

# The Guardian

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2020.12.26 - 2020.12.29

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## Hospitals

# Doctors raise alarm over 'dire' situation in NHS as Covid cases rise

Hospitals under growing pressure as patient numbers surpass first wave of pandemic

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



An intensive care unit in Coventry. The number of coronavirus patients in NHS hospitals is 20,426, more than April's high of 18,946. Photograph: Jonny Weeks/The Guardian

NHS hospitals in [England](#) are under increasing pressure as coronavirus cases rise, with doctors raising the alarm about “very, very busy services” and one trust calling for volunteers to help prone patients.

The warning comes as the number of coronavirus patients in hospitals surpassed the peak of the first wave – up to 20,426 as of 8am on Monday,

more than April's high of 18,974. [Health](#) officials in Wales and Scotland have also said they fear becoming overwhelmed.

The UK reported 41,385 new lab-confirmed cases on Monday, the highest figure yet for a single day.

Matthew Kershaw, the chief executive of Croydon Health Services [NHS](#) trust, told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that hospitals were "very pressurised" and "very, very busy".

There were also calls for new national coronavirus restrictions to prevent a "catastrophe" at the start of 2021, from a leading infectious disease expert.

#### [Daily count of confirmed Covid-19 patients in hospital at 8am on date shown](#)

Andrew Hayward, a professor of infectious diseases epidemiology at University College London, told Today: "I think we are entering a very dangerous new phase of the pandemic and we're going to need decisive and early national action to prevent a catastrophe in January and February.

"A 50% increase in transmissibility means that the previous levels of restrictions that worked before won't work now, and so tier 4 restrictions are likely to be necessary or even higher than that.

"We're really looking at a situation where we're moving into near lockdown, but we've got to learn the lessons from the first lockdown."

Kershaw said capacity had been expanded in Croydon, alongside hospitals around the capital and across the country. He said: "So we have responded, thus far, well to the needs of our population."

He added: "It is very, very busy ... and it's a really important and difficult moment but we are responding well at this moment."

#### [UK coronavirus cases](#)

UK coronavirus cases

His words were echoed by Samantha Batt-Rawden, an NHS critical care doctor and the president of Doctors Association UK – a union that represents frontline medics – who expressed her exasperation on social media.

“I run a network for over 46K doctors. Things are really bad on the frontline and NHS doctors need help getting the word out,” she tweeted.

She added: “Hospitals are running out of oxygen. One trust has no non-invasive machines left. ICUs are tweeting for volunteers to prone patients. Transfer teams being requested to move patients 65-plus miles to the nearest hospital with critical care capacity. Please. Stay at home if you can.”

Batt-Rawden shared a tweet from Cardiff and Vale University health board, which has since been removed, that read: “Our critical care department is urgently looking for assistance from medical students or other staff groups who have previously supported with proning patients.”

“Proning” is the process of getting a patient on to their front. Getting someone into this position helps patients with acute respiratory distress.

Batt-Rawden said: “Please help NHS staff speak up about how things are on the frontline. It’s dire. And we are shouting it from the rooftops.”

Richard Breeze, the clinical director of critical care at Lewisham and Greenwich [NHS](#) trust, said coronavirus cases there were reaching the levels of the first wave but this time around they had fewer staff.

“It’s bad. And it’s getting worse,” he said. “We are swamped and expanding our footprint but we are stretched thinly, having to make our unit bigger to fit people in. We have fewer staff this wave than last, as more people are ill and have been tested for coronavirus and told to quarantine. We have less provision in terms of staff.”

Will Broughton, from the College of Paramedics, said there was a significant number of patients with Covid needing hospital admission in addition to the normal seasonal demands.

[Hospitals](#) were near the point of “urgently” needing more resources, he said, and it was taking them longer than it should to help some patients.

“All we are trying to do at the moment is protect the response to those who are critically unwell … but those who are lower priority are waiting a long time or not receiving an ambulance at all,” he said.

In a new year message recorded at a vaccination centre, Sir [Simon Stevens](#), the chief executive of the NHS, paid tribute to those on the frontline including doctors, nurses, therapists, as well as cleaners and non-medical staff such as carers, volunteers and care home workers.

Stevens said Covid-19 meant 2020 had “probably been the toughest year most of us can remember”.

“That is certainly true across the health service where we have been responding to the worst pandemic in a century,” he said. He added that the immunisation programme, the biggest in the health service’s history, was a source of greater hope for the year ahead.

“Many of us have lost family, friends, colleagues and – at a time of year when we would normally be celebrating – a lot of people are understandably feeling anxious, frustrated and tired,” Stevens said.

“And now again we are back in the eye of the storm with a [second wave of coronavirus](#) sweeping Europe and, indeed, this country.”

[Coronavirus](#)

# Covid pressure mounts on government to delay return to school in England

Teaching unions and experts urge caution over safety of staff and students as new strain ‘changes game’

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



Teaching unions are asking for more effective testing to be introduced.  
Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty

Teaching unions are asking for more effective testing to be introduced.  
Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty

[Sarah Marsh](#)  
[@sloumarsh](#)

Tue 29 Dec 2020 06.25 EST

There is growing pressure on the government to delay next week’s return to school for millions of children as teaching unions and experts continue to

urge caution over the safety of staff and pupils.

Amid a worsening pandemic and growing concern about the new strain of Covid-19 [spreading from London and the south-east](#), teaching unions have asked the government for more clarity on why sending children back to classrooms will not put them at risk.

They are asking for more effective testing to be introduced and a better strategy in place before ploughing ahead with plans. It comes as debate is under way within the government over the risk of a surge of infections as ministers are understood to be divided over [the announcement by the education secretary, Gavin Williamson](#), about a phased return for pupils.

The pressure grew as NHS England said it had [a record 20,426 people in hospital being treated for Covid-19](#) as of 8am on Monday, surpassing April's peak of 18,946. Health officials in Wales and Scotland have also said they fear becoming overwhelmed.

### [Covid vaccine uptake high despite concerns over hesitancy](#)

[Read more](#)

A leading social scientist said the new strain of Covid-19 “changed the game” in terms of schools reopening. Dr Zubaida Haque, the former deputy director of the race equality thinktank the Runnymede Trust, said: “The key question is are schools safe enough right now? Has the government made schools safer and, in making it safer, can we then keep schools open?”

Speaking to Good Morning Britain, she said: “Right now we have a critical situation: yesterday we had the highest number of daily Covid cases, over 41,000 cases of coronavirus in this country.

“By Christmas Day we had more people in hospitals than at the peak in April this year, so we are in a crisis situation now.”

She added: “The government has delayed opening parliament because we are in a crisis situation but yesterday we had [Michael Gove](#) saying, ‘No, it’s fine, we’re going to have schools open next week and we’ll have a staggered return’ and, frankly, that’s not acceptable, and that’s not safe.”

The head of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) called for “a more grownup” debate around the plans. Speaking to Good Morning Britain, Geoff Barton said: “This doesn’t have to be binary – it doesn’t have to be all young people in school or not in school.

“I would say the people who best know their communities, the people who best know what facilities young people have got at home, whether it’s IT or books, are the school leaders or the teachers.”

The union leader added: “What we could be doing is reducing the number of young people in schools while we get that testing in place, making sure we focus on those young people who we need to have in school, trusting the other ones not to be in school.

“Why don’t we have a more nuanced debate about it? A more grownup attitude, and why don’t we trust our school and college leaders who, frankly, are looked to for real leadership by their local communities?”

Steve Chalke, the founder of Oasis, one of the largest multi-academy trusts in England, told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “We would ask the government to pause, to come up with a clear strategy for the continuity of education. We think that means a short delay to think things through.

“We would suggest a week or two’s delay to think it through, to do it well – and we think that if you really care about kids you would do this well – to invest now, to give time now makes sense.”

Barton said the ASCL union supported the phased opening of schools with a testing system already in place, set up with the support of health services and the military.

He told BBC Breakfast: “What that would then allow would be the phased introduction of children from next week and for us not to be on the back foot in implementing something we haven’t heard about until the day before Christmas Eve, but to be able to do it in a planned way.

“Those people that are calling for a delay to young people coming back [to

school] are doing it on the principle that we should get this testing right and we should listen to what the scientists are saying.”

## Vaccines and immunisation

# Covid vaccine uptake high despite concerns over hesitancy

Experts fear misinformation and development worries could undermine efforts to control pandemic

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



Few people who have been offered the vaccine so far have refused to have the jab. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

Uptake of the Covid-19 vaccine has been high among those offered it, doctors say, despite fears that vaccine hesitancy could [undermine efforts to control the pandemic](#).

Experts have feared mass uptake of the jab could be jeopardised by widespread misinformation, concerns among the public about [the speed at](#)

which the vaccine has been developed and approved, and lack of trust in vaccines and the pharmaceutical companies and governments calling for it.

Such concerns have been compounded by the new, highly transmissible variant of coronavirus that is spreading across the UK, which will mean a greater proportion of the population needs to be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity.

But for now, at least, it seems few are shying away from vaccination. “We’ve had reports from our members that despite inevitable teething problems – to be expected when delivering a completely new and complicated vaccine at scale and speed – the programme seems to be running well overall with very positive take-up rates, so far,” said Prof Martin Marshall, chair of the Royal College of GPs and a practising GP in east London.

Dr Julia Patterson, founder and chief executive of EveryDoctor, a network of grassroots NHS medics, agreed. “I run a network of 26,000 doctors. The response so far has been overwhelmingly positive among those receiving the vaccine. Despite much disinformation online, the uptake is going well,” she told the Guardian.

According to UK government figures, 616,933 people had received their first dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech Covid vaccine by the week ending 20 December, with those over the age of 80, residents and workers of care homes and NHS staff the first groups to receive the shot.

Dr Fari Ahmad, a GP, said a lot of elderly recipients are very happy to have the vaccine.

“I think they do understand how much of a difference it will make to them individually and they’re probably the ones that have been shielding, and it’s had a massive impact on them,” she told BBC Breakfast.

“As we move through the age ranges I certainly think there will be some vaccine hesitancy, but I would hope that people will have seen the benefits of it.”

Dr Samantha Vanderslott, of the Oxford Vaccine Group, said that surveys have previously suggested acceptance of a Covid vaccine would be higher among older age groups.

A [poll by YouGov in November](#) showed that 67% of Britons were very likely, or fairly likely, to take the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine if offered, a figure that rose to 81% among those aged 65 and over.

“The acceptance in older ages has been higher in surveys and vaccination seems to have been going quite smoothly,” said Vanderslott. “How younger people will fare is a bit unknown but they will be far down the list and millions will have had the vaccine already, so the hope is that the worries about the newness and speed of development will decrease.”

But Vanderslott added that more effort is needed to underscore the importance of vaccination in younger people, and offer clear and tailored messages to groups with particular conditions or situations.

Prof Beate Kampmann, director of the vaccine centre at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine agreed that as the number of those who have been vaccinated grows, many of those wavering may decide to have the jab.

But, she added, other factors may also play a role. “If there are going to be travel restrictions and people can’t go anywhere unless they have got this vaccine passport [if that approach is taken], I think people will change their mind quite quickly about whether they want this vaccine or not.”

## Schools

# Armed forces to support Covid testing in schools in England

MoD says 1,500 military personnel will ensure facilities ready for start of term on 4 January

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

## Nadeem Badshah

Mon 28 Dec 2020 19.01 EST Last modified on Mon 28 Dec 2020 23.37 EST



Students will be expected to swab themselves in the vast majority of case, under supervision from a school staff member. Photograph: Owen Humphreys/PA

Members of the armed forces will be deployed to support coronavirus testing operations for thousands of school and college students in England, the government has announced.

The [Ministry of Defence](#) said 1,500 military personnel would ensure testing systems were implemented by next Monday, when pupils are due to begin a staggered return for the new term.

It said the majority of the personnel would form local response teams, providing support and phone advice to institutions needing guidance on the set up of testing facilities.

Students will swab themselves in the vast majority of cases, under the supervision of a school staff member or volunteer trained for the role, while teachers are not expected to take a role in the testing process.

The decision follows successful testing pilots conducted in schools in November and December.

The education secretary, [Gavin Williamson](#), said: “It is a true cross-government effort to make sure secondary schools and colleges have the support, guidance, materials and funding they need to offer rapid testing to their staff and students from the start of term.

“I am grateful to the armed forces personnel, and all the school and college staff, leaders and volunteers working to put testing in place.”

Any students who have been in contact with a positive case will be offered seven days of daily testing while teachers can have weekly Covid tests.

However, at the end of the autumn term teaching unions described the testing scheme as [“inoperable” and “undeliverable”](#) and advised staff to refuse to work on the scheme over the Christmas break. A joint statement from all four major education unions, school governors and the Church of England, which runs about a quarter of the nation’s schools, accused the government of making a “chaotic and rushed” announcement on the final day of term.

Year 11 and year 13 pupils who are preparing for their GCSE and A-levels are to be allowed to return to school next Monday along with those taking vocational qualifications that week, the children of key workers and vulnerable youngsters. Most secondary students will not be back in the classroom until 11 January and will be taught remotely.

However, [a split has emerged between ministers](#) over whether the plans should go ahead after the government's scientific advisers urged a delay to the start of the new term amid a surge in cases. The Department for Education has said the return to schools is being kept "under review".

Williamson is understood to be mounting a "rearguard action" against what one source described as "senior colleagues" who have been alarmed by advice that reopening schools will make it impossible to keep [the R number](#) below one.

Williamson is expected to meet Downing Street officials to consider whether schools in tier 4 areas should remain closed until February.

[UK news](#)

## UK weather: snow and ice disrupt travel services across Britain

Police warn motorists as yellow warning issued for much of England, Scotland and Wales



A mother and daughter sledging in Newcastle-under-Lyme in Staffordshire. More cold weather is on the way. Photograph: Joe Giddens/PA

A mother and daughter sledging in Newcastle-under-Lyme in Staffordshire. More cold weather is on the way. Photograph: Joe Giddens/PA

[Matthew Weaver](#)

Tue 29 Dec 2020 06.54 EST

Snow and ice has prompted weather and travel warnings in parts of the Midlands and north-west [England](#) and much of Scotland.

Police warned against all but essential road journeys in [Staffordshire](#), [Cheshire](#) and [Derbyshire](#) after a layer of snow fell overnight. In East Lancashire, there were “lots of collisions coming in as the snow falls heavily”, according to Terry Woods, the county’s deputy chief constable,

while Highways England also warned cautioned motorists over snow-hit roads.

The snow also led to disruption to bus services in [Manchester](#) and [parts of Lancashire](#).

In Stourbridge, west of Birmingham, a [police sniffer dog called Frank found a eight-year-old girl](#) sitting in the snow an hour after she was reported missing. The girl was reunited with her family, West Midlands police said.

[Year of extreme weather creates confusion for Britain's flora and fauna](#)  
[Read more](#)

The bad weather meant bins full of post-Christmas rubbish were left uncollected in several areas including [Nottingham](#), [Wakefield](#) and [Blackburn](#).

Edinburgh Zoo announced it was forced to close on Tuesday [due to the icy weather](#). And the Five Sisters Zoo near West Calder advised visitors against coming due to difficult and [dangerous](#) road conditions around the attraction.

Holyrood park in [Edinburgh was also closed to traffic](#). The snow on the Salisbury crags above the city was thick enough to snowboard on.

Edwardas Dauksa snowboarding down Salisbury Crags this morning  [pic.twitter.com/k9zXKJR9oR](https://pic.twitter.com/k9zXKJR9oR)

— Edinburgh Spotlight (@edinspotlight) [December 29, 2020](#)

The Manchester central MP, Lucy Powell, tweeted that “snowball fights make lockdown much more doable”.

Snowball fights make lockdown much more doable ....

— Lucy Powell MP (@LucyMPowell) [December 29, 2020](#)

A yellow warning for snow and ice for much of England, [Wales](#) and Scotland remained in force after heavy snowfall in some regions, with further wintry weather expected on Wednesday and Thursday.

The warning area was extended early on Tuesday to cover more of southern and central Scotland, as well as further south-east to include parts of Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire.



Red deer alongside the A82 in Glencoe, Scotland. Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA

The snow was forecast to spread south into Wales and the Midlands during the morning, with some snow expected for some other areas of the UK. Large parts of London, southern, south-west and eastern England, plus Wales and parts of the Midlands have also been warned there is a chance snow and ice could hit on Wednesday and Thursday.

Freezing fog patches are likely to be slow to clear in parts of England and western Scotland, the Met Office forecast.

Temperatures were recorded close to freezing on Tuesday morning in central Scotland and parts of the Midlands, a Met Office graph shows, and between 2C (35.6F) and 4C (39.2F) elsewhere, rising to 7C (44.6C) in Plymouth.



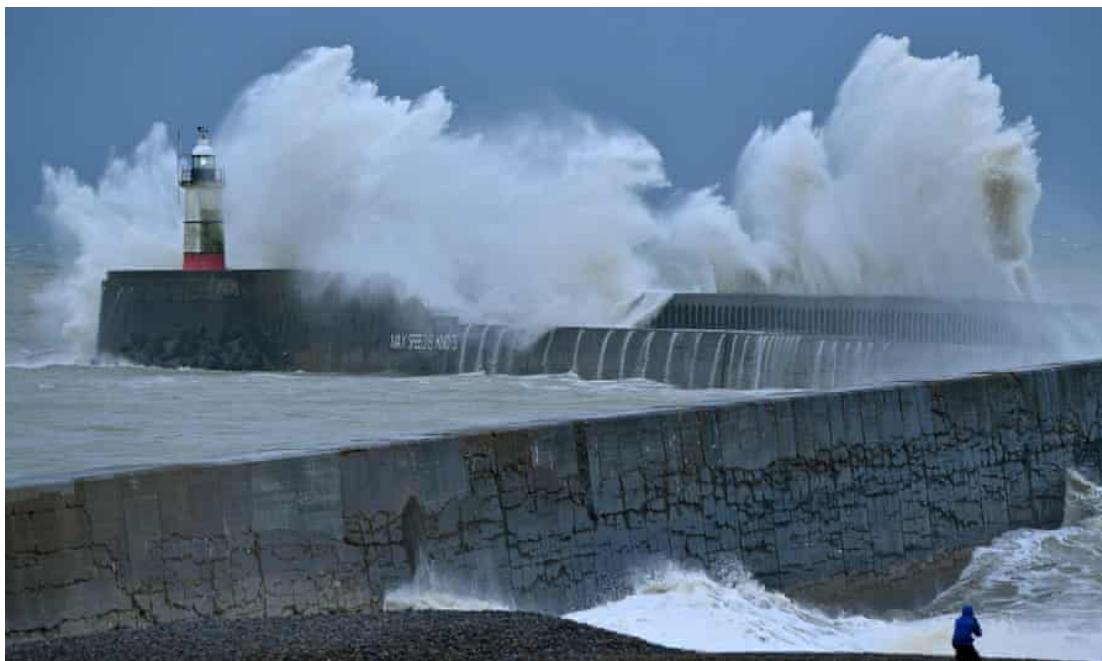
A woman walks across a snow-covered park in Knutsford, Cheshire.  
Photograph: Phil Noble/Reuters

The Met Office said: “Wintry showers will start to fade inland in the afternoon, but they will continue to stream into coastal areas, northern Scotland and [Northern Ireland](#).”

## Wind power

# Storm Bella helps Great Britain set new record for wind power generation

On Boxing Day more than half of country's daily electricity came from wind turbines



Newhaven lighthouse and the harbour wall on 27 December as Storm Bella continued to hit the south coast of Britain. Photograph: Glyn Kirk/AFP/Getty

Newhaven lighthouse and the harbour wall on 27 December as Storm Bella continued to hit the south coast of Britain. Photograph: Glyn Kirk/AFP/Getty

[Rob Davies](#) and [Jillian Ambrose](#)

Mon 28 Dec 2020 12.47 EST

More than half of Great Britain's daily electricity came from wind turbines for the first time on Boxing Day, as the country headed for its "greenest year on record", due in part to the coronavirus.

As [Storm Bella](#) arrived, bringing gusts of up to 100mph, wind provided 50.7% of Great Britain's electricity according to data charting the power generation mix.

While wind briefly hit 60% in August, it had not previously sustained such levels for 24 hours.

"Britain has experienced a renewables revolution over the last decade with the growth of biomass, wind and solar power," said Drax Electric Insights, part of coal and biomass power company Drax, which tracks the data.

The milestone follows a string of new low-carbon records set in 2020, as Covid-19 restrictions depressed power demand, helping wind and solar to claim a larger share of the mix. Fossil fuels have increasingly been edged out as a result, helping Great Britain enjoy its [longest coal-free period](#) since the Industrial Revolution.

### [Storm Bella: high winds add to flooding chaos across UK](#)

[Read more](#)

Gas and [coal power plants](#) made up 36% of the electricity generated in England, Scotland and Wales in the year up to 21 December 2020, according to data from National Grid's electricity system operator (NGESO), down from 46% in 2019.

Wind and solar farms delivered 29% of the electricity mix, rising from 23% of electricity generated in Great Britain last year, according to the early data report.

- For the first time ever yesterday, amid [#StormBella](#), more than half of Great Britain's [#electricity](#) was generated by the [#wind](#)
  - ⚡ 50.67% of power was produced by wind turbines
  - ⚡ Previous record of 50% set on 21 August
- <https://t.co/otBFE9zO46> ( □ by [@I\\_like\\_eggs](#))  
[pic.twitter.com/yEU4mdRf50](https://pic.twitter.com/yEU4mdRf50)

— Drax (@DraxGroup) [December 27, 2020](#)

While Boxing Day set a record for the highest share of power generated by windfarms, it was not a record for the most power they have ever supplied. That was set [earlier this month](#), when windfarms delivered 17.3 gigawatts. Because overall demand was higher at the time, their percentage share of total power generation was lower than it was on Boxing Day, at 40%.

The larger role for renewables has caused the “carbon intensity” of Great Britain’s electricity to fall to its lowest level on record of 181g of carbon dioxide per kilowatt-hour of electricity, compared with an average of 215g last year and 248g in 2018.

Rob Rome, NGESO’s head of national control, said: “2020 has been a record-breaking year for Great Britain’s electricity system. The grid continues to transform at an astonishing rate as we harness the growth of renewable power sources.

“We saw the highest ever level of solar generation in April, [the longest period of coal-free operation](#) between April and June, and the greenest ever month in May,” and the wind record set earlier this month illustrated the “changing nature of electricity in Britain”.

There was a blip during August and September, when the electricity system bucked the trend of declining carbon intensity as emissions rose despite lower demand for electricity, suggesting a higher use of fossil fuels.

Tom Edwards, an analyst at the energy consulting group Cornwall Insight, said the electricity system operator increased its reliance on gas-fired power plants by 20% in September compared with the year before, amid a slump in renewable energy generation.

“To compensate for the lower wind speeds and *dunkelflautes* – dark, still periods – we turned to gas and coal,” he said. “It’s part and parcel of relying more on weather driven capacity and interconnector exports, which makes us more reliant on the vagaries of the wind and sun.”

Steve Jennings, a partner at the consulting firm PwC, said the “key challenge on our pathway to net zero” is what the electricity system does “when the wind doesn’t blow or the sun doesn’t shine”.

The falling cost of energy storage – such as batteries – is expected to play a major role in Great Britain’s ability to use more renewable energy, and less fossil fuel power, alongside a more flexible approach to when major energy users consume electricity.

But Jennings said nuclear power and gas-fired power plants fitted with carbon capture technology would still be required if Great Britain hopes to avoid unabated fossil-fuel generation.

“Everyone is very positive about the UK’s green energy records but I think the microscope will begin to turn to what is happening on a daily basis rather than simply a cumulative basis,” he said.

The coronavirus pandemic reduced electricity usage overall in 2020 compared with a normal year, as large swathes of the economy have been forced to shut their doors for extended periods. Average power demand across the course of the year has dropped from 32.58GW in 2019 to 30.6GW so far in 2020.

Air pollution

## Mother of girl who died from asthma urges mayor to rethink Silvertown tunnel

Mother of Ella Kissi-Debrah who died from air pollution says road tunnel will drive up pollution



Rosamund Kissi-Debrah outside Southwark coroner's court after the inquest into the death of her nine-year old daughter Ella Kissi-Debrah. Photograph: Kirsty O'Connor/PA

Rosamund Kissi-Debrah outside Southwark coroner's court after the inquest into the death of her nine-year old daughter Ella Kissi-Debrah. Photograph: Kirsty O'Connor/PA

Matthew Taylor

Tue 29 Dec 2020 05.42 EST

The mother of Ella Kissi-Debrah has called on the mayor of [London](#) to rethink his plans for a new four-lane road tunnel under the Thames warning

it will drive up pollution with a potentially devastating impact on young people's health.

Rosamund Kissi-Debrah, [speaking after a coroner ruled](#) that illegal levels of air pollution had caused the death of her nine-year-old daughter in 2013, said it was critical Sadiq reconsider the £2bn scheme.

"I am kindly asking the mayor of London to take another look at the tunnel as there is absolutely no evidence that air quality will improve especially for the most polluted schools," she said.

Kissi-Debrah fought a seven-year campaign for justice for her daughter, and the coroner's ruling is believed to be the first in the world to identify air pollution as a cause of death.

In a landmark narrative verdict, Philip Barlow, inner south London coroner, said Ella died from acute respiratory failure, severe asthma and air pollution exposure.

Now Kissi-Debrah says she has looked at the "impact assessment reports" of the proposed Silvertown Tunnel and is convinced it would increase dangerous levels of toxic air in an already polluted part of London.

Khan has come under increasing pressure over the proposed tunnel with a growing list of MPs, councillors, environmentalists and residents coming out against the project. They argue it will increase pollution, drive up car use and increase emissions in the midst of a climate crisis.

Labour's environment secretary, Matthew Pennycook, whose Greenwich and Woolwich constituency would contain one end of the tunnel, earlier this year [called on Khan, a Labour mayor, to reverse the plan](#). Lyn Brown, the Labour MP for West Ham, where the other end of the tunnel would be, [has also called for the project to be scrapped](#).

The rising cost of the scheme has come under scrutiny. In September [the Guardian revealed](#) that the project could cost nearly £2bn over the next three decades if it goes ahead. The figure – which includes the construction,

maintenance and operation of the tunnel as well as interest payments on the debt – is more than twice the original estimate.

In June, [a report from the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies](#), backed by some of the UK's leading climate scientists, found that the development was incompatible with the Greater London Authority's aim to [become carbon-neutral by 2030](#).

But Khan's administration has repeatedly defended the scheme, saying it was essential to improve river crossings in east [London](#) that are “antiquated and worn out”.

City Hall insists the new tunnel would provide a “public transport-focused river crossing” with improved bus links, and be paid for by introducing tolls on both the Blackwall tunnel and at Silvertown.

But Kissi-Debrah said instead of focusing on a new road tunnel the mayor should extend the planned ultra low emissions zone [Ulez], which is due to be widened from its current central London zone to the north and south circular from October 2021.

“Based on the success of the Ulez can the mayor rather consider implementing it London wide? 250,000 children have an asthma diagnosis and they will breathe better and it would save lives.”

Conservatives

## UK government accused of pursuing 'white nationalist' agenda

Boss of Runnymede Trust says white working class being prioritised at expense of BAME people to win votes



Halima Begum said ministers had failed to respond meaningfully to the ‘seismic shifts’ represented by the Black Lives Matter movement.  
Photograph: Handout

Halima Begum said ministers had failed to respond meaningfully to the ‘seismic shifts’ represented by the Black Lives Matter movement.  
Photograph: Handout

[Haroon Siddique](#)

Tue 29 Dec 2020 01.00 EST

The head of a race equality thinktank has accused the government of pursuing a divisive “white nationalist” agenda, prioritising the white working class at the expense of ethnic minorities in an attempt to win votes.

In her first interview since being appointed director of the Runnymede Trust, Halima Begum said ministers had failed to respond meaningfully to the “seismic shifts” represented by [Black Lives Matters \(BLM\) protests](#) and the [disproportionate effect of Covid-19](#) on black and minority ethnic (BAME) Britons.

She said that while companies such as [Penguin](#), [Goldman Sachs](#) and [Apple](#) had been approaching Runnymede to find out what they could do to tackle structural racism, and the public and even civil servants were engaging on the topic, the government was denying its existence.

“I think the government’s long-term plan is to work up white nationalism for the next elections,” said Begum. “What we should be saying is that working-class black and white communities have been left behind, because they’ve seen industries demolished in the north of this country. We haven’t seen the economies built back, we haven’t seen investment in our education system for years so that our black, white and Asian working-class children will thrive.

“What I see instead is the [Conservatives](#) pushing through [a narrative of] a white working class that’s been left behind, which by the way is where [Donald] Trump was at about six years ago.”

Runnymede was formed in 1968, the same year as [Enoch Powell’s “rivers of blood” speech](#). Much has changed since then but BLM and the health and [economic impacts of Covid on BAME people](#) have highlighted longstanding inequalities. Begum, who joined Runnymede at the end of August, said this year’s events shifted the public discourse.

By contrast, she said the government had been slow to address the [increased risk to ethnic minorities from Covid](#) and had used BAME appointments to its [commission on race and ethnic disparities](#) and to ministerial roles to propagate its denial of structural racism, citing as an example the equalities minister [Kemi Badenoch’s rubbishing of critical race theory](#).

“If you have white liberals pushing a white nationalist agenda, it’s very easy to challenge for other white liberals who don’t agree,” said Begum. “But if you can actually put in more black and minority leaders pushing hard on

white nationalism, [it's] much harder to challenge ... It's really important that we understand why these leaders are appointed. It is not to promote inclusiveness, it is actually to promote divisions.”

Begum said she believed the Conservative government was inspired by the electoral success of rightwing politicians such as [Trump in 2016](#) but also the party’s “individualistic notion of society and the economy”.

She said: “There’s nothing wrong with the values of the Conservative party, which is to create more wealth ... What they don’t see is that when they talk about the level playing field, they think the level playing field is not level for white people. What they don’t see is that the playing field is not level for black people, it hasn’t been for years ... What I’d like them to think about is a formula that brings black working-class people with them as well and then I think if they did win [the election] good on them, they’re actually taking the whole voter base with them.”

Despite her damning critique, Begum said she remained committed to working with the government and had recently met Boris Johnson’s special advisers. She also said her concerns were not limited to the Conservatives, warning a “nervous” Labour party against pandering to white nationalism and thinking “we’ve got to try some of that ourselves”.

Begum said that while white working-class communities were disadvantaged, “they are not discriminated against because of the colour of their skin and that is what we mean by structural racism”.

A government spokesperson said: “The independent [commission on race and ethnic disparities](#) was set up to examine where inequality exists across the whole of society. Both the prime minister and the commission remain fully committed to tackling racism, and we reject the divisive idea that the government is prioritising one group over another.

“The PM is thrilled to have assembled a group of talented and diverse commissioners, who each bring a wealth of experience from across a range of important sectors. The evidence-led commission has been undertaking research and inviting submissions from various stakeholders – with the aim of delivering a positive agenda for change.”

## New rules to tackle ‘wild west’ of plastic waste dumped on poorer countries

International convention to stop richer countries exporting contaminated material for recycling could mean a cleaner ocean in five years



Plastic waste is photographed before being shipped back to the country of origin in Port Klang, Malaysia. Countries will soon be given powers to refuse shipments. Photograph: Mohd Rasfan/AFP/Getty

Plastic waste is photographed before being shipped back to the country of origin in Port Klang, Malaysia. Countries will soon be given powers to refuse shipments. Photograph: Mohd Rasfan/AFP/Getty

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Tue 29 Dec 2020 01.30 EST

New international rules to tackle the “wild west” global trade in plastic, which has seen wealthy nations dump contaminated plastic waste on to poorer ones, will result in a cleaner ocean within five years, according to a UN transboundary waste chief.

The rules, which come into force on 1 January, aim to make the trade more transparent in order to allow developing nations such as Vietnam and Malaysia to refuse low-quality, difficult-to-recycle waste before it is even shipped.

“It is my optimistic view that, in five years, we will see results,” said Rolph Payet, the executive director of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions. “People on the frontline are going to be telling us whether there is a decrease of plastic in the ocean. I don’t see that happening in the next two to three years, but on the horizon of five years. This amendment is just the beginning.”

At the moment, developing countries – many of which have recycling industries that take in shipments from other nations – cannot see whether a given shipment of plastic is actually recyclable or if it is too contaminated to use before it arrives.

Waste that cannot be recycled usually ends up being illegally burned or dumped in landfills or waterways.

Only 9% of all plastic ever produced has been recycled. About 12% has been incinerated. The other 79% has accumulated in landfill, dumps and the natural environment, where it often ends up washing into rivers via wastewater, rain and floods. Much of it eventually [ends up in the ocean](#).

The new rules, agreed by more than 180 nations under an amendment to the Basel convention, introduce a system of “prior informed consent” for all exports of difficult-to-recycle or contaminated plastic.

Payet acknowledged that tighter export controls may at first see major plastic exporting nations, such as the UK and the US, dispose of waste in landfill and incinerators instead.

“In the short term, yes, there will be landfilling, there will be incineration of the plastic waste,” he said. “But in the long term, if government policies are right and if consumers keep applying pressure, it will create the environment for more recycling and a circular approach when it comes to plastic.”

Turkey is the largest export market for British plastic waste, with Malaysia second, [according to October data](#).

[UK to support plans for new global treaty to 'turn tide' on plastic pollution](#)  
[Read more](#)

So far this year, Britain has had 22 repatriation requests from seven countries to take back plastic exports, the Environment Agency told the Guardian. They include Malaysia, which [sent back](#) 42 containers of “illegal” waste in January, as well as Indonesia, Vietnam, Romania, Croatia, Poland and Belgium.

Under the new rules, prior consent would have been needed for 20 of those 22 requests, presumably resulting in refusals. The Basel amendment has been incorporated into UK law, allowing UK regulators to implement and enforce it.

Payet said China's ban on plastic waste imports in 2018 had sent "shockwaves" through developed nations, who were reliant on China to take material they could not recycle themselves.

"The China export ban was a signal to the world that something was seriously wrong and we had to fix it."

As well as plastic waste, developing nations also export the hidden health and environmental costs of disposal. Many of the nations that import problematic or heavily contaminated plastic lack the proper facilities to deal with it.

"It was the wild west for plastics," Payet said. "It was easier for everybody to put everything in a container and export it without asking questions: 'Does this country have the capacity to deal with it, the technology to deal with it – and also, what can we do with the things we can't recycle?'"

The amendment is a "catalyst" for change, he said, and it is now up to governments to encourage the recycling sector, an industry with low profit margins, and other private sector firms, to innovate.

"There is a lot of pressure from industry, from consumers, from supermarkets, to be innovative. Covid-19 has thrown a spanner into the works, but it also helps us to reflect a lot more on how we can repackaging food in a healthier way."



Gama recycling facility in the southern Turkish province of Gaziantep. Turkey is the largest export market for British plastic waste. Photograph: Yasin Akgül/AFP/Getty

The UK, which alongside the US is the world's largest producer of plastic, exports two-thirds of its plastic waste. Britain's [total plastic waste exports](#) to non-EU countries in October was 22.9m kg, of which 13.9m kg went to Turkey.

A Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs spokesperson said it had pledged to ban the export of polluting plastic waste to non-OECD countries and to introduce tougher controls on waste exports, though as of October the UK was still sending 7.1m kg to Malaysia, which is not in the OECD.

Simon Ellin, of the UK Recycling Association, warned that the new rules could mean more waste plastic going into domestic landfill or incineration.

"In the UK we export about 70% of the plastic we collect because we don't have the processing capacity to handle it," said Ellin. "A lot more will be incinerated and landfilled."

Despite that "short-term hiccup", said Tim Grabiels, a lawyer with the Environmental Investigation Agency, the new rules would have a positive

impact. “I personally believe that from an ethical and environmental perspective, it can have a very positive effect,” he said. “[Contaminated plastic] has been an economic burden on developing countries. We will see a lesser amount coming to developing countries, and it will free up their waste management capacity for their own domestic waste.”

Brexit

## Starmer faces high-profile Labour rebellion before Brexit deal vote

MPs including John McDonnell say party must not ‘fall into trap of rallying around rotten deal’



Keir Starmer has confirmed Labour will support the Brexit deal in a Commons vote. Photograph: Nigel Roddis/Getty Images

Keir Starmer has confirmed Labour will support the Brexit deal in a Commons vote. Photograph: Nigel Roddis/Getty Images

*Jessica Elgot Deputy political editor*

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Mon 28 Dec 2020 17.00 EST

Keir Starmer is facing a high-profile rebellion against Labour’s Brexit position on the eve of the vote in parliament, as prominent MPs including John McDonnell and Clive Lewis accused him of “falling into the trap of rallying around this rotten deal”.

Labour is likely to contain a major rebellion of frontbench MPs but an increasing number of prominent supporters are urging Starmer to change course. Backbenchers have also raised concerns on private WhatsApp groups that Labour's endorsement for the deal has been given without the legislation being published.

Tory Brexiters who are studying the trade deal will deliver their verdict on Tuesday afternoon.

The European Research Group (ERG), the influential group of Eurosceptic backbenchers, will take its cue from its so-called "star chamber", which includes the ERG deputy chairman David Jones, Sir Bill Cash and the QC Martin Howe, and is scrutinising the deal.

It is understood senior members of the ERG are broadly supportive of the document but have identified issues – including fishing rights – where members plan to raise concerns.

Those who signed the Labour statement urging Starmer not to support the deal come from across the political spectrum, including the former shadow chancellor McDonnell and Ben Bradshaw, a former cabinet minister who is a staunch supporter of Starmer.

"This deal is a substantial downgrade of the UK's relationship with the EU," the statement warns, "and is designed to open the door to rampant economic deregulation – a loss of rights and protections for workers, the environment, food standards and many other areas of life."

Two former Labour leaders in the European parliament, Richard Corbett and Glyn Ford, as well as the former MEPs Julie Ward, Mary Honeyball, David Martin and Jude Kirton-Darling have also signed, along with the former Labour cabinet minister Andrew Adonis.

The statement, organised by Another Europe is Possible and Labour for a Socialist Europe, has also been endorsed by two former MPs who lost their seats in the 2019 election, Anna Turley and Sandy Martin.

Activists including Laura Parker, the former head of Momentum, the film-maker Paul Mason and Michael Chessel, from Another Europe Is Possible, who coordinated leftwing second-referendum efforts under Jeremy Corbyn, have also signed.

