, a number of studies have suggested mask-wearing in schools is linked to [smaller increases in case rates](#) and a [lower likelihood of outbreaks](#).

Zahawi has also announced that nurseries, schools and colleges would be given 7,000 more air cleaning units in a bid to improve ventilation, a move the joint general secretary of the National Education Union, Mary Bousted, said would be “completely inadequate”.

## Will schools have to close?

Zahawi has said he will do “everything in his power” to protect education. However, some experts have said more should be done.

“The fact that children [in England] who are household members of a case are mandated to come into school, and children sitting next to a case in a classroom are not even considered close contacts, suggests that policies are geared towards maximising transmission rather than protecting children and their families,” Dr Deepti Gurdasani, a clinical epidemiologist at Queen Mary University of London, told the Guardian.

Another key issue is staffing, given the level of absences because of Covid and self-isolation, with [ex-teachers being encouraged to return](#) – although there are [doubts this will happen in time for the new term](#) in England.

It seems likely that at least some teaching will be done remotely, with [Zahawi urging schools](#) to implement a flexible approach to learning where necessary, to maximise on-site education.

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## Coronavirus

# Volunteers praised for huge role in giving UK public Covid jabs

More than 100,000 people donated their time in 2021 as part of largest ever British vaccination campaign

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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A man receives a 'jingle jab' Covid vaccination booster injection at Redbridge town hall, in Ilford, Essex on Christmas Day. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

*[Jessica Murray](#)*

Sun 2 Jan 2022 19.00 EST

Tens of thousands of vaccine volunteers have been praised for giving up about two million hours of their time to help with the rollout of Covid jabs throughout 2021.

A woman who translated crucial health messages into Punjabi to reach more communities is among more than 100,000 people who donated their time to the vaccine effort in the past year.

More than 132m coronavirus jabs were given last year in the largest vaccine campaign in British history. More than 90% of people in the UK over the age of 12 have now had their first dose of a Covid-19 jab and 82.4% have had their second.

After the emergence of the Omicron variant triggered an acceleration of the rollout over the festive season, more than 1.6 million people received their booster dose in the final week of 2021, bringing the total number of boosted adults in the UK to nearly 34 million, including three in four eligible adults in England.

NHS England said volunteers working alongside healthcare staff had particularly helped during the ramped-up supply of jabs and boosters in December.

The health service launched a recruitment drive to speed up the distribution of jabs and so far 17,500 people have registered their interest in paid vaccination roles, NHS England said.

### [uk corona cases](#)

A further 48,000 people have registered as steward volunteers through the NHS Volunteer Responders programme in just over a month, of which more than 10,000 have already deployed.

Working alongside the NHS, St John Ambulance has seen 17,000 people come forward to do shifts as volunteer vaccinators.

The health secretary, Sajid Javid, said the success of the vaccination programme was “astounding and a true reflection of the fantastic work of

our NHS and its volunteers. I want to thank each and every one of them”.

NHS England’s chief executive, Amanda Pritchard, said the efforts of volunteers would “undoubtedly help to save many more lives”.

She said: “Alongside NHS staff, our selfless volunteers have worked tirelessly to protect the nation – in football stadiums, shopping centres, Christmas markets and countless other vaccination sites up and down the country.

“I want to give my personal thanks to everyone who has given up their time to help us beat record after record – continuing to make the NHS Covid-19 vaccination programme the biggest and most successful in health service history.”

Boris Johnson set the target of offering all eligible adults the chance to get their booster jabs by the end of January, but after the emergence of Omicron he brought forward the deadline to the new year.

Millions of people queued at about 3,000 vaccination centres, and on 18 December NHS England administered a record 830,000 jabs in a single day.

Jaz Kaur Bangerh, from Leeds, has been promoting messages about the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine in ethnic minority communities, including translating information into Punjabi.

“Volunteering for the vaccination programme, I have helped people to fill in forms, guided them to the right place and answered any questions, especially if they were a bit anxious in the early days, when there was a lot of information out there.”

John Hardman, who has volunteered at jab sites in the capital including Wembley stadium and the Science Museum, said he “can’t recommend it [volunteering] enough”.

“There are lots of opportunities to support locally, even if just for a few sessions.”

NHS England said people interested in getting involved can search NHS vaccine team online.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/03/volunteers-praised-for-huge-role-in-giving-uk-public-covid-jabs>

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## New Zealand

# British DJ escapes prosecution after sparking New Zealand's first Omicron scare

Robert Etheridge, aka DJ Dimension, apologises for ‘my misunderstandings’ in breaking isolation rules and visiting Auckland venues before testing Covid-positive

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



Auckland, New Zealand, where Robert Etheridge visited venues over two days last month before testing positive to Covid. The British DJ, also known as DJ Dimension, has escaped prosecution for breaching isolation rules. Photograph: Kehan Chen/Getty Images

*[Helen Livingstone](#)*

Sun 2 Jan 2022 21.36 EST

A British DJ who [triggered New Zealand's first Omicron scare](#) after breaking home isolation rules will not be prosecuted for the time being, authorities say.

“The Ministry of Health does not plan to refer this case to the police at this stage,” the ministry said in a statement, adding that it “needs to balance the deterrence effect from any potential prosecution with enabling an environment that does not discourage future cases from assisting with the public health response to Covid-19”.

Robert Etheridge, also known as DJ Dimension, arrived in New Zealand on 16 December and spent seven days in one of the country’s managed isolation and quarantine (MIQ) facilities, where he returned three negative Covid test results, [Stuff reported](#).

After leaving MIQ he was required to spend three days in home isolation but did not wait to receive a negative day-nine test – as also required – before entering the community.

According to the ministry, he visited a series of venues in Auckland over two days including nightclubs, a shopping precinct and restaurants before receiving a positive test result on 27 December and being returned to MIQ.

Etheridge, who had been due to play at the Rhythm and Alps festival near Wanaka last week, apologised to “those who I have inadvertently put at risk as a result of my misunderstandings”.

“I realise the gravity of the situation and I am deeply regretful to those who have been impacted.”

In an earlier statement he said: “After completing my 10-day isolation, and of the understanding that I had completed my quarantine, I entered the community. To my shock and enormous concern, I unexpectedly received a positive test on day 12, two days after my isolation period had ended.”