The group that signed the statement, which also includes local activists and councillors, says the task of the opposition is proper parliamentary scrutiny and setting out an alternative. “That task gets harder if opposition parties fall into the trap of rallying around this rotten deal,” it says.

“We are witnessing an act of vandalism against our livelihoods, our rights and our horizons. We call on Labour, the Labour movement and other opposition parties not to support the Tories’ Brexit deal when it is put to a vote in the House of Commons.”

The UK parliament has been recalled to sit on Wednesday 30 December to debate and vote on the legislation but MPs are widely expected to pass the post-Brexit [trade and security deal](#) by a substantial margin after [Starmer confirmed Labour would support it](#). The Lib Dems and the [SNP are to vote against the deal](#).

Any Tory Brexiter rebellion is likely to be small, though most said there would be no “whipping” arrangements for group members. “It will be up to individual colleagues to decide how they vote,” one MP said, a contrast to the heavily coordinated opposition of the Theresa May era.

The Democratic Unionist party said it would be voting against the Brexit deal “on a point of principle” and not because it supported no deal, it said. The party’s leader, Arlene Foster, said she recognised it reduced the impact of red tape on trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but “we still have many negative issues” arising from the Northern Ireland protocol. Other Northern Ireland MPs from the SDLP and Alliance parties will also vote against the deal.

On Monday [EU member states unanimously backed the deal](#), paving the way for the new arrangements to come into force on 1 January. At a meeting of ambassadors in Brussels, the [27 member states](#) gave their support for the 1,246-page treaty to be “provisionally applied” at the end of the year.

The European parliament is delaying its vote until February or March, when it is hoped MEPs will return to Strasbourg to complete the formal EU ratification process.

Speaking on Monday morning, the Cabinet Office minister, Michael Gove, hailed the deal but said British businesses faced a “bumpy” period from 1 January.

“Businesses will need to make sure that they’re ready for new customs procedures and we as individuals will need to make sure that our passports are up to date because they need to have at least six months before expiry on them in order to be able to travel abroad,” he said.

“I’m sure there will be bumpy moments but we are there in order to try to do everything we can to smooth the path.”

There has been [mounting anger from Britain’s fishers](#) about the extent of EU boats’ fishing rights in UK waters. Under the terms of the agreement, 25% of EU boats’ fishing rights in UK waters will be transferred to the UK fishing fleet over a five-and-a-half-year transition period.

Gove said UK fishers would be “getting a significant uptick … we will have by 2026 about two-thirds of the fish in our waters”. However, Andrew Locker, the chairman of the National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations, said they would be “absolutely worse off” as a result of the deal.

“What we have got now is a fraction of what we were promised through Brexit. We are going to really, really struggle this year.”

Many MPs on all sides have told whips they do not plan to be present on Wednesday given London’s [tier 4 coronavirus restrictions](#). The Commons Speaker, Lindsay Hoyle, has strongly urged MPs to participate virtually and to use proxy votes.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

## Zaghari-Ratcliffe: UK 'starting to look weak' over failure to protect citizens, says Hunt

Former foreign minister says Iran must faces consequences and ‘it is not clear there have been any’



Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe has been detained in Iran since 2016. Photograph: PA

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe has been detained in Iran since 2016. Photograph: PA

Patrick Wintour *Diplomatic editor*

Tue 29 Dec 2020 03.08 EST

The former foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt has said the UK has been made to look weak by failing to do more to protect British Iranian dual nationals held as hostages in Iran.

He is the first former member of the Conservative government to say the UK should find a way to pay the £400m debt the UK owes to [Iran](#), accusing the government of dithering over the issue and not thinking imaginatively about a way of paying the debt that does not fall foul of sanctions.

The debt is formally treated as a separate issue, but is widely seen as a barrier to the release of the British-Iranian dual nationals [Anoosheh Ashoori](#) and Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. A third British dual national has just been given an eight-year sentence but not yet jailed.

Hunt's criticism of the Foreign Office came in an article in the Times, written after a letter sent to the lawyers of Zaghari-Ratcliffe by Sarah Broughton, the head of the Foreign Office consular department, said the Foreign Office had no statutory duties owing to citizens held abroad, even if they were the subject of torture.

The tone of the letter angered Hunt since it ran wholly counter to the review commissioned by Hunt as foreign secretary on why the UK had often failed citizens abroad in complex consular cases.

## Timeline

### **Imprisonment of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe in Iran**

Show

3 April 2016

Arrest in Tehran

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is arrested at Imam Khomeini airport as she is trying to return to Britain after a holiday visiting family with her daughter, Gabriella.

2016

Release campaign begins

Her husband, Richard Ratcliffe, [delivers a letter to David Cameron in 10 Downing Street](#), demanding the government do more for her release.

9 September 2016

Sentenced

She is [sentenced to five years in jail](#). Her husband says the exact charges are still being kept a secret.

November 2016

Hunger strike

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's health deteriorates after she spends several days on hunger strike in protest at her imprisonment.

24 April 2017

Appeal fails

Iran's supreme court [upholds her conviction](#).

1 November 2017

Boris Johnson intervenes

Boris Johnson, then Foreign Secretary, tells a parliamentary select committee "When we look at what [she] was doing, she was simply teaching people journalism". Four days after his comments, Zaghari-Ratcliffe is returned to court, where his statement is cited in evidence against her. Her employers, the Thomson Reuters Foundation, deny that she has ever trained journalists, and her family maintain she was in Iran on holiday. Johnson is eventually forced to apologise for the "distress and anguish" his comments cause the family.

12 November 2017

Health concerns

Her husband reveals that Zaghari-Ratcliffe has fears for her health after lumps had been found in her breasts that required an ultrasound scan, and that she was now "on the verge of a nervous breakdown".

3 August 2018

Hunt meets husband

New Foreign Secretary [Jeremy Hunt meets with Richard Ratcliffe](#), and pledges "We will do everything we can to bring her home."

23 August 2018  
Temporary release

She is granted a temporary three-day release from prison.

14 January 2019  
Hunger strike

Zaghari-Ratcliffe is [on hunger strike again](#), in protest at the withdrawal of her medical care.

8 March 2019  
Diplomatic protection

The foreign secretary, Jeremy Hunt, takes the unusual step of [granting her diplomatic protection](#) – a move that raises her case from a consular matter to the level of a dispute between the two states.

17 May 2019  
Travel warning

The UK upgrades its travel advice to British-Iranian dual nationals, for the first time advising against all travel to [Iran](#). The advice also urges Iranian nationals living in the UK to exercise caution if they decide to travel to Iran.

15 June 2019  
Hunger strike in London

Richard Ratcliffe joins his wife in a new hunger strike campaign. He fasts outside the Iranian embassy in London as she begins a third hunger strike protest in prison.

29 June 2019  
Hunger strike ends

Zaghari-Ratcliffe ends her hunger strike by eating some breakfast. Her husband also ends his strike outside the embassy.

17 July 2019

Moved to mental health ward

According to her husband, [Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#) was moved from Evin prison to the mental ward of Imam Khomeini hospital, where Iran's Revolutionary Guards have prevented relatives from contacting her.

11 October 2019

Daughter returns to London

Zaghari-Ratcliffe's five year old daughter Gabriella, who has lived with her grandparents in Tehran and regularly visited her mother in jail over the last three years, [returns to London](#) in order to start school.

17 March 2020

Temporary release

Amid the threat of the coronavirus pandemic, she is temporarily released from prison, but will be required to wear an ankle brace and not move more than 300 metres from her parents' home.

8 September 2020

New charges

Iranian state media reports that she will appear in court to face new and unspecified charges. In the end, a weekend court appearance on a new charge of waging propaganda against the state that could leave her incarcerated for another 10 years is [postponed without warning](#), leading Zaghari-Ratcliffe to say "People should not underestimate the level of stress. People tell me to calm down. You don't understand what it is like. Nothing is calm."

28 October 2020

Return to prison threatened

Zaghari-Ratcliffe is told she is to stand trial on fresh charges and will be returning to prison after the hearing.

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Hunt also granted Zaghari-Ratcliffe in March 2019 the rare status of “diplomatic protection” after a long campaign led by Redress, a move designed to signal that an injury to her is an injury to the British state.

But her new status appears largely symbolic and does not appear to have led to any practical change to the way in which the Foreign Office has pursued her case.

Since she was given diplomatic protection, she has faced fresh charges and she is now being held on a tag at her parent’s home in Tehran awaiting a delayed fresh trial.

Her initial five-year sentence is due to end on 7 March. Iran refuses to recognise dual citizenship and refuses to give British diplomats in Iran consular access.

The current foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, has discussed the release of the dual nationals numerous times with the Iranian foreign minister, Javad Zarif, but Iran believes the UK is not genuinely trying to pay the debt, partly because it fears disapproval by the Trump administration.

Hunt suggests the debt could be paid through humanitarian aid, so potentially avoiding US or EU sanctions, but the government refuses to discuss the debt issue even at private briefings.

Writing in the Times, Hunt says he envisaged practical consequences for Iran when he gave Zaghari-Ratcliffe protection. He wrote: “It is not clear to me there have been any – something that is beginning to make us look weak.”

He added: “We must show the world that if you imprison a British citizen on trumped up charges you will pay a very heavy price because Britain is a major player on the world stage and intends to remain one. Allowing

ourselves to be pushed around like this at the moment of post Brexit renewal sends the opposite signal.”

But alongside the demand for a tougher stance, Hunt suggests ministers have failed to act decisively over the payment of a £400m debt owed to Iran arising from arms sales to the shah of Iran in the mid-70s. The arms contract was cancelled after he fell, but the UK never repaid the cash and has since either disputed the size of the debt, the level of interest or more recently its ability to hand over the cash because of sanctions.

Hunt writes: “We must be nimble about the separate dispute with Iran over the debt involving tanks after the toppling of the shah. When a court has ruled that the money is legally owed to Iran, why have we dithered in sorting it out? Why do we not pay them in medicines instead of cash if we need to comply with sanctions?”

His question reflects divisions within government during his foreign secretaryship over the payment of the debt, including fears that payment would be perceived as a reward for state hostage taking. Ministers have refused to discuss the feasibility of a payment either to the central bank of Iran or in medicines, and with some exceptions rarely pressed on the issue in parliament.

Hunt claims there are elements in the Iranian regime desperate to release Zaghari-Ratcliffe due to the reputational damage to Iran. He writes: “Britain must restate Nazanin’s innocence, insist on consular access and representation at her court case making the price of injustice too high for Iran.”

Critics of Hunt will claim he is advocating a contradictory regime of demanding tougher unspecified action, and at the same time showing a willingness to pay the debt.

In a letter sent to Zaghari-Ratcliffe lawyers, the head of the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office legal department said: “The FCDO is not a statutory safeguarding body nor does it have a legal duty of care to British nationals overseas. As set out in our guide on support for British

nationals Abroad, there is no legal right to consular assistance, rather the FCDO provides support on a discretionary basis.”

It has long been known that the Foreign Office has no legal duty to provide consular access to its citizens abroad, even if subject to maltreatment owing to their nationality, an issue that has been highlighted by Redress.

Ashoori’s wife, Sherry, has also hired lawyers to win her 66-year-old husband diplomatic protection.

[IVF](#)

## England's first not-for-profit IVF clinic to open in 2021

British Pregnancy Advisory Service is setting up fertility network to address inequalities in provision



IVF provision has been cut back in many areas, with some now offering no paid-for fertility treatment and others only one or two cycles. Photograph: Sebastian Kaulitzki/Alamy Stock Photo

IVF provision has been cut back in many areas, with some now offering no paid-for fertility treatment and others only one or two cycles. Photograph: Sebastian Kaulitzki/Alamy Stock Photo

*Helen Pidd* North of England editor

Tue 29 Dec 2020 02.00 EST

England's first not-for-profit [IVF](#) clinic is to open in London next year, run by a charity better known for providing abortions.

The British [Pregnancy](#) Advisory Service, which has been helping women terminate pregnancies for more than 50 years, has decided to set up its own

fertility network to address the inequalities in IVF provision in England.

It plans to undercut private clinics and charge only the true cost of treatment, which it estimates will be between £3,000 and £3,500 each IVF cycle, not including drugs. There will be no expensive “add-ons” – such as embryo glue or “assisted hatching” – which patients often feel pressured into accepting at a very vulnerable time, despite many not being proved to work.

Women should be offered three cycles of IVF on the NHS, according to guidelines from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (Nice), which recommends which drugs and treatments should be available on the NHS in England and Wales.

Yet IVF provision has been cut back in many areas, with some now offering no paid-for fertility treatment and others only one or two cycles. Some refuse to treat women over 35, those who cannot prove they are in a “stable relationship” or couples with one partner who has had a child in a previous relationship.

BPAS sees parallels between the provision of IVF in 2020 with the provision of abortion in 1968, when the charity was founded.

“In 1968, women were unable to access NHS-funded abortion care and were forced to turn to private providers, who often exploited their desperation by charging extortionate prices,” said Katherine O’Brien, associate director of communications and campaigns at BPAS. “Some private providers were also not offering an ethical service and were more akin to snake oil salesmen than medical professionals. While not as extreme as the backstreet abortions of the 1960s, it is clear that some private IVF providers are encouraging patients to undergo clinically unproven treatments at a huge personal and financial cost.”

The BPAS clinic is set to open in central London in September 2021, for egg collection and embryo transfers. Scans and other appointments will take place at satellite clinics operating from existing BPAS centres outside the capital, starting first in Peterborough and Swindon, before being rolled out across England.

The satellite clinics will use separate entrances and different clinics for patients seeking abortions and fertility treatment, to make sure a woman wishing to terminate a pregnancy is not sitting in the waiting room next to someone desperately hoping to conceive.

It will have no set criteria for treatment, according to Marta Jansa Perez, director of embryology at the charity. “We want our clinic to be as inclusive as possible in terms of ethnic diversity, sexual orientation and gender identities,” she said. “We’re not going to say bluntly say no to anyone but we are planning to follow all professional guidelines and provide patients with the full picture in terms of chances and risks to them and the baby that they will potentially have.”

No one will be turned away for being too old, “though we will have very honest conversations with people about their chances of conceiving and will tell them if they have next to no chance of it succeeding.”

Too many private clinics give people “false hope”, she said. People are often “strongly pushed the hope of buying a baby” when the truth is that treatment is statistically likely to fail in many cases.

Jansa Perez had fertility treatment to conceive her two children and says she understands how vulnerable patients can be. “I think that helps me a lot professionally, because I can see it from both sides. Even though I was successful, and I feel super privileged, I still know what it feels like,” she said.

“One of the things I feel very passionate about is that it’s important that people have access to fertility treatment. It’s something that impacts on people’s lives quite significantly, and it impacts on people’s mental health, as well.”

Like many people who have experienced infertility, she remembers “hating seeing pregnant ladies and babies” when she was trying to conceive. That’s why the BPAS clinic and its website will not have any pictures of pregnant bellies or babies.

The BPAS clinic will start small, aiming to carry out 200 egg collections in its first year. But Jansa Perez hopes to scale it up and eventually also become a registered IVF provider for the NHS, which means some patients could choose to have their NHS-funded cycles there.

The clinic will be regulated by the Human Embryology and Fertility Authority and Jansa Perez insists it will be transparent not just in its pricing but also its success rates. Private clinics have been accused of using misleading graphs and statistics to inflate their rates, by not being clear that the data only includes women under 35, according [to the fertility watchdog](#).

For Jansa Perez, helping patients decide when to stop treatment – or potentially not to start it in the first place – will be as important as starting it. “A lot of patients feel that when they have a negative pregnancy test, they’re either rushed on to having another treatment cycle and there is not discussion of maybe not having any further treatment, looking at the whole picture and seeing what their chances are, and whether that’s something that they want to do, emotionally and financially,” she said. “We’re not selling them the baby, we’re selling them a chance to possibly have one.”

[US politics](#)

# House Republicans join with Democrats to override Trump's veto of defence bill

If, as expected, the Senate follows suit later this week, it will be Congress's first such rebuke of his presidency

Play Video

1:30

House Republicans join Democrats to override Trump's veto of defence bill – video

[Donald Trump](#) suffered fresh humiliation on Monday when more than a hundred Republicans joined Democrats in the House of Representatives to override his veto of a \$741bn defence bill.

If, as expected, the Senate follows suit later this week, it will be Congress's first such rebuke of his presidency, which has only three weeks left to run.

During a high stakes day on Capitol Hill, the Democratic-controlled House also voted to boost coronavirus relief payments to \$2,000 per person. This was a step endorsed by Trump but is thought unlikely to progress in the Senate.

The National Defense Authorization Act, which funds service members' pay, overseas military operations and other needs, has been passed by Congress every year since 1967. Trump exercised his veto last week, returning the bill with objections including its proposal to change the names of 10 military bases honouring Confederate leaders.

Trump was also aggrieved that the legislation did not repeal/repeal Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which protects tech companies from legal liability over content posted by their users. The president has accused Facebook and Twitter of political bias against him.

His objections served as the latest loyalty test for [Republicans](#) in the aftermath of his election defeat by Joe Biden. Kevin McCarthy, the House minority leader, announced that he would not vote to override Trump's veto despite supporting the original bill, which passed both chambers of Congress with strong bipartisan backing.

But it was not enough. Some 109 Republicans broke from Trump on Monday and joined [Democrats](#) to support the bill. The final tally of 322-87 comfortably reached the two thirds threshold required to override the veto.

Mac Thornberry, the most senior Republican on the House armed services committee, urged colleagues who had supported the bill earlier this month to back it again. "It's the exact same bill, not a comma has changed," he said. "I would only ask that as members vote, they put the best interests of the country first. There is no other consideration that should matter."

Democrat Adam Smith, chair of the committee, said: "It is enormously important that we pass this bill. We did it once. Let's just do it one more time, and then we can all go home for the year. We can be done, and we can be proud of what we have accomplished."



Mac Thornberry, the ranking Republican on the House armed services committee, urged colleagues to support the bill. Photograph: Getty Images

The bill is expected to go before the Republican-controlled Senate later this week. It will become law if passed with a two thirds majority. Trump has exercised a veto nine times during his presidency, but this would be the first override by Congress.

Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the House, expressed gratitude that Trump's "dangerous sabotage efforts" had been thwarted. "The president must end his eleventh-hour campaign of chaos, and stop using his final moments in office to obstruct bipartisan and bicameral action to protect our military and defend our security," she said.

But activists found little consolation in the Republican defiance. Mary Small, Indivisible's acting national policy director, said: "This is no cause for celebration. It's sad and infuriating that the only time Republicans banded together to rebuke Trump was in pursuit of an over-militarized foreign policy and bloated defense budget and not any of the other horrifying, democracy-destroying, cruel things he has done."

Trump blindsided Republicans again last week when he initially refused to sign a \$2.3tn government funding and coronavirus relief package that had taken Congress months to negotiate. He eventually relented on Sunday night at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, averting a government shutdown.

Trump had demanded direct stimulus payments to US citizens be increased to \$2,000 as opposed to the agreed \$600. On Monday the House voted 275-134 in favour of the higher sum, with 44 Republicans joining Democrats. But it is not certain whether it will even be taken up by the Senate, where again many Republicans would find themselves in the uncomfortable position of crossing Trump.

Bernie Sanders, an independent senator from Vermont, said: "The House has passed a \$2,000 direct payment for working people. It is time for the Senate to act. This week on the Senate floor Mitch McConnell wants to vote to override Trump's veto of the \$740 billion defense funding bill and then head home for the New Year. I'm going to object until we get a vote on legislation to provide a \$2,000 direct payment to the working class."

Sanders, a former candidate in the Democratic presidential primary, added: “Let me be clear: If Senator McConnell doesn’t agree to an up or down vote to provide the working people of our country a \$2,000 direct payment, Congress will not be going home for New Year’s Eve. Let’s do our job.”

[Banksy](#)

## A rollercoaster year for Banksy as sales soar and activism increases

The street artist's work sells for millions while his controversial migrant rescue mission aimed to be a wakeup call for Europe



A person photographs Banksy's Aachoo!! mural on the side of a house in Bristol, south-west England. Photograph: Geoff Caddick/AFP/Getty

A person photographs Banksy's Aachoo!! mural on the side of a house in Bristol, south-west England. Photograph: Geoff Caddick/AFP/Getty

*Lanre Bakare* Arts and culture correspondent

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Tue 29 Dec 2020 05.32 EST

This year may have been one to forget for most people, but for [Banksy](#) it has been 12 months in which he has continued a seemingly irrepressible rise from street artist to cultural phenomenon.

In September, after six months of uncertainty in the art market [as fairs closed](#) and [sales slumped](#), he bucked the trend. Banksy's impressionist

pastiche [Show Me the Monet](#) sold for [£7.5m at Sotheby's](#) – £2.5m above its most optimistic estimate – while a year earlier his piece Devolved Parliament sold for just under £9.9m.

His standing in the art market has grown in part due to an increasingly interested Asian audience, while his public profile has been maintained by trademark street pieces on [houses](#), [a hair salon](#) and on [the London Undergound](#).

[Banksy confirms hula-hoop girl mural in Nottingham is his](#)  
[Read more](#)

Alex Branczik, European head of contemporary art at Sotheby's, said the demand for Banksy pieces and prints in the secondary market has never been higher with more traditional buyers hungry to add a piece to their collection.

He said: “A lot of the more traditional collectors, people who buy [Basquiat](#) and [Haring](#) and even [Giacometti](#) or [Bacon](#), are also now looking at Banksy as a really serious artist.”

Yet despite these successes, 2020 hasn't all been plain sailing for Banksy. In August, a rescue boat funded by the artist was reportedly close to declaring a “[state of emergency](#)” after it set off from Spain to recover people stranded in the [crossing between Libya and Italy](#).

The Louise Michel, which was painted bright pink and featured [Banksy](#) artwork, recovered about 200 people and eventually made its way to [Palermo](#) after sending a distress signal. It was criticised by some for its approach, while its crew said they hoped it was a wakeup call for European nations in a year when [more than 500 refugees are known to have died in the Mediterranean](#).



A boy waves from the deck of the Louise Michel rescue vessel, a French patrol boat manned by activists and funded by Banksy. Photograph: Santi Palacios/AP

Brandler said the incident at sea wasn't surprising. "The migrant boat situation was typical in that he has the best intentions, but he doesn't think it through," he said.

The dealer added that Banksy's guerrilla tactics can cause issues because his worldwide fame means the consequences of him installing a piece on someone else's property can be costly.

The recent stencil of a woman sneezing on a wall in Bristol caused problems for the family who owned the property as they were in the middle of selling the house. Tabloid coverage said the house price rocketed to £5m, and the family were criticised after temporarily pausing the sale. They later confirmed the sale was going ahead as planned.

Brandler said: "Because it's left on their wall, they have all the responsibility and costs of maintaining it and protecting it, but they can't do anything with it. So they get all the negatives without the positive."

As well as the problems at sea there were setbacks in court, with a European trademark ruling going against the artist. Banksy lost a long-running dispute

with a greetings card company, which argued it should be able to use an image of his Flower Thrower stencil mural because of the artist's anonymity.

In 2014, Banksy's representatives, Pest Control Office, successfully applied for an EU trademark of the Flower Thrower and he set up a shop in Croydon in order to help support his case. But in September that was overturned after a two-year dispute.

An EU panel said they found "his intention was not to use the mark as a trademark to commercialise goods ... but only to circumnavigate the law. These actions are inconsistent with honest practices."

A trademark lawyer, who represented the card company, said as a result of the ruling "all of Banksy's trademarks are at risk as all of the portfolio has the same issue".

So could that potentially sour 2021 for Banksy? Brandler doesn't think so and said people should expect more big market prices and unpredictable activism rather than a retreat.

"If a signed print of Love Is in the Air can go for hundreds of thousands of dollars, there's no limit," he said. "That's more expensive than a Picasso or a Rembrandt."

Branczik, meanwhile, is taking a more pragmatic approach. "I've learned never to be surprised by Banksy," he said.

## 2020.12.29 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus: India reports cases of UK Covid variant; Philippines extends travel bans](#)
- [Sydney Three cases outside northern beaches keep city on high alert](#)
- [Science Weekly Review of the year: uncovering the science of Covid-19 \(part one\)](#)
- [Switzerland Only about 12 Britons stay in quarantine in ski resort after hundreds flee](#)
- [Global report South Africa bans alcohol sales; Spain sets up Covid vaccine register](#)
- [The lost year Could Covid lockdown have helped save the planet?](#)
- [WHO Covid-19 pandemic is 'not necessarily the big one', experts warn](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

## **Coronavirus live news: India reports cases of UK Covid variant; Philippines extends travel bans**

Health

## Three Covid cases outside northern beaches keep Sydney on high alert

Cases in Wollongong, the inner west and north of Sydney yet to be linked to Avalon cluster, chief health officer says



NSW chief health officer Dr Kerry Chant says contact tracers are investigating the source of three cases outside the northern beaches.  
Photograph: Dan Hembrechts/AAP

NSW chief health officer Dr Kerry Chant says contact tracers are investigating the source of three cases outside the northern beaches.  
Photograph: Dan Hembrechts/AAP

[Melissa Davey](#)

[@MelissaLDavey](#)

Mon 28 Dec 2020 21.12 EST

New South Wales has recorded three locally acquired cases of Covid-19 in the 24 hours to 8pm on Monday, but the chief health officer has warned additional cases were recorded overnight outside the Avalon cluster.

While the three cases identified on Monday were all in people already in isolation on the northern beaches, Dr Kerry Chant said she had been alerted to three more cases by Tuesday morning, which will be included in Wednesday's update.

"There were three cases that we are currently investigating," Chant said. One of them is in Wollongong, another in Sydney's inner west and the third in Sydney's north.

"This highlights how the situation can change quite rapidly, and that's why we're mentioning these cases," she said.

[Covid hotspots NSW: list of Sydney and regional coronavirus case locations](#)  
[Read more](#)

The premier, Gladys Berejiklian, said the cases outside the northern beaches were worrying, but would not lead her to impose "stay at home" orders in greater Sydney at this stage.

"We won't impose anything on our citizens unless we absolutely have to," she said.

She expressed concern that the number of people getting tested had dropped since Christmas, saying higher rates of testing would give authorities confidence cases were not being missed.

"It's always a bit concerning when you read about a positive result outside of the northern beaches and so the contract tracers are working to try and establish those links."

She said the threat in greater Sydney was "almost becoming equal to parts of the northern beaches and that's where we'll be adjusting potentially some of our restrictions".

"Until those links are established, all of us in greater Sydney have to be on high alert."

The cluster linked to Avalon on the northern beaches now numbers 129. There are 142 active cases of the virus throughout the state.

Berejiklian took aim at the border closures put in place by some state premiers after being asked about plans for the Sydney cricket Test. There are concerns that cricketers who played in the Sydney would not be able to travel to Queensland for the following Test in Brisbane due to the closure of Queensland's borders to people who have been in NSW, unless Queensland made an exception. Cricket Australia was expected to announce its decision on plans for the rest of the Test series later on Tuesday.

Berejiklian said Cricket Australia should consider moving Brisbane's Test, as opposed to moving Sydney's, if the Queensland government did not allow players to travel. She said Cricket Australia seemed "pleased with the plans" the government put forward to allow crowds at 50% capacity at a seated event.

[Twelve people from Sydney's northern beaches fined after allegedly attending inner-city wedding](#)

[Read more](#)

"Our government prefers open borders throughout Australia for the duration of the pandemic, that has always been our position and as we have demonstrated to date, we have capacity in New South Wales to get on top of things," the premier said. "It is extremely volatile and I don't want to speak too soon, but certainly I hope we have been able to demonstrate that border issues shouldn't really be there unless they absolutely have to be, and we ask all governments to consider the decisions they take."

"On compassionate grounds, I think people have already suffered enough regarding Christmas and new year's in terms of not being able to reunite with families, and the feedback we're getting from tourism operators in all states is that everybody is suffering in terms of jobs and economy. They are all issues need to turn our attention to."

Covid-19 cases linked to the Avalon cluster have visited a growing list of locations across Sydney, and new places of concern [are added every day](#). NSW Health said with a number of cases recently linked to Sydney's central business district, it is important for people who spent time in the north-eastern part of the city over the past two weeks – including Australia Square, the MLC Centre and Chifley Square – to be alert for symptoms, and to

isolate immediately and get tested if any symptoms develop, no matter how mild.

Meanwhile in Queensland, health minister Yvette D'Ath said Queensland had detected a variant of Covid-19 causing concern in South Africa. It is the first time the South African variant had been identified in Australia, she said.

“The positive news ... is that they were in hotel quarantine at the time they were tested and they have since been transferred to a hospital, and we are absolutely confident that all proper measures were taken at the hotel, and in the transfer” D'Ath said.

The [South African variant](#) is different to a UK variant also causing concern, but both contain an unusually high number of mutations compared to other variants. Both strains contain the N501Y mutation, however, so do other variants that do not appear to be associated with increased transmission.

The UK strain has been detected in returned travellers in hotel quarantine in NSW as far back as June, but never infected the Australian community. Queensland's chief health officer Dr Jeanette Young said exemptions allowing returned international travellers to quarantine at home instead of in hotels would be reduced in light of both variants.

However, scientists say more work needs to be done to establish with certainty whether the variants are associated with more severe disease and more rapid spread.

[Science Weekly](#)

[Science](#)

## **Review of the year: uncovering the science of Covid-19 (part one)**

Coronavirus

# Only about 12 Britons stay in quarantine in Swiss ski resort after hundreds flee

Hundreds left Verbier after discovery of new Covid variant despite order to self-isolate

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

Peter Beaumont

Mon 28 Dec 2020 10.34 EST Last modified on Mon 28 Dec 2020 23.37 EST



A ski instructor walks past a screen with social distancing instructions at the start of a ski lift in the Alpine resort of Verbier. Photograph: Fabrice Coffrini/AFP/Getty Images

Only about a dozen British tourists out of about 420 appear to be left in the Swiss ski resort of Verbier after an [undisclosed number fled](#) a mandatory quarantine, many under cover of darkness, risking a 10,000 Swiss franc fine (£8,300) and drawing widespread condemnation on social media.

Asked about the runaway tourists, the Swiss health minister, Alain Berset, said: “We are aware of that. It’s obviously a problem. There was an order to quarantine that has not been respected.”

He added: “One shouldn’t underestimate what an impossible situation it was. We had to decide within hours what to do … That things don’t work perfectly in such a situation, that problems surface, is a reality we have to live with.”

While some Swiss officials were sympathetic to the British skiers who quietly escaped rather than comply with Switzerland’s new quarantine rules for citizens from the UK and South Africa, after the discovery of a new highly contagious [variant of coronavirus](#), commentators on Twitter were less kind, focusing on the wealth and entitlement of the skiers.

It also appeared that some of the skiers may have ignored UK advice on not travelling abroad as part of the new restrictions announced before Christmas.

While Verbier, not far from the French border, has been the focus of most reporting, British skiers also fled other resorts – including the former Leave.EU campaigner Andy Wigmore, who compared his own family to the Von Trapps from The Sound of Music as he escaped via Paris after tough Swiss restrictions were introduced last week.

“So had the best time in wengen.swiss until the Swiss decided to lockdown the country and quarantine all those who didn’t escape for 14 days … well just like in the Sound of Music the Wiggy von Trapps decided to make a run for it from the slopes of [Switzerland](#) to the French border in less than 3 hours.” In the film, the Von Trapps are escaping the Nazis.

Wigmore was one of few British tourists in Switzerland willing to put his head above the parapet in the last week as many chose to leave their apartments and rooms, leaving meals uneaten and beds unslept in.

## Covid cases in Switzerland – graph

While Verbier was hosting about 420 British skiers, it is believed about 3,500 flew into Switzerland for the Christmas break, with many travelling by car or train. Pre-pandemic, British skiers made up 21% of all overnight stays in the Verbier resort.

Swiss resorts had appeared to be set to benefit from restrictions imposed in other parts of Europe but the restrictions by the Swiss government – introduced on 21 December and including a [10-day retroactive quarantine](#) for those arrived from Britain since 14 December – caught out large numbers.

The restrictions were amended on Christmas Eve to allow Britons to return home, including those in quarantine, if they abided by “special measures” including informing local authorities of their mode of transport.

It is unclear how many simply fled and how many left under the amended rule.

“Many of them stayed in quarantine for a day before they set off unnoticed under the cover of darkness,” said Jean-Marc Sandoz, a spokesman for the wider Bagnes municipality, calling the situation “the worst week our community has ever experienced”.

Reports in the Swiss media as the ban was announced last week suggested some hotels had been explicit about the new quarantine rules for British guests, suggesting that those who fled were aware they were breaking the law.

The Neue Zürcher Zeitung quoted Anne Georges of Verbier’s Hotel Phenix before Christmas as advising three groups of British guests to stay in their rooms. “It’s uncomfortable, but what else do I want to do?”

Commentary on social media focused on the wealth and entitlement of the skiers.

The former Financial Times editor Lionel Barber [tweeted](#): “Postscript to the [#Verbier](#) break-out: the British must now officially count as the laager louts

of Europe.”

Lionel Barber (@lionelbarber)

Postscript to the [#Verbier](#) break-out: the British must now officially count as the laager louts of Europe

[December 28, 2020](#)

Other posted mockups of the poster for the film The Great Escape or called for those who fled to be arrested.

Simon Wiget, a spokesperson for Verbier, defended the British tourists, explaining that the notion that hundreds had fled was probably due to a misunderstanding that had led British skiers being “stigmatised”.

“The new regulations required visitors from both Britain and South Africa to register,” he told the Guardian. “There was also a formal process of permissions to allow people to return home, either to travel to the airport or to drive.”

He added it was unclear how many had left using this official permission, as the commune was simply required to register foreign visitors and inform them of the regulations.

Coronavirus

# Global report: South Africa bans alcohol sales; Spain sets up Covid vaccine register

German care home workers accidentally injected with five vaccine doses; South Korea reports record deaths

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



South Africa's president Cyril Ramaphosa announces new restrictions in attempt to slow the Covid-19 surge. Photograph: Nic Bothma/EPA

South Africa's president Cyril Ramaphosa announces new restrictions in attempt to slow the Covid-19 surge. Photograph: Nic Bothma/EPA

*Martin Farrer and agencies*

Tue 29 Dec 2020 00.10 EST

South Africa's president has reimposed a ban on alcohol sales and ordered the closure of all bars as part of new restrictions to help the country battle a

resurgence of the coronavirus, [including a new variant](#).

In a nationwide address on Monday, Cyril Ramaphosa also announced the closure of all beaches and public swimming pools in the country's infection hotspots, which include Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and several coastal areas.

In addition, [South Africa](#) is extending its nighttime curfew by four hours, requiring all residents must be at home from 9pm until 6am, the president said.

[Only about 12 Britons stay in quarantine in Swiss ski resort after hundreds flee](#)

[Read more](#)

“Reckless behavior due to alcohol intoxication has contributed to increased transmission. Alcohol-related accidents and violence are putting pressure on our hospital emergency units,” Ramaphosa said.

“As we had to in the early days of the lockdown, we now have to flatten the curve to protect the capacity of our healthcare system to enable it to respond effectively to this new wave of infections.”

Ramaphosa said the ban on selling alcohol and other new restrictions would take effect at midnight on Monday. They include the mandatory wearing of masks in public, and anyone found not wearing a mask in a public place will be subject to a fine or a criminal charge punishable by a possible jail sentence, the president said.

Ramaphosa said the increased restrictions are necessary because of a surge in Covid-19 infections which has [pushed South Africa's total confirmed virus cases past 1 million](#).

“Nearly 27,000 South Africans are known to have died from Covid-19. The number of new coronavirus infections is climbing at an unprecedented rate,” he said. “More than 50,000 new cases have been reported since Christmas Eve.”

Ramaphosa announced the new measures after a cabinet meeting and an emergency meeting of the national coronavirus command council. He said the new restrictions would be reviewed in a few weeks and a relaxation would only be considered when the numbers of new cases and hospitalisations decrease.

The country surpassed the 1 million mark in confirmed virus cases on Sunday night, when authorities reported that the country's total cases during the pandemic had reached 1,004,413, including 26,735 deaths.

Like Britain, South Africa is battling [a variant of Covid-19](#) that medical experts think is more infectious than the original. The variant has become dominant in many parts of the country, according to experts.

The South African Medical Association, which represents nurses and other health workers as well as doctors, warned on Monday that the health system was on the verge of being overwhelmed by the combination of higher numbers of Covid-19 patients and people needing urgent care from alcohol-related incidents. Many holiday gatherings involve high levels of alcohol consumption, which in turn often lead to increased trauma cases.

When South Africa previously had a total ban on liquor sales, trauma cases in hospitals dropped by as much as 60%, according to government statistics. When the ban on alcohol sales was lifted, trauma cases went back up to previous levels.

South Africa's seven-day rolling average of confirmed daily cases has risen over the past two weeks from 11.18 new cases per 100,000 people on Dec. 13 to 19.87 new cases per 100,000 people on 27 December.

As [European Union](#) countries began rolling out the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine which was approved by the bloc's regulators last week, **Spain** said it was setting up a registry of people who refuse to be vaccinated and will share it with other member countries.

The vaccine will not be mandatory in [Spain](#) but Salvador Illa, Spain's health minister, told Spanish TV the best way to defeat the virus was "to vaccinate all of us - the more the better".

Eight care home workers in **Germany** were accidentally injected with five doses of the Covid-19 vaccine, local authorities said on Monday - but are suffering no serious ill effects so far.

The seven women and one man, aged between 38 and 54, are employees of a retirement home in the town of Stralsund in north-eastern Germany.

**South Korea** said on Tuesday it would sign a deal with Moderna to offer Covid-19 vaccines for 20 million people, Yonhap news agency reported citing the presidential office. The nation reported 40 deaths on Tuesday, a daily record.

This comes a day after officials vowed to speed up efforts to launch a public coronavirus vaccination programme as the country detected its first cases of the virus variant linked to the rapid rise in infections in Britain.

Other developments include:

- **Thailand** confirmed 155 new coronavirus cases on Tuesday, the majority of which were locally transmitted infections, the public health ministry said.
- **Indian** health authorities said on Tuesday they had found six people who had returned from Britain in recent weeks positive for the new more infectious strain of the coronavirus. All six patients have been kept in isolation.
- The **United States** military has begun to vaccinate personnel in Japan and South Korea.

[The lost year: 12 months of coronavirus](#)[Climate change](#)

## Could Covid lockdown have helped save the planet?



Hurricane Genevieve is seen from the International Space Station orbiting Earth in August 2020. Photograph: Nasa/Reuters

Hurricane Genevieve is seen from the International Space Station orbiting Earth in August 2020. Photograph: Nasa/Reuters

Slowdown of human activity was too short to reverse years of destruction, but we saw a glimpse of post-fossil fuel world

*[Jonathan Watts](#)*

*[@jonathanwatts](#)*

Tue 29 Dec 2020 02.00 EST

When lockdown began, climate scientists were horrified at the unfolding tragedy, but also intrigued to observe what they called an "[inadvertent experiment](#)" on a global scale. To what extent, they asked, would the Earth system respond to the steepest slowdown in human activity since the second world war?

Environmental activists put the question more succinctly: how much would it help to save the planet?

Almost one year on from the first reported Covid case, the short answer is: not enough. In fact, experts say the pandemic may have made some environmental problems worse, though there is still a narrow window of opportunity for something good to come from something bad if governments use their economic stimulus packages to promote a green recovery.

During the northern hemisphere spring, when restrictions were at their strictest, the human footprint softened to a level not seen in decades. [Flights halved, road traffic in the UK fell](#) by more than 70%. Industrial emissions in China, the world's biggest source of carbon, were [down about 18%](#) between early February and mid-March – a cut of 250m tonnes. Car use in the United States declined by 40%. So light was humankind's touch on the Earth that seismologists were able to detect [lower vibrations from “cultural noise”](#) than before the pandemic.



British Airways planes parked on the tarmac at Glasgow Airport in March 2020. Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

The respite was too short to reverse decades of destruction, but it did provide a glimpse of [what the world might feel like without fossil fuels](#) and with

more space for nature.

Wildlife did not have time to reclaim lost territory but it had scope for exploration. Alongside apocalyptic images of deserted roads, the internet briefly buzzed with heartwarming clips of sheep in a deserted playground in Monmouthshire, Wales, coyotes on the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, wild boar snuffling through the streets of Barcelona, and deer grazing not far from the White House in Washington DC. Wildflowers flourished on roadsides because verges were cut less frequently.

In the global south, the picture was more mixed. Rhino poaching [declined in Tanzania](#) due to disruption of supply chains and restrictions on cross-border movements, but bushmeat hunting, illegal firewood collection and incursions into protected areas [increased in India](#), Nepal and Kenya [because local communities](#) lost tourist income and sought other ways to care for their families.

In Brazil, traditional guardians of the Amazon have been weakened. The Xavante and Yanomami indigenous groups have been strongly impacted by the disease, and the lockdown has kept forest rangers at home. Meanwhile, land grabbers, fire-starters and illegal miners were busier than ever. Deforestation in Brazil [hit a 12-year high](#).

Elsewhere, there were health gains, though probably not enough to offset the losses. Providing a little relief from rising Covid death tolls [were projections](#) in Europe of at least 11,000 fewer fatalities from air pollution. Breathing cleaner air also meant 6,000 fewer children developing asthma, 1,900 avoiding A&E visits and 600 fewer being born preterm.

In the UK, 2 million people with respiratory conditions [experienced reduced symptoms](#). The change was [visible from space](#), where satellite picked up clear reductions of smog belts over Wuhan in China and Turin in Italy. Residents in many cities could also see the difference. In Kathmandu, Nepal, residents were astonished to [make out Mount Everest](#) for the first time in decades. In Manila, the [Sierra Madre became visible](#) again.

But the gains were short-lived. Once lockdown eased, traffic surged back and so did [air pollution](#). In a survey of 49 British towns and cities, 80% had

contamination levels that were now the same or worse than before the pandemic. Elsewhere, sightings of distant mountain peaks and wild animals are fading in the memory.

The story is equally disheartening when it comes to global carbon emissions, which fell steeply but not for long enough to dent climate fears. Months of empty roads and skies and sluggish economic activity reduced global greenhouse gas discharges by an estimated 7%, the sharpest annual fall ever recorded.

## Quick Guide

### **8 ways to offset your carbon emissions**

Show

### **These eight companies**

These eight companies are among those who will help you offset your carbon emissions. Here is an indication of the cost, and where the money will be spent:

#### **Climate Care**

**Cost:** £17.61 for 2.35 tonnes

**Projects:** Safe drinking water in Malawi, fuel efficiency in Ghana, landfill energy in Thailand, rainforests in Brazil

#### **Atmosfair**

**Cost:** £106 for 5 tonnes

**Projects:** Energy efficiency in South Africa, biogas in Nepal, wind and hydro power

#### **Carbonfund.org**

**Cost:** \$47 for 2.24 tonnes

**Projects:** Water treatment in Kenya, hydroelectric in India

#### **Clevel**

**Cost:** £38.74 for 2.6 tonnes

**Projects:** Restoring grasslands in Mongolia, reducing deforestation in Tanzania

### Flygreen

**Cost:** £20.79 for 2.4 tonnes

**Projects:** Solar panels in India

### Myclimate

**Cost:** £72 for 3.1 tonnes

**Projects:** Energy efficiency in Africa, reforestation in Nicaragua

### Carbonfootprint.com

**Cost:** Between £7 and £30 a tonne

**Projects:** Borehole rehabilitation in Uganda, hydroelectric in Chile

### Gold Standard

**Cost:** Asks you to calculate your own emissions and choose a project

**Projects:** Water purifiers in Cambodia, fuel-efficient stoves in Sudan

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

That is a saving of 1.5 to 2.5bn metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> pollution, but it merely slowed the accumulation of carbon in the atmosphere, leaving the world on course for more than 3.2C of warming by the end of this century. In its annual emissions gap report, the United Nations environment programme said the impact of the lockdown was “negligible”, equivalent to just [0.01C difference by 2030.](#)

On a more optimistic note, it said ambitious green recovery spending could put the world back on track for the Paris agreement target of less than 2C of warming.



Polar circle boat heading towards Esperanza, an Argentinian base on Antarctica. Photograph: brytta/Getty Images/iStockphoto

There is scant sign of that so far. Although China, the EU, the UK, Japan and South Korea have all recently announced [carbon neutral targets](#) by the mid-century, no nation is doing enough to achieve such a goal. Most stimulus spending is going to fossil fuel industries that are making the climate worse rather than to renewables that could make it better. These twisted priorities have raised concerns that the Covid lockdown may end up like the 2008-09 financial crisis, which led to a brief fall in emissions followed by a surge back to record highs.

“Based on how little of the roughly \$15tn in stimulus spending has gone to green energy and clean tech, I think Covid will delay the transition to a carbon-free future,” said Rob Jackson, the chair of [Global Carbon Project](#). In China, he said, emissions were already back to 2019 levels, while other governments were using the pandemic as an excuse to delay climate action in the aviation sector.

In the US, Donald Trump has gone further in his demonstration of crisis capitalism by rolling back a raft of environmental protections and ramping up support for fossil fuels.

The situation is not entirely bleak. This exceptional year has strengthened the economic argument for renewable energy, which has proved a robust, cheap alternative during the lockdown. [Analysts predict](#) 2020 will confirm the terminal decline of coal, the dirtiest of fuels, and also heighten doubts about investments in oil. Crude prices at one point fell to minus dollars a barrel.

By comparison, wind and solar power is stable and clean. “The virus has highlighted the health damage of oil-based transportation through air pollution. We caught a glimpse of a future with cleaner air in our cities without fossil fuel pollution from vehicles,” Jackson said.

Whether this is a blip or a turning point depends on action at the national and international level. As the climate-limp stimulus packages have shown, national governments are reluctant to change direction alone. Global cooperation is therefore essential.

But here too, coronavirus has proved an impediment. World leaders were supposed to meet in Glasgow this month for a UN climate summit that was designed to ramp up ambition, but that physical meeting had to be postponed until 2021. The virtual gathering that the UK hosts organised instead barely maintained the momentum. Very few of the participating nations came forward with concrete steps.

It was a similar story with international biodiversity talks that were supposed to have taken place in Kunming. They have been pushed back until next May at the earliest and recalcitrant nations such as [Brazil have been accused](#) of impeding progress by throwing up questions about online processes. As with the climate, it would not be accurate to say this was a lost year in international decision-making, but schedules have definitely been set back even as world leaders warn that time is running out.

The necessity for action was driven home by another year of horrifying climate news: 2020 saw record smoke plumes from bushfires in Australia, a freakishly protracted heatwave in Siberia, the most tropical storms ever registered in the Atlantic, devastating blazes in Brazil’s Pantanal wetlands, the highest flood levels recorded in east Africa, unusually devastating cyclones and typhoons in India, Indonesia and the Philippines, the hottest

northern hemisphere summer in history, and temperature records in the Antarctic and the Arctic, where winter ice formation was delayed for longer than in any season in the satellite era.

## Quick Guide

### **Extreme heat has become more common in recent years**

#### Show

- Temperatures stayed over 34C for six consecutive days last week in the UK, the longest such run since comparable records began in the 1960s
- Spring was the sunniest on record in the UK, even as millions of people were stuck indoors by lockdown. There were more hours of sunshine than in any year since the series began in 1929, and May was the driest in more than a century
- February was the UK's wettest ever, with 202.1mm of rainfall as storms battered the country
- July was unusually wet and cool
- In April, meteorologists forecast that 2020 would be the [world's hottest year since records began](#)
- Last year was [Europe's hottest on record](#), with 11 of the 12 hottest years on record having occurred in the past two decades
- Siberia has experienced temperatures more than 10C above average this summer, in an Arctic heatwave that has alarmed scientists
- Last summer, Arctic sea ice was at its [second lowest extent on record](#). This year may surpass records, and recent research suggests Arctic sea ice is on track to disappear in summer by 2035
- Antarctica hit a record high of 20.75C in February, recorded on Seymour Island by Brazilian scientists, at the close of its summer

- The last decade was the earth's hottest on record

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

January and November registered all-time heat records, while 2020 as a whole is certain to ensure the last seven years are the hottest since measurements began.

The interconnectedness of the world's multiple crises is also increasingly apparent. Epidemiologists and conservationists have warned that outbreaks of coronavirus-like diseases are more likely in the future as a result of deforestation, global heating and humankind's treatment of nature.

"The emergence of the pandemic is not an accident, as there have been repeated warnings for years that we were exerting too much pressure on the natural world by our destructive practices. Habitat loss, intensive agriculture and the over-exploitation of wildlife are key drivers of the emergence of novel infectious diseases like Covid," said Carole Mitchell, of WWF.

The secretary general of the UN, António Guterres, went further. In an impassioned state of the planet address this month, he declared making peace with nature the defining task of the 21st century. "Humanity is waging war on nature. This is suicidal," he said. "Nature always strikes back – and it is already doing so with growing force and fury"

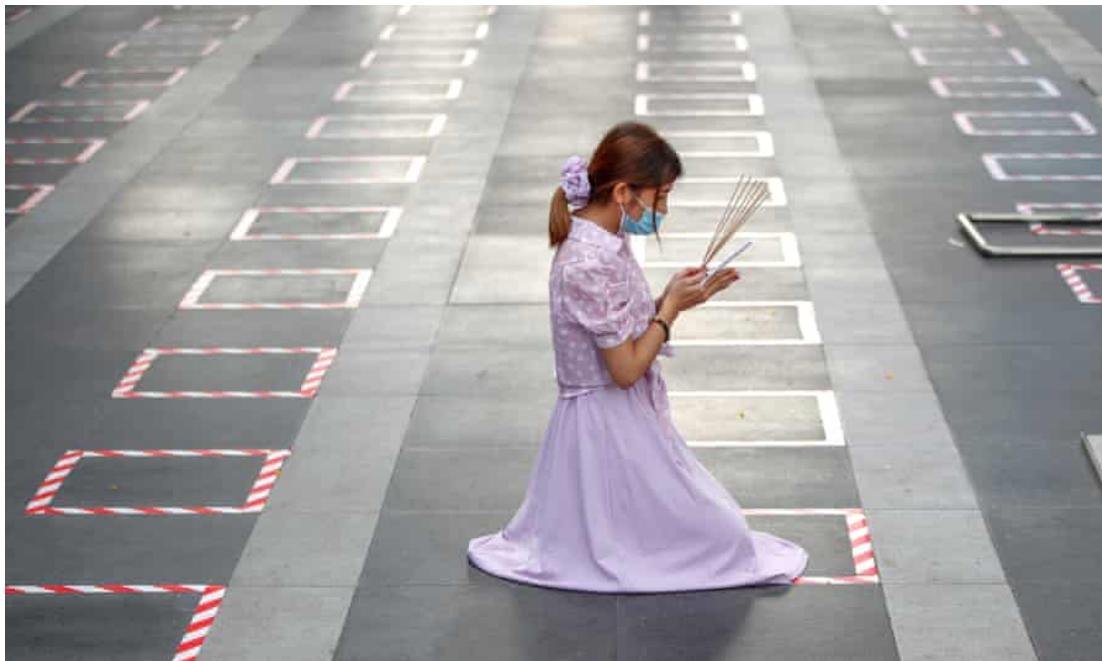
Work on a truce will have a better chance of getting under way next year with a new vaccine, a new president in the White House, a newfound respect for science and a new awareness of how rapidly change can come. It remains to be seen whether that leads to transformative improvement of the Earth system or a resumption of tinkering around the edges.

## Coronavirus

# WHO warns Covid-19 pandemic is 'not necessarily the big one'

Experts tell end of year media briefing that virus is likely to become endemic and the world will have to learn to live with it

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



A woman prays to a statue of Ganesh amid safety guidelines to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease pandemic in Bangkok. Photograph: Diego Azubel/EPA

A woman prays to a statue of Ganesh amid safety guidelines to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease pandemic in Bangkok. Photograph: Diego Azubel/EPA

*[Melissa Davey](#)*

*[@MelissaLDavey](#)*

Tue 29 Dec 2020 01.19 EST

World Health Organization experts have warned that even though the coronavirus pandemic has been very severe, it is “not necessarily the big one”, and that the world will have to learn to live with Covid-19.

The “destiny” of the virus is to become endemic, even as vaccines begin to be rolled out in the US and UK, says Professor David Heymann, the chair of the WHO’s strategic and technical advisory group for infectious hazards.

“The world has hoped for herd immunity, that somehow transmission would be decreased if enough persons were immune,” he told the WHO’s final media briefing for 2020.

[Australia insists WHO inquiry into Covid origin must be robust, despite China tensions](#)

[Read more](#)

But Heymann, who is also an epidemiologist with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said the concept of herd immunity was misunderstood.

“It appears the destiny of SARS-CoV-2 [Covid-19] is to become endemic, as have four other human coronaviruses, and that it will continue to mutate as it reproduces in human cells, especially in areas of more intense admission.

“Fortunately, we have tools to save lives, and these in combination with good public health will permit us to learn to live with Covid-19.”

The head of the WHO emergencies program, Dr Mark Ryan, said: “The likely scenario is the virus will become another endemic virus that will remain somewhat of a threat, but a very low-level threat in the context of an effective global vaccination program.

“It remains to be seen how well the vaccines are taken up, how close we get to a coverage level that might allow us the opportunity to go for elimination,” he said. “The existence of a vaccine, even at high efficacy, is no guarantee of eliminating or eradicating an infectious disease. That is a very high bar for us to be able to get over.”

That was why the first goal of the vaccine was to save lives and protect the vulnerable, Ryan said. “And then we will deal with the moonshot of potentially being able to eliminate or eradicate this virus.”

Ryan warned that the next pandemic may be more severe. “This pandemic has been very severe ... it has affected every corner of this planet. But this is not necessarily the big one,” he said.

“This is a wake-up call. We are learning, now, how to do things better: science, logistics, training and governance, how to communicate better. But the planet is fragile.

“We live in an increasingly complex global society. These threats will continue. If there is one thing we need to take from this pandemic, with all of the tragedy and loss, is we need to get our act together. We need to honour those we’ve lost by getting better at what we do every day.”

WHO chief scientist Dr Soumya Swaminathan told the briefing that being vaccinated against the virus did not mean public health measures such as social distancing would be able to be stopped in future.

The first role of the vaccine would be to prevent symptomatic disease, severe disease and deaths, she said. But whether the vaccines would also reduce the number of infections or prevent people from passing on the virus remains to be seen.

[Scheme to get Covid vaccine to poorer countries at 'high risk' of failure](#)  
[Read more](#)

“I don’t believe we have the evidence on any of the vaccines to be confident that it’s going to prevent people from actually getting the infection and therefore being able to pass it on,” Swaminathan said. “So I think we need to assume that people who have been vaccinated also need to take the same precautions.”

The WHO director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said the end of the year was a time to reflect on the toll the pandemic had taken, but also the

progress made. He said the year ahead would see new setbacks and new challenges.

“For example, new variants of Covid-19, and helping people who are tired of the pandemic continue to combat it,” he said.

“New ground has been broken, not least with the extraordinary cooperation between the private and public sector in this pandemic. And in recent weeks, safe and effective vaccine rollout has started in a number countries, which is an incredible scientific achievement.

“This is fantastic, but WHO will not rest until those in need everywhere have access to the new vaccines and are protected.”

## 2020.12.29 - Coronavirus uk

- ['She could have judged The Great British Sewing Bee' Eileen Bryan, died aged 88, of Covid-19](#)
- ['Know you are loved' Hope and tragedy in NHS hospital as Covid vaccine launched](#)
- [George Galloway Bizarre trip to Queen of the South to end in charge for football club](#)
- [Anxieties Analysis of Covid search terms reveals Britons' hopes and fears in 2020](#)

[Lost to the virusCoronavirus](#)

## **‘She could have judged The Great British Sewing Bee’: Eileen Bryan, died aged 88, of Covid-19**

A retired accounts clerk, she was a skilled seamstress who made sure her daughter was never held back by illness

- Read more stories from the [Lost to the virus series](#)



[Sirin Kale](#)

Tue 29 Dec 2020 05.00 EST

When Lynn Shouls, 57, a retired solicitor from Kent, was a baby, her lung collapsed. Her mother, Eileen Bryan, noticed straight away. “If it wasn’t for her, I might not be here at all,” Lynn says. “She was very quick about it. It must have been terrifying.”

Eileen grew up in Peterborough, in an ordinary family. She married a bank manager, Patrick, whom she met on holiday in Torquay, in 1951. “It was a very happy marriage,” says Lynn. “They’d go about everywhere hand in hand.” The couple had two children, Lynn and her sister, and Eileen worked part-time as an accounts clerk after she had children, which was relatively unusual at the time. “She knew her own mind,” says Lynn. “Most women stopped work completely when they married and she didn’t want to do that. She was quite determined and strong and was never going to be persuaded otherwise.”

Lynn had lifelong problems with her lungs, but Eileen never made a big deal of it, instead encouraging her daughter to achieve anything to which she put her mind. “I could have been mollycoddled as a child, but instead she gave me this attitude that I could do almost anything,” she says. “It was about just getting on with things – that was her whole mindset.”

I thanked her for always being my greatest supporter and told her how much I loved her

When Lynn came home from school, she would sit at the kitchen table for half an hour and tell her mum about her day. “If I was upset about something, she’d always tell me that things would be better in the morning,” says Lynn. “And they always were.” Eileen loved sewing and gardening. “She could have judged The Great British Sewing Bee.” She was meticulous: when Lynn bought clothes, Eileen would inspect them and could tell if they had not been made properly. Eileen made almost all her clothes herself.

When Patrick was diagnosed with dementia, Eileen was his carer. “It was hard,” Lynn says. “Dad would get frustrated sometimes. He couldn’t understand why he couldn’t do things like before.” Sometimes, Eileen would intentionally let his car battery run down, to stop him driving off. Patrick died in 2015 and Eileen lived on her own for two years, before moving into a care home in Cambridgeshire.

“She accepted the home quickly,” says Lynn. “I admire her for that. She said the food was good.” She grew closer to her mother in the last decade of her life. “That’s one of the upsetting things about this,” she says. “We were

getting so much closer. It became more like a friendship.” When she visited, Eileen would always notice if she was wearing something new. They’d do crosswords together. Eileen was in good health: she had had a small stroke in 2018, but recovered well. “She was not remotely approaching her death.”

Lynn says Eileen was sounding wheezy and feeling unwell on 11 May; she tested positive for Covid on 15 May and went downhill rapidly. She died in hospital on 19 May. Lynn could not visit, because of her lung condition. A nurse held a phone to her mother’s ear, so she could say goodbye. “I thanked her for always being my greatest supporter and told her how much I loved her.”

She has considered trying to investigate how Covid got into her mother’s care home, but ultimately decided against it. “I’ve thought about it, but I’m not sure if it will help me.” She is angry at the government, for not locking down sooner or providing more personal protective equipment and clearer guidance to the care sector. “My mum was the most straightforward person you could wish to meet,” she says. “And she was badly let down by our government.”

Lynn is also angered by the dismissive tone with which some people talk about fatalities among older people. “It’s disgusting to say that they were old and going to die any way,” she says. “The vulnerable deserve our care and attention. These people have given so much to society. They should be the most protected.”

[The Guardian picture essay](#)

## 'Know you are loved': hope and tragedy in NHS hospital as Covid vaccine launched

A patient on CPAP inside intensive care. Photograph: Jonny Weeks/The Guardian

Queen of the South

## George Galloway's bizarre trip to Queen of the South to end in charge for club

- Club have issued two apologies over the incident
- Tier 4 status in Scotland means all football fans are banned



George Galloway was at the Queen of the South v Dundee football match on Boxing Day. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/PA Images

Queen of the South are likely to be hit with a Scottish FA charge after allowing George Galloway to attend the Boxing Day Scottish Championship visit of Dundee to Dumfries. Queens have issued two apologies, which Galloway has defended on the basis of giving publicity to the club.

The Scottish government's switch to tier 4 for the entire country from Boxing Day means spectators are not allowed entry to football matches. Strict guidelines issued by Scottish football's Covid-19 joint response group

to clubs state that only ambulance staff, club directors and senior personnel – with no guests – analysts, scouts, the match delegate, referee observer, the stadium announcer and a screen operative can view from the “amber zone”.

Galloway, apparently in the company of his family, [posted a photo on social media](#) from the fixture. When challenged on his attendance, the former MP said: “I live in D&G [Dumfries and Galloway]. My family have five season tickets. I’m about to be a sponsor. I’m spreading the word about the club to millions of people.”

Other clubs who have, for example, conducted post-match interviews with sponsors via Zoom immediately expressed concern at the situation. The rules had been agreed between the Scottish FA, Scottish Professional Football League and Scottish Government.

With an angry backlash from their own supporters, Queens issued a statement on Sunday. “We can confirm that [George Galloway](#) did attend our game against Dundee at Palmerston yesterday. He was socially distant within an area of the ground where he formed a bubble with his family. All Covid protocols were followed at all times. We would like to apologise to our supporters who have been upset by his attendance at the match.”



George Galloway (@georgegalloway)

George

Queen of the South 1- [@Charlie26Adam](#) 3 The auld yin abune them a'  
[pic.twitter.com/5aIZAjarmI](https://pic.twitter.com/5aIZAjarmI)

[December 26, 2020](#)

On Monday morning, another statement appeared. “Reflecting on our statement to the fans last night we realise that we should have given a fuller apology.

“George Galloway was granted permission to attend our game against Dundee when Dumfries and Galloway was in tier 1 and fans were being allowed back into matches. We however accept that we should’ve readdressed the decision once the rules changed and should’ve informed Mr Galloway that he could no longer attend the match. We realise it was a total error of judgement and we should have been more considerate of our loyal supporters.

The Fiver: sign up and get our daily football email.

“We would again like to issue an unreserved apology to our fans and would like to reassure them that we fully accept and understand their anger. It was a genuine mistake that shouldn’t have been made. As we navigate our way through some tough times both on and off the park your valued support is needed more than ever.”

Dundee won the match 3-1, which leaves Queens rooted to the bottom of Scotland’s second tier with four points from nine games.

# Analysis of Covid search terms reveals Britons' hopes and fears in 2020

## Coronavirus

# Analysis of Covid search terms reveals Britons' hopes and fears in 2020

Although preoccupations changed over year, Britons' thirst for Covid-related information continued to outstrip that for all other health topics

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

## Linda Geddes

Mon 28 Dec 2020 08.00 EST Last modified on Tue 29 Dec 2020 03.26 EST



Illustration: Guardian Design

At the peak of the pandemic, Britons were searching for coronavirus-related information six times a day on average, an analysis of search engine data reveals. And although our preoccupations have changed over the months, our thirst for Covid-related information continues to outstrip that for all other health and social care-related topics.

2020 has been an extraordinary year. Never before have we been so united in our concerns and interests as we roller-coasted through the months. To better understand what that psychological journey looked like, [Kaiasm](#), a Somerset-based data intelligence company, crunches the searches people make on Google, Bing and other internet sites. But rather than analysing the top search terms people use, it groups these together into underlying concepts, to better understand people's needs and interests.

Using this approach, its analysts charted the Covid-related search topics that Britons typed into their search engines during 2020, ranking them by absolute increase in interest. "We wanted to understand the worries we all had during this year of Covid and how that changed month by month, reflecting on what was important to ordinary people beyond the daily news cycle," said Liam McGee, Kaiasm's chief scientist.

Doing so revealed some interesting insights into the British psyche: for instance, people appeared to care more about Good Morning Britain presenter Kate Garraway's husband, Derek Draper, who was treated in hospital with Covid during April, than they did about Boris Johnson's [brush with the virus](#). Also, once coronavirus restrictions began to ease during the summer months, it was information about the coronavirus situation in France, Greece and Croatia that we avidly searched for – presumably in the hope of booking holidays to these destinations.

The journey through the hopes, dreams and anxieties of British society began in January, when "Covid-19" wasn't a word, and even coronavirus seemed like a distant and abstract problem. That all changed in early March, as increasingly large one-day leaps in British infections triggered a tsunami of public interest. "If you estimate the number of Britons who searched [coronavirus update], it was about six times a day on average across the peak week," says McGee.

As the months crept by, other previously underused words such as “furlough” and “lockdown” became everyday staples of people’s internet searches, as did hitherto unrecognised public figures such as Dominic Cummings. In May, Cummings-related searches rose 13-fold compared with the previous month – the second biggest absolute increase, after “self-employed income support scheme”. [His transgressions](#), when so many of us were sticking to the rules and suffering as a result, clearly hit a collective raw nerve.

“It so clearly seemed to exemplify ‘them and us’, and the whole way in which you undermine public trust is by making authority seem to be about ‘them’,” says Stephen Reicher, a professor of psychology at the University of St Andrews. “And then of course, the scandal ran and ran and ran, because the defence of his actions was so patently absurd. So, I don’t think it is surprising that it generated such high public interest.”

By June, a split in the nation’s interests was becoming apparent. As many people searched for information about hairdressers reopening, foreign travel advice and air bridges, and pubs reopening – apparently in that order of priority – the biggest increase in interest related to shielding advice for vulnerable groups.

In the following two months, we began to see the impact of some of those renewed freedoms, as well as further fracturing of the national experience, as first “Leicester lockdown” followed by “Aberdeen lockdown”, “Preston lockdown” and “Manchester lockdown” climbed up the nation’s worry list. During September, “Covid test” registered the biggest increase in interest, and by October it was “Covid restrictions” and “UK lockdown” weighing heavily on our collective mind. Also experiencing a surge in interest that month was Martin Lewis of MoneySavingExpert.com.

“My suspicion is that it’s a combination of my TV show coming back on air, answering direct questions about people’s finances, which are, of course, highly Covid-related, and the reannouncement of various financial support schemes, that changed rapidly during October – both the self-employed and furlough-type schemes,” says Lewis. “I think many people would have immediately tried to find out what was going on, and it’s rather flattering that they chose to look me up, and my information on it.”

There are further stories in some of the search topics that did not quite make the top 10 list each month, including “NHS rainbows” in April, and “medical grade face masks” or “charity shops reopening” in June. “I suspect that one is: my house is just full of stuff I don’t need, and I have cleared it all out and I can’t put it anywhere,” says McGee.

So, what’s preoccupying us now? Although Kaiasm has only analysed data for the first two weeks of December, “tier 3 rules”, “Joe Wicks PE lesson” and “what rhymes with coronavirus” all make it into the top 10 list. So does “Canary Islands quarantine” and “coronavirus statistics Spain”. Clearly many of us are dreaming of an escape from the overwhelmingly gloomy year we’ve experienced. Let’s hope 2021 is brighter.

## A year of Britain’s worries

**January:** On 30 January, the World Health Organization [declares a global health emergency](#) amid thousands of fresh cases of a new coronavirus in China. Britons, who are largely watching this unfolding crisis from the sidelines, search for “coronavirus symptoms”, “how many people have died from coronavirus” and “face mask”.

**February:** Similar coronavirus-related searches dominate February, although as the virus edges closer, “UK coronavirus cases” and “travel advice coronavirus” begin to register on our collective worry-list.

**March:** Covid-19 takes off in the UK, and we can’t stop ourselves searching for information about it. During the peak informational demand week (15 March), we are searching for it five to six times a day on average – roughly a thousand times more searches than for all other medical conditions and treatments combined. “Coronavirus update” tops the list, but we are also seeking information about symptoms, guidelines, deaths, and local numbers of cases.

[March topics link](#)

**April:** The nation is in lockdown, and “UK coronavirus deaths” is our top concern. The furlough scheme and face masks also make the top 10 list, as

do “Kate Garraway husband update” and “Boris Johnson” – both individuals have been treated in hospital for Covid-19.

**May:** Besides Dominic Cummings and the self-employed support scheme, many of us are investigating car MOT extensions and the [bounce-back loan scheme](#). Also, perhaps weary of Joe Wicks’ PE lessons, “when will gyms reopen UK?” is a common search topic.

**June:** As lockdown begins to ease, the nation’s preoccupations appear to be fragmenting: “Shielding coronavirus” update has the greatest increase in absolute growth, followed by “hairdressers reopen”, and “Scotland phase 2”, referencing the country’s newly published route map through and out of the crisis. But “Covid deaths today UK” has the greatest number of searches.

[June topics link](#)

**July:** “Facemasks” and “UK lockdown” are our top concerns, but we are also thinking about travelling, and putting our homes on the market, with [“stamp duty holiday”](#) hitting number 10 in the chart.

**August:** Now that many people are returning from foreign holidays – or wondering if it’s safe to take them – searches for “self isolation”, “Covid test” and “UK quarantine list” experience a surge, as do searches for information about specific holiday destinations. Lockdowns in Aberdeen, Preston and Manchester also generate interest.

**September:** As schools and universities reopen, Covid cases begin to climb, and [tests are in short supply](#). “Covid test”, “NHS coronavirus” and “coronavirus update” have the greatest increase in interest, and people begin to worry about “UK lockdown” again as well.

**October:** Changes to the furlough scheme and financial worries prompt a surge of interest in Martin Lewis of MoneySavingExpert.com, but “coronavirus update” still has the greatest number of coronavirus-related searches. People are also seeking information about the newly announced [three-tier alert system](#).

[October topics link](#)

**November:** As we [re-enter lockdown](#), financial worries continue to grow, with a continued growth in interest regarding the self-employed income support and furlough schemes. People are also wondering whether their dentist or garden centres are open. Amid all of this gloom, the news of positive vaccine trials prompts many to search for information about the “coronavirus vaccine” and “Oxford vaccine”.

**December:** As we re-adjust to life post-lockdown, the tier 3 rules top our list of preoccupations. Also surfacing in our top 10 interests for the first time are “opticians and coronavirus” and “what rhymes with coronavirus”, as we presumably try to make sense of the rollercoaster year we’ve lived through.

## 2020.12.29 - Spotlight

- [My best pandemic shot Guardian and Observer photographers' take on 2020](#)
- [Patti Smith As a writer, you can be a pacifist or a murderer](#)
- [2021 culture preview Dune, Bond and Top Gun reloaded: films to look out for in 2021](#)
- [Best of 2020 Films that you haven't seen](#)
- [Bouquinistes Through gilets jaunes, strikes and Covid, Paris's 400-year-old book stalls fight to survive](#)
- [The resolution I kept I was bored of chats about house prices and polyamory – but I had a secret plan for happiness](#)
- [Render unto Rome Contrite tourists return pilfered relics](#)
- [Newt Gingrich Democrats are trying to 'brainwash the entire next generation'](#)
- [Flat pack, rising prices Ikea furniture is now collectable](#)

# **My best pandemic shot: Guardian and Observer photographers' take on 2020**

Patti Smith

Interview

## Patti Smith: 'As a writer, you can be a pacifist or a murderer'

Fiona Sturges



'I feel like I'm part-wolf' ... Patti Smith. Photograph: Circa, Courtesy of the Artist

'I feel like I'm part-wolf' ... Patti Smith. Photograph: Circa, Courtesy of the Artist

As she prepares to ring in 2021 with a performance on screens at Piccadilly Circus, the punk poet explains why she's optimistic amid the 'debris' of Trump's years in office

Tue 29 Dec 2020 03.00 EST

Patti Smith talks about her first poetry performance – in 1971 at St Mark's Church in New York's Bowery – as if it were yesterday. "I remember everything," she says over the phone from her home in New York. Smith was in her early 20s, working at a bookshop and living in the Chelsea Hotel

with her then lover, the playwright Sam Shepard. She had attended poetry readings before, most of which put her into a deep sleep. “I wanted to do something that wasn’t boring,” she recalls. “Sam said that since I sang to myself all the time, I should try singing a song, or maybe do something with a guitar.” And so she called on the musician Lenny Kaye to provide “interpretative” noises on guitar while she half-read, half-sang her poems.

The show was an instant hit. “It seemed to make a big impression on people – which I really didn’t understand,” she says. The producer Sandy Pearlman approached her afterwards and suggested she front a rock band. She eventually took his advice, making the landmark album *Horses* in 1975, and an icon of American punk was born.



How Patti Smith’s performance will appear in Piccadilly Circus on New Year’s Eve. Photograph: Circa

Trump's damage is not going to be easily healed. He has empowered people of a like mind

To celebrate 50 years since the St Mark’s show, next month Smith will be taking over the light screens at London’s Piccadilly Circus. Curated by the digital artist Josef O’Connor and designed for our socially distanced reality, the installation will combine art, music, poetry and prose, and include two

recorded performances – one scheduled for midnight on New Year’s Eve and another on the day of the US presidential inauguration on 20 January. “Some of the work I did in my bedroom, some in a recording studio and some at my desk,” says Smith, 74 this week. “I had to teach myself how to use Photo Booth on my computer and film myself reading a poem. I’m sure there are 14-year-olds who can do this in five minutes but it took me quite a while. But I got there and I’m so proud of myself.”

Her favourite piece is a reworked version of Peaceable Kingdom. Written in the aftermath of 9/11, it is a song of solace and hope in the face of catastrophe and, in performing it, Smith will be commemorating 100 NHS workers who have died from Covid. “It’s just so sad when we lose people who work so hard to rebuild our world,” she reflects. She will also read a new poem dedicated to the environmental campaigner [Greta Thunberg](#), who will be 18 in January and who, Smith says, “pretty much sacrificed her childhood for all of us”.

Smith is a great talker: generous, self-deprecating, yet deeply serious about her work. She apologises for not using Zoom but, she explains, “I can feel a person’s presence, talking to them on the phone. You and I could be sitting in the cafe across the street.”

She says the past 10 months have been tough. Smith has a lifelong bronchial condition – “I was a sickly kid, sometimes they were worried that I wouldn’t pull through” – and so has stayed home throughout the pandemic. Accustomed to travelling, with her band or on book tours, she can scarcely remember spending longer than two weeks at home before now. There was the time, in 1979, that Smith put her career on hold for a decade to raise her two children with her late husband, the MC5 guitarist Fred “Sonic” Smith. But then, she says: “I had so much responsibility and a true purpose. To be in limbo almost 10 months, for a person like me who doesn’t like sitting in the same place, it’s been very challenging. I feel like I’m part-wolf, roaming from room to room.”



Patti Smith performing her poetry online. Photograph: Circa, Courtesy of the Artist

Four years under Trump has also taken its toll. “It’s been a terrible atmosphere to live in,” she says. “You try to do your work and not let [politics] permeate your consciousness daily but it does. It’s very insidious.” She notes that she and the outgoing president are about the same age. “I have encountered him in New York through the years and found him a horrible, narcissistic person and just a bad businessman. I’ve seen the debris of his deals. I think the damage he has done is going to be felt for a long time. It’s not going to be so easily healed because globally he has empowered people of a like mind.”

Nonetheless she will take “huge psychological relief in the new administration. I’m a natural optimist so I’m not without hope or inspiration. What matters is trying to clean up some of his mess and get some order. I’m doing that in my house. I’m a messy person, and I know that before I can do something creative or exciting I’ve first got to clear everything away.”

Although Smith is celebrated for her music – Rolling Stone ranked Horses as the 26th greatest album of all time and in 2007 she was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame – she sees herself a writer rather than a musician.

“My daily practice since I was young has always been writing,” she says. “I was married to a musician and my children are musicians, so I know how a musician thinks. It’s out of respect to [them] that I don’t like being called one.”

Over the past 20 years she has largely swapped poetry for memoir, initially with her award-winning book Just Kids, about her relationship with Robert Mapplethorpe. Her two subsequent books, M Train and Year of the Monkey, focused on her recent life, revealing her as a solitary soul dedicated to creativity and for whom the ghosts of those she has lost – her parents, her brother, her husband – remain close.

“The funny thing is, I never wanted to write non-fiction,” she says. “For years I wrote fiction, all of it unpublished. Then Robert asked me the day he died to write our story and I, of course, promised him that I would.”

Mapplethorpe died due to complications from HIV in 1989, though it took Smith 10 years to start writing Just Kids and another 10 to complete it. When she first arrived in New York, her plan wasn’t simply to make a lot of money. “I had more hubris than that,” she explains. “I wanted to do something great. I wanted to write a classic. My dreams were much loftier than fame and fortune. But Robert really wanted me to have success ... And in my whole life, including any record, [Just Kids] has been my most successful undertaking. So Robert got his wish.”



Patti Smith at a Paris exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe's work in 2014.  
Photograph: Patrick Kovarik/AFP via Getty Images

Now Smith is working on a new book that she calls “auto-fiction”, which will be full of dreams and imagination, and a further reflection on where her life is now. Smith keenly “feels the urgency of our global problems”. But, she adds: “I still love life. I’m so grateful to be able to write – my notebook has been my companion through the most difficult times. As a writer, I’ll get as dark as I have to be – you can be a pacifist or a murderer in your work. But as a mother, a grandmother, an aunt, I try to stay upbeat and practical and responsible. I try to live by my parents’ work ethic and I plug away, and do what I have to do to make things as good as they can be.”