His case triggered outrage in New Zealand, which has frequently been praised for its pandemic response and which only [recently lifted lockdown restrictions](#) on Auckland, its largest city, after a Delta outbreak.

Despite identifying dozens of close contacts, the ministry said on Monday that none had so far tested positive for the virus.

Covid cases are currently trending downwards in [New Zealand](#), with just 27 new community cases announced on Monday and 24 at the border.

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## [Australia news](#)

# **Thousands of Australians are isolating with Covid. Here's how some of them are coping**

While some have felt ‘lucky’ at their situation, others have ended up in debt or without the care they normally receive



Some people with chronic illness or disability have been left with little to no support as carers and friends are forced to isolate while sick or awaiting results. Photograph: golibo/Getty Images/iStockphoto

*[Royce Kurmelovs](#)*

*[@RoyceRk2](#)*

Sun 2 Jan 2022 23.50 EST

Something about the sticky floors of the dingy nightclub Gemma Moore was at on the [New South Wales](#) central coast gave her the sense she was about to

get sick.

“It was a good night, but I just really didn’t feel comfortable being out,” Moore said. “There weren’t any QR codes and the staff weren’t wearing masks. And I remember thinking: someone in here has Covid.”

A few days later, the 28-year-old care worker’s hunch proved correct when she, her boyfriend and her housemate all showed symptoms and tested positive to Covid.

“It took me ages to believe it was Covid,” Moore said. “I couldn’t wrap my head around it. I had had a negative rapid antigen test and it all had felt so far away.

“I also really didn’t want to have it, because that meant the people I saw in the last two days, my clients, were exposed and I was really worried about them.”

From the moment they received their PCR results, the three went into isolation, joining thousands of others across the country despite efforts by political leaders to open up the country ahead of Christmas.

“We can’t leave the house,” Moore says. “It feels like this invisible barrier – we’ve all been saying it. We can go to the end of the driveway and watch people from a distance as they walk or drive past, but we can’t go any further.

“It’s weird to feel normal, but also know that we’re infectious. It’s weird to think that just by me going out in the community I could share the love.”

Moore, however, says they are among the lucky ones.

With a stable housing situation, an ocean view and their other housemates visiting their families for the holidays, they have avoided a situation where they would have had to isolate from each other as well as the world.

Their mornings are spent apart, but they share meals and wait out the time in the afternoons.

Anna Mazzone had a different experience when she travelled to Adelaide from Berlin via Melbourne, and ended up spending almost three weeks in isolation over Christmas.

It was the 35-year-old's first trip home in two years to visit her parents and she had initially quarantined with her brother in a small unit in Adelaide.

Over the course of the first week, the siblings couldn't avoid each other in the "one big space". Then, on the final day, Mazzone tested positive.

"Unfortunately, I must have caught it travelling. When I landed in Melbourne, I got a test that was negative and I was meant to do a final test, and that was positive," Mazzone said.

While her brother, who was vaccinated, remained Covid-free, the unexpected result caused chaos.

The pair immediately tried to physically distance as best they could while they worked out what to do next. Though they were supposed to receive a call with instructions, none ever came. Mazzone said they spent the day calling health authorities for details but had a "different answer for every person we spoke to".

Mazzone decided to take matters into her own hands by booking an Airbnb at a cost of \$500 a day to isolate for 14 days, which has left her in debt.

"It feels like it's the first wave in Adelaide, like no one's experienced Covid before. Even coming in through Melbourne, it seems like no one knew what the right thing to do was."

Others like Alex, who is chronically ill, began isolating as a pre-emptive measure when they saw case numbers start to climb, in a practice known as "shielding".

The 30-year-old, who did not wish to be identified and who lives with myalgic encephalomyelitis, otherwise known as chronic fatigue syndrome, spends most of their day in bed and relies on the help of their carer. They

have [struggled to apply for the NDIS](#), and have had to privately fundraise to pay for care.

Alex, who is vaccinated, is not just worried about dying from Covid, but after-effects like [long Covid](#) that will make their circumstances worse.

Their isolation has taken on “another layer” as their carer and two friends who helped with groceries have been exposed, and are isolating while waiting for test results.

Until their results came, Alex said they would be on their own and having to triage basic tasks.

“Basically the level of care that I need is very high, so whenever I have to exert myself, like cleaning stuff, sanitising all the stuff coming in, it takes so much out of me,” Alex said.

“I just prioritise where I put my energy each day. So it’s like: OK, I’m meant to shower today, do I shower, do I make sure I’m having three meals?”

Alex said for all the talk about “living with Covid” and allowing it to spread, disabled people were being left to carry the cost – often without government support.

“It’s not just disabled people shielding, but the people who care for us, that we rely on,” they said. “There’s a shortage of people who are caring for us.

“A lot of people are going to wind up getting disabled from long Covid, and the system already doesn’t support chronically ill, disabled people enough.”

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## 2022.01.03 - Opinion

- It's the great green reset: 10 things Britain can do now to save the planet
- Understanding, not judgment, should shape our response to those who remain unjabbed
- The return of whales, seals and dolphins to the British coast is a wonder to witness
- Sports stars can no longer plead ignorance. They have political power and must use it

## [Opinion](#)[Climate crisis](#)

# It's the great green reset: 10 things Britain can do now to save the planet

[John Vidal](#)

We still hold the presidency of Cop26 – it's vital to send a signal to the world of what is possible



Illustration by Ben Jennings.

Mon 3 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

So that was it? One great heave of climate diplomacy at Cop26 in Glasgow and we can go back to normal? No: 2021 was one of the hottest years on record, [coal is booming](#), emissions surging and we are well on track for climate catastrophe.

We need an immediate post-Cop climate reset now because the job is far from done. Britain remains president of the UN climate body for another

year and is expected by the rest of the world to lead by example at least until we hand over to Egypt in November. Indeed, 2022 is probably more important than 2021 because the gap between rhetoric and action is vast and must now be closed.