She still loves performing – “My goal is to stay in contact with people, and when I go on stage it’s all for them” – but it has not always been smooth sailing. Smith mentions her performance of Bob Dylan’s A Hard Rain’s Gonna Fall at the 2016 Nobel prize ceremony in Sweden, when she forgot the lyrics and had to stop and start again. “I blanked, I just froze,” she says. “I felt like a child. I just wanted to run away and hide under the bed. But I had to forge on because I had a responsibility. If that performance did nothing else, I hope it gave an example to not give up in the face of humiliation, and just to take a breath and keep going.”

Taking a breath and keeping going is what Smith is doing now under lockdown, working on her book and counting the days until she can hit the road once more. Lately she has been dreaming of revisiting Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper in Milan, and Rubens' Adoration of the Magi in Cambridge. "But art endures, and these works aren't going anywhere," she says. "When the time is right, I will be back."

- [Circa](#) presents Patti Smith throughout January at 20:21 GMT at Piccadilly Lights, London. A limited-edition print by Smith will be available to buy for £100 from 1 January. Viewers can watch the installation on YouTube from 23:45 GMT on 31 December.

# **Dune, Bond and Top Gun reloaded: films to look out for in 2021**

## Movies

# The best films of 2020 ... that you haven't seen

From a gentrification drama to a convention-defying crime thriller, Guardian writers pick their favourite underappreciated films of the year

[Charles Bramesco](#), [Jordan Hoffman](#), [Peter Bradshaw](#), [Guy Lodge](#), [Pamela Hutchinson](#), [Beatrice Loayza](#), [Radheyen Simonpillai](#), [Benjamin Lee](#), [Adrian Horton](#) and [Andrew Pulver](#)

Tue 29 Dec 2020 04.15 EST Last modified on Tue 29 Dec 2020 04.17 EST



Obinna Nwachukwu in *Residue*, Gillian Jacobs in *I Used to Go Here* and Pete Davidson in *Big Time Adolescence*. Composite: Alamy

## The Grand Bizarre

At the unlikely midpoint between the psychedelic visuals projected on to the wall at a rave and one of economist Naomi Klein's essays picking apart

global capitalism, we find this one-hour, one-of-a-kind experimental wonder from Jodie Mack. Combining her skills as an animator with 16mm footage shot in Mexico, Poland, China and a dozen other countries, the media-mixing artist has single-handedly assembled a euphoric, hyperkinetic tapestry of colors and textures from little more than loose scraps of fabric.

She places her focus on the textile industry, then lets the patterns and associations in her raw material suggest ideas about regionalism and commerce – a cerebral project, enlivened by the sheer propulsion of Mack’s editing and the jittery electropop soundtrack she largely composed herself. If you get lost grooving to the hallucinatory imagery onscreen, you’ll be taken off guard by the intellectual rigor; if you’re busy trying to parse the commentary, you’ll be surprised by the energizing good time you’re having. Either way, it’s an accessible pleasure from the wild world of the avant-garde. *Charles Bramesco*

## **Big Time Adolescence**

Most agree there’s something endearing about the tall, skinny and badly tattooed comedian Pete Davidson. Judd Apatow based an entire film of him making bad decisions in [The King of Staten Island](#). But a far better use of Davidson’s whole thing is [Big Time Adolescence](#). In it, Davidson is first a portal then obstacle to adulthood for a 16-year-old kid (Griffin Gluck), who pals up with Davidson after his older sister briefly dates him.

At first it’s all bong hits and video games (and a dalliance with lawbreaking that would have a graver effect were these not suburban whites) until the realization that living in squalor surrounded by empty beer bottles is not an enviable station in life. And yet, palling around with the gross, foul-mouthed Davidson is undeniably hilarious. This scrubby mess asking “yo, bro, you have any pea shoots?” at the supermarket is, in its own way, a kind of beautiful music. Charisma is not something that can be built, one simply has it or doesn’t. This film exploits Davidson’s talents exceptionally well. *Jordan Hoffman*

## **I Used to Go Here**

Kris Rey is an actor and director from the “mumblecore” stable who, without anyone really caring or noticing, made one of the year’s most beguiling films. *I Used to Go Here* is a comedy of quarterlife or thirdlife crisis with a throwaway lightness and dapper self-awareness, combined with a broad and surreal streak of farce. Kate, played by Gillian Jacobs, is a woman in her 30s who has finally achieved her life’s dream – she is publishing her first novel. But so far from entering an enchanted garden of prestige and cultural celebrity, Kate finds that she is plunged into a world of poor sales and iffy reviews. Then she gets an invitation to speak at her old college, where her tutor (Jemaine Clement) now has a creepy fan-worshippy crush on her, and hanging out with the students there, Kate begins to regress to her callow late-teen self, which was there under the surface all along. An irresistibly dry satire of adulthood and our yearning for success. *Peter Bradshaw*

## I'm Your Woman

“Underseen” is a relative term when it comes to *I'm Your Woman*: it was released directly to Amazon Prime earlier this month, so who's to say exactly how many people have seen it? Either way, Julia Hart's smart, sinewy, from-the-margins underworld story feels like a film more people should be talking about.

Starring [Rachel Brosnahan](#) (in a welcome key change from TV's *The Marvellous Mrs Maisel*) as a previously sheltered gangster's wife forced to go on the run when her husband's dealings turn sour, and a superb Arinze Kene as the heavy, reluctantly assigned to guard her, it's a quietly subversive realignment of genre priorities, centering the female and black characters that many mob films dispatch without a second thought. Hart works elegantly in the flinty, melancholic language – visual and verbal – of 1970s American crime cinema, but with a modern feminist consciousness, constantly questioning and chafing against genre conventions. *Guy Lodge*

## The Roads Not Taken

If you went looking for escapism in your movies this year, you'll probably have swerved *The Roads Not Taken*, which promised to be a gruelling

drama about Alzheimer's – both the pain of enduring the condition and the burden of caring for a loved one in its grip. But Sally Potter's film offered more than tears and trauma.

Elle Fanning's brilliant performance as Molly, the daughter of dementia-struck author Leo (Javier Bardem) brings home the cost of caring, the choices that we make between our careers and our families. Their scenes together reach for a brutal black comedy, while flashbacks to Leo's past reveal a long-buried tragedy. The key perhaps to getting the most from the film is to consider Molly as its centre, not her father. Potter offers possibilities rather than platitudes, and looks with both rigour and sympathy at the effects of living with illness, but also with regrets. *Pamela Hutchinson*

## An Easy Girl

A glistening summer in Cannes sets the stage for Rebecca Zlotowski's breezy coming-of-age tale, which unfolds as a deceptively simple cruise through the world of vacationing elites, casual sex and transactional relationships. At its center are two Maghrebi women: the titular "easy" girl played by French tabloid sensation Zahia Dehar, and a naive but intelligent high-schooler (newcomer Mina Farid) who tags along and observes her older cousin's worldly, sexually liberated ways. A model and reality star who draws comparisons to Brigitte Bardot and Kim Kardashian, Dehar first made the headlines a decade ago when she was involved in an underage sex scandal involving high-profile French footballers.

In *An Easy Girl*, Zlotowski carefully deconstructs Dehar's persona and its underpinning stereotypes, revealing the hurt behind the coy smile, the emotional burden beneath the carefree veneer. Perhaps all the bling and skinny-dipping is a distraction, but the movie is subtle and complex in ways not immediately apparently – not unlike the women it seeks to dignify. *Beatrice Loayza*

## Residue

Residue demands to be seen, even if the characters in the film are deeply apprehensive about who is watching. That makes appearing on this list a

complicated position for Merawi Gerima's, concrete-hard, hip-hop-fuelled debut about the gentrification of a black neighbourhood.

The film follows a young film-maker named Jay (Obinna Nwachukwu) who returns from Los Angeles to his old community in Washington DC's Q Street area. Jay searches for absent friends on empty corners, while haunting memories fill the spaces. He also chafes at all the new white residents and their prying eyes.

The camera often leans in close on Jay to keep those white faces offscreen, as if Gerima's film is putting up a resistance to gentrification. But Gerima also thoughtfully and emotionally interrogates that resistance and acknowledges its futility. That tight framing confines Jay, as if he's trapped by those watching. *Radheyen Simonpillai*

## Saint Frances

While it might have taken us far too long to get to a place where films about women who just can't seem to get their shit together are starting to equal those about men in the same boat, it's a character type that's too often written in broad, lazy strokes. So what a joy it was to see the witty, specific and fully realised protagonist of Saint Frances make a believable mess of things without ever feeling like a thinly traced archetype, written not for shock value but for emotional connection instead.

Bridget (played by Kelly O'Sullivan, who also wrote the script) is not the writer she thought she'd be. In fact, she's not even a writer at all. She dropped out of college and years later, approaching her mid-30s, she's shagging twentysomethings at parties and hate-working as a waitress. But when an opportunity to become a nanny enters her life, things slowly start to change. I'm quite allergic to stories where children are used to rehabilitate, the age-old dynamic relying on an overdose of saccharine and a simplistic notion of the healing power of pre-pubescent. But Saint Frances is a film that earns every single emotional beat, overcoming its well-worn formula with wit and warmth, O'Sullivan's unfiltered yet generous script selling every character and action, avoiding cliche at every turn. It's a wonderful, big-hearted film and deserves an audience of equal size. *Benjamin Lee*

## Through the Night

[Through the Night](#) does what so many self-serving hosannas for [essential workers](#) during the pandemic did not: pay ample, generous attention to those who [keep the country functioning](#) with [undervalued jobs](#) often hollowed of benefits, look closely at the work itself as life-sustaining and valued in its own right. Over the course of two years, Bronx-based Afro-Dominican director Loira Limbal embedded in one 24/7 home daycare in New Rochelle, New York, operated by married couple Deloris (“Nunu”) and Patrick (“PopPop”) Hogan. A fly on the wall, Limbal observes their home as a fount of caregiving, a pillar of support not just for the children but the parents, often Latina and black single mothers, strained by night shifts or America’s gig economy.

The film’s quiet, radical curiosity radiates far wider than one daycare; in observing with wonder small acts of love and the everyday work of care – work frequently fulfilled by women, especially women of color, and often dismissed or hidden – Through the Night argues for a much larger reorientation of values. Though filmed pre-pandemic, it offers a promising path forward with scenes of caring many Americans should sit with, in a documentary I hope more people see. *Adrian Horton*

## White Riot

If you could distil all the political aggravation of the last few years into one film, it would be this: a short sharp lesson about Rock Against Racism (RAR), which put itself about in a mid-1970s UK roiled by racial violence, class conflict and the disruptive energy of punk rock.

The film’s contentious title takes its name from an early classic by the Clash; a song that even at the time divided audiences as to its exact position on the irony scale. The Clash in fact loom large over this film: they were the key to turbocharging RAR’s appeal and pulling in the thousands of kids to the final climactic concert.

White Riot, though, is as much about politics as music, and the sight of street battles between the National Front and various anti-fascist groups, is a

basic reminder that this really hasn't gone away, just changed its tone. In truth the National Front were never anywhere near an electoral breakthrough in the 1970s but their presence, like the EDL or Proud Boys, was simply toxic. This film demonstrates the joy of lancing the boil. *Andrew Pulver*

# **Through gilets jaunes, strikes and Covid, Paris's 400-year-old book stalls fight to survive**

The resolution I kept  
Education

# I was bored of chats about house prices and polyamory – but I had a secret plan for happiness

Desperate to regain my sense of wonder, I have spent 18 months learning about the world



‘I decided I had a responsibility to interest myself’ ... Laura Barton.  
Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

‘I decided I had a responsibility to interest myself’ ... Laura Barton.  
Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian



Laura Barton

Tue 29 Dec 2020 02.00 EST

It took me a long time to admit that I was bored. I had left London and moved to a small town on the coast, drawn by the light and the landscape and the freedom, and by the promise of joining a new creative community. There were gigs and art shows and pop-up restaurants; festivals and funfairs and parties on the beach. Having spent many years feeling perpetually in transit, I wanted deeply to belong – to someone and to somewhere.

But the appeal quickly waned. Even in the summer, the days felt flat and bleak. Soon I realised that I did not want to be part of a scene. I did not think any of it was cool. I was weary of conversations that revolved around ketamine and house prices, and which of the town's polyamorous relationships had recently hit the rocks. I had nothing to contribute. I fell quiet and retreated inward.

Meanwhile, my boyfriend was in his element. Sometimes, I thought back to our first date and remembered how I had talked – drunkenly, happily, readily – about the inventor of barbed wire, and the bullfrogs of the Mississippi, and the symbiotic relationship between jackdaws and deer. I wondered where that woman had gone.



‘Facts have reminded me that life is rich and wild and variegated.’  
Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

It was January when I decided that salvation might lie in facts. I was in the Mojave desert, watching the sun rise over [Seven Magic Mountains](#) – Ugo Rondinone’s much-Instagrammed neon-rock sculpture in the Ivanpah Valley. I remember a huge desire to talk to someone about it all: about the effects of colour and light on the human eye; about the fact that honeybees can see ultraviolet and rattlesnakes have infrared detectors; about how, at night here in the desert, cold air slopes off the mountains to lie on the valley floor. And that this is the land of the Chemehuevi, whose name means either “those who play with fish” or “nose in the air like a roadrunner”, depending on whom you believe.

I wanted to talk about how, the evening before, I had learned that, in the Southern Paiute language, the word “pah” means water, and to see it suffixed on a placename such as “Ivanpah” meant the promise of hydration. How, once you know this, the “pah” names dotted across a map of the desert come to resemble a path, a way to lead yourself through a dry land. But I realised, standing there in the early light, that I did not know whom to talk to about any of it.

What I decided then was that I would simply talk to myself about it. That, if I were bored, I had a responsibility to interest myself. So, each day I would find a new fact to enjoy – prompted by something I saw, or by a line in a newspaper article, or by a passing mention on a radio programme, or sometimes just by a thought that drifted through my head. I would read about it, online or in books, understand it and then squirrel it away in my brain.

The facts I have rejoiced in over the past 18 months or so have been many and various: the origins of [the Becket controversy](#); the etymology of “currach”; how temperature affects sound; the [Highway Serial Killings Initiative](#); and how to identify the song of the mistle thrush. I have studied brief histories of [Webster, Iowa](#), and the narcissus ‘Passionale’ and enjoyed loose refreshers in [Macrobius](#) and dream theory, [the hundred years’ war](#), and the [House of Plantagenet](#).

I have also learned that ketamine was originally pronounced “keetamine”, due to the presence of a ketone group in its chemical structure, and trialled on prisoners in Michigan in 1964. I have learned that house prices in Thanet have [risen 13% in the past three years](#). And that the word “polyamorous” first appeared in the spring of 1990 in an article by the neopagan priestess Morning Glory Zell-Ravenheart, titled A Bouquet of Lovers.

An accumulation of facts does not make you an interesting person. It can make you the bar-room bore, or the pub-quiz king, or a rum sort of dinner-party guest. In my case, fact-learning was a private matter; I chose not to share these facts with anybody, nor, until now, to share that I was doing this at all.

Rather, their purpose was to re-engage me with the world, to rekindle a sense of wonder I was in danger of losing. They have reminded me that life is rich and wild and variegated, that the days are filled with knowledge worth exploring. As I have pressed on through the months of this peculiar mission, each fact has become like a water-point on the map; a way to lead me back through a dry land to myself.

Italy

## Render unto Rome – contrite tourists return pilfered relics



A fragment of scrawled upon ancient marble that was returned to the National Roman Museum. Photograph: National Roman Museum

A fragment of scrawled upon ancient marble that was returned to the National Roman Museum. Photograph: National Roman Museum

Whether compelled by guilt or superstition, more and more tourists are returning items they lifted from Italian cultural sites

*[Angela Giuffrida in Rome](#)*

Tue 29 Dec 2020 00.30 EST

Some of the repentant sinners may be compelled by guilt, others by superstition.

But Italian museum curators and archeological officers have observed a trend of tourists who, having pilfered artefacts from cultural sites, return them, years later, with a heartfelt letter of confession.

One American man, Bob Martin, went a step further in 2018 when he travelled all the way to Paestum, a vast archaeological park of ancient Greek ruins in the southern Italian region of Campania, to give back a small figurine he took from the site when he was a child.

“I was really surprised,” said Gabriel Zuchtriegel, the park’s director. “It wasn’t the first time this had happened but what was special is that the person wanted to come all this way. He sent me a photo [of the stolen item] before coming.”



Bob Martin, left, returning a figurine to Paestum archaeological park director Gabriel Zuchtriegel.

Martin is now in his 60s, and it had been over 50 years since his misdeed. Similarly, with items returned to Pompeii or sites in Rome, or even precious sand taken from Sardinia, many of the thefts date back decades.

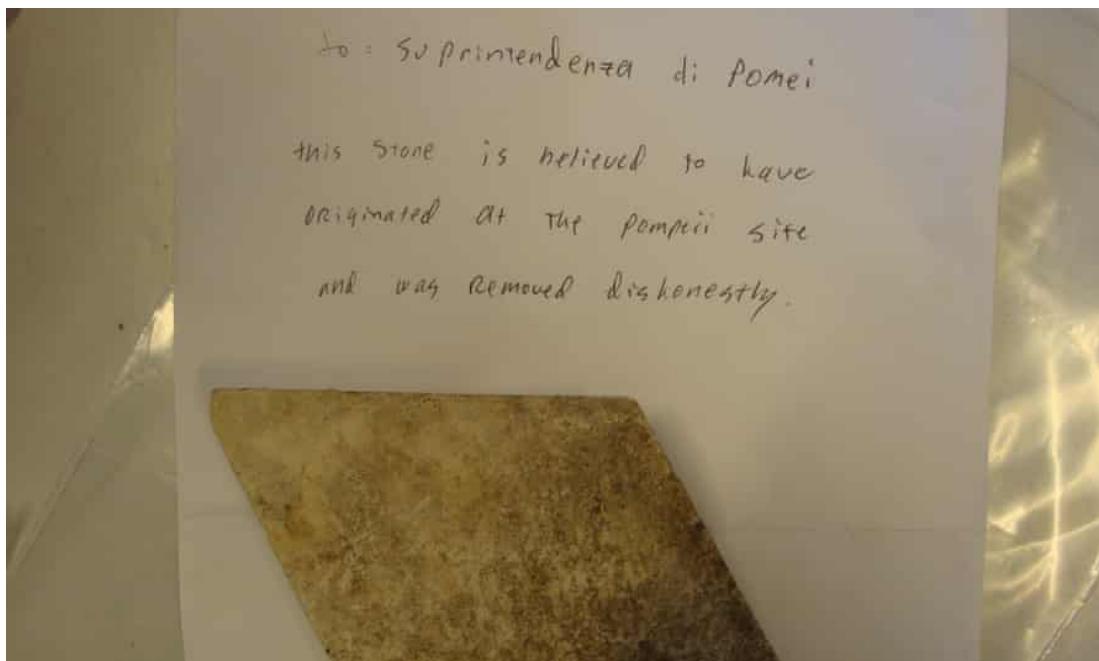
In his eight-year-old mind, Martin imagined the figurine, which was of prime quality and had probably been a feature of a rich person’s home in the city founded by the Greeks, were the bones of a Roman soldier.

“It was only at home that his desperate mother discovered it was actually a small piece of artwork,” added Zuchtriegel.

“So he had carried this around with him for almost a lifetime and that’s actually the point – it becomes a burden. It’s almost irrational and often superstitious – they think that since they took this everything has gone wrong – and the only way to undo it is by giving it back.”

Superstition certainly played on the mind of Nicole, a Canadian woman [who returned fragments](#) she stole from the ancient city of Pompeii, claiming they were “cursed”.

In her letter of confession, received by park officials in October, Nicole blamed the theft, in 2005, for a run of misfortune that had befallen her since, including having breast cancer twice and experiencing financial hardship.



A letter and stone returned to the Pompeii archaeological park.

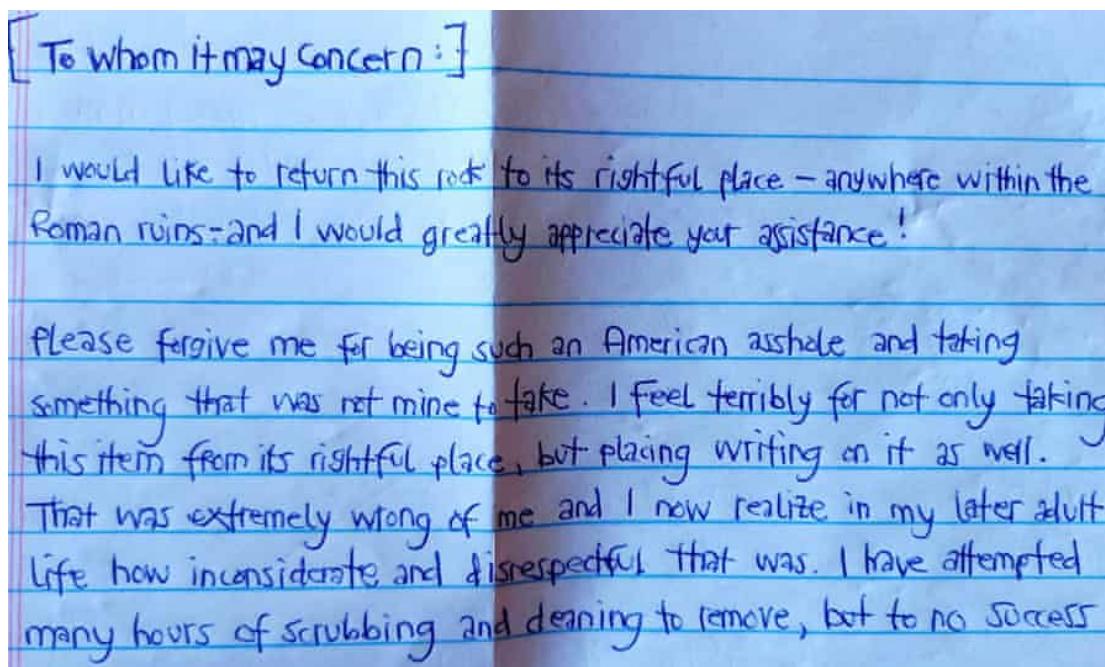
Over the years, so many stolen relics have been returned to Pompeii, along with letters expressing guilt, that a museum displaying the artefacts was established.

A letter written in English in 2015 and signed off only with C, said: “I would like to return this stone to the archaeological site. My boyfriend took it during our holiday in August and I feel rather wrong about it.” Another letter, in Italian, said. “I took this item in August 1975 ... an error of youth.”

A few weeks after Nicole's story made headlines, [an American woman sent](#) a package to the National Roman Museum containing a fragment of ancient marble inscribed with the message: "To Sam, love Jess, Rome 2017."

In her confessional letter, she wrote: "Please forgive me for being such an American asshole and taking something that was not mine to take. I feel terribly for not only taking something from its rightful place, but placing writing on it as well."

The museum's management believe the artefact, thought to have come from the Roman Forum, which was the political heart of the Roman empire, was intended as a gift to her boyfriend.



The letter to the National Roman Museum.

"This kind of theft can cause considerable damage," said Dr Agnese Pergola, an archaeological officer at the museum. "Not only due to the removal of the artefact, which is a crime, but precisely because a piece of history that cannot be reconstructed is lost."

A museum in Caprera, an island among the La Maddalena archipelago off Sardinia, also collates sand stolen from Budelli, an island famous for its pink-sanded beach.

Visitors have been barred from the beach since the mid-1990s, and so the confessional letters relate to sand thefts before then. An Italian tourist called Alessandro, overcome with guilt after visiting the museum in 2019, returned sand stolen from the pink beach in 1989.

“Unfortunately, they do not understand the value,” said Tomasso Gamboni, a manager at Caprera’s mineralogical and wildlife museum.

“Every year we have this problem, not just the archipelago but the rest of Sardinia – they take shells, stones and sand as a souvenir. Why can’t they just take a photo?”

Newt Gingrich

Interview

## Newt Gingrich: Democrats are trying to 'brainwash the entire next generation'

David Smith in Washington



Newt Gingrich at the Iowa Freedom Summit in Des Moines, Iowa, in 2015.

Photograph: Mark Peterson/Redux/eyevine

Newt Gingrich at the Iowa Freedom Summit in Des Moines, Iowa, in 2015.

Photograph: Mark Peterson/Redux/eyevine

The 77-year-old Republican former House speaker says Trump will ‘remain a dominant figure for a fairly long period of time’



[@smithinamerica](#)

Tue 29 Dec 2020 01.00 EST

Some blame Donald Trump. Others blame social media. And those with longer memories blame Newt Gingrich for carving up America into [blue states and red states](#) racked by mutual fear, suspicion and alienation.

As speaker of the House of Representatives from 1995 to 1999, the Republican arguably did more anyone else to sow the seeds of division in Washington. “Newt Gingrich turned partisan battles into bloodsport, wrecked Congress, and paved the way for Trump’s rise,” [reflected the Atlantic magazine](#) in 2018.

But now the 77-year-old party grandee, former history professor and [author of three books](#) lionising Trump must contemplate a new chapter in which the ultimate outsider president makes way for Joe Biden, the ultimate insider who has promised healing, unity and a return to pre-Gingrich norms.

So where does the Republican party go from here? “I’m guessing, but I think we’re going to be the commonsense reform party,” Gingrich says by phone from Rome, where his wife, [Callista](#), is American ambassador to the Vatican.

“You look at the degree to which the bureaucracies don’t work. You look at these Democratic governors who are petty dictators and you look at the challenges facing us – whether it’s a collapsing education system, a collapsing infrastructure, competing with China – and you know that the Democrats, as the party of government employee unions and liberalism, aren’t going to be able to deal with any of this.”

As the dust of last month’s elections settled, Marco Rubio, a Republican senator for Florida and potential White House contender in 2024, called for the party to cool its love affair with big corporations. “The future of the party is based on a multiethnic, multiracial working-class coalition,” [he told the Axios website](#).

Gingrich believes it is already on the way but, as seems habitual among many in Trump’s orbit, he again pivots to a [critique of the other side](#). “It is becoming that partly because the left is so desperately committed to being the party of very wealthy people living in enclaves, explaining that the police don’t matter because they have their own security guards.”

Democrats have also succumbed to a liberal theology, he argues, echoing a rightwing “culture wars” talking point. “What you have, I think, is a Democratic party driven by a cultural belief system that they’re now trying to drive through the school system so they can brainwash the entire next generation if they can get away with it.”

A red tsunami beat the blue wave at the polls, he continues, pointing to unexpected Republican gains in the House, victories in state legislatures and various defeats for leftwing causes in state referendums. He singles out for praise Congresswoman Elise Stefanik, whose political action committee dedicated to electing Republican women [reaped dividends](#).

“What an amazing job she did. If we were liberals, the covers of all these women’s magazines would be ‘The year of the Republican woman’ but of course, that would be so politically incorrect they couldn’t do it. So the only place that’s truly an anomaly is the presidential race. I think it’s an anomaly so I find myself [engaged as a historian](#) every day trying to figure out what in the devil is going on.”



Newt Gingrich at the 41st annual Conservative Political Action Conference on 8 March 2014 in National Harbor, Maryland. Photograph: TJ Kirkpatrick/Getty Images

Though there is no factual basis for this claim, Gingrich shares Trump's view that fraud must be the explanation and has said so on the conservative Fox News network. "I don't see how any reasonable human being can – you can argue over how much it was – but it's clearly the most in our lifetime," he insists.

Trump's homeland security department described the election as the most secure in history; his justice department uncovered no evidence of widespread voter fraud; state officials including Republicans reported no significant irregularities; judges tossed out numerous Trump campaign lawsuits.

Yet 18 Republican attorneys general and 126 House Republicans backed a preposterous lawsuit to invalidate millions of votes that was given short shrift by the supreme court. The failed coup was the latest measure of Trumpism's spread into every organ of the Republican party.

But ultimately, Gingrich believes, Trump's future sway over the party will depend on Trump himself. "He'll remain a dominant figure for a fairly long

period of time, depending on how hard he wants to work at it and how serious it is. People fade pretty quickly if they don't pay attention. This is a country of enormous restiveness."

Does he expect Trump to run for president again in 2024? "I have no idea," admits Gingrich, who sought the Republican nomination himself in 2012. "He certainly can look at [former presidents] Andrew Jackson and [Grover Cleveland](#) and then make his own mind up.

"If he does run, he'll be very formidable and part of it's going to be based on what happens with Biden. If Biden ends up drifting into a really serious recession, the temptation for Trump to run on 'I told you so, would you like to go back to my economy?' may be overwhelming."

Biden will inherit overlapping crises of public health, the economy, racial injustice, the climate and democracy. Even in more serene times, incumbent presidents typically suffer losses in the House midway through their first term. With Democrats now holding [only a fragile majority](#), the Republican leader, Kevin McCarthy, could claim the speaker's gavel in 2022.

Gingrich, who was a member of Congress for 20 years, muses: "As a historian, I'm pretty cheerful. When [Bill] Clinton won, we picked up 54 seats two years later and when [Barack] Obama won, we picked up 63 seats two years later. I don't know that the House Democrats get slaughtered on that scale but I'm 99% sure that McCarthy is the next speaker of the House."



Bob Dole, Al Gore, Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich, in the White House's Oval Office on 19 December 1995. Photograph: Robert McNeely/Consolidated News Pictures/Getty Images

Control of the Senate, meanwhile, hinges on two runoff races in Georgia early next month. If Republicans preserve their narrow majority, will Biden be able to [work with the majority leader, Mitch McConnell?](#)

Gingrich, just seven months younger than the president-elect, says bluntly: "He won't have any choice. That's the genius of the American system. But if he wants to get nothing done, he doesn't have to work with Mitch.

"Mitch's memoir, called [The Long Game](#), really helped me understand him much better. He's a very long-term player and he's very self-contained so he's not intimidated by anything. When he finally forged an alliance with Trump, it was astonishingly productive if you're a conservative and has given us probably two generations of conservative judges.

"Particularly if we win the two Georgia seats, which I think we will, Biden's going to have to decide, does he want to try to move to being a moderate Democrat, in which case his left will rebel and go crazy, or does he want to stick with the left in which case nothing will get done? And Mitch will be happy with either outcome."

There is a historical rhyme here with the 1990s when Gingrich led a Republican majority against a centrist Democratic president in the shape of Clinton. There may be lessons from that experience for both sides.

[“An immense amount got done](#) but it’s also why the left hates Clinton. He signed welfare reform, he signed capital gains tax cut, he signed four balanced budgets. It’s nothing to do with his personal behaviour. It’s very much like what happened to the prime minister in Great Britain, Tony Blair: both of them were centrist and both of them were viciously repudiated by their left even as they were popular in the country. It’s just fascinating stuff.”

Could Biden, who is making overtures to Republicans and giving little voice to the left in his cabinet, pay a similar price? “He will.”

The Clinton v Gingrich years are also often cited as the start of the rot in American democracy. Gingrich was [a political pugilist](#) who hurled insults, played to the cameras and set about blowing up the bipartisan consensus. His [Contract with America](#) proposals in 1994 helped Republicans win a majority in the House for the first time in four decades.

Clinton was impeached for lying under oath and obstructing justice to conceal an extramarital affair with White House intern [Monica Lewinsky](#). Gingrich declared it “the most systematic, deliberate obstruction-of-justice cover-up and effort to avoid the truth we have ever seen in American history”.

Looking back, does he accept the view that, among the causes of today’s hyperpartisan climate in Washington, he played a role akin to a coal-fired power station?

“We had been in the minority for 40 years and unless you had a clear, vivid, polarising message and style, you were going to be in the minority for 40 more years,” he says frankly. “So I did my job, but I also proved over and over again I could work with Clinton. I worked with Democrats all the time. It wasn’t a pathology. It was a professional job.”

Today’s dysfunction, rancour and tribalism cannot be pinned on one person alone but has multiple causes that run deeper, acknowledges [Allan](#)

[Lichtman](#), distinguished professor of history at American University in Washington. But Gingrich certainly had an outsized role.

“He was the original polariser,” Lichtman says. “Way back when he was first elected decades ago he criticised the mainstream Republican members of Congress because he thought they were too acquiescent and not engaged in sufficiently vigorous political warfare against the Democrats.

“He was also, very importantly, one of the architects of one of the most pivotal elections in modern American history, the midterm elections of 1994, when Republicans took over the House and the Senate for the first time since the first two years of Dwight Eisenhower. That election also greatly contributed to polarisation because it wiped out a lot of moderate southern Democrats and replaced them with very conservative southern Republicans.”

Ikea

## Flat pack, rising prices: Ikea furniture is now collectable



A set of Ikea's Vilbert chairs, designed by Verner Panton, is for sale for £4,661 on the Pamono website. Photograph: Pamono & 1st Modern

A set of Ikea's Vilbert chairs, designed by Verner Panton, is for sale for £4,661 on the Pamono website. Photograph: Pamono & 1st Modern

Low-cost products from the 1960s to the 1990s can be worth thousands of pounds



[Patrick Collinson](#)

Tue 29 Dec 2020 02.08 EST

Don't chuck out your old flatpack furniture just yet – you could be sitting on a fortune. Since [Ikea launched a scheme to buy back and resell unwanted furniture](#) in November, classic designs once sold at bargain prices by the retailer have become expensive must-have items. Some collectors are willing to pay thousands of pounds for vintage pieces designed for the Swedish chain, including some that were common in stores as recently as the 1990s.

A set of four Vilbert chairs, a multicoloured MDF and melamine product sold by Ikea in the early 1990s for about £60, are on sale at Pamono, a vintage and contemporary furniture website, [for more than £4,500](#).

The Vilbert chairs had just a small production run so are unlikely to be hanging around many British homes today. But even some basic [Ikea](#) furniture that had huge production runs can fetch significantly more than they cost originally.

Jarpen metal wire chairs that sold for as little as £12 in 1986 [now go for £300](#) or more, while the stackable Hasslo polyurethane chairs for indoor and outdoor use, popular in the 1990s, now have [asking prices of £675 for four](#).

“The most popular vintage Ikea pieces are from the 1980s and 1990s,” says Wava Carpenter of Pamono. “I think this is because Ikea in this era began to define itself as a brand aimed at a youthful, urban and contemporary audience. The silhouettes are fun, eye-catching and colourful, even while maintaining a rather minimalist quality.”



Hasslo chairs by Monika Mulder cost £600 for four at Pamono. Photograph: Pamono & 1st Modern

Ikea’s Buy Back initiative, which allows customers to hand back used or unwanted pieces, was launched in stores across the UK and Ireland last month. Participants will receive vouchers to spend in store, with their value calculated according to the condition of the returned items, which will then be put back on sale in the store or recycled.

Ikea did not arrive in the UK until 1987, when it opened a store in Warrington. The furniture it sold elsewhere during the 1960s and 1970s borrowed heavily from Danish midcentury modern trends that are now popular globally.

Gillis Lundgren, who [designed the Billy bookcase](#) and is credited with inspiring the flatpack furniture revolution, was behind many early Ikea creations regarded as modern classics, fetching north of £6,000 each.

His 1972 Impala chair, with a tubular steel frame and vibrant red or gold upholstery, is [currently on sale](#) through 1stDibs, a New York-based high-end furniture website for £6,210.



Gillis Lundgren's Impala chair is on sale for more than £6,000. Photograph: Bukowskis

"There's a rising market for 1960s Ikea furniture, which often looked like midcentury modern Scandinavia," says Carpenter. "It's a bit less distinctive in terms of the brand identity, but it's also pretty rare to find these days."

Some Ikea designs that fetch £750 or more at auction have been reproduced for modern buyers at a fraction of the price. The Lovet leaf-shaped side table was Ikea's first flatpack product, released in Sweden in 1956. At 1stDibs, an [original](#) is for sale at £720, but it has been reproduced by Ikea as the [Lovbacken](#) table and is still on sale in stores, priced at £45 in the UK.

In Ikea lore, the Lovet table inspired the flatpack system after Lundgren was forced to saw the legs off to fit it into his car.

While Ikea may be regarded by some as cheap and utilitarian, in Stockholm, Eva Seeman, head of modern works of art and design at auctioneers Bukowskis, says many items have stood the test of time.

“Some of Ikea’s earlier pieces are really quite good quality both when looking at the actual make as well as the design as being very up to date from the period it was designed in,” she says. “The other reason [they are popular] is that they are still a lot more affordable for a larger group of people than for instance Danish equivalents, which the designers at Ikea were very inspired by (to say the least).”



Harold Fust Singoalla's daybed for Ikea reached £3,600 in an auction at Bukowskis. Photograph: Bukowskis

At Bukowskis, the highest under-the-hammer price fetched for an Ikea item was [£3,600 for a 1960s daybed](#), Singoalla.

Your best bet that you are sitting on a flatpack financial surprise is if it was made under the PS series. PS stands for Post Scriptum, a collection introduced by Ikea in 1992 and repeated about every three years to complement its standard range of products.



Mats Theselius' PS series chairs for Ikea sell for about £300 at auction.  
Photograph: Bukowskis

Seeman adds: "The small editions Ikea made in what was called the PS series are generally attractive. One example is the chairs by [Mats Theselius](#)." These tend to go under the hammer for about £350.

Given that the vast majority of Ikea furniture was meant for everyday use, few items remain in pristine condition. The Amiral armchair, designed by Karin Mobring for Ikea in the 1970s, features an Ikea signature chrome metal frame with a thick saddle leather seat and backrest. Bukowskis sold a worn, marked and stained pair for about £500 last year, but 1stDibs is seeking about [£4,000 for a pair in perfect condition](#).

So could your old Billy bookcase one day be worth something? No, is the short answer. More than [110m have been made since 1978](#), and the store still sells about 4.5m of them every year. It is unlikely ever to enjoy rarity value.

## 2020.12.29 - Opinion

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# With a Brexit deal that puts workers' rights at risk, we need unions more than ever

[Owen Jones](#)



The official opposition is missing in action, so it's vital that the labour movement asserts itself in the struggles to come



‘There are examples of unions successfully defying defeatism.’ Postal workers at a north London sorting office before a strike ballot in which more than 97% of Communication Workers Union members voted for industrial action, 10 September 2019. Photograph: Guy Smallman/Getty Images

‘There are examples of unions successfully defying defeatism.’ Postal workers at a north London sorting office before a strike ballot in which more than 97% of Communication Workers Union members voted for industrial action, 10 September 2019. Photograph: Guy Smallman/Getty Images

Tue 29 Dec 2020 05.00 EST

Britain’s decision to leave the EU in 2016 was driven by many factors, but one is often overlooked: the dismantling of trade union power and workers’ rights. When Britain voted in a referendum which, for many, was asking them “Are you happy with the status quo?”, workers had suffered the longest squeeze in wages since the Battle of Waterloo. The [halving of trade union membership](#) since 1979 – a collapse particularly marked in the private sector, where membership is now little over 13% – contributed to this protracted stagnation.

Workers, after all, had been stripped of bargaining power when it came to demanding higher wages. Simplistic generalisations often made about the triumph of leave should be avoided – most full-time and part-time workers [voted to remain](#), as did a majority of those whom pollsters classify as

working class under the age of 35 – but that real wages had fallen or stagnated for so long fuelled the disillusionment that Brexit fed on. When rightwing Brexiteers argued that migrants were undercutting wages, they were redirecting blame away from the weakening of unions and the so-called “flexible labour market” – but they had a receptive audience. In many ex-industrial areas, the replacement of jobs that had security and prestige with ones lacking both fed that disenchantment: the ingenious slogan “take back control” appealed to many for a reason.

How perverse, then, that the Brexit deal may only accelerate the justified grievances that helped drive the referendum result in the first place. According to new research by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), workers’ rights – along with environmental protections – are at serious risk of degrading because of the trade deal. The agreement specifies that if Britain fails to keep to a “level playing field” on social and environmental protections – designed to prevent a race to the bottom, where Britain slashes rights to attract businesses to its shores – then the EU could respond with tariffs. But the IPPR believes the burden of proof is so high that the government could easily water down protections. That would mean it was unscrupulous bosses who took back control, not their workers.

This should set a challenge for Britain’s weakened labour movement. It is certainly up against it: as Tony Blair put it in 1997, even after Labour’s planned reforms the country would still have “the most restrictive union laws in the western world”, and David Cameron’s 2016 Trade Union Act made strike action even harder. The number of workers on zero-hours contracts has sharply increased, and the rising trend of agency and temporary workers with precarious terms and conditions has been accelerated by the pandemic.

However, there are examples of unions successfully defying defeatism. The Communication Workers Union prides itself on using the power of mobilising people to defy the punitive thresholds needed to legally go on strike: in a ballot in 2019, more than 97% of postal workers voted for industrial action. Two smaller unions – United Voices of the World and the Independent Workers of Great Britain – have shown that it is possible to organise insecure workers and to win. Last month, the IWGB won a 10-year battle to end the outsourcing of cleaners at the University of London, and

won a high court victory over the government's [failure to protect](#) gig economy and precarious workers in the pandemic; earlier this year, the UVW celebrated as a major NHS trust was forced to abandon its [use of private contractors](#).

[Throughout history Britain's ruling class has created crisis after crisis – just like now | John Harris](#)

[Read more](#)

A fight for a new “normality” after the pandemic beckons: the danger is that, as with the aftermath of the financial crash, it becomes an excuse for businesses to attack workers’ terms and conditions – so they can unfairly extract more value out of their employees – and for the Conservatives to roll back the state, aided by a Brexit deal that permits the diluting of hard-won rights and protections. You would hope that Labour – the clue being in the name – would offer leadership here, too. But its decision to order its MPs to [vote for the Brexit trade deal](#) in its entirety means it will be hard to take its objections seriously. The argument here, of course, is that Labour is voting to stop no deal, but this is a nonsense – the deal will pass in parliament whatever the opposition chooses to do. The truth is Labour is trying to win back its leave voters angry at the party for having veered into a remain direction in the run-up to last year’s election. That is legitimate, but it was the same political calculation made by Jeremy Corbyn during his leadership, leading to his vilification as a Brexiteer by those who now cheer on or say nothing about Labour voting for the hardest possible Brexit deal.

With the opposition party missing in action, it falls to the trade unions to make the case for workers’ rights, both in word and in deed. Britain’s political tumult did not land out of a clear blue sky: it was driven in large part by the social and economic consequences of the labour movement being brought to heel by Thatcherism. When the “war” is over, the government must not be left to define the “peace”: the trade unions must assert themselves in the struggles to come.

- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist

# The UK and the US need to learn from countries that better handled Covid-19

Laura Spinney

Vietnam's 2003 Sars epidemic and Senegal's 2014 Ebola outbreak informed their fast and effective responses



'Encouraged by their leaders, the US and UK chose instant gratification, and will now pay the price.' Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

'Encouraged by their leaders, the US and UK chose instant gratification, and will now pay the price.' Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

Tue 29 Dec 2020 02.00 EST

In October 2019, in those halcyon pre-Covid-19 days, a chart was published that ranked 195 countries according to their capacity to deal with outbreaks of infectious disease. Drawn up by the Washington DC-based Nuclear Threat Initiative and the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security in Baltimore, Maryland, the [2019 Global Health Security Index](#) (GHSI) placed the US and UK first and second, respectively. South Korea came ninth, New

Zealand 35th and China 51st, while a number of African countries brought up the rear.

Well, that was droll. Either the authors of the chart got their [colour key inside out](#) or our definition of health security needs an overhaul – and given all the fancy data visualisation software available these days it's unlikely to be the former. Of course, the pandemic is not over. But back in March, when the index was already looking about as accurate as a 2016 US election poll, Johns Hopkins health policy analyst [Sarah Dalglish wrote in the Lancet](#): “The pandemic has given the lie to the notion that expertise is concentrated in, or at least best channelled by, legacy powers and historically rich states.” And she hasn't changed her view.

Many factors contribute to good epidemic management, but perhaps what the sorry fate of the GHSI teaches us is that while many of them are measurable – disease surveillance arrangements, emergency response plans, intensive care unit capacity – some are more ephemeral, or hard to discern until the chips are down. And yet good leadership, public trust in government and experts, and a sense of solidarity also powerfully shape a population's vulnerability to infectious disease.

You may also need a dose of luck, such that all these things align in the moment, but that's no reason to stint on praise for the countries that have come through well. Each one took different weapons into the fight: Vietnam is relatively poor but learned lessons from the 2003 epidemic of Sars (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and now has a world-beating epidemiological workforce; Senegal is even poorer but, remembering Ebola in 2014, used travel restrictions and testing well; New Zealand was untouched by both Ebola and Sars (apart from a single probable case of the latter) but had the competent and charismatic Jacinda Ardern in charge.

One thing the leaders of all these countries have in common is that they know an outbreak can grow exponentially, and that their best hope of containing Covid-19 was therefore to act fast and in a coordinated, data-driven manner. In a sense, each government sacrificed its population's present for its future, but only because it understood that the sooner the sacrifice was made, the smaller it would be. They spared themselves agonising dilemmas down the line, such as whether to let the elderly

residents of care homes die of Covid-19 or loneliness, or what to do about the generation of young adults facing mass unemployment. The ones that did best knew that offering support to those hit hardest by the containment measures would require a much smaller investment than would be required to stimulate recovery if they didn't put those measures in place.

In contrast, the wealthy countries that topped the GHSI sacrificed their future for their present, arguing as US president Donald Trump did that the cure must not be worse than the disease, or in UK prime minister Boris Johnson's immortal phrase, that "Our country is a freedom-loving country" – to which the only possible response is this line from Albert Camus' *The Plague*: "They fancied themselves free, and no one will ever be free so long as there are pestilences."

Thinking back now on how these leaders failed, when according to a colourful chart they had so much going for them, it's hard not to be reminded of the marshmallow experiment. If you aren't familiar with this classic test of a child's ability to delay gratification, [watch this YouTube video](#) posted by the Canadian newspaper the Globe and Mail. Four preschoolers do their best not to scoff a marshmallow left alone with them for 15 minutes, because they've been promised two if they pull it off. The marshmallows look pretty soggy and dog-eared by the end, but they survive the encounter and the children get their reward. Encouraged by their leaders, the US and UK chose instant gratification instead, and will now pay the price.

Luckily, societies have built-in counterweights to such present bias – ways of investing in the future that they call research and education. Though both have suffered this year, the fact that they have a long investment horizon means that previous generations' efforts have tided us over. Hence a pandemic that for 11 long months has felt ancient, because our only shield against it was the age-old one of social distancing, suddenly slipped through a wormhole and became postmodern. The Covid-19 vaccines that have recently been approved mark a technological watershed – one from which the world is unlikely to look back.

Those vaccines offer us the possibility of herd immunity and a return to something approaching normality – but only if enough people take them.

Unless governments make them compulsory for some or all of the population – which hopefully won’t be necessary – this will be an individual decision, which means our collective future lies in every individual’s hands. Getting in line for a dose seems like a no-brainer, given that our regulators have deemed the vaccines to be safe and effective, and not only our future but potentially that of the next generation is riding on them. At any rate, we are the ones staring down the marshmallow now.

Once the pandemic has receded, there will be lessons to digest and implement. One of them is that experts should be treated once again with the respect they deserve. They are, after all, the dividend of our investment in research and education – our guides to the future. They should be allowed to disagree, to say they don’t know, to fail, as all human beings occasionally do. But we should keep them on their toes too, and point out their blindspots, because it’s not really droll that more than 300,000 Americans have died of Covid-19 to date, or that the UK has had the [sixth highest number](#) of deaths in the world at the time of writing. It’s a tragedy of dimensions that would have been literally inconceivable a little over a year ago, when the GHSI was published.

Key to preventing any recurrence is understanding why that coloured chart got it so wrong, because hindsight is all very well but it should at least sing for its supper. As Dalglish pointed out, 85% of global health organisations are headquartered in Europe or North America, and half of all global health leaders are UK or US nationals. The community of experts that seeks to protect us from future pandemics needs to open up to Vietnam, Senegal, China, New Zealand and all the other countries that learned from their diverse past experiences, and learned well – in many cases, with fewer resources. It may seem like another no-brainer, but global health should be truly global.

- Laura Spinney is a science journalist and author. Her latest book is [Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How it Changed the World](#)

## What I learned in 2020 Relationships

# **Black Lives Matter changed my life, and my interracial marriage, for the better**

Tineka Smith

In a defining year as an African American woman, I realised my white British husband will always be learning about race



‘For a long while, my husband couldn’t understand, let alone appreciate, just how different the path I tread is from his own.’ Photograph: Roy Hsu/Getty Images/Uppercut

‘For a long while, my husband couldn’t understand, let alone appreciate, just how different the path I tread is from his own.’ Photograph: Roy Hsu/Getty Images/Uppercut

Tue 29 Dec 2020 03.00 EST

Like some sort of subversive enlightenment, 2020 has revealed a number of unpalatable truths about our world. But perhaps the most uncomfortable

moments of the year came when we looked inwardly at ourselves and the relationships we have with others.

I speak from personal experience when I say that 2020 has been defining for me. As an African American woman married to a white British man, the racial unrest that unfolded globally over the summer after the killing of [George Floyd](#) at the hands of the police catalysed a number of frank and difficult discussions in my own personal circles that led to great change.

The [Black Lives Matter movement](#) brought hidden racial biases within many countries to the forefront – countries that vehemently denied racism was ever a problem, just a far-fetched thing that happens “over there in America”.

But for me, it also ignited some difficult conversations at home. The racial aspect of my interracial relationship was always in the back of my mind. And while racism wasn’t a central topic at the beginning of our relationship, it certainly became one in 2020. For a long while, my husband couldn’t understand, let alone appreciate, just how different the path I tread is from his own, even as we walk together hand in hand through life as husband and wife.

I think we were so focused on understanding each other’s personalities and quirks in the beginning of our relationship that we didn’t really talk about race – and I’ve come to learn we absolutely should have. [Race](#) is a part of our identity, and for any mixed-race relationship to work I think it’s absolutely vital to know each person’s view on all aspects of racism.

Yes, our marriage has love and mutual respect at its core, but the vast disparities in our life experiences could have driven us apart. At times I needed support and empathy but instead my husband assumed I might have played a part in provoking others who I believed targeted me based on the colour of my skin. “Maybe they were having an off day,” he would say, and that sounded like he was defending a complete stranger. And while there have been other white people who doubted my experiences with racism, I expected my husband to be the opposite: the one person who believes I am the most reliable witness to my racial experiences.

He did not recognise racism where racism existed, only identifying it when the offence was clear as daylight. Nor could he grasp why I was so affected by the highly publicised deadly moments of racism in the US that led to the widespread protests. Little did he know that, as a Black woman who has been assaulted and spat at simply because of the colour of my skin, I go about life in a constant state of survival.

So how did we move beyond our worldly differences to come back stronger together?

It started from accepting that much could be learned if only we actively and fearlessly listened to one another. And we started to explore our racial differences, we found ourselves diving into unfamiliar waters. We analysed our experiences as a mixed-race couple and we found that defensiveness and gaslighting can surreptitiously impinge on the loving space, shutting down empathic listening and meaningful conversations.

I realised that I was asking my husband to suddenly grasp nuances of my experience as a Black woman that I had never required of him before. I had to learn to simply accept that there are some things that he will never totally understand. He realised that he'll always be coming from a place of learning when it comes to race. We had to both realise and admit our limitations. That's a hard thing to do. But our relationship became better because of it.

[This year, I took a leap of faith and married someone I'd only met three times | Ellie Mae O'Hagan](#)

[Read more](#)

This year was an opportunity for many interracial couples to reaffirm their love and support for one another in the face of intolerances, both covert or otherwise. Or perhaps it was a reality check for a few – a realisation that, in some cases, a difference in lived experiences can be just too much even for love to reconcile.

A fear of change is natural. But for me, the fear of maintaining the status quo is worse. I believe we've passed that. This crazy year has changed me. It has catalysed conversations between people. It has challenged my marriage

and made it stronger; it has sharpened my sense of purpose in life, and it has helped me see that I must use my voice and speak up.

And as 2020 draws to a close, I take comfort in the signs that times will change. Truly understanding our differences is not supposed to be a short and simple journey. It has the ability to unite us and strengthen relationships – if only we’re able to honestly admit what divides us first.

- Tineka Smith is co-author with Alex Court of [Mixed Up: Confessions of an Interracial Couple](#), which is available on Audible

# Hong Kong's democracy movement was crushed in 2020. But the spirit of resistance survives

Jessie Lau

Returning home, I found a broken city. Yet solidarity persists, under the most stringent conditions and amid palpable fear



'In Hong Kong, there's no denying that political life is severely under threat.' A protester attempting to march in opposition to the national security law, in May. Photograph: Aidan Marzo/SOPA Images/Rex/Shutterstock

'In Hong Kong, there's no denying that political life is severely under threat.' A protester attempting to march in opposition to the national security law, in May. Photograph: Aidan Marzo/SOPA Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Tue 29 Dec 2020 04.00 EST

"Check out that security guard," Alex said, nodding to my left.

Alex (not his real name) is a protester in his early 20s, and I was meeting him for coffee at the only “yellow” pro-democracy cafe in New Town Plaza, [Hong Kong](#), a once quiet shopping mall in my home district that last year became a battleground in massive anti-government protests. I turned to look: sure enough, there was a guard standing to the side of the main square, staring out into the crowd. I hadn’t noticed him before. Now I can’t help but catch him in the corner of my eye every time I pass through.

It was November 2020, and I’d just returned home for the first time after a year of tumultuous change.

This time last year, Hong Kong was at the peak of its protest movement, and the square was covered by an enormous display of pro-democracy posters and artwork. I remember tip-toeing around the confetti of rainbow origami cranes sprinkled across various printouts, trying not to crush their tiny paper wings.

Before that it was the site of a huge strike rally and clashes between protesters and police. In one, riot police stormed the floor with [batons and pepper spray](#). In another, [protesters](#) beat up a man they accused of being a mainland Chinese spy, and defaced a Chinese flag. Last Christmas, [protesters vandalised](#) the shopfronts of various “blue” chain shops, owned by companies deemed complicit in the system of economic and political oppression that keeps Hong Kong one of the world’s most unequal cities.

Now the square is empty; a negative space around the weight of what once was.

Sitting by me in a secluded spot, Alex seemed cautious at first, clutching his takeaway cup as if unsure of how much to say. But he soon relaxed and began talking freely, reflecting on the rapid changes and how – in the absence of protests – he’s been channelling his energy into one of Hong Kong’s many [new labour unions](#). After an interview that ran over by an hour, we parted ways. He might move to Taiwan but he’ll keep in touch, he said.

[I left Hong Kong for London so I could tell Britain the truth about China | Nathan Law](#)

## [Read more](#)

It was one of many candid and, for me, unexpectedly generative conversations I had with protesters, journalists and activists invested in the pro-democracy movement. On the plane from London, I'd braced myself for a broken Hong Kong: one silenced and stripped of dissent, worse than in the period of fatigue I'd witnessed as a reporter in the aftermath of the 2014 [umbrella revolution](#). And, on the surface, that's what I found.

Since the pandemic enabled local authorities to successfully clamp down on mass protests and Beijing passed a sweeping [national security law](#) in June criminalising secession, subversion and other ambiguously-defined actions, the pro-democracy movement has experienced almost daily crackdowns. Hundreds of mostly young protesters have been [put behind bars](#), including high-profile figures Joshua Wong and Agnes Chow. Chinese authorities have detained 12 Hongkongers who attempted to flee to Taiwan by boat. There have been newsroom raids, cancelled elections, the disqualification of pro-democracy lawmakers on the grounds of national security and more.

Censorship, both external and self-imposed, has choked my city – now irrevocably cracked by the invisible lines of yellow and pro-Beijing blue. People are sanitising their social media output, surveying their surroundings before speaking, and rejecting even anonymous media interviews. The fear is palpable; the silence shocking for a city that once prided itself in being the bastion of free speech in China.

Yet beneath it all, there's a thread of resistance, strung tightly together by the resilience of people who continue to care about human rights, express their beliefs and quietly do what they believe to be right, despite intensifying pressures.

There's the teacher who is worried about [academic freedom](#), and plans to make “alternative” open-source course materials available online. There's the reporter who has pro-Beijing parents but continues to cover political news, even as her family drifts further apart. There's the artist who had a breakdown after helping friends flee the city, but is slowly creating theatre projects again, telling local stories. There's the [civil servant](#) who feels

persecuted at work but wants to stay and hopefully change the culture from within.

There's also the mainland Chinese journalist who is saddened by anti-Chinese sentiment, and exhausted from balancing her job with the safety of herself and her family in China. "When I arrived 10 years ago I was naive. I wanted to cover human rights – maybe return home and change things. Now I don't even know if I have a future here," she confessed to me quietly, after a long day at work. Still, like everyone else I spoke to, she'll carry on.

In Hong Kong, there's no denying that political life is severely under threat: the structures we have to advocate for rights are being rapidly eroded. But solidarity is a powerful force. Even under the most crushing conditions, it survives, breathing life into thoughts unheard, actions unseen.

Solidarity is a precondition for both the preservation and creation of mechanisms for change. Hongkongers who care about democratic freedoms will continue to establish and utilise existing sites of political struggle: for instance, through the district council – the only body where representatives are directly selected by voters – diaspora organising, unionisation or grassroots mobilisations. From [migrant and prison justice](#) to the plight of [street cleaners](#), many socioeconomic struggles are being tied to the movement, keeping it alive.

Censorship is only total with our consent and complicity. To those who are carrying on and speaking out: I'll be here, with many others, listening. I only hope you will be too.

- Jessie Lau is a [writer and journalist](#) from Hong Kong covering identity, politics, culture and human rights

[Opinion](#)[Donald Trump](#)

# Donald Trump's influence will evaporate once he leaves office. Here's why

Julius Krein

Those who believe in the invincibility of Trump's personality cult hold a view of American democracy that is at once too cynical and too naïve



'The critical policy factors that set Trump apart in his first campaign have diminished considerably since then.' Photograph: Joshua Lott/AFP/Getty Images

'The critical policy factors that set Trump apart in his first campaign have diminished considerably since then.' Photograph: Joshua Lott/AFP/Getty Images

Tue 29 Dec 2020 06.00 EST

Donald Trump's refusal to concede the election has fueled intense speculation about his post-presidency: will he start a new conservative cable

network? Will he act as a kingmaker in the Republican party? Will he run for president again in 2024?

Underlying all of these rumors is the assumption that Trump will continue to hold sway over a significant voter base. But this is by no means assured. It seems just as likely that, over time, Trump's trajectory will land him closer to associates like Steve Bannon and Rudy Giuliani – hosting a middling podcast and hawking branded merchandise while trying to fend off prosecution.

[To keep the Democratic coalition together, Biden will have to be the Great Balancer | Geoffrey Kabaservice](#)

[Read more](#)

The media echo chamber which now insists that Trump will be a titanic political force for years to come sounds increasingly similar to the one that, five years ago, claimed he was no more than a flash-in-the-pan celebrity candidate. The glaring underestimation of Trump in the past and probable overestimation of his prospects today actually stem from the same error: the belief that Trump's political appeal rests mainly on his personality cult, not on any association with a certain set of policy arguments.

Trump did not win the presidency in 2016 simply because he had a cameo in Home Alone 2 and an uncanny talent for Twitter. He also outlined a wide-ranging, if inchoate, critique of the bipartisan policy consensus that had dominated American politics since the end of the cold war: a failed combination of “neoliberal” economics at home and military adventurism abroad. Moreover, Trump’s critique was based on national interests rather than the (often treacly) left-liberal moralism of progressive Democrats, thus scrambling ideological categories and establishing himself as a candidate with a unique appeal among key constituencies.

Trump’s larger-than-life persona, ubiquitous presence in pop culture and peculiar media savvy were certainly assets in 2016, as they are today. But the critical policy factors that set Trump apart in his first campaign have diminished considerably since then.

First, after one term in office, it is clear that the Republican establishment changed Trump more than he changed the party. Although his administration's policy record is a [mixed bag](#), the shift in rhetoric over four years was unmistakable. Attacks on hedge fund managers and pharma executives became rarer and rarer, replaced with praise for tax cuts, cheering on the Dow, bashing "socialism" and lauding supreme court appointments. To be sure, arguments can be made for all of these things, at least among conservatives, but they are arguments that Ted Cruz or even Jeb Bush could make, albeit less theatrically. Of late, Trump's combativeness has focused almost exclusively on allegations of election fraud and cringe-inducing self-pity; most people are already [tuning it out](#).

Meanwhile, as Trump has drifted away from the more substantive themes of 2016, others have embraced them. Up-and-coming politicians like Senator Josh Hawley and pundits like Tucker Carlson have articulated more coherent right-populist arguments than Trump ever has. Senator Marco Rubio is leading an ambitious attempt to rethink Republican economic policy, while figures like Representative Matt Gaetz have emerged as passionate critics of foreign interventionism. It made little sense for these and other prominent Republicans to criticize the 45th president while he was in office. Should Trump enter the 2024 race, however, he will find the populist "lane" of the Republican primaries far more crowded. The Democratic party has also changed. Joe Biden campaigned on a "Made in America" industrial policy program, something Trump never really countered in the 2020 campaign.

Politics, of course, is about much more than policy. Yet those who believe in the invincibility of Trump's personality cult – including, it seems, the president himself – hold a view of American democracy that is at once too cynical and too naïve.

On the one hand, the average voter is not motivated entirely by tribal loyalties and subrational impulses (though the average media personality might be). Even if wonkishness is an undesirable trait for presidential candidates, big-picture policy visions matter.

On the other hand, turning out enthusiastic audiences at rallies and commanding a large social media following are much less important than is commonly believed. Joe Biden proved that in both the Democratic primaries

and the general election of 2020. Furthermore, when it comes to policy formation, the effectiveness of mass politics is often constrained by an increasingly oligarchical system. Institutional power often outweighs popular appeal.

Trump's 2016 victory proved the concept that Republican voters are tired of zombie Reaganism, but his presidency did almost nothing to reorient Republican institutions and donors, which supported his administration out of convenience, not conviction. Despite four years in office, Trump built essentially no new long-term infrastructure or donor networks that could sustain a distinctive and lasting political movement, even one centered entirely around himself.

On his own, Trump may never lack an audience or fail to draw a crowd. Yet as an aficionado of professional wrestling, he should understand the limitations of a genre in which advertising rates historically tend to be quite low relative to ratings, presumably because wrestling's core audience has comparatively little discretionary spending power. Unfortunately, the parallels between pro wrestling and American politics go beyond the entertainment spectacle; they extend to economics and influence as well.

Accordingly, claims that the Republican party is "afraid" of Trump are grossly exaggerated. Republican members of Congress recently voted overwhelmingly for the National Defense Authorization Act, in spite of Trump's public opposition to it, just as they steamrolled Trump on the recent Covid-19 stimulus and spending bill. The Republican party might give Trump a wide berth on symbolic gestures like his frivolous election lawsuits, and he could still be a factor in close races like the upcoming Georgia Senate runoffs. But on significant matters of policy, the party's attitude is closer to contempt than to fear.

Like Nietzsche's Socrates, Trump was "the buffoon who got himself taken seriously". Unlike a Socratic buffoon, however, Trump never overcame himself. Bereft of the wider critique that once confounded political elites, his personality cult is no longer compelling even as a vessel for ressentiment. Its chief acolytes today are the legacy media operations whose fortunes his nonstop controversies helped revive, opportunistic scribblers hoping to cash in on one more #Maga or #Resistance potboiler, and those who prefer that

the media focus on anything except the substantive issues raised in 2016. They will happily ride the Trump gravy train as far as it goes, but it's already running out of steam.

- Julius Krein is the editor of [American Affairs](#)

# 2020: the year relaxation became impossible

Joel Golby

Since March I've felt like a tensed cat ready to pounce. It's a side-effect of Covid - and this government

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‘In a year where I have spent an impossible amount of time sitting down, lying down and idly watching television, I feel less refreshed than ever.’  
Photograph: Image by Chris Winsor/Getty Images

‘In a year where I have spent an impossible amount of time sitting down, lying down and idly watching television, I feel less refreshed than ever.’  
Photograph: Image by Chris Winsor/Getty Images

Mon 28 Dec 2020 10.55 EST

My dreams have become quite frantic lately. Normally I don't remember my dreams, so I assume that if I have them they are incredibly ordinary. But I have been waking with the [vivid glow of them](#) in the front of my brain for the past few weeks, and they are all vibrantly strange.

There was the one where I had to very politely go to Jamie's Italian with my ex's parents and they, bereft of anything to say to me, just repeatedly asked me how work was going ("Fine," Dream Me said, a lie). There was one where I somehow landed a lucky punch to knock out Tyson Fury in the first round and, in the aftermath, every single pundit on the planet lined up on Sky News to say mean things about me, about how useless I was, not just as a boxer but as a person. There's one where I sprinted through woods to escape the licking tendrils of flames, and then have failed tense job interviews with sweat beading on my forehead. I wake up exhausted at the horror my dormant mind has invented for no reason but to torture me. I wake up, frankly, afraid of the things I have created to be afraid of. I do not wake up relaxed.

When was the last time you were, properly though, relaxed? This isn't a trick question – I am not a sign-up sheet at a GP surgery, asking you how many units of alcohol you consume each week, gently ushering you towards a worried consultant if you say the wrong thing. When was the last time you were actually relaxed? I've been thinking about this lately (while sat on the sofa in supposed repose but actually, when I focus on it, every single muscle in my body tensed as I think distantly about bills): I think the last time I relaxed, you know, was 2019. That feels: bad.

This is a [side effect of coronavirus](#), although if you want to be more specific I suppose you could say it's a symptom of "having this government", because it is their fault. Not coronavirus in the first place – or, really, the chaotic mismanagement of it, though I'll give them a half credit for that – but the constant push-pull, on-off, eat-out-help-out, tier 1-tier 4 thing, each day another crapshoot: what thing you did very legally today will be fully illegal tomorrow? Which behaviour that you've been encouraged to spend the summer doing will you now personally be blamed for for deaths because of it in winter? You know that time you went out for pizza in August? Did you really think that through?

Our block of flats has a fire alarm that keeps wailing even when there's no fire – once or twice a week, normally, but sometimes it will blare erratically three or four times a day, often when I'm on semi-serious work calls, sometimes late at night. I have learned to cope with this, to turn the sound of the alarm into an ambient background peril: nobody in the flats makes moves to evacuate the building any more, after one confused night we all stood outside at teatime eating pasta out of saucepans, staring back at a patently un-ablaze building. This is roughly how I feel about Boris Johnson [scheduling press conferences](#): he will make the noise designed to make me alarmed, and I will absorb it with a detached feeling of "I've heard this honk before", and then I'll go back to sitting on the sofa, neither relaxed nor alert, my fight or flight response locked in a horrible limbo.

It's strange that in a year where I have spent a previously statistically impossible amount of time sitting down, lying down and idly watching television (forming the shape of relaxation without the content of it) I feel less refreshed than ever. It feels like a particularly cruel and unusual punishment at this time of year, too: Christmas is normally a period I set aside for catching up on the relaxation of the year that just happened, all of January's ills and February's enemies and those weekends missed in March all snowballing up, then the April–June stress chicane that cedes into holiday season (nice but getting on a plane undoes any restorative effects, so you return actually more stressed than before you left, and that's even before you look at your work inbox), and then autumn comes and the nights grow short and finally you sit down at Christmas with a Bond film on and a Quality Street pile and drink Baileys until your shoulders ease down.

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That's what happens in a normal year, but this year isn't normal: watching the [Queen's Christmas address](#) on Friday I still felt, somehow, that the prime minister would burst in halfway through and firmly put Her Majesty in tier 10. You know how cats sometimes freeze and stand still and hold there, primed, staring at the front door or something, constantly ready to sprint at lord knows what? That's roughly how I've felt since March.

I think we've all started cultivating a sort of bucket list of things we want to do when the world goes back to whatever we're going to end up calling "normal": holidays, trips to see and hug family, a meal in a restaurant where you can walk to the toilet without being personally escorted there by a member of staff. Mine is unextravagant but important: I just want to sit on a sofa, put my head on a cushion, and – actually, for once – relax. It feels more and more ambitious by the day.

- Joel Golby is the author of *Brilliant, Brilliant, Brilliant Brilliant Brilliant*

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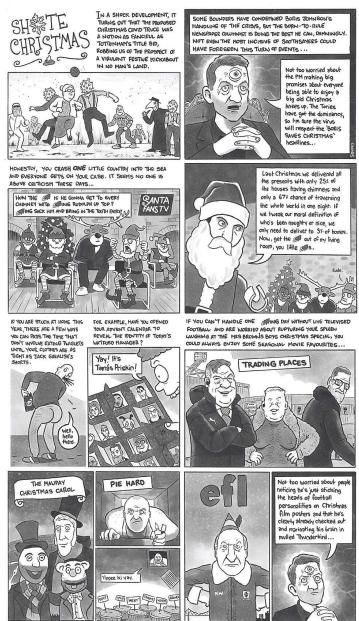
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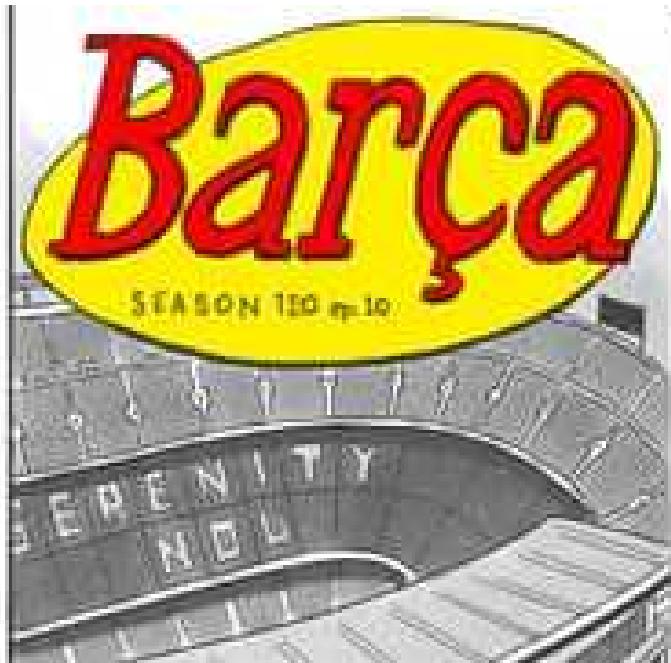
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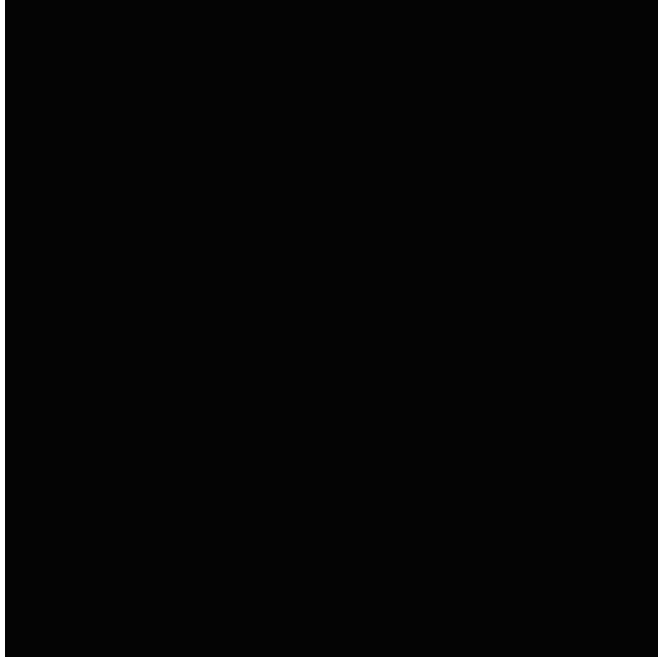
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## The Spin: six wishes for cricket in 2021

The return of fans to stadiums would be great for the sport and New Zealand becoming the No 1 Test side would be welcome

Tim de Lisle

Tue 29 Dec 2020 05.51 EST Last modified on Tue 29 Dec 2020 05.57 EST



BJ Watling tries to run out Fawad Alam in the first Test at Mount Maunganui – New Zealand can go top of the world rankings if they win both Tests against Pakistan. Photograph: Michael Bradley/AFP/Getty

Ahhh, midwinter Test matches. For cricket-lovers around the world keeping a sleepy eye on Australia's showdown with India, there's nothing quite like the warm feeling of waking up to an Aussie batting collapse. It can be rather ruined when swiftly followed by the icy feeling of waking up to [an Indian batting catastrophe](#). But that makes it all the better when India bounce back to pull off [a famous victory](#) masterminded by a stand-in captain.

The last week in December is the peak of the cricket year, even if the only tests involving England this time are of the medical variety. It's also the moment to look ahead and work out what we would like to see in 2021. So here are The Spin's wishes, some realistic, others merely hopeful – but then, as the Guardian likes to say, [hope is power](#).

## 1) The gates are opened

Cricket can manage better without fans than many sports – it has had plenty of practice. But an empty ground is still a crying shame, and as the Premier League has shown, even a distanced crowd can drum up an atmosphere. This is one facet of the pandemic where the British government has erred on the side of caution. In hindsight, it would have been perfectly fine to build on [the experiments of midsummer](#), rather than abruptly giving up on them. A couple of thousand people could have safely trickled in to watch each day of England's matches at the Ageas Bowl and Old Trafford. Let's hope the relevant minister, Oliver Dowden, noticed that the MCG in Melbourne has just lifted its attendance back up to 30,000, or about one-third capacity.

There is plenty of time to iron out the details: England's home summer is due to begin on 29 June, almost as late as last year, and the first Test is not until 4 August. There's even time for Dowden to be replaced by someone who actually has a passion for culture and sport. It's baffling that Boris Johnson has yet to hand the culture brief to Jesse Norman, the financial secretary to the Treasury, who a) writes books, b) plays the trumpet, c) supports Manchester United and d) loves cricket.

## 2) New Zealand go top of the world

If you asked a fan to name the world's top-ranked Test team, they would almost certainly say Australia or India. [The latest ICC rankings](#), issued on 14 December, have Australia top by a whisker. But it's not India who are breathing down their necks – it's New Zealand, the quiet achievers of international cricket. By the time their current series are over, any of the three could come out on top. If New Zealand win both their home Tests against Pakistan, it will take a 3-1 win by either Australia or India to keep

them from the summit. Cinderella is at the ball: the only question is how long she is staying.

### 3) Crawley does it again

It's a great achievement to make a Test hundred for England, and in 143 years, only 171 men and 21 women have discovered what it feels like. The latest of them is Zak Crawley, aged 22, with that [fabulous innings of 267](#) against Pakistan. As he gazes out from his flat at the St Lawrence Ground in Canterbury, there's just one small cloud in the sky. Of the 170 Englishmen to make a Test hundred before him, 60 never added a second.



Zak Crawley will be hoping his century against Pakistan is not his only one for England. Photograph: Mike Hewitt/PA

The [One Ton Club](#) includes two players with their name on a stand at Lord's (Plum Warner and Gubby Allen); several other England captains (Douglas Jardine, George Mann, JWHT Douglas, Tony Lewis); a sprinkling of commentators (Trevor Bailey, David Lloyd, Nick Knight); a man whose first Test hundred was even bigger than Crawley's (Tip Foster, who made 287 in Sydney *on his Test debut*); a couple of cult figures (Gilbert Jessop, David Steele); three of Crawley's recent teammates (Ollie Pope, Chris Woakes and Stuart Broad); another of his fellow tourists this winter (Ben Foakes); and

his mentor, Rob Key, who stroked 221 against West Indies at Lord's but never reached that second fine careless rapture. Crawley hasn't had much practice making hundreds – the 267 was only his fifth in first-class cricket – but he has the talent and the temperament to stop his magnum opus turning into a millstone.

## 4) Wood gets a go

Bowlers need landmarks too. Mark Wood waited nearly four years for [his first England five-fer](#), added [another](#) a year later, and then hit the buffers. His problem hasn't been bowling badly, it has been getting on the field. Since his blazing breakthrough in St Lucia, Wood has played only three Tests – two in South Africa that went swimmingly and one in Southampton that gave West Indies a measure of revenge. By the end of this year, he was even missing from the white-ball side, squeezed out by the Curran brothers. After spending far too long with the physio, Wood is now having to deal with a different kind of frustration, living in the bubble and carrying the drinks.

The Spin is not just concerned because Wood is a great character and a magnificent sight when in full flow. Come next winter's Ashes, England are going to need all the firepower they can get, assuming Steve Smith remembers how to reach double figures. Of England's many talented seamers, Wood is the only one who gets dramatically better when he steps on a plane: his average in overseas Tests is under 21, while at home it's nearly 45. On 11 January, he turns 31. Three days later, all being well, England face Sri Lanka in Galle, and with Jofra Archer resting, Wood's is the first name we will be looking for on the team sheet.