So here, culled from groups like Friends of the Earth and Carbon Brief, global bodies like the UN, International Monetary Fund and World Bank, as well as the Welsh and Scottish governments, is the reset. It would be popular, cost little, greatly improve millions of lives and restore Britain's reputation as a progressive country.

1. Announce an end to North Sea oil and gas exploration. Hardly any oil extracted from wells on the UK seabed ever gets to a UK-based refinery, let alone a British car or boiler. It's mostly exported, earns the government little, but adds vastly to emissions and the wealth of foreign-owned corporations. We could announce an immediate end to exploration and few people would even notice. Along with the [expected end](#) of UK coal power in 2022, it would be a powerful signal to the world that the era of fossil fuels was ending.
2. Ditch fossil fuel subsidies. Despite pledges, progress at Cop26 to abolish or reduce the \$420bn (£313bn) spent each year by governments on subsidies for the fossil fuel industry was incremental at best, and is already being watered down. Britain spends [billions a year](#) propping up the polluting industries but less than a 10th of that goes to support renewable energy. Whatever the imminent [high court ruling](#) on the legality of government fuel subsidies, the UK could immediately level the playing field, and save billions by not encouraging the wasteful use of energy which mostly benefits the rich.
3. Protect nature. The most important meeting in 2022 will be in [China in April](#) when all countries meet to finish negotiating new goals to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. Many have already said they plan to protect 30% of the planet's land and oceans but have failed abysmally in the past to meet even minimal targets, so are not to be trusted. Covid has shown how climate, biodiversity and human health depend on each other, so Britain could be the first to act boldly by translating all global goals into law.

**4.** Stop adding to deforestation. There are plans to clean up the UK's supply chains to help protect forests and reduce climate emissions, but they will not stop companies buying from legal deforestation and they do not address human rights abuses. The [proposals](#) could be easily tightened.

**5.** [Slow steaming](#). The 2008 financial crisis forced shipowners to cut fuel bills and many chose to reduce the speed of their ships. As a result, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions were simply, if inadvertently, reduced by nearly 200m tonnes, or about what a country like the Netherlands emits a year. The UK could work with others to press the International Maritime Organization to adopt ocean speed limits. This would [greatly reduce](#) air pollution, cut the cost of cruise holidays and save billions of tonnes of carbon over the next decades.

**6.** Keep changing behaviour. Thanks to Covid, climate anxiety and conviction, people are [shifting diets](#) away from meat and dairy, cutting back on flying and [pledging](#) to change carbon-polluting habits. Schools, institutions, companies and individuals can all help increase demand for climate-friendly, plastic-free consumerism.

**7.** Scrap most transport plans. The £24bn roads programme, the £1.2bn Silvertown tunnel in London, much of the £96bn HS2 project and proposals for many new runways and airport expansions are not needed, will add to emissions and could be shelved without much complaint. The money saved would allow the government to concentrate on popular, sustainable public transport schemes. The UK is going in the opposite direction to most countries which are prioritising affordable rail travel, cycling and walking. The financial, health and carbon savings of [a radical change in transport direction](#) would be immense.

**8.** Confront the building industry. New [regulations](#) due to come into effect in 2022 are intended to reduce carbon emissions from new-build homes by about 30% compared with current standards. But a more ambitious Future Homes Standard, which aims to make all new buildings "net zero ready", will not come into force until 2025 and the government has a long and bad record of bowing to industry pressure to weaken plans.

**9.** Insulate, insulate. A major programme to promote household solar, increase electric car-buying, better insulate all homes and switch to

renewables could galvanise many industries, reduce soaring energy bills, improve health and dramatically cut emissions.

**10.** Keep the promises we have made. For all the fine words at Glasgow and the “net zero” and other [pledges](#), countries do not have the policies in place. The priority for the UK is to make the net zero target legally binding and help other countries deliver on their promises rather than to widen the gap between targets and delivery.

That’s some list. We must be realistic, but also ambitious. Achieving just a half of all that would be something Britain could be proud of when it hands the Cop climate baton to Africa next year. But the reset must start now.

- John Vidal is a former Guardian environment editor
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**OpinionCoronavirus**

# Understanding, not judgment, should shape our response to those who remain unjabbed

[John Harris](#)



The start of the coming year will be defined by the UK's vaccination gap, but the issue is more complex than you think



‘The start of the coming year will be defined by the UK’s vaccination gap, but the issue is more complex than you think.’ Photograph: Barrington Coombs/PA

Sun 2 Jan 2022 07.00 EST

Amid rocketing Covid infection rates, [rising hospitalisation numbers](#) and [test shortages](#), the opening weeks of 2022 are going to be defined by the UK’s vaccine gap.

According to the latest [official figures](#), 91% of people aged over 18 in the UK have had at least one Covid jab, 88% have received two and 64% have had their third. But the 9% who have yet to be vaccinated at all accounts for about five million people, whose preponderance among those now being hospitalised is clearly a huge problem.

Precise figures are a matter of debate: some senior NHS staff put the share of unvaccinated people [on their wards at up to 90%](#), although the most recent estimates show the share of people needing critical care who are unvaccinated running at [just over 60%](#). What cannot be doubted is that if more people were vaccinated, the latest phase of the Covid crisis would be much more manageable, and the people in charge might not be faced with such a [difficult set of options](#).

The vaccine gap shows us how far we are from being a society that understands itself collectively

If the NHS is soon overwhelmed, tightening across-the-board restrictions might become inevitable, but it would highlight the unfairness of disrupting the lives of the vaccinated majority to protect those who are still unjabbed. Coercing people into getting vaccinated using stringent Covid passports – let alone introducing compulsory inoculation – would infuriate the Tory backbenches, make Boris Johnson’s future all but impossible, and even to many of us outside Conservative circles mark a worrying extension to the state’s reach, not least under a government as illiberal as this one. There are, in fact, no clear and easy choices, beyond retaining a vague hope that the sudden urgency of the pandemic’s latest phase might convince more people to pitch up at a vaccination centre, and keeping faith in the grassroots organisations currently doing their best to change minds.