## 5) Holding has a bestseller

Cricket's most moving moment in 2020 was when Michael Holding and Ebony Rainford-Brent bared their souls on Sky and talked about facing racism. Coming from Holding, who has been so self-contained as a commentator, it was like the moment when David Attenborough finally spoke out about the state of the climate – his dignity, and seniority, lent even greater weight to his dismay.

Holding is writing a book called Why We Kneel, How We Rise. His agent is Charlotte Atyeo, who used to be at Bloomsbury working on Wisden, and his publisher is Ian Marshall of Simon & Schuster, the man behind the Playfair [Cricket](#) Annual. There have been several bestsellers about race, but none of them has homed in on sport. It would be great if Holding changed that.

## 6) Ireland manage to keep busy

For Ireland's cricketers, 2020 started promisingly, with nine white-ball games in 10 weeks. Touring West Indies in January, they bounced back from a 3-0 drubbing in the T20s to draw the ODI series 1-1. As the thwack of leather on willow gave way to stadium gates slamming shut, they squeezed in three T20 games against Afghanistan in India – losing the first two and tying the last. When cricket resumed in July, they led the way by touring England. True to form, they lost the first two ODIs before winning the third in style – the first time they had ever beaten England on English soil.

Their problem is that as the pandemic drags on, the bigger fish will bend over backwards to face each other and may well forget about the minnows. Ireland should be back in action next week, when they play the first of seven ODIs in UAE – four against their hosts, followed by three against Afghanistan. After that, their diary is as blank as yours or mine. A glance at the ICC's [timetable of Future Tours](#) from 2018 suggests the pandemic has already cost Ireland five Tests, which is a high price to pay when you have played only three in your history.

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[Australia cricket team](#)

## India level Test series after completing memorable win over Australia

- Australia 195 & 200; India 326 & 70-2 at the MCG
- India win second Test by eight wickets to draw level at 1-1



India's captain Ajinkya Rahane hit the winning runs on day four of the Boxing Day Test against Australia at the MCG. Photograph: Asanka Brendon Ratnayake/AP

India's captain Ajinkya Rahane hit the winning runs on day four of the Boxing Day Test against Australia at the MCG. Photograph: Asanka Brendon Ratnayake/AP

*Australian Associated Press*

Mon 28 Dec 2020 22.49 EST

India pulled off one of their greatest Test wins, chasing down Australia's fourth-innings target of 70 to secure victory by eight wickets at the MCG.

The tourists responded from a horror start to the Border-Gavaskar series when they were skittled for a record-low of 36 in Adelaide 10 days ago.

Even without star captain Virat Kohli, India levelled the series at one-all to become the first touring side to win consecutive Boxing Day Tests in Melbourne since England in 1982 and 1986.

[Australia's supposed summer of improvement stutters against India | Geoff Lemon](#)

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Australia's lower-order, spearheaded by young allrounder Cameron Green, added 67 runs in the first session on day four after resuming on 133-6 to be all out for 200.

India suffered some anxious moments in the tiny chase, falling to 19-2, but rookie opener Shubman Gill (35 not out) and stand-in skipper Ajinkya Rahane (27 not out) guided them home in the 16th over.

Led superbly by Rahane, who made a courageous 112 in the first innings, India controlled the contest from day one when they rolled Australia for 195.

While Rahane's 12th Test century – which Indian legend Sunil Gavaskar hailed as one of the most important innings in the country's history – was vital, it was the bowlers who set the game up.

Australia's batting problems were exposed by a disciplined Indian bowling unit that never allowed the batsmen to settle. It was the first time since 1988 Australia have had a home Test without any batsman posting a half-century – Marnus Labuschagne's first innings 48 was the hosts' top-score.

India could have slumped when veteran quick Umesh Yadav hobbled off with a lower-leg injury, shortly after dismissing out-of-form opener Joe Burns for four to follow the Australian's first-innings duck.

But Jasprit Bumrah and pace debutant Mohammed Siraj stepped up with spinners Ravi Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja to never relent against the brittle Australian top-order. The load was shared between the front-line attack in

both innings, with Bumrah (six wickets), Ashwin (five) and Siraj (five) dominating.

[India beat Australia by eight wickets on day four of second Test – as it happened](#)

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India could be given an extra boost with speculation abounding the next Test will be held at the MCG, instead of the SCG, due to the Covid-19 outbreak in Sydney's northern beaches. Their only concern will be finding a replacement fast bowler if Yadav is ruled out of the next match.

But Australia have plenty of soul-searching to do after losing their first Test on home soil since the corresponding match in 2018. Justin Langer's team went undefeated last summer with clean sweeps against Pakistan (2-0) and New Zealand (3-0).

Burns' poor run will almost certainly see him dropped, particularly with David Warner set to return from injury. But it wasn't just the batting which cost Australia, with abysmal fielding in the first-innings allowing India to reach 326.

## Sport

# 21 for 2021: the unmissable sporting events over the next 12 months



Anthony Joshua celebrates beating Kubrat Pulev, Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar, Davy Russell on Tiger Roll, Manchester City's Sam Mewis, Ben Stokes, Owen Farrell of the British & Irish Lions, Sofia Kenin of the US, Bayern Munich's Kingsley Coman and Dina Asher-Smith of Great Britain.

Anthony Joshua celebrates beating Kubrat Pulev, Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar, Davy Russell on Tiger Roll, Manchester City's Sam Mewis, Ben Stokes, Owen Farrell of the British & Irish Lions, Sofia Kenin of the US, Bayern Munich's Kingsley Coman and Dina Asher-Smith of Great Britain.

The rearranged Tokyo Olympics and Euro 2020 feature in a crowded calendar capped off by the Ashes



[Sachin Nakrani](#)

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## **Six Nations, 6 February – 20 March**

Given [the 2020 Six Nations](#) concluded on 31 October it is going to feel somewhat bewildering for players, staff and spectators alike when the tournament gets going again a mere 14 weeks later. England are the champions and face Scotland at Twickenham first up, with Ireland's trip to Cardiff the standout contest of the opening weekend. Ireland host England on the final weekend in what could well be a championship decider.

## **Australian Open, 8 February – 21 February**

The third grand slam of the Covid-era and the first to take place in the year when everyone hopes we return to some level of normalcy. That will not quite be the case in Melbourne given this tournament is starting three weeks later than scheduled due to the presence of the virus and competitors will have their stay and practice conditions heavily modified in line with

quarantine protocols. When play does get going, [Novak Djokovic](#) and [Sofia Kenin](#) will be aiming to defend their respective men's and women's titles.

## Formula One world championship, 21 March – 5 December

[Having matched Michael Schumacher's record](#) of seven world titles this year Lewis Hamilton will be aiming to establish himself as F1's all-time leading champion in 2021. His pursuit will take place during Formula One's longest season, with the calendar consisting of 23 races, including a controversial grand prix in Saudi Arabia on 28 November. The 2021 season will also see Sebastian Vettel drive for Aston Martin following his switch from Ferrari.



Max Verstappen enters the pits at Silverstone in August 2020. Photograph: Mark Thompson/Getty Images

## The Masters, 8 April - 11 April, Augusta

The first major of the year will hopefully see a return of spectators, or to use those most Augusta of terms, patrons and guests. Dustin Johnson competes

as defending champion while the European charge will include the likes of Jon Rahm, Rory McIlroy and Race to Dubai champion, Lee Westwood.

## **The Grand National, 10 April, Aintree**

“It’s hats off and a tremendous reception … you’ve never heard one like it at Liverpool.” [Peter O’Sullivan’s famous commentary](#) to accompany Red Rum’s hat-trick in 1977 will be replayed over and over again in the build-up to Tiger Roll’s attempt to win a third consecutive Grand National following this year’s abandonment of the races. Of course crowds will need to be back if there is going to be an echo of that amazing roar.

## **Women’s FA Cup final, 22 May, Wembley**

[Can anyone stop Manchester City](#) winning a third FA Cup in a row? That is the burning question going into next year’s tournament and City’s rivals can certainly take hope from how hard Everton pushed them in November’s final. A threat to City’s dominance of the FA Cup comes from close by – Manchester United have impressed in the WSL and may well view winning the double as the ultimate way to mark their arrival in the women’s game.

## **Champions League final, 29 May, Istanbul**

The Ataturk Stadium missed out on hosting the 2020 final due to the pandemic but, all being well, will be the setting for the 2021 occasion. Bayern Munich should fancy their chances of being there to defend the title they won in Lisbon four months ago while three English sides – Chelsea, Liverpool and Manchester City – are also in the mix. Could this finally be City’s year? It certainly helps their cause that this month’s draw for the last 16 saw them handed a favourable tie with Borussia Mönchengladbach.

## **Euro 2020, 11 June – 11 July**

A European Championship like no other, in more ways than one. Firstly because it’s taking place a year later than scheduled (while still being called “Euro 2020”) and secondly because it will see 24 teams compete across a

host of cities, including Rome, Baku, Dublin and Bilbao, with the semi-finals and final taking place at Wembley. From a domestic point of view, England's clash with Scotland, at Wembley, on 18 June already feels like one to savour.

## **Tour de France, 26 June – 18 July**

Copenhagen was meant to host the Grand Départ but will no longer do so for Covid-related reasons. So, for a fourth time, Brest will kickstart cycling's most prestigious event and the task for Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar will be to defend the title he won in September. Team Ineos will also be aiming to bounce back after a poor Tour showing in 2020 and will have to do so [without Chris Froome following his move](#) to the Israel Start-Up Nation team.

## **Wimbledon, 28 June - 11 July**

The good news is that the Championships are more than likely to take place in 2021 having not being held this year for the first time since the second world war. Organisers expect to welcome full crowds but are braced for reduced numbers, or even none at all. Andy Murray will hope to compete while Novak Djokovic and Simona Halep, both of whom contracted Covid-19 in 2020, will be seeking to defend their respective men's and women's titles.



Simona Halep poses with the trophy after winning the women's singles in 2019. Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

## **British & Irish Lions tour to South Africa, 3 July - 7 August**

The Lions head to South Africa for for [the first time since 2009](#) and led by Warren Gatland for a third tour in a row. They will play three Tests against the world champions – in Johannesburg, twice, and Cape Town. The task is a formidable one but the priority for all concerned is that the tour actually takes place, with the South Africa Rugby chief executive, Jurie Roux, warning that it simply would not be commercially viable to proceed if fans are not allowed to travel due to Covid restrictions.

## **The Open, 15–18 July, Royal St George's, Kent**

Royal St George's hosts the Open for a 15th occasion, for the first time since 2011 and 12 months on from when it was originally scheduled to do so. The R&A is “cautiously optimistic” of welcoming a full attendance – well in

excess of 100,000 people – and for Shane Lowry, crowds or no crowds, the task will be to retain the title he won at Royal Portrush in 2019.

## **The Hundred, 17 July - 13 August**

The tournament that has traditionalists scratching their heads in bafflement should take place in 2021 having been postponed for a year due to the pandemic. Eight franchises will compete across eight venues with the hope being – from the England and Wales [Cricket](#) Board, at least – that a new format will draw a new, family-centric audience to the sport. With players such as Ben Stokes, Jofra Archer, Heather Knight and Nat Sciver representing new teams including Northern Superchargers, Southern Brave, London Spirit and Trent Rockets, there should at least be a few moments to savour.

## **Tokyo Olympics, 23 July – 8 August, Japan**

The showpiece event of 2020 will be the showpiece event of 2021 – or at least that's the hope of organisers who, according to the IAAF president, Sebastian Coe, have a “cast-iron will” to stage the event. Should the Games take place it will be a simplified version of those that have come before, but there will still be plenty of medals on offer. Dina Asher-Smith and Katarina Johnson-Thompson are among those tipped to win gold for Great Britain.



Dina Asher-Smith will be going for gold in Tokyo. Photograph: Mike Egerton/PA

## **Tokyo Paralympics, 24 August – 5 September, Japan**

All being well, the 16th summer paralympic games will see 537 events contested from 22 different sports, with badminton and taekwondo new additions to the programme. Great Britain are targeting gold in a number of events, including wheelchair rugby and shooting.

## **Women's Rugby World Cup, 18 September – 16 October, New Zealand**

The tournament takes place in the southern hemisphere for the first time and it is fitting New Zealand are the hosts given they are also reigning champions. They find themselves in the same pool as Australia while England are in the same one as France, South Africa and Fiji. Simon Middleton's side plan on winning the trophy but will have to do so without [Katy Daley-Mclean, the captain of their 2014 triumph](#), following her recent retirement.

## **Ryder Cup, 21–26 September, Wisconsin**

Whistling Straits is scheduled to host the 43rd edition of golf's greatest team battle. Europe will arrive in Wisconsin having won four of the last five tournaments and confident that, under captain Padraig Harrington, they can triumph again. But the USA, led by Steve Stricker, will contain a host of the world's leading names and provide a stern test for the men in blue shirts.

## **Twenty20 World Cup, 18 October – 15 November, India**

The tournament did not take place in Australia this year but, all being well, will take place in India in 2021. The same format will be used and for England, one of 16 sides competing across 15 venues, the intention is to win another limited-overs trophy, following on from their World Cup triumph in 2019, as well as make up for their heartbreaking defeat to West Indies in the 2016 final.



England's T20 team have their eyes on another limited-overs title.  
Photograph: Gallo Images/Getty Images

# **Rugby League World Cup, 23 October - 27 November, England**

Rugby league's flagship international tournament, in which Australia will defend the title they won in 2017, is set to go ahead as planned. Should it do so, it will undoubtedly be the biggest and most interesting edition yet, with the men's, women's and wheelchair tournaments all running at the same time. Teams from Brazil, Greece and Jamaica will also be making their debuts at the event.

## **The Ashes, 22 November - 14 January, Australia**

[Joe Root admitted recently](#) that despite his other, more pressing commitments he cannot stop thinking about the prospect of doing battle with Australia next winter. Should he do so, Root would become the first Englishman since Johnny Douglas in 1920-21 to lead two Ashes campaigns down under and the plan, no doubt, will be to secure a first English series win since 2015 and first away from home since 2010-11.

## **Anthony Joshua v Tyson Fury, tbc**

[It would be the biggest fight in British boxing history](#) and all the talk after Anthony Joshua's recent victory over Kubrat Pulev is that it will definitely happen in 2021. Boxing's politics – and greed – means it may ultimately not, but for now fight fans can dream of seeing a first ever showdown in which all four heavyweight titles are on the line. It would be historic, huge and, given the fighters involved, undoubtedly unforgettable.

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## [Australia's supposed summer of improvement stutters against India](#)

It is hard to compute that a team can bowl out their opposition for 36 in a Test series and still be the one under the pump

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The Buffalo Bills became the first AFC East foe to sweep the season series with the New England Patriots in two decades with a 38-9 victory on Monday night

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[Surging Bills light up New England as Patriots swept for first time since 2000](#)



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**Over-by-over report:** India chased down the 70 runs required in their second innings after Australia were all out for 200 at the MCG

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[India beat Australia by eight wickets on day four of second Test – as it happened](#)



## India level Test series after completing memorable win over Australia

India steadied the ship after losing two early wickets to knock off the 70 runs needed in the second innings of the Boxing Day Test at the MCG

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Mauricio Pochettino

## **Mauricio Pochettino an odd choice for PSG, a club where the individual is king**

Jonathan Liew



A coach who has built his reputation as a team-builder will have to find a way to harness players unlikely to be willing to sacrifice themselves for the cause



Mauricio Pochettino took Tottenham to a Champions League final within five years of taking over and on a net transfer spend of around £30m.  
Photograph: James Marsh/BPI/Shutterstock

Mauricio Pochettino took Tottenham to a Champions League final within five years of taking over and on a net transfer spend of around £30m.  
Photograph: James Marsh/BPI/Shutterstock

Tue 29 Dec 2020 03.01 EST

The first thing you need to know about the six-day [underground Christmas disco that Neymar is allegedly hosting](#) for 500 people in the soundproofed annexe of a mansion outside Rio de Janeiro is that Neymar denies its very existence.

Nevertheless, [CNN Brasil has reported](#) that in recent days an unusually high number of cars have been seen pulling up outside Neymar's home in the small beach town of Mangaratiba. Local hotels have been registering a surge in bookings, despite rising coronavirus cases in the region. A source for the municipal government has described the alleged gathering as "a sanitary disrespect". And a representative for a Brazilian folk band called Vou Pro Sereno has confirmed that they have been booked to play an underground Christmas disco that Neymar – and we really can't stress this part enough – insists is not actually taking place.

[Path cleared for Pochettino after PSG confirm Thomas Tuchel's dismissal](#)

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Look: who knows if any of this is true? The guests certainly, although seeing as Neymar has allegedly banned the attendees of his alleged six-day underground Christmas disco from bringing their mobile phones, it is unlikely we will ever find out for sure. For our purposes, at any rate, the existence or otherwise of the Neymar six-day underground Christmas disco is largely irrelevant. The aim is to offer just the briefest glimpse of the confusion – the noise, the confusion, the real scandal, the fake scandal, the chaos – that awaits Mauricio Pochettino as the new manager of [Paris Saint-Germain](#).

PSG's last manager was Thomas Tuchel, a fine coach who nonetheless [struggled with the internal currents](#) at the club. Just before Christmas he gave an interview to German television in which he said he felt like “more of a sports politician or sports minister” than a football coach. “At a club like PSG, there are many influences,” he said, a point the club’s Qatari owners neatly proved a few days later by sacking him.

Despite leading them to a [first Champions League final](#), Tuchel never quite fitted in the PSG universe: a world of competing agendas and competing truths, where everything is football and everything is something else. It’s a benevolent luxury brand. It’s a front for an autocratic government. It’s a decadent star vehicle. It’s a magical dream factory. It’s built on hard work and Parisian elan. It’s built on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and modern slavery. It’s all real. Nothing is real.

To thrive as a PSG coach is to be able to hold all these ideas at once, perhaps even to believe in them all equally. Eventually it all got too much for Tuchel, a man who ultimately just wanted to coach some football and win some cool trophies. He could refuse to comment on the six-day underground Christmas disco. He could deride it as a distraction or media obsession. He could pretend not to notice. What he couldn’t do – fatally – was unsee it.



Neymar and Kylian Mbappé are the two biggest stars at PSG. Photograph: Franck Fife/AFP/Getty Images

And so into the breach steps Pochettino, a man who in his last job took a Tim Sherwood team to a Champions League final in the space five years on a net transfer spend of about £30m. Naturally, his impending arrival has catalysed all sorts of feverish speculation about who else might be joining the revolution: Dele Alli, Christian Eriksen, perhaps even Lionel Messi. The more interesting question, in the short and long term, is how he deals with what he already has.

This, after all, is Pochettino's gift: he shifts your horizons, raises your expectations, redefines the boundaries of the possible. He is your bridge between Sherwood and José Mourinho, between Nigel Adkins and Ronald Koeman. He forces you to dream a little bigger.

[Lille, Lyon and PSG will fight it out in a three-way title race in Ligue 1](#)  
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The problem is that none of this really applies to PSG. They don't need their expectations raised. They don't want to go on a holistic journey of growth, renewal and self-realisation. This is the most intriguing aspect to the appointment: Pochettino made his name as a team-builder, a coach who

demands humility and honesty and suffering, and who draws his squads tight like a family. What happens when he takes over a club that demands the exact opposite? Where the individual is king? Where all the forces spin outwards?

Thomas Meunier left PSG in the summer and remembers his four years there as “nothing but birthday parties”. The club president, Nasser al-Khelaifi, is said to have a direct line to the dressing room. The sporting director, Leonardo, wields the sort of influence that goes well beyond what Pochettino will have experienced with, say, Les Reed at Southampton.

Put more simply: in almost every facet of the job, Pochettino will be confronted with reminders of his basic powerlessness. Five-nil wins over Dijon will be scrutinised for signs of potential decay. Every substitution will feel like the end of the world. Then there will be the questions about Messi, the questions about birthday parties, about imagined feuds and real feuds, questions that will demand braggadocio, obfuscation and lies. On the pitch all he has to do is to persuade [Neymar](#) and Kylian Mbappé, two of the world’s most individualistic attacking players, to sacrifice themselves to a collective high-intensity pressing game and win the Champions League. Good luck with that.

This is how it comes apart. But this is also how it all comes together. Because this is the possibility we must also confront: that somehow PSG’s entitlement and Pochettino’s zeal and PSG’s lust for pleasure and Pochettino’s thirst for pain complete each other. That on some level, each has what the other needs. And right now, it feels possible to believe in both outcomes equally.

Paris Saint-Germain

## Path cleared for Pochettino after PSG confirm Thomas Tuchel's dismissal

- French champions sack German with side third in league
- Mauricio Pochettino set to be named coach's successor



Mauricio Pochettino, left, is set to be named as Thomas Tuchel's successor at PSG. Composite: AFP via Getty Images; UEFA/SIPA/Shutterstock

Mauricio Pochettino, left, is set to be named as Thomas Tuchel's successor at PSG. Composite: AFP via Getty Images; UEFA/SIPA/Shutterstock

*Reuters*

Tue 29 Dec 2020 04.56 EST

French champions Paris Saint-Germain have sacked coach Thomas Tuchel, with the side sitting third in the league standings, the [Ligue 1 club said in a statement](#) on Tuesday.

Tuchel, who led PSG to the Champions League final in August which they lost to Bayern Munich, was dismissed on Christmas Eve following a 4-0 win

over Racing Strasbourg.

[Mauricio Pochettino an odd choice for PSG, a club where the individual is king](#) | Jonathan Liew

[Read more](#)

“I would like to thank Thomas Tuchel and his staff for everything they brought to the club,” PSG president Nasser Al-Khelaifi said. “Thomas has put a lot of energy and passion into his work and of course we’ll remember the good times we shared together. I wish him the best for his future.”

PSG have 35 points from 17 games, one point behind league leaders Olympique Lyonnais and Lille, and are through to the last 16 of the Champions League, where they face Spanish side Barcelona.

Tuchel, 47, was appointed PSG boss in 2018 and guided them to two Ligue 1 titles along with a domestic quadruple in his second season at the club.

L’Equipe reported that Argentine [Mauricio Pochettino](#), the former manager of English Premier League side Tottenham Hotspur, is set to be named Tuchel’s successor. Pochettino, who played for PSG as a defender in the early 2000s, has been out of a job since being dismissed by Spurs in November, 2019, a few months after guiding the north London club to the Champions League final.

Eibar

Interview

## 'Money isn't everything' – Fran Garagarza and the miracle of Eibar

Sid Lowe in Eibar

The sporting director explains how the club have survived six seasons in La Liga when their record signing is Edu Expósito for €4m



Fran Garagarza says financial management is central to Eibar at all levels.  
Photograph: Eibar

“OK,” Fran Garagarza says, “what have we got?” Quite a lot, as it turns out. Tuesday evening in Eibar and five men sit around a table in a smart new meeting room overlooking the pitch at Ipurúa, where heat lamps light up the gloom. A sixth joins on a screen. One by one, Mikel Martija, Arkaitz Lakanbra, Eneko Romo and Fran Rico run through the players they have been watching this week, a small sample of the 19,000 in the system. Conversation starts: a catalogue of qualities – “striker, very much our style”

– and classification. Red, amber and green: stop watching, keep watching, move to the next phase.

Every now and then, Garagarza asks for some extra detail: a spelling, an age, an agent. As they go round, Unai Ezkurra enters everything into the system. Garagarza used to travel around in a van, delivering packages for a courier; now he travels to watch matches for a club – or did before the pandemic, remote tracking taking over since. He has been at Eibar for 16 years, as under-19 coach, assistant manager and academy director. For the past decade, he has been sporting director, overseeing one of the greatest success in Spanish football, a model of debt-free, sustainable overachievement.

On Tuesday night, Eibar travel to the Camp Nou to play Barcelona. Back then, they travelled to Guijuelo, La Muela and Lemona. When they went to bigger clubs – Athletic, Real Sociedad, Osasuna – it was to face their B teams. Eibar were in the semi-professional Segunda B, one of 80 teams spread across four regionalised groups.

From a town of 27,378 wedged into the Ego valley, blocks of flats towering over the main stand, they had never played in the first division and never expected to either. Not even in 2014, when they got there: their unexpected promotion was almost blocked because they were too small. They haven't left since. This is Eibar's seventh season in *primera*, each a little miracle.



SD Eibar's Fabian Orellana scores from the penalty spot against Athletic Club in June 2020. Photograph: Sid Lowe

"I never imagined this," says Garagarza, but the club with a ground that holds 8,000 and didn't fill even pre-pandemic, traditionally a by-word for humble, tough football on muddy pitches, belongs in the elite now.

If budgets have grown and facilities have changed, the ground impeccable and overhauled, the ideals have not and the limitations remain. As watching briefs are assigned in this meeting, none of the games are from the Premier League, Serie A or the Bundesliga and only one is from Spain's first division. That's Eibar's division but, Garagarza says: "It's not our market."

He outlines the process from scout to technical secretary to sporting director to coach. This is not a place players dream of, not a club that seduces with salaries. Even at youth level, they cannot compete with those surrounding them. They must invent imaginative solutions, contribute to the club's development off the field too. "Financial management is central to our focus at all levels," he says. "The idea has always been: 'If I have five, I spend four'."

"Last year for example we sold well – Joan Jordán [to Sevilla for €12m], Rubén Peña [to Villarreal for €8m] – but we never spend everything we

make. It's not just fees, it's salaries too and other players always find out. Balancing that, managing renewals and increases, is one of the hardest tasks. Money isn't everything, but if you can't get close on salaries, forget it: players won't come.

"We talk to the family, get friends to convince them, show what we offer. Investment in the stadium, training ground, medical facilities, the stability we have means we can convince some. But we couldn't spend €10m, say".



Fran Garagarza, right. Photograph: Eibar

Eibar's record signing is Edu Expósito, at €4m. The first-team squad cost less than €25m. Which is not to say they won't invest. With every year investment increases and not spending was almost a costly early lesson.

When they played their first *primera* game, seven of the starting XI remained from Segunda B. Midway through that season Raúl Albentosa left for the Championship club Derby, who offered a seven-fold salary increase and triggered his €600,000 buyout clause. "We didn't want to sell, but they got him easily," Garagarza says. "We already had 27 points, a long way towards survival, and decided not to invest any of that. We got it wrong. We finished third from bottom, relegated, but Elche were administratively demoted

because of their financial problems, saving us. We said: ‘We’ve been lucky; we can’t do that again.’

We’ve done a lot right but also benefited from the timing and from big clubs being badly run

*Fran Garagarza*

“We hadn’t expected to reach the first division. We had built a squad to survive in the second division: no money, players on loan. But we find ourselves in the play-offs, going up. Even in *primera* we couldn’t compete with some second division teams for players and within the club there were two currents of thought. One was a kind of fear of *primera*, the other a feeling that it was just a year to be enjoyed. See Madrid here, play a derby, increase income, go down again. We can’t survive. It was like an unexpected gift and it came too soon.

“But going down and surviving anyway – and we finished third from bottom, not last – changed things. That’s where we said: ‘We have to invest.’ If we had gone down, we would have had a good economic cushion to build, but we got a second chance to do so from *primera*. ”

In the six years since then they have not dropped below 14th; at times even Europe seemed possible. It feels a broader shift permitting Eibar to explicitly become a model for others to follow.

“Zaragoza, Sporting, Oviedo: they’re in the second division or Segunda B. And you ask what’s happening to allow smaller clubs like Leganés, Huesca and Eibar to appear in the first division. Why are clubs from small towns with little history here when big cities like those or Alicante, Córdoba or Murcia aren’t represented?

“We’ve done a lot right but also benefited from the timing and from big clubs being badly run. Some have debts to service, embargoes on income; we never had that. We don’t live above our means. We also have a small shareholder model, responsibility delegated in professional hands, rather than a sole owner making decisions sometimes for the wrong reasons.”

That provides some protection from the pandemic and poses broader questions about the foundations of modern football. “Not filling the stadium has less of an impact on us,” Garagarza says. “In relative terms we’re better off than clubs who depend on 50,000 coming through their gates. We got to *primera* at the right moment because despite having only 5,000 members, our ‘customer’ is television and that’s grown.

“For how long, though? Without TV, we may not be sustainable. We live well within that bubble; without it, we have little chance to diversify. We can’t really grow our catchment area. School kids are growing up thinking of Eibar as a first division team, which might help, but what about when we’re not? We have members who’ve always been there, down in the third tier. Others came since we reached *primera*. If we went down – which probability says is getting nearer – would they continue? I’m less optimistic.

“I’m not sure about the word: settled. What’s settled? How many years? What does it mean? Can we build a big stadium? No. Although we’re in *primera*, our limitations remain big, maybe even more than before. [Alavés](#) and [Osasuna](#) are back and they’re competition here. There are only 27,000 people in the town and Athletic and Real Sociedad dominate the surrounding area.

“The Basque element is important and we may have lost that identity a little. We had Dani García, Yuri Berchiche, Jon Errasti, Mikel Arruabarrena, Txema Añibarro. In our squad now there are only two: Roberto Olabe and Anaitz Arbilla.”

There’s a pause. “That concerns me. Luckily, the coach, José Luis Mendilibar, is Basque and fits the club perfectly: a leader whose values carry everyone with him.

“I also feel like that ‘Eibar fever’, the image, the repercussion, is dropping. We’ve seen Messi here seven times, Sergio Ramos seven times, Koke seven times. People might think: ‘What’s the attraction of a season ticket now? I’ve seen Atlético, Madrid, Barcelona, Sevilla, Real Sociedad, Athletic.’ There’s a sort of comfort you can feel.”

The Fiver: sign up and get our daily football email.

The miracle of Eibar is that it no longer seems like a miracle. On Tuesday they face Barcelona, reason enough to celebrate, but these games have become normalised. “People know survival is a success and appreciate that,” Garagarza says, “although maybe it has flatlined. Yet what’s been done can’t be undone now.

“If one day we’re not a first division team, it won’t be like before. The history we’re building, the infrastructure, the foundations – youth football, women’s football, stadium, training ground, the sense of belonging – is the legacy. We’ll realise what Eibar have done when we’re not on this stage any more.”

[Everton](#)

## **Everton want answers after game with Man City called off due to Covid-19**

- News of postponement comes four hours before kick-off
- Manchester City close training ground on medical advice



Everton’s game against Manchester City was called off four hours before the kick-off. Photograph: Martin Rickett/PA

Everton’s game against Manchester City was called off four hours before the kick-off. Photograph: Martin Rickett/PA

[Andy Hunter](#)

[@AHunterGuardian](#)

Mon 28 Dec 2020 18.06 EST

Everton will request “full disclosure” of the information [Manchester City](#) provided to the Premier League which led to the postponement of Monday’s fixture at Goodison Park hours before kick-off.

[Neymar under fire for ‘macabre’ week-long New Year’s Eve party](#)

## [Read more](#)

City's training ground has been closed for an indeterminate period after a number of their players tested positive for Covid-19 following the latest round of testing. The club had confirmed four positive tests on Christmas Day, including those for Kyle Walker and Gabriel Jesus, with unconfirmed reports that a further three players have now tested positive.

A [Premier League](#) board meeting agreed to rearrange the fixture after taking medical advice before postponing a game that would have been attended by 2,000 home supporters – a decision that left Everton frustrated and disappointed.

“Our players were prepared for the game, as were both the team staff and everyone at Goodison,” said the statement. “Matchday is the most important date in our calendar. And this was a big one. Whilst [Everton](#) will always have public safety uppermost, we will be requesting full disclosure of all the information that Manchester City provided to the Premier League so the club can be clear on why this decision was taken.”

## Quick Guide

### **Rochdale, Morecambe and Doncaster hit by Covid-19 cases**

Show

Rochdale, Morecambe announced that their next two games were postponed due to Covid-19, while Doncaster Rovers' have called off their next three matches after a further three players tested positive, following two confirmed cases on Boxing Day. Five games were also unable to take place in the fifth-tier National League on Monday.

Doncaster were scheduled to play against Fleetwood Town (29 December), Peterborough United (2 January) and Oxford United (5 January). Rochdale's next two League One games, at home to Crewe on Tuesday and Saturday's visit of MK Dons, are now off with players and staff from the hosts forced to self-isolate. League Two Morecambe were due to play at Bolton on 29 December and away to Bradford on 2 January.

Morecambe football secretary and director Mick Horton said: "It is very disappointing that we have had to make this decision but the welfare of our players, staff and opponents remains the number one priority and, following detailed conversations with the relevant authorities, we have also decided to close our training ground for 10 days as well."

National League games at Barnet, Boreham Wood, Chesterfield, Dagenham & Redbridge and Sutton were postponed on Monday after positive tests were returned at various clubs.

Rotherham's Championship game with Barnsley on Tuesday will go ahead, but boss Paul Warne said the coronavirus-hit Millers are only fulfilling the fixture to avoid receiving a possible points deduction.

The Millers' last two games have been called off after an outbreak of the virus in the camp before Christmas and they were keen for the south Yorkshire derby to go the same way, but EFL doctors have ruled it can be played.

That is despite three players still being in isolation, with a fourth waiting on a test result, and one only ending quarantine on the day of the game. **PA Media**

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Premier League guidelines that pre-date the pandemic state a fixture should proceed and requests for a postponement be rejected unless a club has fewer than 14 players available. With players in quarantine and the training complex closed, City's matches at Chelsea on Sunday and Manchester United the following Wednesday in the Carabao Cup semi-final may also be in doubt.

[Football and Brexit: a guide to the new rules and their impact on clubs](#)

[Read more](#)

A City statement read: "After the latest round of Covid-19 testing, the club returned a number of positive cases, in addition to the four already reported

on Christmas Day. With the security of the bubble compromised, there posed a risk the virus could spread further amongst the squad, the staff and potentially beyond. Based on strong medical advice the Premier League, in consultation with both clubs, has decided to postpone the fixture.

“All positive cases involving players and staff will observe a period of self-isolation in accordance with Premier League and UK government protocol on quarantine. The first-team training ground at City Football Academy will close for an indeterminate period, with the squad and associated bubble undergoing testing before any decision is made for training to resume. Everyone at the club wishes all of our colleagues a speedy recovery ahead of their return to work, training and competition.”

The Everton game is the second Premier League fixture to be postponed owing to Covid-19, after Aston Villa v Newcastle this month, but despite the outbreak at City the league insists its protocols are being observed.

[George Galloway's bizarre trip to Queen of the South to end in charge for club](#)

[Read more](#)

A statement read: “This rise has created uncertainty and the Premier League board received medical advice that the match should be postponed. The board agreed to rearrange the game as a precaution and further testing will now take place tomorrow. The decision has been taken with the health of players and staff the priority. The Premier League continues to have full confidence in its protocols and rules, and the way in which all clubs are implementing them. The League wishes those with Covid-19 a safe and speedy recovery and will rearrange the postponed fixture against Everton in due course.”

The Arsenal defender Gabriel Magalhães, meanwhile, has tested positive for coronavirus, ruling the Brazilian out of their upcoming matches against Brighton and West Brom.

[Talking Horses](#)[Horse racing tips](#)

## **Talking Horses: Saldier has quality to foil Champion Hurdle hopefuls**

With the Willie Mullins team in outstanding form it could be worth chancing the fitness of the 2019 Morgiana Hurdle winner



The top-class action at Leopardstown continues on Tuesday. Photograph: Tommy Dickson/INPHO/Shutterstock

The top-class action at Leopardstown continues on Tuesday. Photograph: Tommy Dickson/INPHO/Shutterstock



[Greg Wood](#)

[@Greg\\_Wood](#)

Mon 28 Dec 2020 19.01 EST

Newbury's Challow Hurdle card on Tuesday is subject to a precautionary inspection at 8.30am but there are no concerns at Leopardstown where the Grade One Matheson Hurdle is the feature event on the final day of the Christmas meeting.

An up-to-scratch renewal has added interest after Epatante's defeat at Kempton Park on Boxing Day and Abacadabras or Saint Roi, last season's County Hurdle winner, could join or even unseat her at the top of the Champion Hurdle betting with an impressive success. Aspire Tower, who upset the odds-on Abacadabras at Down Royal in October, is also in the mix along with Sharjah, who is going for a hat-trick in this race.

[A Plus Tard catches Kemboy in the final strides to land Savills Chase thriller](#)  
[Read more](#)

With the Willie Mullins team in outstanding form, though, it could be worth chancing the fitness of **Saldier (2.25)** at around 10-1 as he returns from more than a year on the sidelines. He was made favourite for the Champion

Hurdle after winning the Morgiana first time up in November 2019 and has a decent chance today on that form.

**Leopardstown 1.15** Concertista took the Mares' Novice Hurdle at Cheltenham in March, is the second-favourite for the Mares' Hurdle back at the Festival next year and is an obvious favourite here, but her credentials could face a stern test from **Black Tears**. Gordon Elliott's runner was second in the ultra-competitive Coral Cup in March and looked sure to find plenty of improvement for the run when third at Punchestown in November.

**Newbury 1.30** The most interesting runner is Dickie Diver, who makes his chase debut 22 months after finishing 11 lengths fourth to Minella Indo in the Albert Bartlett at Cheltenham. That was his third start under Rules and he is potentially a handicap blot, but that long absence – and Nicky Henderson's iffy form – are concerns. He is up against some fit and firing opponents too, including **Demachine**, unbeaten in two starts over fences with more progress still to come.

**Leopardstown 1.50** Monfish, last season's Albert Bartlett winner, cemented his place at the top of the market for the Festival's three-mile novice chase with an impressive fencing debut at Fairyhouse in November. Latest Exhibition was just a neck behind him at Cheltenham but **Monfish**, every inch a chaser, looks like the better long-term prospect.

**Newbury 2.05** It is hard to rule out any of the seven runners here with confidence, and the smart Ch'Tibello is an eye-catcher dropping back to handicaps after several good runs in Graded company. Marginal preference, though, is for Ben Pauling's **The Cob**, up just 5lb after a win in a strong time on his handicap debut at Haydock this month.

**Newbury 2.40 Cuban Pete** has shown improved form on his past two starts and won with plenty in hand at Hereford last time. This is much more competitive, but he is still quite lightly-raced for an eight-year-old and will appreciate every yard of the trip on the testing ground.

**Leopardstown 3.00 Legacy Thor** has his own ideas about the game and refused to race at Fairyhouse two runs ago. There was nothing wrong with

his subsequent defeat of a big field at Navan, however, and while is not one for maximum faith, that is factored in to a price of around 6-1.