To some people, though, the issues are completely straightforward. Ten days before he was made a Knight Companion of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, Tony Blair issued a characteristically sweeping verdict: “If you’re not vaccinated and you’re eligible … you’re not just irresponsible, you’re an idiot”. He later [expressed regret](#) about his choice of words, but by then it was rather too late: he had already triggered a wave of judgment on social media, suggesting that most unvaccinated people were either reckless fools, or the unhinged disciples of those online cults that put the past two years of human history down to a quest to tighten the grip of the secret world government.

Inevitably, the facts of the vaccine gap are immeasurably more complicated, as no end of statistics prove. According to the [latest numbers](#) published by the UK Health Security Agency, 30% of eligible people in Liverpool are yet to receive their first jab. In Birmingham, the figure is 33%; in the London boroughs of Newham and Tower Hamlets, about 38% and 34% respectively. Conspiracy theory and misinformation are sizeable and worrying features of the Covid era, and our politicians still say surprisingly little about them. But particularly in cities, beyond high levels of mobility and transience, figures showing large numbers of unvaccinated people reflect much deeper questions of age, class, ethnicity, faith and language – and what poverty,

insecurity and institutionalised prejudice do to people's relationship with the state. In that sense, the limits of the vaccination drive remind us of one of the most simple truths of power and politics: that if governments continually ignore fundamental issues of trust and basic empathy, any big social rupture will instantly reveal the consequences.

Earlier this week, I spoke to Manisha Kumar, an inner-city GP in Manchester and the medical director of the city's health and care commissioning partnership, which is steering a grassroots [vaccination drive](#) that involves an array of local organisations centred on the city council. The main figures she and her colleagues work with are based on people registered with a medical practice. Some come with caveats, but they show the proportion of eligible Mancunian adults who have not received even a single vaccine dose currently standing at about 30%. In more affluent areas of the city, less than 20% of eligible people have not been jabbed, but in some poorer neighbourhoods, the figures tend to hover at about 50%. In aggregate, white people who identify as English, Scottish, Welsh or British register vaccine uptake levels of more than 80%, whereas the current number for people from a Caribbean background is 52%; among those classified as Gypsy or Traveller, the figure is 28%.

Such numbers, she said, only tell you so much: what is important is to get to the complex combinations of factors that make people either hesitant about vaccination, or downright hostile. "People come to this with their beliefs, their experiences of Covid, their perception of risk – there isn't just one sort of person who hasn't come forward," she said. In some parts of the country, she went on, "you can just open your doors, send out a text, and people will come." Her patch, by contrast, requires much more delicate and detailed work. "The majority of the city is hugely deprived, and lives in very small communities defined by culture, identity and geography. Knowledge of those communities is really important."

What is lacking from a lot of people's understanding of the vaccine gap, she told me, is any real sense of the sheer weight millions of people have borne over the past two years, and how precarious their lives often are. "The pace of change, the amount of information coming out – for some people it's just

been overwhelming. They've gone: 'I can't do this – it's too much. I've lost my job, I've got issues with domestic abuse, my children are out of school.'" She also talked about huge issues around access to the internet, made worse by vaccines being introduced during lockdown. "People didn't have phone credit or data roaming, or wifi in their houses. So when you sent out a link saying 'Book on the national booking service', they couldn't do it."

By way of getting to the heart of it all, a PowerPoint presentation she sent me made mention of "historic lack of trust in public institutions including health services within some groups and communities". In some black communities, she said, people's relationships with authority are so poor that that some have chosen to be vaccinated well away from where they live and work, "because they're almost embarrassed to be vaccinated, thinking their community isn't behind them." She paused. "There's no easy fix. We just keep on talking."

In a lot of what she said, there were echoes of the kind of government actions that have only furthered people's distance from the state, from the creation of a cruel and punitive benefits system, to the hostile environment doctrine that quickly led to the Windrush scandal. [Cutting spending](#) on English tuition was always going to keep people confined to the social margins; the innumerable other ways that austerity has hacked back even the most basic everyday help has made things even worse. If you are white, middle class and confident enough to play the kind of games large institutions always demand, the state might look benign and dependably helpful. But if it usually treats you with a mixture of hostility and indifference you will tend to keep your distance, even when it says it has your best interests at heart.

In the UK and elsewhere, what all that means for any attempt to make all of us move in lockstep is simple enough. The vaccine gap shows us how far we are from being a society that understands itself collectively, and how easily we still break into "us" and "them". It demands not judgment, but a level of understanding we have yet to get near.

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist
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## The return of whales, seals and dolphins to the British coast is a wonder to witness

[Philip Hoare](#)



Our shapeshifting seas have been degraded over the centuries, but we can still take inspiration from their beauty



‘An increasing numbers of seal pups are being born.’ Photograph: Jeroen Hoekendijk

Mon 3 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

It’s an encouraging start to 2022. In an informal census – or perhaps a sort of watery award ceremony – the Wildlife Trusts’ marine review of 2021 has pointed to [humpback whales](#) off the north-east coast of Scotland and England, increasing [numbers of seal pups](#) being born, and seahorses in protected beds of eel grass off the Dorset coast.

It seems the work of the trusts and other marine conservation bodies is having a good effect. Blue whales appearing in the Irish Sea may be physical beneficiaries of the general agreement of the International Whaling Commission in 1982, effected three years later, to halt the cull of the species. It is as if the whales themselves remember, encouraged to return without fear of someone sticking a harpoon in them.

But in many ways these optimistic signs are also the markers of what we have lost. In the 19th century the waterways of the Solent were so full of salmon that local apprentices, according to one author writing in 1850, “stipulated in their indentures that it should not be served up to them oftener than three times a-week”. The same author reported shoals of porpoises in

Southampton Water, “rolling and springing on the surface in their renewed gambols”. While in the 18th century, Oliver Goldsmith reported on an English Channel filled with whales, dolphins, cod fish, tuna and even great white sharks chasing columns of herrings. “The whole water seems alive,” Goldsmith wrote in one of the first popular science books, *Animated Nature*, in 1776, “and is seen so black with them that the number seems inexhaustible.”

Humans, too, were [once more watery](#). In the north of England and Scotland, fisherwomen were known as herring quines, so covered were they in silvery scales they seemed to be becoming fish themselves. Charles Richard Weld of the Royal Society declared in 1859, riffing on Darwin: “If a man may become a monkey, or has been a whale, why should not a Caithness damsels become a herring?”