## Quick Guide

### **Greg Wood's Tuesday tips**

Show

#### **Kelso**

11.40 Gipsy Rose Lee

12.12 C'Est Le Bonheur

12.47 Whiteoak Fleur

1.22 Eternally Yours

1.57 Elysian Flame

2.32 Lake Takapuna

3.07 Scoop The Pot

#### **Doncaster**

12.00 Dashing Perk

12.35 Flemcara

1.10 Major Dundee

1.45 Cut The Mustard

2.20 Asharann

2.55 Ronde De Nuit

3.30 Fast Buck

## **Newbury**

12.20 Mystic Dreamer

12.55 Gowel Road

1.30 De Machine

2.05 The Cob (nb)

2.40 Cuban Pete

3.15 Star Gate (nap)

3.45 Shanacoole Prince

## **Southwell**

3.55 Native Silver

4.30 Exotic Escape

5.00 Restricted Area

5.30 A Pint Of Bear

6.00 Reaction Time

6.30 Giogobbo

7.00 Gossip

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

**Newbury 3.15** A fascinating renewal of the Grade One Challow Hurdle. Four of the six runners are unbeaten over timber this season and another – the overnight favourite, Bravemansgame – is two-from-three after a £370,000 transfer to the Paul Nicholls yard after a win in his only point-to-point. Any one of the five could win, but the unbeaten **Star Gate** has had

two races under Rules and looked a top-class prospect when successful in a Grade Two at Sandown in early December.

**Newbury 3.45** King D'Argent is an obvious favourite after a successful chasing debut off 114 at Warwick last time but an 11lb rise in the weights looks harsh. **Shanacoole Prince**, second on his first start over fences and with three races under Rules, could be a better option at around 5-1 for Kim Bailey and David Bass.

WNBA

## The most notable US athletes of 2020: No 4 – Breanna Stewart, the unstoppable ally

A gruesome injury couldn't stop basketball's most dominant force from adding to her trophy cabinet, but it was her allyship in the memory of Breonna Taylor that made a bigger impact



Breanna Stewart poses with the WNBA championship trophy and WNBA finals Most Valuable Player trophy after leading the Seattle Storm to a record-tying fourth title in October. Photograph: Ned Dishman/NBAE/Getty Images

Breanna Stewart poses with the WNBA championship trophy and WNBA finals Most Valuable Player trophy after leading the Seattle Storm to a record-tying fourth title in October. Photograph: Ned Dishman/NBAE/Getty Images



[Bryan Armen Graham](#)

[@bryanagraham](#)

Tue 29 Dec 2020 04.00 EST

There's a special joy in watching Breanna Stewart go about her work. The 26-year-old archetype-busting star forward of the Seattle Storm stands 6ft 4in with a 7ft 1in wingspan that's longer than LeBron's, blending the size and strength of a top-drawer post player with the agility and coordination of an elite wing. When she's not using her length and physicality to pick her teeth with muscle-bound defenders in the paint, you can find her on the perimeter, calmly sinking three-pointers or roasting opponents off the dribble to create chances for herself and her teammates.

[The most notable US athletes of 2020: No 7 – Maya Moore](#)

[Read more](#)

Stewie wins everywhere she laces them up: for college, club and country. After capturing four NCAA championships and a record four Final Four most outstanding player awards in four seasons at the University of Connecticut, she was chosen by Seattle with the No 1 overall pick of the 2016 [WNBA](#) draft and picked right up where she left off in Storrs. Two years ago, when the Olympic gold medalist won the WNBA's Most Valuable

Player award and hauled her team to a championship, the Storm had every look of a dynasty-in-waiting.

Then disaster struck. Stewart [ruptured an achilles tendon](#) in April 2019 while playing for Dynamo Kursk in the Euroleague Women championship game. Not only did the rehab cost her the entire 2019 WNBA season, but the severity of the injury meant there was no guarantee she would return to her otherworldly form.

Somehow, the upstate New York native came back this year even better than before. Behold her performance in Game 1 of the WNBA finals against the top-seeded Las Vegas Aces in October. After three quarters, Stewart was on a game-high 23 points, but the resilient Aces had kept within touching distance throughout and only trailed by two entering the fourth.

That's when Stewart found another level and simply took over, tearing off the first 11 points of the final period, restoring Seattle's double-digit lead and finishing with 15 in the quarter. Driving finger rolls, turnaround fadeaways, cutting lay-ups, one three-pointer after another: she could not be stopped. Her 37 points were one shy of the finals record. It was one of the more dominant individual performances you will ever see on a basketball court.

Breanna Stewart of the Seattle Storm became the first player in WNBA finals history to finish with 35 points and 15 rebounds this year in a Game 1 win over the Las Vegas Aces.

She went on to average 28.3 points on 63% shooting in the Storm's three-game sweep, sealing the club's [record-tying fourth WNBA title](#) and her second WNBA finals MVP award.

Yet on-court dominance only scratches the surface of her impact. Stewart is not an attention-seeker by nature, but she's never shied away from using her platform to turn a light on societal issues, like when she [wrote about her experience as a survivor of sexual abuse](#) in a deeply personal essay published back in 2017. She certainly wasn't the only WNBA player to [publicly encourage the league](#) to back Black Lives Matter and dedicate its season to Breonna Taylor as a nation reeled amid a fresh wave of

extrajudicial killings of black and brown people. A'ja Wilson, Angel McCoughtry, Nneka Ogwumike and Layshia Clarendon were among the many players at the fore of push, building on the WNBA's [lengthy history of shared urgency around social causes](#). Still others like [Maya Moore](#), Natasha Cloud and Renee Montgomery chose to sit out the season to fully devote their efforts to racial equity.

But it always will carry additional weight when the face of a sport throws their weight behind a cause. Stewart [did the work](#). She attended protests. She grappled with her privilege as a white star in a predominately black league. Most of all, she listened. And when the moment came, Stewart's decision to stand with Clarendon before the opening game in the WNBA bubble and [call for 26 seconds of silence](#) in remembrance of Taylor, the 26-year-old African American woman killed by plainclothes police officers while asleep in her Louisville home, stood out as a model of allyship that deserves to be remembered long after the wins and losses fade into time.

## 2020.12.29 - From the uk

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Eating disorders

# Hospital admissions for children with eating disorders rise by a third in England

Mental health practitioners call for improved access to treatment services



There were 21,794 admissions for eating disorders among children in 2019-20, up by 32% in 2017-18. Photograph: Chanintorn Vanichsawangphan/Getty/EyeEm

There were 21,794 admissions for eating disorders among children in 2019-20, up by 32% in 2017-18. Photograph: Chanintorn Vanichsawangphan/Getty/EyeEm

*Yohannes Lowe*

Mon 28 Dec 2020 19.01 EST

Hospital admissions for children with eating disorders have risen by almost a fifth in two years and a third among all age groups, figures show, as mental health practitioners call for improved access to treatment services.

According to the latest NHS Digital data for [England](#), there were 21,794 admissions for eating disorders among all age groups in 2019-20, up by 32% from 16,547 in 2017-18.

Meanwhile, there were 4,962 admissions for eating disorders for children aged 18 and under in 2019-20, a 19% increase from the 4,160 admissions seen in 2017-18.

Teenagers aged 13-18 accounted for 4,348 of the admissions in 2019-20, with almost half of a further 418 admissions for 10- to 12-year-old girls with anorexia.

The figures came as the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child [Health](#) warned parents and guardians to look out for signs of eating disorders in children and young people over the holiday period.

Dr Karen Street, a consultant paediatrician at the Royal Devon and Exeter hospital and officer for child mental health at the RCPCH, said: “We are extremely concerned about many children and teenagers’ wellbeing because of the pandemic.

“Many of them are just not coping. [Eating disorders](#) are often related to a need for control – something many young people feel they have lost during the pandemic. Many have described needing a focus and goals which, in the absence of anything else, has for some centred around eating and exercise.”

She added: “We know that the earlier eating disorders are spotted, the better the chance that a young person can be successfully treated. Eating disorders begin with often quite small changes such as refusing to eat foods that were previously enjoyed.

“If you’ve noticed a difference in the way your child or teenager approaches food and exercise and it concerns you, talk to them about what’s normal and what is not – often those with eating disorders will try to convince you all is OK but trust your instincts. Seek advice from your GP and from helplines and if you’re still concerned, contact local eating disorder team.”

Charities have also expressed concern at the figures, as they call on the government to invest more in prevention and training so that medical professionals can spot developing eating disorders early.

“It is worrying to see a further rise in the number of children and young people being admitted to hospital for eating disorders,” Tom Madders, the director of campaigns at the mental health charity Young Minds, said.

“While there have been improvements in waiting times for eating disorder services for children in recent years, it can still be difficult for them to get the help they need before they reach crisis point.

“With it becoming clearer that the pandemic is deepening the crisis in young people’s mental health, the government must act to ensure that early support is there for those that are struggling and make prevention and early intervention a genuine priority.”

Eating disorders – of which anorexia, bulimia and binge-eating disorder are most common – are characterised by eating too much or too little, being obsessed with weight or body shape, excessive exercise, having strict food routines and/or deliberate vomiting after eating.

In the [NHS](#) Digital data, obtained by the Press Association, overall hospital admissions for anorexia rose by 9% from 8,090 in 2018-9 to 8,796 in 2019-20, while bulimia increased by 15% from 4,253 to 4,904.

Hospital admissions were most common in adults aged 26 to 40, with 6,510 in women and 437 in men in 2019-20.

Leading mental health experts have warned that eating disorders are thriving in the isolation brought on by coronavirus, with many losing access to community services and local support networks as a result of the pandemic.

Dr Agnes Ayton, chair of the eating disorders faculty at the Royal College of Psychiatrists, said: “Infection control and social distancing in inpatient units has also led to a reduced number of beds, so desperately-ill patients are struggling to get help. The government and the NHS must take immediate action to tackle this crisis.”

Reacting to the figures, Claire Murdoch, NHS England's mental health director, said the NHS continues to offer face-to-face appointments and inpatient care, while providing phone and video consultations where appropriate.

"Young people who are struggling with an eating disorder also stand to benefit significantly from recently announced rapid access to specialist NHS treatment across England, which will provide access to early intervention, treatment and support," she added.

## Technology sector

# UK chipmaker Graphcore valued at \$2.8bn after it raises \$222m

British firm challenges rivals including Nvidia with chips used in artificial intelligence



Graphcore founders Simon Knowles and Nigel Toon. Photograph: Graphcore

Graphcore, the UK maker of chips designed for use in artificial intelligence, has raised \$222m (£164m) from investors, valuing the company at \$2.8bn.

The Bristol-based company's latest round of funding was led by the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan as well as investors including Fidelity International and Schroders. Existing Graphcore investors including Baillie Gifford and Draper Esprit also joined the round.

The \$2.8bn valuation propels Graphcore further up the ranks of the UK's most valuable private tech companies as it seeks to confirm its position in

the fast-growing [artificial intelligence industry](#). The company has \$440m in cash as it seeks to expand.

Graphcore first achieved the coveted “unicorn” status, a valuation above \$1bn, in 2018, when it raised \$200m for a valuation of \$1.8bn. Since its official founding in 2016, Graphcore has raised more than \$710m from investors, including the carmaker BMW, the tech companies Microsoft and Samsung, and the prominent Silicon Valley venture capital business Sequoia Capital.

Plans for Graphcore were first started in late 2013 by its chief executive, Nigel Toon, and its chief technology officer, Simon Knowles, both of whom were previously directors at Icera, a business making chips for 3G mobile network infrastructure. Icera was sold to the US chipmaker Nvidia in 2011.

Graphcore’s technology, which it calls “intelligence processing units”, is designed to handle the power-hungry requirements of machine learning, in the expectation that its use will grow rapidly across high-tech industries. Graphcore’s Colussus chip was named after an early computer built during the second world war at [Bletchley Park, the codebreaking centre](#).

The company hopes to differentiate itself from rivals making [graphics processing units \(GPUs\)](#), including Nvidia. Toon said the company’s technology “dramatically outperforms legacy processors such as GPUs”.

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Graphcore’s investment round underlines the intense rivalry in the semiconductor industry, with US companies vying with competitors backed by the Chinese state.

Nvidia in September agreed [a \\$40bn deal](#) to buy the UK-based chip designer Arm, partly in the hopes of targeting artificial intelligence. However, the takeover of a British company – albeit one that was owned by Japan’s Softbank – was [deeply controversial](#). Graphcore’s Toon said the takeover was “bad for competition”, “bad for the market overall” and “bad for Britain”, in [an interview with the Financial Times](#).

Toon said Graphcore's next fundraising step would probably be an initial public offering, but added that this would be unlikely during 2021.

## House prices

# Islington records UK's highest house price growth of 2020 at 13.4%

London boroughs take nine of top 20 places, with Leeds and Wolverhampton second and third



Properties in Islington, north London, now cost an average of £727,922.  
Photograph: Simon Newman/Reuters

Islington in north [London](#) has shown the fastest house price growth over 2020, with the average property rising 13.4% to £727,922, according to the estate agent Halifax.

At the other end of the table, the price of an average home in Paisley, west of Glasgow, decline by 1.7% to £138,036.

While in many London boroughs average house prices rose much more quickly than last year, Hackney, which borders Islington in north-east London, recorded a 1.5% decline to £636,000 to become the second-biggest faller.

Overall the London average house price was up 6%, taking nine of the top 20 places. Croydon, south London, had the second biggest rise in the capital at 10.9%.

Outside London, Leeds was in second place overall, recording a 11.3% rise to £247,116, followed by [Wolverhampton](#), with a 9.5% rise to £217,837.

Russell Galley, Halifax's managing director, said: "Much like many other things about 2020, it would have been hard to predict which areas would see the greatest movement in average house prices this year. For example, depending on the borough, you could be looking at the biggest price rise or the biggest falls in the capital."

### [chart](#)

"House prices have leapt by more than 11% in Yorkshire's great cosmopolitan city of [Leeds](#) and almost 10% in Wolverhampton at the heart of the Black Country.

"Further north, Doncaster and Inverness have also seen healthy growth and whilst the overall house price trend this year has been upward, anyone looking to buy in Paisley, Hackney or Aberdeen will find homes cost a little bit less than last year."

Inverness, in the Highlands – where homes now cost an average of £195,534 – recorded Scotland's highest house price rises this year, with an average increase of 8.1%. That compares with no increase at all between 2018 and 2019. In Edinburgh, property prices rose by 6% to an average of £274,246.

On the other hand, in Aberdeen and Falkirk house prices fell by 1.4% and 0.8% respectively – the third and fourth biggest fallers in the UK overall. Buyers can expect to pay £200,810 on average for a home in Aberdeen or £175,789 in Falkirk.

In London, even some of the closest neighbours have some of the biggest contrasts. Islington, Croydon, Hounslow, Romford, Richmond, Kingston, Lambeth, Sutton and Hillingdon have all experienced some of the biggest house prices increases in the year. Over the same period, Hackney, Merton,

Greenwich, Tower Hamlets, Haringey and Wandsworth all recorded either a drop or some of the lowest annual growth rates when looking across the UK as a whole.

## Veganism

# Veganuary predicts biggest year as Covid lockdown inspires diet overhaul

Plant-based campaign sets target of 500,000 signatories worldwide

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



Vegan falafel burgers. Veganuary attracted 400,000 signatories last year.

Photograph: Vaaseenaa/Getty/iStockPhoto

Vegan falafel burgers. Veganuary attracted 400,000 signatories last year.

Photograph: Vaaseenaa/Getty/iStockPhoto

*[Rebecca Smithers](#) Consumer affairs correspondent*

Mon 28 Dec 2020 19.01 EST

Organisers of [Veganuary](#) are gearing up for their biggest ever year next month since the meat-free pledge was launched seven years ago, thanks to a surge in consumers tucking into more [plant-based foods](#) during lockdown and greater concern about health and the environment.

The UK-based campaign, which since 2014 has asked people to pledge to follow a diet free of animal products in January, has set a target of 500,000 signatories worldwide and expects to reach 350,000 by Tuesday.

A record 400,000 people signed up to the campaign last year, compared with 250,000 participants in 2019 and 170,000 in 2018.

This year the bosses of large UK and multinational companies – including [Nestlé](#) – are backing the campaign on health grounds and urging their workforces to do the same.

Marco Settembri, the chief executive of Nestlé (Europe, Middle East and north Africa) said: “A well-planned plant-based diet can meet nutritional needs during all stages of life while there are environmental and health benefits too.

“This year I am passing the baton and encouraging all employees to participate in Veganuary and sign up to the challenge. I am happy to be part of this movement as it grows across Europe and beyond.”

Among other large companies whose leadership teams are supporting the campaign are the leading accountancy firms [PwC](#) and [EY](#), the media company [Bloomberg](#), [Marks & Spencer](#) and the UK’s largest meat-free brand, [Quorn](#).

Philip Watson, Quorn’s UK and Europe commercial director, said: “Our purpose is to provide healthy food for people and the planet and by backing Veganuary 2021, we aim to get closer to our 2030 target of 8bn meat-free servings a year worldwide.”

April Preston, the director of product development at Marks & Spencer, said the retailer would be further expanding its vegan own-label Plant Kitchen range.

“The M&S food leadership team is getting fully involved and will be creating a series of fun, weekly videos that we will be sharing internally, comparing different Plant Kitchen products and their meat equivalents and finding out which comes top,” she said.

Even before the pandemic UK manufacturers, supermarkets, [restaurants](#) and [pub chains](#) were scrambling to tap into not only the burgeoning vegan market but also the large number adopting “[flexitarian](#)” diets – people who enjoy meat and dairy but want to eat less of it.

Lockdown has forced consumers to cook more from scratch as a result of restaurant closures, and pay [closer attention](#) to their diet.

On Friday, [vegan sausage rolls](#) and steak bakes from the bakery chain Greggs will go on sale exclusively in the frozen cabinets of Iceland, while the Domino’s Pizza chain is about to add its first meat-alternative pizza – the Chick-Ain’t – and southern-fried vegan nuggets to its vegan-friendly range.

The plant-based meat company Moving Mountains is launching vegan fish fingers made from white soy, with a flaky fish-like texture that aims to replicate the real thing.

Meanwhile, the Co-op convenience chain, named by Kantar as the fastest-growing UK retailer for plant-based food and drink sales, will double the number of pies and meals in its GRO range.

The Veganuary charity started modestly six years ago in York at the kitchen table of its founders, Jane Land and Matthew Glover, and initially attracted just 3,300 supporters.

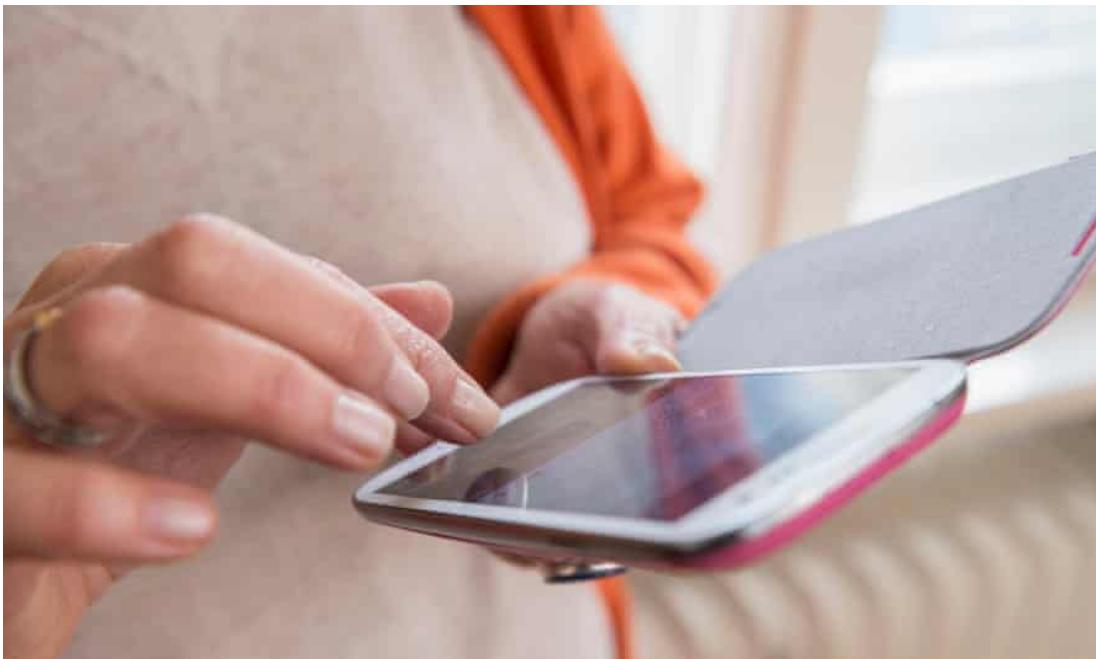
Teaming up with the York chef and restaurateur Adam Lyons, Glover has this month provocatively unveiled a vegan fried chick\*n company called [VFC](#), which he hopes will expose mass meat production and “a system that has brought us climate change, environmental destruction, factory farming and slaughterhouses”.

## Loneliness

# Government announces £7.5m fund to fight loneliness in England

Arts, radio and libraries to help ease the strain of Covid restrictions on isolated people

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



A volunteer phone call service for older social housing residents was singled out for praise. Photograph: MITO images GmbH/Alamy Stock Photo

A volunteer phone call service for older social housing residents was singled out for praise. Photograph: MITO images GmbH/Alamy Stock Photo

*Nazia Parveen*  
[@NParveenG](#)

Mon 28 Dec 2020 19.01 EST

A volunteer phone call service for older and vulnerable social housing residents and a homemade Christmas food delivery service are among a

number of initiatives being singled out for praise as the government announces a £7.5m fund to tackle the epidemic of loneliness in [England](#).

With millions now living under tier 4 restrictions in England, ministers said on Tuesday that the package would help counter loneliness over the winter period, and support sectors well known for bringing people and communities together, such as the arts, libraries, charities and radio.

A [recent survey](#) showed that more than a quarter of people were not likely to see loved ones during the festive period. A poll of 2,100 adults in Great Britain commissioned by the British Psychological Society found that 41% were worried about those close to them feeling isolated in coming weeks and 27% said they were not planning on spending Christmas with loved ones.

The communities secretary, Robert Jenrick, thanked those who are helping to tackle isolation, urging the public to look out for their neighbours.

He highlighted two housing associations that he believed had gone the extra mile following the launch of the government's charter for social housing residents last month. The charter aims to improve the lives of residents, give them more power to hold landlords to account, and help them form networks to combat social isolation. Jenrick praised Poole Housing Partnership, which established a phone call service for older and vulnerable residents to enjoy regular chats with friendly volunteers, and Your Homes Newcastle, which delivered homemade Christmas meals to its older residents.

“None of us have never known a Christmas like this. While we may have had smaller and quieter Christmases than normal, for some people this Christmas will have been especially hard – and very lonely. That’s why I’m encouraging people to find other ways to reach out virtually and help combat loneliness – by picking up the phone or writing a letter, for example,” Jenrick said.

He added: “Let’s all do what we can to connect with our older neighbours – in a Covid-secure way – so they feel less alone and know how valuable they are to their communities at this difficult time.”

The charity Age UK estimates that there are approximately 1.4 million chronically lonely older people in England.

Meanwhile, the government revealed that from the £750m charity funding package [announced in April](#), just £24m went towards reducing loneliness, and a further £45m to organisations supporting people's mental health.

However, the government announced there would be a new campaign to highlight the charter for social housing residents in February 2021. The campaign will highlight what the changes will mean for residents and how they can access support.

On 19 December, the prime minister issued a “stay at home” order covering London and much of the south and east of England in response to a new fast-spreading strain of coronavirus, leaving many with no option but to spend Christmas alone.

## Hut Group

# The Hut Group spends more than £300m on acquisitions

Online retail company buys US site Dermstore.com and two UK-based nutrition suppliers



Matthew Moulding, the founder and chief executive of The Hut Group.  
Photograph: Thg Holdings Plc/Reuters

The Hut Group, the online retail company run by the [billionaire Matthew Moulding](#), has spent more than £300m on acquisitions as it continues aggressive expansion plans after listing on the stock market.

It is buying Dermstore.com, an online skincare retailer, from the US retail chain Target for \$350m (£259m). It is also spending almost £60m on the purchase of two UK-based nutrition suppliers, Claremont Ingredients and David Berryman.

The Hut Group (THG) [floated its shares](#) on the London Stock Exchange in September in the biggest initial public offering in the UK since 2013. The

company was valued at £6.8bn on Christmas Eve, a valuation that would make it part of the FTSE 100 index of the UK's largest listed companies but for THG's heavily criticised governance arrangements, which give Moulding tight control of the company.

Moulding serves as both chairman and chief executive, while retaining a US-style "founder's share" which prevents other investors from taking over the company for at least three years.

Moulding, who has donated hundreds of thousands of pounds to the Conservative party, has also this year received one of the biggest payouts in UK corporate history. He is already [entitled to shares worth £830m](#) after THG's share price hit targets set at the initial public offering, but if the company's value reaches £7.25bn before 31 December 2022 the award could break the £1bn mark.

Moulding and the finance boss, John Gallemore, both former Phones4U executives, founded THG in 2004, using a [tax loophole to dodge VAT](#) on sales of cheap CDs and DVDs. It then moved into niche retail areas, and used its IT and logistics abilities to expand rapidly.

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THG plans to expand its existing online retail brands, such as the makeup site Lookfantastic and protein shake brand MyProtein, as well as selling its online retail technology to other companies that want to sell directly to customers.

Moulding said: "A key driver behind the decision to list THG on the London Stock Exchange just over three months ago was to enable the group to make major global investments, such as Dermstore.com.

"Accessing capital through a London listing has enabled us to accelerate our growth plans and build out a global leadership position within the exciting beauty industry."

## Venture capital

# UK tech firms attract record \$15bn in venture capital funding

Investments in 2020 are higher than in rest of Europe combined and help to create seven ‘unicorns’



An Octopus-branded electric taxi. The firm raised \$200m in funding and is now valued at \$2bn. Photograph: Reuters

An Octopus-branded electric taxi. The firm raised \$200m in funding and is now valued at \$2bn. Photograph: Reuters

*Rupert Neate*

*@RupertNeate*

Mon 28 Dec 2020 19.01 EST

UK technology companies attracted a record \$15bn (£11.2bn) in venture capital funding in 2020, including the creation of seven “unicorn” firms valued at more than \$1bn.

The firms raised more money from VC investors than the rest of Europe combined, according to research by the data provider Dealroom. The \$15bn

total compares with the previous record of \$14.8bn in 2019.

The investments helped create seven unicorns – : the electric vehicle startup Arrival, the recipe box company Gousto, the green energy provider Octopus Energy, the e-commerce platforms Gymshark and Cazoo, and the cloud communications platform Infobip.

[UK's Octopus Energy valued at \\$2bn after Japan supply deal](#)

[Read more](#)

The UK is now home to more unicorns than any other European country, and as many as Germany, Netherlands and France combined, according to the research.

Oliver Dowden, the digital secretary, said: “It’s fantastic to see the UK’s tech companies flourishing, despite all the challenges of 2020. The thousands of high-skilled jobs they are creating will be a crucial part of our economic recovery and the government is committed to supporting the tech sector through an unashamedly pro-tech approach.”

The venture capital investment in UK companies was lifted by a series of “mega-rounds” of funding raised by companies including the challenger financial technology company Revolut and the digital insurance provider Ki, which both secured \$500m. In the final weeks of December significant fundraisings included \$95m for GoCardless, while [Octopus Energy raised \\$200m.](#)

The investment from a Japanese utility firm valued Octopus, which was founded little more than five years ago, at \$2bn. The 7.4% stake of the founder, Greg Jackson, is worth an estimated \$155m (£115m).

['Tech unicorn' Octopus Energy to create 1,000 new UK jobs](#)

[Read more](#)

Oxford overtook Cambridge to take the number two spot in terms of VC investment in tech firms behind London. Oxford’s startups and “scaleups” raised \$532m in investment this year, led by the city’s health-related companies such as the biotech unicorn Oxford Nanopore, which raised

\$84.4m in October. Companies based in Leeds, Newcastle and Glasgow also raised more money than last year.

The digital minister Caroline Dinenage said: “Despite the challenges of 2020, the UK tech sector has had one of its strongest years yet, creating seven new billion-dollar companies and achieving record levels of investment.

“The success of our regional tech hubs is something to celebrate, as is the industry’s resilience by offering high levels of employment opportunities across a variety of disciplines. Over the upcoming months, we will work closely with the sector to support tech firms and ensure this momentum can be maintained.”

[Admiral](#)

## Admiral to sell Confused.com to Uswitch owner for £500m

ZPG will acquire all of Admiral's comparison website business with shareholders to receive majority of funds

Press Association

Tue 29 Dec 2020 03.52 EST First published on Tue 29 Dec 2020 03.51 EST



Admiral will keep some money from the sale to 'invest in new business development'. Photograph: Admiral/PA

The insurance group [Admiral](#) has agreed to sell its comparison website business, which includes Confused.com, to the owner of its rival Uswitch in a deal worth just over £500m.

[Admiral](#) has agreed to sell the Penguin Portals arm, which also includes Rastreator.com, LeLynx.fr, the group's technology operation, and its 50%

share in Preminen Price Comparison Holdings to ZPG (Zoopla Property Group).

ZPG said it will control the acquired businesses through its comparison site division, RVU. The Spanish insurance group Mapfre said it will also sell its stake in Rastreator.com and Preminen as part of the deal.

The deal is worth £508m in total, although the proceeds for Admiral will be about £450m after accounting for minority interests and transaction costs.

Admiral said it expects to return a majority of the funds to shareholders, although some cash will be kept to “support investment in new business development over the coming years”.

The deal is subject to regulatory approval and is expected to close in the first half of 2021.

David Stevens, the chief executive of Admiral Group, said: “The purchase of the UK and European comparison businesses by RVU offers a positive outcome for our customers and our employees, and also provides good value for our shareholders.

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“The combination of Penguin’s strengths, notably in insurance comparison across much of Europe, with RVU’s strengths beyond insurance and experience in growth through acquisition provides a solid foundation for the combined businesses to grow and prosper.

“Admiral will continue to focus on what Admiral has consistently done well, namely designing and underwriting good value mass market financial service products.”

Tariq Syed, the chief executive of RVU, said: “Penguin Portals offers an exciting opportunity for us to expand our comparison brand portfolio and geographic reach. With its strong brand heritage and focus on insurance, Confused.com perfectly complements Uswitch’s expertise in the home services category.”

[UK news](#)

## Three teenagers charged with murder after boy, 16, stabbed in Preston

Lancashire police charge Jamie Dixon, 18, and two males aged 16 and 17 over the death of Sarmad Al-Saidi



Sarmad Al-Saidi died in hospital on Sunday after being stabbed at a house in Preston on 23 December. Photograph: Lancashire police/PA

Sarmad Al-Saidi died in hospital on Sunday after being stabbed at a house in Preston on 23 December. Photograph: Lancashire police/PA

*PA Media*

Mon 28 Dec 2020 12.10 EST

Three teenagers have been charged with murder after a 16-year-old boy died following a stabbing in Preston.

Sarmad Al-Saidi was found with stab injuries to his chest and legs when police were called to a house at about 5.45pm on Wednesday 23 December. He died in hospital on Sunday.

A spokesman for Lancashire police said Jamie Dixon, 18, of Leyland, and two boys aged 16 and 17, who cannot be named for legal reasons, appeared at Preston magistrates court on Monday charged with his murder.

The three were remanded in custody to appear at Preston crown court on Wednesday, police said.

A 20-year-old man and a 28-year-old woman, both from Preston, and a 36-year-old woman from Leyland were arrested on suspicion of assisting an offender but have since been released under investigation.

DCI Lee Wilson said: “This incident has resulted in a young man losing his life and my thoughts are very much with Sarmad’s family and friends at this incredibly difficult time.

“Sarmad’s family have been supported by specially trained officers throughout this investigation and that will continue.

“While we have now charged a man and two teenagers with Sarmad’s murder, our investigation is very much ongoing and I would ask anybody with information that could assist us to come forward.

“I know this incident has had a major impact on the community and I would like to thank the public for their extremely valuable support with this murder inquiry.”

Anyone with information should call police on 101, quoting log 0575 of 24 December 2020, contact independent charity Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 or report it via the major incident portal at <https://mipp.police.uk/operation/0401020120S05-PO1>.

[Radio](#)

## Ex-BBC and XFM presenter Michelle Mullane dies from cancer at 50

Jason Manford and Steve Penk among those paying tribute to radio host whose 'laugh filled a room'



Michelle Mullane, who died from bowel cancer on Christmas Eve, was praised for being 'an incredible supporter of new talent.' Photograph: Michelle Mullane/Instagram

Michelle Mullane, who died from bowel cancer on Christmas Eve, was praised for being 'an incredible supporter of new talent.' Photograph: Michelle Mullane/Instagram

[Nadeem Badshah](#)

Mon 28 Dec 2020 13.39 EST

Tributes have been paid to Michelle Mullane, the former BBC and XFM radio presenter, who has died aged 50 from bowel cancer.

The broadcaster, who was diagnosed in June 2019 and told she had only six months to live, died on Christmas Eve.

In an Instagram video last week, she revealed she had been unable to leave the house for the past two months due to experiencing “excruciating pain for nearly six weeks straight”.

Her close friend, the comedian Jason Manford, shared a tribute to the former BBC Radio Manchester presenter.

He wrote on Instagram: “I have so many fond memories of Michelle from when I was starting out in standup in the late 90s. Michelle was the first person to get me on the airwaves and we spent many an evening laughing, flirting & joking over brews; on air and off. We drank millions of cups of tea!”

Manford, 39, added: “Michelle Around Midnight was one of the only shows you could get on, get paid and just be yourself without having to be a big ‘TV name’.

“She was an incredible supporter of new talent and gave a leg up to so many of us northern comedians at a time where it felt like if you weren’t in London, you didn’t stand a chance.

“She has supported me and many others ever since. She will be dearly missed by so many people, not least her young daughter Liv.

“She only messaged me the other week to congratulate me on Royal Variety and to say how proud she was of me. For over a year we’ve been trying to organise a charity gig – postponed due to Covid – in aid of Kidney Cancer UK & Bowel Cancer Research.

“The second we are able to, I will 100% make sure this happens in your name Michelle!”

Mullane, from Alderley Edge in Cheshire, had raised money for charity Cancer Research UK and wrote a blog, SK9 Cheshire, about her treatment. She had begun chemotherapy and also had a stent fitted to push her tumour to the side.

Her daughter Liv Winter, 23, posted a tribute on Instagram, writing: “Beautiful Mum. My mum taught me a lot, she held my hand in times of

upset and pride, she guided me till the end, she screamed at teachers and had my back (even though I was actually just a little s\*\*t and they didn't do anything), she had an energy ... an energy that words don't do justice.

"A quick wit and intelligence that gave her an unmatched quality you find only in the rarest of stars, her warmth allowed me to confide in her with any of my problems ... and I mean ANYTHING, even ones a lot of people don't tell their ma's.

"She had a laugh that filled the whole room, she was my biggest supporter and forever made me believe I could and still can achieve anything. She was my best friend. I can feel her still and I always will."

The broadcaster Steve Penk [tweeted](#): "So sad to hear of the passing of Michelle Mullane. My memory of Michelle during her time at Key 103, will always be her laughter, she was such a sweet girl. X"

## 2020.12.29 - Around the world

- [Turkey Pressure to protect Uighurs as China ratifies extradition treaty](#)
- [Breonna Taylor Oakland police investigate smashed statue](#)
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- [Nashville explosion Investigators work to find motive behind Christmas blast](#)

[Turkey](#)

## Pressure on Turkey to protect Uighurs as China ratifies extradition treaty

Ankara has long welcomed Uighur and Turkic Muslims fleeing China but human rights groups fear the treaty will endanger them



China's persecution of the Uighur minority in Xinjiang has escalated in recent years. Photograph: Ozan Köse/AFP/Getty Images

China's persecution of the Uighur minority in Xinjiang has escalated in recent years. Photograph: Ozan Köse/AFP/Getty Images

*Helen Davidson in Taipei*

[@heldavidson](#)

Tue 29 Dec 2020 00.56 EST

Beijing has ratified an extradition treaty with [Turkey](#) that human rights groups warn could endanger Uighur families and activists fleeing persecution by Chinese authorities if it is adopted by Ankara.

The treaty, first signed in 2017, was formalised on the weekend at the national people's congress, with state media saying it would be used for

counter-terrorism purposes. Facing strong opposition within its parliament, Turkey's government has not yet ratified the deal, and critics have urged the government to abandon it and prevent the treaty from "becoming an instrument of persecution".

China's persecution of the Uighur minority in Xinjiang has escalated in recent years, amounting to what experts have said is cultural genocide. More than one million people are thought to have been detained in [internment camps](#), and there is mounting evidence of re-education programs, restrictions on religious and cultural beliefs, [enforced labour programs](#), [mass surveillance](#), and forced sterilisation of women.

Members of the Uighur diaspora have given evidence of coordinated Chinese efforts to have [people return to Xinjiang](#), or to use family inside China to pressure individuals overseas against conducting activism.

China strenuously denies the accusations, and says the policies are to counter terrorism and alleviate poverty. Officials regularly dismiss all reports of abuses as fabrications.

In May, human rights group Nordic Monitor, expressed alarm at ambiguities in the text of the treaty, including a clause that "it shall not matter whether the laws of both parties place the offence within the same category or describe the offence by the same terminology".

Other articles allow one party to refuse the request if they believe it is purely political or military, or if the subject has been granted asylum.

Leo Lan, spokesman for China Human Rights Defenders, said the treaty would expose Uighurs to a higher risk being returned to China, where they could face detention and torture, and he warned Turkey of its international obligations of non-refoulement.

"China can use very ambiguous and broadly defined national security charges to request the extradition of certain people to China," Lan told the Guardian.

Historically, Turkey has long [welcomed Uighurs and Turkic Muslims fleeing China](#) and has spoken out against abuses. An estimated 50,000 Uighurs are refugees in Turkey. In May, Turkey's ambassador to the US reiterated the cultural and linguistic ties between the ethnic minority groups and Turkey, and [told Axios](#) that “any issue pertaining to their well-being holds a special place on our agenda”.

However in recent years Ankara has grown closer to Beijing, and increased its assistance in apprehending or interrogating Uighurs who Chinese authorities have accused of terrorism. While it refuses to return Uighurs to China directly, Turkey has been accused of [sending them to a third country](#), like Tajikistan, where extradition to China is easier.

“This extradition treaty will cause worry among Uighurs who have fled China and do not yet have Turkish citizenship,” Dilxat Raxit, spokesman for the German-based Uighur World Congress, told AFP.