To these writers, the idea that one day there might not be plenty more fish in the sea would have been unthinkable. The depredations of the natural world that began to accelerate in the 19th century would remove much of that marine biomass from around our shores, with disastrous effects.

The physical absence of the great whales such as blue, fin, humpback and sperm whales may have actually [accelerated the climate crisis](#) – because it deprived the oceanic food chain of their fertilising faeces, and their rotting carcasses which, on the sea bed, helped sequester carbon from the ecosphere and sustain species, from polar bears and seals to bone-eating osedax worms. The life cycles of smaller organisms depended entirely on carcasses.

We look to science to point out what needs to be done, but often art inspires as much as academic reports. In 2012, Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey performed a kind of reincarnation on the skeleton of a minke whale stranded at Skegness by growing [diamond-like chemical crystals on its bones](#). A year later, the artists Ellen Gallagher and Edgar Cleijne used the bone-eating worm to conjure up a similarly alchemical transformation in [their film, Osedax](#): a dead whale slowly sways to the bottom to become, in the words of Shakespeare’s Ariel in *The Tempest*, “something rich and strange”.

With its shapeshifting sense of gender ([slipper snails](#) form stacks upon each other, changing sex from male at the bottom to female at the top) and of time

(“shadow” parts of the ocean [may be 1,000 years old](#)), the sea defies all our assumptions. It is a decidedly queer place; just [ask any dolphin](#). Nor does it recognise national boundaries, of course.

The sea is where our laws and jurisdictions run out. That inevitably raises contrary questions of responsibility and freedom. Indeed, it is hard to divorce the threats to our native marine life from “alien species” without considering the [human refugees](#) arriving on those same shores. Or to note that the climate crisis is a driver for both.

It is easy to ignore the sea, or to think of it as a kind of highway with a fish shop attached. Some may consider it bizarre that commentators such as George Monbiot call for a [rewilding of our seas](#) as well as of the land. Others may worry there’s no chance of that while English and French politicians squabble over who has the “right” to take fish from the sea. But humpbacks off Whitby? [Dancing sea slugs](#) off Cumbria? White-beaked dolphins off Essex? These may be anomalies or signs of disruption, but merely bearing witness to such wonders has the power to restore our faith.

As I swim in the chilly winter sea, the sleek black head of a grey seal pops up beside me, and in the louring grey sky a skein of brent geese, charcoal-coloured visitors from Siberia, steer into view. It’s not quite Goldsmith’s vision of Eden, but I’m still hoping for miracles in 2022. Happy new year to the sea, all its species, and to all of you.

- Philip Hoare is an author whose books include [Leviathan, Or the Whale](#)

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[Sportblog](#)[Sport politics](#)

## **Sports stars can no longer plead ignorance. They have political power and must use it**

[Philipp Lahm](#)



As the Qatar World Cup nears, football can learn a lesson from tennis: turning down money will make your voice heard



Construction workers at Qatar's Lusail Stadium in 2019. Photograph: Giuseppe Cacace/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 2 Jan 2022 15.00 EST

Sport is politics. There is no question about that at the beginning of the year when the Winter Olympics are taking place in Beijing and the World Cup in Qatar. You only have to open the newspaper these days. The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, the Guardian, the Polish Gazeta Wyborcza and other quality media, which gather many voices to report on the world, deal on their sports pages with the [diplomatic boycott of the Olympics](#) by the USA, Great Britain and other countries, the “[quiet diplomacy](#)” of the International Olympic Committee and [workers' rights in Qatar](#).

One news item received particular attention worldwide. Out of concern for the life of Peng Shuai, the former world No 1 in doubles, the WTA has [suspended all tournaments in China](#). In total, about 30% of the WTA’s revenue comes from China, with the annual finals in Shenzhen paying out the equivalent of about €12m (£10m), more than any other event in women’s tennis. But the players are now saying: we’ll do without.

Taking a strong stance is a tradition in women's tennis, whose history is marked by personalities. In the 1960s, the WTA founder and multiple grand slam winner [Billie Jean King](#) campaigned for equal treatment and pay for the genders. Later, the multiple Wimbledon winner Martina Navratilova campaigned for gay rights. The supposedly weaker sex actually dominates the fighting mode. Female athletes have turned their federation into an independent institution.

The WTA's consistent decisions send a signal: you can say no in sport. Negotiations require an interplay – approaching each other, but also withdrawing from time to time. Countries in which human rights are not universal also invest in football. These countries are part of global sport and offer so much money that many find it difficult to refuse.

The German television broadcaster ZDF recently ran a hidden-camera investigation. The reporter spoke to workers from Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh who build stadiums and roads in Qatar. Eight of them lived in one room; they earn €300 a month each but have been waiting months for their salaries.

The report also featured attractive match scenes from the 2021 Arab Cup and all eight new stadiums. In a country with 2.9 million inhabitants there are now eight of the most modern, expensive and beautiful stadiums in the world, less than an hour's drive apart. The ZDF report was in anticipation of the dilemma facing the 2022 World Cup: people know about the situation in Qatar but they enjoy watching the spectacular pictures and the best teams.

When the 1978 World Cup [took place](#) under the direction of the Argentinian military regime, many players had no answer to questions about human rights. Today, the world can no longer be viewed so naively. Everyone involved knows better than before about what is going on in faraway continents. Most footballers also have more time to deal with such issues, due to advanced professionalisation. Public figures like them are also expected to inform themselves of matters outside their bubble. Now that the world has become a village, everyone knows the conditions in Qatar.



Bayern's Munich's Leon Goretzka is among the footballers to have spoken out about the Qatar World Cup. Photograph: DeFodi Images/Getty Images

Some footballers are stepping in and calling for human rights to be respected. "I think more attention needs to be paid to this kind of thing in the future when awarding contracts," the Germany international Leon Goretzka has said. Finland's captain, Tim Sparv, wrote in an [open letter](#): "We woke up too late, I woke up too late." Sparv called on players, media and fans to talk about working conditions in Qatar.

On a small scale, this argument is already bearing fruit. When a black player was racially insulted by a spectator during the third division match between MSV Duisburg and VfL Osnabrück in Germany in December, [the teams forced a stop](#). All parties quickly agreed that they wanted to set an example: players, both clubs, referees, the association and fans from both camps.

The individual is not powerless; people can make a difference. Small is where you start, big is where it can end. Greta Thunberg was 15 when she stood alone on a street in Stockholm to draw attention to climate change. Many joined in, and Fridays for Future has since put the environment on the global agenda. This has changed politics. Football too: the 2024 European Championship in Germany can be judged a success only if it takes ecological aspects into account. Our preparations are under way.

The Fiver: sign up and get our daily football email

I consider myself lucky to have been born into a democracy. It was not long ago that the conditions in my home country were different. Three decades ago Germany was divided, the eastern part a dictatorship. Other nations in Europe were also going through a change. The 1964 European Championship took place in a fascist state, and Spain's team won its home tournament in front of General Franco. He was still in power when the 1982 World Cup was awarded to Spain. By the time it took place, Spain was a democracy.

Major sporting events, especially in football, generate enormous attention. Nowadays, European Championships and World Cups require everyone who takes part to deal with working conditions and human rights. At Euro 2024 in Germany, too, Europe will negotiate with each other how we want to live together.

*Philipp Lahm's column appears regularly in the Guardian. It is produced in partnership with Oliver Fritsch at [Zeit Online](#), the German online magazine, and is being published in several European countries.*

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## 2022.01.03 - Around the world

- [Hong Kong Citizen News to close citing fears for staff safety](#)
- [Afghanistan 3,000 litres of alcohol poured into Kabul canal amid crackdown](#)
- [Yemen Royal Navy says it received reports of vessel attacked near port](#)
- ['Democracy could collapse' US could be under rightwing dictator by 2030, professor warns](#)
- [Steve Bannon Bid to expand pro-Trump influence in local politics](#)

## Hong Kong

# Hong Kong's Citizen News to close citing fears for staff safety

Independent online news portal to cease operations amid 'worsening environment for media' in city



Chris Yeung, chief writer at Citizen News and former president of the Hong Kong Journalists Association and Citizen News Chief Editor Daisy Li pose for photo after they announced Citizen News will cease operations in Hong Kong. Photograph: Tyrone Siu/Reuters

*[Helen Davidson](#) with agencies  
[@heldavidson](#)*

Mon 3 Jan 2022 00.36 EST

The [Hong Kong](#) independent news outlet Citizen News has said it will cease operations from Tuesday in the face of what it described as a deteriorating

media environment in the Chinese-ruled city and to ensure the safety of its staff.

“Regrettably, the rapid changes in society and worsening environment for media make us unable to achieve our goal fearlessly. Amid this crisis, we have to first make sure everyone on the boat is safe,” Citizen News, which was established in 2017, said in a statement.

At a press conference on Monday, Citizen News chief editor Daisy Li said the environment had changed, and she didn’t know what “safe” news was any more.

“If I am no longer confident enough to guide and lead my reporters, I must be responsible,” she said.

The decision to close Citizen News was triggered by the early morning police raid of [Hong Kong’s Stand News](#) last week, Chris Yeung, chief writer at Citizen News and former president of the Hong Kong Journalists Association, told reporters on Monday.

“We could not rule out that … we might be exposed to some risks,” Yeung said.

“Reporting fearlessly means we aren’t afraid of offending the political elite, we criticise the authorities when their policies aren’t right, we don’t shy from covering corporations due to business pressure,” he said, according to [local media](#). “But it doesn’t mean we should have to sacrifice our freedom as a price.”

Last week hundreds of police raided the Stand News newsroom, and arrested seven current and former employees, including popstar activist Denise Ho. Two former senior editors of the outlet [were charged with conspiring to publish seditious materials](#) and denied bail. The UN and media watchdogs CPJ and RSF condemned the crackdown as an attack on press freedom.

“The government is abusing a draconian colonial law that has not been used for more than FIVE decades to prosecute journalists,” said exiled activist and former politician, Nathan Law.

It followed last year's [enforced closure of Apple Daily](#) and the arrest of several journalists and executives last year, and a government-led overhaul of the operations of public broadcaster RTHK.

Pro-democracy activists and rights groups say freedoms promised when Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, including freedom of the press, have been increasingly eroded since Beijing [imposed a national security law](#) in 2020.

Hong Kong authorities have repeatedly rejected accusations they are eroding rights and freedoms, and the city's government denies targeting the media.

In an interview with China News Agency on Monday, security secretary Chris Tang lauded his bureau's arrests of "anti-China agitators", singling out the "cessation" of Apple Daily as the most impressive, the Standard [reported](#).

In its description on Facebook, Citizen News says it has no party affiliation and aims to promote Hong Kong's core values, such as those of freedom, openness, diversity and inclusion.

In a farewell message of thanks to its readers, the outlet said it had launched hoping "to serve the public and greater public good".

"We may not be the fastest or the most productive outlets in town but our team, with veterans and young journalists, stand united to publish truthful news reporting with depth," it said.

"We all love this place deeply. Regrettably, what was ahead of us is not just pouring rains or blowing winds, but hurricanes and tsunamis."

The Hong Kong Journalists Association said it was deeply saddened by the closures of the two outlets, and that the impact the crackdown on press would have on Hong Kong's reputation was hard to describe.

This article was amended on 3 January 2022 to clarify details about the raid on the Stand News newsroom. Denise Ho was not one of the two former senior editors charged as stated in an earlier version.

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## Afghanistan

# Afghan agents pour 3,000 litres of alcohol into Kabul canal amid crackdown

Liquor destroyed after barrels seized and three arrested in capital as Taliban government increases raids over alcohol and drugs

00:24

Taliban agents pour barrels of seized alcohol into Kabul canal – video

*Agence France-Presse in Kabul*

Mon 3 Jan 2022 02.34 EST

A team of Afghan intelligence agents poured about 3,000 litres of liquor into a canal in Kabul, the country's spy agency has said, as the new Taliban authorities crack down on the sale of alcohol.

Video footage released by the General Directorate of Intelligence showed its agents pouring alcohol stored in barrels into the canal after seizing it during a raid in the capital.

“Muslims have to seriously abstain from making and delivering alcohol,” a religious scholar said in the video, posted by the agency on Twitter.

It was not clear when the raid was carried out or exactly when the alcohol was destroyed, but a statement issued by the agency on Sunday said three dealers were arrested during the operation.

Selling and consuming alcohol was banned even under the previous Western-backed regime but the Taliban, known for their austere brand of Islam, are stricter in their opposition to it.

Since the Islamists seized power on 15 August, the frequency of raids, including on drug addicts, has increased across the country.

The Taliban government's ministry for promotion of virtue and prevention of vice has also issued several guidelines restricting women's rights.

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## UK news

# Royal Navy says it received reports of vessel attacked off Yemen

UKMTO advises mariners to exercise extreme caution in the area following the incident in the Red Sea



The last shipping incident near Ras Isa was in 2019 when Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi movement briefly seized a Saudi-flagged ship and two South Korean vessels. Photograph: Ahmed Hasan/AFP/Getty Images

*Reuters*

Mon 3 Jan 2022 02.23 EST

The Royal Navy's maritime information service has received reports of an attack on a vessel near Yemen's port of Ras Isa and an investigation was being conducted.

In an advisory issued at 2150 GMT on Sunday, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) – part of Britain's Royal Navy – advised mariners to exercise extreme caution in the area.

It put the vessel's position at approximately 23 nautical miles west of Ras Isa oil terminal on the Red Sea.

The [last shipping incident near Ras Isa was in late 2019](#) when Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi movement briefly seized a Saudi-flagged ship and two South Korean vessels.

Saudi Arabia is leading a military coalition that has been battling the Houthis for more than six years.

The alliance has accused the movement of attacking shipping in the Red Sea, one of the world's busiest maritime lanes leading up to the Suez Canal.

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## US politics

# US could be under rightwing dictator by 2030, Canadian professor warns

Canadian political scientist warns in op ed of Trumpist threat to American democracy and possible effect on northern neighbor

- [The Steal: stethoscope for a democracy near cardiac arrest](#)



Donald Trump speaks in Greenville, North Carolina, last June. Photograph: Jonathan Drake/Reuters

*[Richard Luscombe](#)*

*[@richlusc](#)*

Mon 3 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

The US could be under a [rightwing dictatorship](#) by 2030, a Canadian political science professor has warned, urging his country to protect itself

against the “collapse of American democracy”.

“We mustn’t dismiss these possibilities just because they seem ludicrous or too horrible to imagine,” Thomas Homer-Dixon, founding director of the [Cascade Institute](#) at Royal Roads University in British Columbia, wrote [in the Globe and Mail](#).

“In 2014, the suggestion that [Donald Trump](#) would become president would also have struck nearly everyone as absurd. But today we live in a world where the absurd regularly becomes real and the horrible commonplace.”

Homer-Dixon’s message was blunt: “By 2025, American democracy could collapse, causing extreme domestic political instability, including widespread civil violence. By 2030, if not sooner, the country could be governed by a rightwing dictatorship.”

The author cited eventualities centered on a Trump return to the White House in 2024, possibly including Republican-held state legislatures refusing to accept a Democratic win.

Trump, he warned, “will have only two objectives, vindication and vengeance” of the lie that his 2020 defeat by Joe Biden was the result of electoral fraud.

A “scholar of violent conflict” for more than four decades, Homer-Dixon said [Canada](#) must take heed of the “unfolding crisis”.

“A terrible storm is coming from the south, and [Canada](#) is woefully unprepared. Over the past year we’ve turned our attention inward, distracted by the challenges of Covid-19, reconciliation and the accelerating effects of climate change.

“But now we must focus on the urgent problem of what to do about the likely unraveling of democracy in the United States. We need to start by fully recognising the magnitude of the danger. If Mr Trump is re-elected, even under the more optimistic scenarios the economic and political risks to our country will be innumerable.”

Homer-Dixon said he even saw a scenario in which a new Trump administration, having effectively nullified internal opposition, deliberately damaged its northern neighbor.

“Under the less-optimistic scenarios, the risks to our country in their cumulative effect could easily be existential, far greater than any in our federation’s history. What happens, for instance, if high-profile political refugees fleeing persecution arrive in our country and the US regime demands them back. Do we comply?”

Trump, he said, “and a host of acolytes and wannabes such as Fox [News]’s Tucker Carlson and Georgia representative [Marjorie Taylor Greene](#)”, had transformed the Republican party “into [a near-fascist personality cult](#) that’s a perfect instrument for wrecking democracy”.

Worse, he said, Trump “may be just a warm-up act”.

“Returning to office, he’ll be the wrecking ball that demolishes democracy but the process will produce a political and social shambles,” Homer-Dixon said.

“Still, through targeted harassment and dismissal, he’ll be able to thin the ranks of his movement’s opponents within the state, the bureaucrats, officials and technocrats who oversee the non-partisan functioning of core institutions and abide by the rule of law.

“Then the stage will be set for a more managerially competent ruler, after Mr Trump, to bring order to the chaos he’s created.”

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**Donald Trump**

## Bannon and allies bid to expand pro-Trump influence in local US politics

Growing drive by hardcore Trumpists spurs election watchdogs to voice alarm about threat to American democracy



Flynn and Bannon have focused new energy on increasing conservative influence by recruiting more allies for key local posts. Photograph: Martin Divíšek/EPA

*[Peter Stone](#) in Washington*

Mon 3 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

Key Donald Trump loyalists Steve Bannon and [Michael Flynn](#) are at the forefront of a drive to expand Trumpist influence at the local level of US politics while forging ahead with efforts aimed at promoting baseless claims that Joe Biden's 2020 election victory was fraudulent.

The growing drive by Trump's hardcore allies has spurred election watchdog groups to voice alarm about the threat to democracy posed by Flynn and Bannon – and other Trump acolytes – as they combine debunked claims about election fraud and calls for further 2020 election audits with planning conservative takeovers of official positions that run US elections.

The moves come a year after the attack on the Capitol in Washington when a pro-Trump mob invaded the building in an attempt to stop the certification of Biden's election victory.

Flynn and Bannon, using varying paths, have focused new energy on increasing conservative influence by recruiting more allies for key posts at the local and precinct level with an eye on the 2022 and 2024 elections, and building more political alliances on issues such as vaccine requirements and mask mandates.

The strategies Flynn and Bannon are deploying overlap those of other conservative outfits, such as the influential youth group Turning Point USA, to expand the pro-Trump base at the precinct level, and work to elect Trump-backed politicians to key posts such as secretary of state in Georgia, Arizona and other battleground states.

Flynn and Bannon have separately relied on a mix of non-profit groups, including one backed by the multimillionaire Patrick Byrne, conservative social media outlets favored by the far right like Telegram, and events that convey evangelical Christian messages with political disinformation.

Bannon, for instance, has used his War Room podcast to espouse plans for “taking over the Republican party through the precinct committee strategy” and invited would-be candidates to appear as guests. The podcast, which has tens of millions of downloads, has found a large and receptive conservative following.

Flynn, meanwhile, touts the adage that “local action has national impact” and has been a star speaker in several key states at “ReAwaken America” events, which are dubbed “health and freedom” conferences and combine evangelical themes with misinformation about the 2020 election and vaccine skepticism.

The conservative crusades by Flynn and Bannon come after Trump pardoned them post-election for lying to the FBI and fraud respectively. Bannon and Flynn also were central actors with other Trump loyalists in scheming about ways to block Congress from certifying Biden's election, efforts that are under scrutiny as part of a House select committee investigation of the deadly Capitol attack by hundreds of Trump supporters.

As they have carved out new roles in the conservative ecosystem, Flynn and Bannon still support Trump's conspiratorial claims that he lost in 2020 due to massive cheating, a mantra that reinforces their drives to expand local and state electoral influence to give [Republicans](#) a better shot at recapturing Congress next year, and the White House in 2024.

"We're seeing a dangerous trend of election deniers lining up to fill election administration positions across the country," Joanna Lydgate, chief executive of the States United Democracy Center, said in a statement to the Guardian. "And the efforts by Flynn, Bannon and other promoters of the big lie are all part of this playbook to hijack elections in 2022 and 2024 if their preferred candidate doesn't win."

Likewise, as they have revved up political work on multiple fronts, the two ex-Trump advisers have taken more extremist stances sparking strong criticism.

Flynn, a retired army lieutenant general, has been skewered for his authoritarian style advocacy of "one religion" for America, and for speaking at some events with heavy presences by adherents of QAnon conspiracy movement. Flynn's call for "one religion" came during a talk to a conservative Christian audience in Texas on the ReAwaken America tour in November.

"If we are going to have one nation under God, which we must, we have to have one religion," Flynn said. "One nation under God and one religion under God, right? All of us, working together."

Flynn's feature role at ReAwaken America meetings in several states such as Michigan and Florida is hardly an accident, according to Byrne, the

multimillionaire founder of the America Project that counts Flynn as special adviser and spokesperson.

Byrne, who has joined Flynn at some ReAwaken rallies, said in text messages that he and Flynn had a large hand in launching the ReAwaken tour during the spring by bankrolling the events with some “tens of thousands of dollars” from the America Project.

Overall, Byrne said that the America Project has raised about \$9.5m, of which he donated close to \$7m. Byrne and the America Project poured over \$3m into a months-long audit of Arizona’s largest county, which Trump was banking on to find major fraud, but which resulted in no significant changes to Biden’s win there or overall in the state, much to Trump’s dismay.

Byrne said the project has helped promote audits in other states besides Arizona. Boasting a net worth pegged at about \$75m, Byrne is the ex-chief executive of furniture retailer Overstock.

Byrne texted that he didn’t vote for Trump, and deems himself a “rule of law” advocate who claims there’s still a “mountain of evidence” to support the widely debunked allegations of fraud.

Byrne’s project has had no dearth of Trump links. The project’s president until late last month was Emily Newman, a former Trump aide. Newman, along with Byrne and Flynn, attended a meeting in December 2020 with Trump about ways to block Biden taking office where Flynn touted the option of declaring martial law and deploying the military to rerun the election in key states Trump lost, according to multiple reports.

Flynn’s brother, Joe Flynn, has succeeded Newman as the project’s president, Byrne said.

On top of his work with the America Project, Flynn’s focus on expanding the Maga base at the local level increased when he became chairman in May of another non-profit, America’s Future, which, in turn, has partnered with Turning Point USA and others to form a larger alliance dubbed County Citizens Defending Freedom USA.

The county citizens group has sponsored an array of training programs, protests and candidate meetings with a focus on mask mandates, vaccine requirements and critical race theory, according to Florida lawyer Ron Filipkowski, a former prosecutor who authored a Washington Post article on the wave of local drives by Trump backers.

For his part, Bannon's heavy emphasis on a local "precinct strategy" to help Republican's electoral fortunes combines conspiratorial and apocalyptic bravado.

Bannon told CNN in December that his War Room podcast is an organizing tool to expand Trump's base. "It's about winning elections with the right people – Maga people," Bannon said. "We will have our people in at every level."

"We're taking over all the elections," Bannon said in November on his War Room podcast.

"We're going to get to the bottom of [last year's election] and we're going to decertify the electors. And you're going to have a constitutional crisis. But you know what? We're a big and tough country, and we can handle that, we'll be able to handle that. We'll get through that."

Megan Squire, a computer science professor at Elon University, told the Guardian that much of Bannon's political messaging has relied on alternative social media channels such as Telegram that appeal to conservative and far right allies to spread pro Trump gospel and help broaden the Maga base at the local level.

To Squire, Bannon's rhetoric and large audience look increasingly dangerous.

"After being de-platformed from mainstream social media over the past year, Bannon has been promoting 'alternative', permissive social media channels such as Telegram and Gettr. There his listeners are able to amplify and intensify Bannon's messaging into a 24-hour-a-day echo chamber filled with disinformation, scams, and conspiracy theories."

For Lydgate, the chief executive of the States United Democracy Center, the multi-front drives by Bannon, Flynn and other key Trump loyalists pose serious risks for the integrity of future elections.

“They want to sow doubt in our democracy and make it easier to undermine the will of American voters.”

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