“We call on the Turkish government … to prevent this treaty from becoming an instrument of persecution,” he said, claiming that Beijing was exerting economic pressure on Turkey to ratify the treaty.

Steve Tsang, director of the SOAS China Institute at the University of London, said the key question was whether Turkey would commit to protecting Uighurs within its borders in accordance with international guidelines and transparency, even in the face of pressure from Beijing.

“If it will not do so, it will make Uighurs living in Turkey worried about their safety as they can become subjected to extradition under this new treaty,” Tsang [told the South China Morning Post](#).

Media reports [speculated](#) Beijing was already putting pressure on Turkey to ratify the treaty, using its promised supply of Covid-19 vaccinations. China has a history of using and [withdrawing trade](#) to achieve diplomatic aims. Turkey's first shipment has [reportedly](#) been delayed several days already, due to “customs” related issues.

[Breonna Taylor](#)

## Oakland police investigate smashed statue of Breonna Taylor

Artist Leo Carson calls damage ‘act of racist aggression aimed at suppressing fight for black freedom’



Breonna Taylor was fatally shot when police broke down her door in the middle of the night. Photograph: AP

Breonna Taylor was fatally shot when police broke down her door in the middle of the night. Photograph: AP

*Reuters*

Tue 29 Dec 2020 04.48 EST

Police are investigating what appears to be an act of vandalism after a statue of [Breonna Taylor](#), erected to honour her memory, was smashed in Oakland, California.

The [Oakland](#) police department said late on Monday it was looking into the incident, although it had not identified any suspects or motives. The statue was found smashed on Saturday, about two weeks after it was installed.

Leo Carson, the artist who created the bust, said he considered the smashing of Taylor's statue "an act of racist aggression aimed at suppressing the fight for black freedom".

The ceramic bust depicts a smiling Taylor and was installed in downtown Oakland near City Hall. On its base is a plaque that reads: "Say her name: [Breonna Taylor](#)".

Who would vandalize statue of Breonna Taylor? That's what Oakland PD is asking after her newly installed bust was smashed on Saturday. Good news: Bay Area law firm has offered to fully fund statue's restoration. [#SayHerName pic.twitter.com/vdT2H1QLh](#)

— Matt Bigler (@mattbigler740) [December 28, 2020](#)

Matt Bigler, a local journalist, tweeted that a Californian law firm had offered to pay for the statue's restoration.

Taylor, a black emergency medical technician, was shot and killed during a botched police raid of her apartment in Louisville, Kentucky, [in the early hours of 13 March](#).

Taylor's boyfriend, who was with her when the police burst into the home, fired once at what he said he believed were intruders. Three police officers responded with 32 shots, six of which struck Taylor, killing her.

The case came back to light as demonstrations against racism and police brutality spread across the US after the [death in May of George Floyd](#), a black man who was killed when a Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes.

Argentina

## Argentina on brink of historic vote to legalise abortion

Senate to debate bill that would make it first major Latin American country to allow terminations



Campaigners celebrate after the lower house approved the bill earlier this month. Photograph: Paula Acunzo/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Campaigners celebrate after the lower house approved the bill earlier this month. Photograph: Paula Acunzo/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

[Tom Phillips](#) Latin America correspondent and [Uki Goñi](#) in Buenos Aires

Mon 28 Dec 2020 12.45 EST

Argentina is on the verge of making history as the first major Latin American country to legalise abortion.

Its 72-member senate will convene on Tuesday to debate a bill that was [approved by the lower house](#) earlier this month to the delight of pro-choice activists.

Pro-choice and anti-abortion campaigners will gather in the plaza near Buenos Aires's congress building on Tuesday afternoon and remain there until the early hours of Wednesday when a vote is expected.

Projections in Argentinian media suggest the “green” camp pushing for change holds a slender advantage over its “blue” opponents: 33 senators reportedly plan to back the legislation while 32 will vote against it. Five senators are officially undecided.

Mariela Belski, Amnesty International’s executive director in Argentina, said she was confident the “voluntary interruption of pregnancy” bill would be approved, sending a loud message to a region with some of the world’s most restrictive abortion laws. “The numbers look very good,” she said.

Belski said she felt overjoyed and excited about what would be the culmination of a decades-long struggle by women’s rights activists.

“The day after tomorrow this country will be a much better place than before,” she said. “This country will be better for my daughter and for the younger generations, so I’m really happy this is going to happen.”

Claudia Piñeiro, a writer and pro-choice activist, said: “This will be a transcendental and unforgettable moment, something we’ve been waiting for at the end of a very hard year for everybody.

“I only hope the senate realises that there is no turning back now. The women’s movement will not allow them to decide any longer about our bodies, about our health, or continue to oblige us to resort to clandestine abortions.

“We still have to endure their senseless arguments that we need to have children to populate the nation, as if we were nothing more than reproduction machines, nothing more than a uterus. This is going to change tomorrow. I have no doubt about it.”

A previous attempt to legalise abortion was voted down by Argentina’s senate in August 2018, with many blaming the then president Mauricio Macri’s failure to support the change.

This time, however, the country's [leftwing leader, Alberto Fernández](#), and his vice-president, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, have championed the legislation and reportedly been battling to convince senators to back the bill.

The political analyst Andrés Malamud said two key things had changed since the 2018 vote. "One is that the government now has a majority in the senate," he said. "And the second most important thing is that Argentina's current president Alberto Fernández is behind the bill, because legal abortion was an electoral promise."

While activists are optimistic, Malamud said it would be impossible to predict the result until the last minute.

"Although the government holds the majority vote, some of its senators will probably vote against the bill. The outcome will then depend on the pro-abortion minority within the opposition's bloc, who are delaying announcing how they'll vote just to deny the government the political success of passing abortion for as long as possible."

Antarctica

## Fractures to Antarctic iceberg reduce risk to South Georgia wildlife

Unclear if iceberg will hit small British territory but researchers more optimistic about threat to ecosystem



Fragments break off from the A68a iceberg, which is floating near the island of South Georgia. Photograph: Cpl Phil Dye RAF/AP

Fragments break off from the A68a iceberg, which is floating near the island of South Georgia. Photograph: Cpl Phil Dye RAF/AP

Weronika Strzyżyńska

Tue 29 Dec 2020 05.27 EST

A giant iceberg, heading for the island of South Georgia, is continuing to fracture into smaller pieces, meaning it poses less of a threat to the island's wildlife and ecosystem.

The Antarctic iceberg, which has been moving towards the island group, has fractured into four parts. Although it is still unclear if the iceberg will collide

with the small British territory, researchers are more optimistic about the risk it poses to local wildlife.

“If it does come back into South Georgia, it will probably be in lots of little pieces as opposed to one big berg, which is what we were fearing,” said Geraint Tarling, a biological oceanographer with the British Antarctic Survey.

[Huge Antarctic iceberg headed towards South Georgia breaks in two](#)  
[Read more](#)

Earlier, researchers worried that iceberg A68a – which at the time was the largest in the world – would grind into South Georgia’s coastal seabed, disturbing the underwater ecosystem and blocking feeding paths for penguins and seals.

However, on [18 December](#), the iceberg was taken hold of by strong currents. This caused it to split in half and to continue fracturing as it floated away from the island’s south-west coast.

A68a is now estimated to be 2,600 sq km, a dramatic decrease from its previous area of 4,200 sq km, which made it comparable in size to South Georgia.

The size of the iceberg is what initially caught the attention of scientists and researchers when it broke away the Antarctic peninsula in 2017. At the time, it was the fourth largest iceberg ever recorded.

The three smaller icebergs, which have since calved away from A68a, have received their own names: A68d, A68e, and A68f. While the icebergs continue to float eastward, away from the island, Tarling says that there is still a chance that they will “loop around” and arrive at South Georgia’s eastern shelf, depending on the currents.

Researchers who have been tracking A68a’s journey for the past weeks will find out the iceberg’s final trajectory in the next few days, said Tarling.

[Hong Kong](#)

## Hong Kong teenager jailed for China flag insult

Tony Chung, 19, to spend four months in prison as Beijing cracks down on prominent activists



Tony Chung (left) marches during a pro-democracy protest in Hong Kong.  
Photograph: Kin Cheung/AP

Tony Chung (left) marches during a pro-democracy protest in Hong Kong.  
Photograph: Kin Cheung/AP

*Agence France-Presse in Hong Kong*

Tue 29 Dec 2020 05.50 EST

A teenager in [Hong Kong](#) has been ordered to spend four months in prison for insulting China's national flag and unlawful assembly, as Beijing increasingly targets prominent activists from the financial hub.

Tony Chung, 19, who led a now-disbanded pro-democracy group, was convicted this month for throwing the Chinese flag to the ground during scuffles outside Hong Kong's legislature in May 2019.

While serving his sentence, Chung will be waiting to be tried [for secession](#), which could lead to life imprisonment, according to the draconian national security law Beijing imposed on Hong Kong on 30 June.

Chung is the first public political figure to be prosecuted under the new security law, which Beijing described as a “sword” to return “order and stability” to the financial hub after seven months of mass and often violent pro-democracy protests last year.

He was sentenced to three months each for insulting the national flag and unlawful assembly, and told to serve four months behind bars. The teenager also faces separate charges of money laundering and conspiring to publish seditious content.

Chung [was arrested by plainclothes police](#) opposite the US consulate in October and had been remanded in custody since.

There has been speculation that the authorities detained Chung because he was hoping to ask for asylum at the US consulate in Hong Kong.

An increasing number of pro-democracy activists across the political spectrum have fled Hong Kong since Beijing stepped up its crackdown on protests against China’s authoritarian rule.

Under the security law, dissenting speech instead of acts can be alleged of vague yet severe offences such as “subversion” and “collusion with foreign forces”.

The law has also toppled the legal firewall between Hong Kong’s internationally recognised common law judiciary and the opaque, party-controlled justice system in mainland China by allowing extradition of suspects across the border for trial.

Last Sunday, China’s state TV CGTN reported that Hong Kong police had put 30 people who are not in Hong Kong on its wanted list for suspicion of breaching the national security law, including the self-exiled activists Ted Hui and Baggio Leung.

Prominent activists remaining in Hong Kong have either been jailed – including [Joshua Wong](#) and [Agnes Chow](#) – or face frequent arrests and multiple charges.

Jimmy Lai, a pro-democracy media mogul, has also been [charged under the national security law](#). Last week, Hong Kong's high court [granted him bail](#) from prison but placed him under house arrest. It also ordered him to surrender all travel documents and banned him from speaking to the press, making public statements, using social media, meeting foreign officials and “colluding with foreign forces”.

The ruling provoked heavy criticism from China, which threatened to extradite Lai to the mainland for trial.

[Russia](#)

## Russian riot police arrest renegade priest in convent raid

Father Sergiy, who denies the existence of the Covid pandemic, seized control of building in June



Father Sergiy speaks to journalists outside Sredneuralsky women's monastery near Yekaterinburg in the Urals in June. Photograph: Vladimir Podoksyonov/AP

Father Sergiy speaks to journalists outside Sredneuralsky women's monastery near Yekaterinburg in the Urals in June. Photograph: Vladimir Podoksyonov/AP

*Reuters in Moscow*

Tue 29 Dec 2020 05.20 EST

Riot police in [Russia](#) have arrested a renegade priest in a raid on a convent in the Urals region.

Father Sergiy, whose real name is Nikolai Romanov, gained notoriety earlier this year after denying the existence of the Covid-19 pandemic, railing

against church closures during the lockdown and criticising the Russian Orthodox Church.

He seized control of the Sredneuralsky women's monastery near Yekaterinburg in the Urals in June and refused to leave.

Known for wearing long dark robes, Sergiy was formally cast out of the church in September for openly ignoring a ban on him holding services and preaching.

Footage posted online showed a melee of riot police and people shouting outside the convent during the raid.

His lawyer confirmed his detention and said Sergiy had been charged with encouraging minors to kill themselves, the *Kommersant* newspaper reported.

The case against him may relate to a YouTube video in which he called on his followers to die for Russia.

The police and local authorities have not yet commented on the raid.

A Russian Orthodox Church spokesman, Vladimir Legoida, wrote on Telegram: “It’s a pity that … Sergiy and his supporters did not heed the repeated calls of the church to repent and amend (their ways).”

Ohio

## Andre Hill: white Ohio police officer who shot dead Black man is fired

Authorities call killing ‘a tragedy’ after Hill, 47, was shot while holding a cellphone and then denied aid



Karissa Hill, center, Andre Hill’s daughter, is comforted during a candlelight vigil to honor her father, who was killed by police on 21 December.  
Photograph: Stephen Zenner/AFP/Getty Images

Karissa Hill, center, Andre Hill’s daughter, is comforted during a candlelight vigil to honor her father, who was killed by police on 21 December.  
Photograph: Stephen Zenner/AFP/Getty Images

*Associated Press*

Mon 28 Dec 2020 20.05 EST

A white Ohio police officer was fired Monday after bodycam footage showed him [fatally shooting Andre Hill](#), a Black man who was holding a cellphone, then refusing to aid him for several minutes.

Columbus police officer Adam Coy was fired hours after a hearing. His firing was announced in a statement from Ned Pettus Jr, the director of Columbus public safety.

“The actions of Adam Coy do not live up to the oath of a Columbus Police officer, or the standards we, and the community, demand of our officers,” the statement read. “The shooting of Andre Hill is a tragedy for all who loved him in addition to the community and our division of police.”

[Ohio police shooting: video shows unarmed Black man holding up phone](#)  
[Read more](#)

Coy remains under criminal investigation for last week’s shooting.

The decision came after Pettus concluded a hearing to determine whether the actions taken by Coy in the moments before and after the fatal shooting of Hill on Tuesday were justified. The public safety director upheld the recommendation of the police chief Thomas Quinlan, who made a video statement Christmas Eve, saying he had seen enough to recommend Coy be terminated.

“This is what accountability looks like. The evidence provided solid rationale for termination,” Quinlan said after Coy’s termination Monday afternoon. “Mr Coy will now have to answer to the state investigators for the death of Andre Hill.”

Members of the local Fraternal Order of Police attended the hearing on behalf of Coy, who was not in attendance, according to a statement from Pettus’ office.

“Officer Coy was given the opportunity today to come and participate,” Brian Steel, vice-president of the police union, told reporters Monday. “He elected not to participate. I do not know why I would have liked to have him here, but it’s his decision.”

The killing of 47-year-old Hill at the hands of Columbus police follows the fatal shooting of Casey Goodson Jr on 4 December by a white Franklin County Sheriff’s deputy. The two back-to-back shootings have resulted in an

outpour of criticism from advocates and the Black community in Columbus for wider and more comprehensive police reform.



A demonstrator holds a sign condemning officer Adam Coy at a candlelight vigil for Andre Hill on 26 December in Columbus, Ohio. Photograph: Stephen Zenner/AFP/Getty Images

Coy and another officer responded to a neighbor's nonemergency call after 1am Tuesday about a car in front of his house.

Police bodycam footage showed Hill emerging from a garage and holding up a cellphone in his left hand seconds before he was fatally shot by Coy. There is no audio because the officer hadn't activated the body camera; an automatic "look back" feature captured the shooting without audio.

Hill lay on the garage floor for several minutes without any officer on the scene coming to his aid. Authorities say no weapon was recovered from the scene.

An investigation is also being conducted into the other officers who responded to the call that ended in Hill being shot, who Quinlan said also appear to have either failed to activate their body cameras or to render Hill aid. He said any others who violated department protocols will be held accountable.

In addition to an internal police investigation, the [Ohio](#) Attorney General, Dave Yost, was appointed a special prosecutor in the death of Hill.

“We will do our duty based on the facts and the law,” Yost said in a tweet. “Whatever the outcome, someone will be angry – but the decision will be objective.”

The US attorney’s office and the FBI are also participating in a separate investigation.

[Business live](#)

[Business](#)

## **FTSE 100 hits nine-month high amid Brexit deal relief and vaccine hopes – business live**

New York

## Jazz trumpeter Keyon Harrold claims woman assaulted his son after false theft accusation

New York attorney investigates incident in which black teenager was accused of trying to steal a white woman's phone in a hotel lobby



Keyon Harrold said he was 'appalled' that his son was tackled by a woman who accused the boy of stealing a phone. Photograph: Deneka Peniston

Keyon Harrold said he was 'appalled' that his son was tackled by a woman who accused the boy of stealing a phone. Photograph: Deneka Peniston

*Associated Press*

Mon 28 Dec 2020 22.13 EST

A confrontation in which the jazz trumpeter Keyon Harrold said a woman tackled his 14-year-old son in a [New York](#) hotel lobby as she falsely accused the teen of stealing her phone is under investigation, prosecutors said.

Harrold posted a [widely viewed video](#) of the confrontation that took place at the Arlo hotel on Saturday. He alleged the unidentified woman scratched him and tackled and grabbed his son, Keyon Harrold Jr, who is black, at the lower Manhattan hotel where the pair were staying.

“He’s the sweetest, most genuine kid you could ask for,” Harrold said in an interview Monday evening. “I was just appalled at how he was treated.”

[Andre Hill: white officer involved in fatal shooting fired amid investigation](#)  
[Read more](#)

The [video](#) shows an agitated woman demanding her phone be returned while a hotel manager tries to settle the situation. At one point, the woman appears to rush forward and says: “I’m not letting him walk away with my phone!”

Harrold said that the hotel has confirmed to him that the phone was returned by an Uber driver shortly afterward.

Although the woman does not mention race in the video, the confrontation prompted comparisons to recent incidents involving false accusations against black people.

A white woman was charged with filing a false report for calling 911 and saying she was being threatened by “an African American man” [during a dispute with a black man](#) in New York’s Central Park in May. That case inspired New York state lawmakers in June to pass a law that makes it easier under civil rights law to sue an individual who calls a police officer on someone “without reason” because of their background, including race and national origin.

“There are thousands of black men sitting in prison who have been falsely accused,” Harrold said. “That’s why we have to address incidents like this now, before they become life altering, life impacting issues that negatively and devastatingly affect black people.”

The parents of Keyon Harrold Jr, and civil rights attorney Ben Crump, issued a statement Monday, calling on the Manhattan district attorney to bring assault and battery charges against the woman.

“As this year of racial awareness is drawing to a close, it’s deeply troubling that incidents like this one, in which a black child is viewed as and treated like a criminal, continue to happen,” read the statement.

Crump and the Harrold family also called for a civil rights investigation into the Arlo Hotel “for its implicit bias” in its treatment of the teen.

[Back to Black: how the music industry reckoned with race this year](#)

[Read more](#)

New York City police did not identify the woman, saying only that there was a harassment complaint on file for an incident at the hotel on Saturday. A spokesperson for Manhattan district attorney, Cy Vance, said the office is “thoroughly investigating this incident” but did not elaborate.

Hotel management said in a post on Sunday they reached out to Harrold and his son to apologize.

“We’re deeply disheartened about the recent incident of baseless accusation, prejudice, and assault against an innocent guest of Arlo Hotel,” they said in a Facebook post. “We are committed to making sure this never happens at one of our hotels again.”

Harrold is originally from Ferguson, Missouri, and lives in New York. He has performed with musicians including Beyoncé, Rihanna and Eminem, according to his website.

Nashville

## Nashville explosion: investigators work to find motive behind Christmas blast

- Anthony Warner, 63, died in Friday explosion he set off
- Hundreds of tips and leads given to police and agencies

Guardian staff and agencies

Mon 28 Dec 2020 16.36 EST Last modified on Mon 28 Dec 2020  
19.16 EST

Play Video

0:46

Nashville explosion: police release footage of blast – video

Federal authorities are working to piece together the motive behind the Christmas Day bombing in [Nashville](#) that severely damaged dozens of downtown buildings and injured three people.

Officials on Sunday named Anthony Quinn Warner, 63, as the man behind the mysterious explosion in which he was killed, but the motive has remained elusive.

“We hope to get an answer. Sometimes, it’s just not possible,” David Rausch, the director of the [Tennessee](#) Bureau of Investigation said in a Monday interview on NBC’s Today show. “The best way to find motive is to talk to the individual. We will not be able to do that in this case.”

In just a few days, hundreds of tips and leads have been submitted to law enforcement agencies. Yet thus far, officials have not provided information on what possibly drove Warner to set off the explosion. According to officials, he had not been on the radar before Christmas. A TBI records report released Monday showed that Warner’s only arrest was for a 1978 marijuana-related charge.

“It does appear that the intent was more destruction than death but again that’s all still speculation at this point as we continue in our investigation with all our partners,” Rausch added.

Jason Pack, a special agent with the FBI, said the investigation into a motive was still “in the early stages”.

“FBI and ATF agents are still collecting evidence from the scene and conducting numerous interviews, which our team will need to analyze. It’s a time-consuming process which could take several weeks,” Pack said.

Some details about Warner’s life have emerged, with acquaintances describing him as a reserved homebody who was long devoted to his pets.

Warner was raised in the Nashville neighborhood of Antioch. He graduated from Antioch high school and then put down roots in the area, according to [The Tennessean](#). In high school, Warner was on the golf team.

“What I can remember about him was essentially three things: quiet, polite, and I don’t like to use the term, but quite frankly nerdish,” Charlie Bozman, who had overseen the Antioch high school’s golf coach when Warner was on the team, told the newspaper. “He was a very reserved person.”

Over the past month, however, Warner “appeared to put his affairs in order,” the newspaper reported. In late November, Warner transferred ownership of his longtime home to a Los Angeles woman. He did so with a “quitclaim deed,” meaning the transfer did not require her signature.

Steve Fridrich, owner of Fridrich & Clark Realty, told the newspaper that Warner resigned from providing IT services after working as a contractor for the firm for about four or five years. “In December he sent us an email saying he’d no longer be working for us,” Fridrich reportedly said.



Police close off an area damaged by the explosion on Christmas morning.  
Photograph: Terry Wyatt/Getty Images

Fridrich also told the local WSMV TV station that federal agents had asked him if Warner had a paranoia about 5G technology. Promoted by the rightwing cult movement QAnon, among others, the conspiracy theory makes [wild claims about 5G](#).

The Associated Press reported that Rick Laude, a neighbor of Warner's, saw him standing at his mailbox less than a week before Christmas and pulled over in his car to talk. After asking how Warner's elderly mother was doing, Laude said he casually asked, "Is Santa going to bring you anything good for Christmas?"

Warner smiled and said, "Oh, yeah, Nashville and the world is never going to forget me," Laude recalled.

Laude said he didn't think much of the remark and thought Warner only meant that "something good" was going to happen for him financially.

"Nothing about this guy raised any red flags," Laude said. "He was just quiet."

Officials have not provided insight into why Warner selected the particular location for the bombing, which damaged an AT&T building and continued to wreak havoc on cellphone service and police and hospital communications in several Southern states as the company worked to restore service.

Forensic analysts were reviewing evidence collected from the blast site to try to identify the components of the explosives as well as information from the US Bomb Data Center for intelligence and investigative leads, according to a law enforcement official who said investigators were examining Warner's digital footprint and financial history, as well as a recent deed transfer of a suburban Nashville home they searched.

The official, who was not authorized to discuss an ongoing investigation and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity, said federal agents were examining a number of potential leads and pursuing several theories, including the possibility that the AT&T building was targeted.

The bombing took place on a holiday morning well before downtown streets were bustling with activity and was accompanied by a recorded announcement warning anyone nearby that a bomb would soon detonate. Then, for reasons that may never be known, the audio switched to a recording of Petula Clark's 1964 hit "Downtown" shortly before the blast.

Police were responding to a report of shots fired on Friday when they encountered the RV blaring a recorded warning that a bomb would detonate in 15 minutes. Suddenly the warning stopped, and Downtown started playing.

The RV exploded shortly afterward, sending black smoke and flames billowing from the heart of downtown Nashville's tourist scene, an area packed with honky-tonks, restaurants and shops.

Earlier Sunday, the officers who responded provided harrowing details, at times getting choked up reliving the moments that led up to the blast.

"This is going to tie us together forever, for the rest of my life," said Metro Nashville police officer James Wells, who suffered some hearing loss due to

the explosion, to reporters at a news conference. “Christmas will never be the same.”

## 2020.12.29 - Climate crisis

- [India How a 'tree mortgage' scheme could turn a town carbon neutral](#)
- [US How tough will Joe Biden be on the shale industry?](#)
- [Australia Weather disasters cost \\$150bn in 2020, revealing impact of climate change – report](#)

[Global development](#)

# How a 'tree mortgage' scheme could turn an Indian town carbon neutral

Kerala villagers are reaping the benefits of a scheme that pays them to leave their trees rooted, reducing risk of deforestation

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

Neha Bhatt in Gurugram

Mon 28 Dec 2020 01.00 EST Last modified on Mon 28 Dec 2020  
23.48 EST



Sheeja CG, a 46-year-old farmer, last month increased her income dramatically by mortgaging 53 of her trees at the local bank, in return for 2,650 rupees (£26.96). Photograph: Ajith Tomy/Thanal

In the misty, hilly terrain of Wayanad, in the southern Indian state of Kerala, the people with any access to land in the quiet town of Meenangadi have been out counting their trees.

Sheeja CG, a 46-year-old farmer, has lived among coffee, coconut and pepper plantations all her life but last month she increased her income dramatically by mortgaging 53 of her trees at the local bank, in return for a sum of 2,650 rupees (£26.96), or 50 rupees each. She was one of the first beneficiaries of the state-sponsored scheme.

It's a simple incentive with big gains: plant a tree, and after three years residents can mortgage each sapling for an interest-free loan that can be renewed annually for 10 years. The money need be repaid only if the tree is chopped down.

Kerala, with its sweeping, spice-filled forested landscape has been troubled in recent years by an ailing farming sector, deforestation which has led to loss of biodiversity, and the climate crisis making summers much warmer, especially in the Wayanad, which used to be comfortably cool.

Suicides of farmers, landslides and floods have made the headlines. Farmers have been compelled to fell trees to supplement their income. Against such a background, the tree banking project, facilitated by a 10 crores rupee (£1.01m) grant from the state government, comes as a big incentive to keep them rooted to the ground.

“With temperatures almost five degrees higher than normal, I’ve faced a crop loss of 25%. The loan from the tree banking scheme will ease financial pressure. I will buy manure for my farm,” says Sheeja.

I have faced a crop loss of 25%. The loan from the tree banking scheme will ease financial pressure

*Sheeja CG, farmer*

Prolonged dry spells and erratic rainfall have made the region increasingly vulnerable, with shrinking paddy farms and a threat to cash crops such as pepper and coffee. According to the [Kerala State Action Plan on Climate Change](#), Wayanad is one of the four major climate change hotspots in the state.

But the tree banking scheme has an ambition to reverse the damage and turn Meenangadi, a town of about 35,000 people into a carbon neutral region. The [Carbon Neutral Meenangadi Project](#) is the first of its kind in India, and has changed the way the community lives and works.



A tree is recorded as part of the tree banking project for farmers in the Indian village of Wayanad, in the southern Indian state of Kerala.  
Photograph: Ajith Tomy/Thanal

“An energy audit in 2018 found Meenangadi had 15,000 tonnes of excess carbon. We are working on ways to bring it down to zero,” says Meenangadi’s *panchayat* (local government) president, Beena Vijayan. To balance the carbon emissions, a meticulous action plan has been set in motion.

“We have held more than 500 meetings with farmers in every nook and corner on waste management, recycling plastic, solar lighting and panels, manufacturing environment friendly coffee and using high-efficiency stoves,” says Vijayan.

Encouraging tree planting is a first step. “It is a model project for the whole district of Wayanad. It took root three years ago, when we prepared a nursery with 33 types of saplings under the national rural employment guarantee scheme. We planted 300,000 saplings in 250 homes in Meenangadi and common areas,” says Vijayan.

“With the trees now mature, we rolled out the tree banking scheme and received about 200 applications that are being processed.”

It was Kerala's finance minister, TM Thomas Isaac, who first mooted the idea, saying it would guarantee a sustainable income for farmers in the district and vastly improve the socio-economic environment.

"Wayanad has the lowest per capita income in Kerala state, so the aim is to double the income of the farmers without overly industrialising the region," says Jayakumar C, founder of Thanal, the environment agency that is implementing the project. The trees also bring supplementary income to the residents, through the sale of fruit and other products, he adds.



A tree is labelled in Wayanad, Kerala. All trees that have matured are photographed and logged on a monitoring system. Photograph: Ajith Tomy/Thanal

Among the thickets around her red-roofed cottage is a cluster of jackfruit trees that Sheeja has mortgaged, white tags hanging from their branches. The trees are monitored through an app.

"We go from farm to farm with a team of volunteers to survey the trees that have matured, take photographs and map them on our monitoring system," says Ajith Tomy, the project coordinator. "We will implement the project in 23 other *panchayats* in Wayanad by 2021. We plan to plant about 10m trees in the next few years."

For Sumathy Valiyakolli, the loan has come through at just the right time, as expenses for her brother's medical treatment are mounting. She says: "It's been very helpful. I will plant more trees and mortgage a higher number next year."

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# **How tough will Joe Biden be on the US shale industry?**

[Joe Biden](#)

# **How tough will Joe Biden be on the US shale industry?**

The president-elect plans to reduce incentives for fracking, but has stopped short of a ban

[Jillian Ambrose](#) Energy correspondent

Sun 27 Dec 2020 12.17 EST Last modified on Sun 27 Dec 2020 15.17 EST



A shale gas drilling site in St Mary's, Pennsylvania. Donald Trump claimed Joe Biden planned to ban fracking. Photograph: Keith Srakocic/AP

The result of the US election has cast a long shadow across the US shale heartlands. Joe Biden wants to make the climate crisis his top priority,

sparking [real hope for global efforts](#) to avert an environmental catastrophe and real concern for shale operators.

The president-elect's climate plans include a return to the Paris climate agreement, \$2tn (£1.5tn) of spending on clean energy, and an ambition [to create a carbon-neutral US energy system](#) by 2035 through "aggressive emission reductions".

He was also quick to scotch claims by the Donald Trump campaign that he planned to extinguish the industry with a ban on fracking.

The former vice-president told voters in the swing state of Pennsylvania before the election that fracking "has to continue because we need a transition", and said there was no rationale to eliminate it "right now".

So, how tough is the new US administration likely to be on the shale industry?

When asked earlier this month whether shale producers should be worried about the incoming administration, the US energy secretary, Dan Brouillette, replied: "Of course." He told the business news channel CNBC: "I think they should be, frankly, because there are some in Congress who are going to drive a climate policy that's going to be very aggressive. So there may be some concern on the part of those folks."

There is little doubt that Biden's victory will spell [a slow and steady decline for a fossil fuel industry](#) that has flourished under the light touch of the Trump administration. But the fate of the industry is likely to be a careful dismantling rather than immediate destruction.

Biden told voters on the campaign trail that he would "transition away from the oil industry" because it "pollutes significantly" and has to be replaced by renewable energy over time. He also said: "We're not getting rid of fossil fuels. We're getting rid of the subsidies for fossil fuels, but we're not getting rid of fossil fuels for a long time."

Many believe that as the new administration tackles the coronavirus pandemic and its economic fallout, any action against fossil fuels will need

to be balanced against the short-term impact on jobs.



Fracking is still likely to become more expensive under Joe Biden.  
Photograph: Joshua Roberts/Getty

The US oil and gas industry helps to prop up the economy by supporting an estimated 10m skilled jobs, enabling relatively cheap road transport and generating more than a third of the country's electricity. The coronavirus pandemic has caused 100,000 job losses in the industry as wells were forced to shut.

Biden is expected to take steps that gently tip the market economics against fossil fuels by gradually whittling away at the amount of oil and gas that can be produced and raising costs. He plans to limit the reserves frackers are free to tap, shrink the end demand for fossil fuels [by building a green electricity system](#) and electric vehicles, and raise the production cost of each barrel to tighten the industry's profits.

His most decisive move is likely to focus on curtailing drilling on federal land. The majority of shale activity takes place on land owned by US states or privately owned property – only about 22% of US oil production and 13% of natural gas production is produced from licences that are federally owned. The move could knock up to 2m barrels a day from total US oil and gas

production by the end of 2024, according to analysts at the analytics arm of S&P Global Platts.

This impact is unlikely to hit too hard in the short term, according to Artem Abramov, an analyst at Rystad [Energy](#). “The permitting ban on federal land has attracted a lot of attention through the presidential campaign, and there are some operators who are concerned,” he said. “But I don’t think they see this as a complete deal-breaker for future growth.”

Many shale operators have fast-tracked permitting applications on federal land in anticipation of policy changes, which should support growth in the short to medium term. Later fracking activity will migrate from federal to the remaining private and state-owned areas, so the impact will be muted.

Some operators are even optimistic that there could be a boom for gas in the short term, as the White House takes steps to help to displace coal in the US energy system to reduce emissions. Coal was used to generate almost a quarter of US electricity last year, compared with 38% for gas.

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Fracking is still likely to become more expensive under Biden, who is expected to roll back many tax incentives and impose tougher regulations on methane emissions and other environmental protections. The net result could add between \$5 and \$6 a barrel to the cost of production, according to analysts at Goldman Sachs, which could make some operators [uneconomic in a global market where price forecasts are significantly lower](#) than they were before the pandemic.

This would probably accelerate the consolidation of struggling debt-laden operators into the leaner, financially efficient oil and gas companies that are poised to lead the industry’s recovery in the years ahead, said Abramov. “But anything could happen. So that’s the major concern for shale producers.”

## Bushfires

# Weather disasters cost \$150bn in 2020, revealing impact of climate change – report

From Australian bushfires to Atlantic hurricanes, insurance damages were the highest annual total ever, says Christian Aid study



A fire front in Mallacoota in Australia, where tens of millions of wild animals were killed in bushfires. Photograph: Bob Semmens

A fire front in Mallacoota in Australia, where tens of millions of wild animals were killed in bushfires. Photograph: Bob Semmens

*Agence France-Presse*

Sun 27 Dec 2020 20.22 EST

The world's 10 costliest weather disasters of 2020 saw insured damages worth \$150bn, topping the figure for 2019 and reflecting a long-term impact of global warming, according to a new report.

The same disasters claimed at least 3,500 lives and displaced more than 13.5 million people.

From Australia's [out-of-control wildfires](#) to a record number of Atlantic hurricanes through November, the true cost of the year's climate-enhanced calamities was in fact far higher because most losses were uninsured.

Not surprisingly, the burden fell disproportionately on poor nations, according to the annual tally from the charity Christian Aid, entitled Count the cost of 2020: a year of climate breakdown.

[The climate crisis has already arrived. Just look to California's abnormal wildfires | Alastair Gee, Dani Anguiano](#)

[Read more](#)

Only 4% of economic losses from climate-impacted extreme events in low-income countries were insured, compared with 60% in high-income economies, the report said, citing a study last month in *The Lancet*.

"Whether floods in Asia, locusts in Africa, or storms in Europe and the Americas, climate change has continued to rage in 2020," said Christian Aid's climate policy lead, Kat Kramer.

Extreme weather disasters, of course, have plagued humanity long before man-made global warming began to mess with the planet's climate system.

But more than a century of temperature and precipitation data, along with decades of satellite data on hurricanes and sea level rise, have left no doubt that Earth's warming surface temperature is amplifying their impact.

Massive tropical storms – variously known as hurricanes, typhoons and cyclones – are now more likely, for example, to be stronger, last longer, carry more water and wander beyond their historical range.

2020's [record-breaking number of named Atlantic hurricanes](#) – with at least 400 fatalities and \$41bn in damages – suggest the world could see more such storms as well.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) had to use Greek symbols after running out of letters in the Latin alphabet.

Intense summer flooding in China and India, where the monsoon season brought abnormal amounts of rainfall for the second year running, are also consistent with projections on how climate will impact precipitation.

Five of the most costly extreme weather events in 2020 were related to Asia's unusually rainy monsoon.

"The 2020 flood was one of the worst in the history of Bangladesh, more than a quarter of the country was under water," said Shahjahan Mondal, director of the institute of flood and water management at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

Wildfires that scorched record areas in California, Australia and even Russia's Siberian hinterland, much of it within the Arctic circle, are also consistent with a warmer world, and predicted to get worse as temperatures climb.

The planet's average surface temperature has gone up at least 1.1 degrees Celsius on average compared to the late 19th-century, with much of that warming occurring in the last half-century.

The [2015 Paris agreement](#) enjoins the world's nations to collectively cap global warming at "well below" 2C, and even 1.5C if feasible.

A landmark report in 2018 from the UN's IPCC climate science advisory panel showed that 1.5C is a safer threshold, but the likelihood of staying below it have grown vanishingly small, according to many experts.

"Ultimately, the impacts of climate change will be felt via the extremes, and not average changes," noted Sarah Perkins-Kilpatrick, a senior lecturer at the University of New South Wales' Climate Change Research Centre.

If the growing frequency and intensity of natural weather disasters is consistent with modelling projections, the new field of attribution science is now able to put a number on how much more likely such an event is due to global warming.

The unprecedented wildfires that destroyed 20% of Australia's forests and killed tens of millions of wild animals in late 2019 and early 2020, for example, were made at least 30% more likely, according to research led by Friederike Otto at the University of Oxford's environmental change institute.

## 2020.12.29 - Culture

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- [Your favourite TV of 2020 From The Crown to Devs](#)

[2020 in TVDrama](#)

## Sian Clifford: 'Quiz gave Charles and Diana Ingram a voice'

The star of ITV's Who Wants To Be A Millionaire? drama on her lockdown viewing habits, helping to rehabilitate the coughing major, and winning a Bafta for Fleabag



‘There have been periods I could only watch animation’ ... Sian Clifford.  
Photograph: Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP

‘There have been periods I could only watch animation’ ... Sian Clifford.  
Photograph: Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP



*Interview by [Stuart Heritage](#)  
[@stuheritage](#)*

Tue 29 Dec 2020 04.00 EST

**Were there any shows you enjoyed over lockdown that you didn't expect to?**

[The Last Dance](#). I had no interest in or knowledge of basketball, and I didn't even make the connection between Michael Jordan and the sport, because I just grew up with him being so famous. I had no idea about that period of history, and I'm now obsessed with basketball. It was such a well-made documentary that showed people and their flaws, as whole humans. I found it so compelling.

**Who has been your TV villain of the year?**

Jamie from *Normal People*. Who by my understanding is an absolute dreamboat of a human being in real-life. The embodiment of that character was amazing.

**Is there a show you're hoping will return in 2021?**

[Bake Off](#). It's like a warm hug, that programme. I've gone through strong phases of what do I mentally have capacity for during this year? There have been periods where I could only watch animation, so I watched the whole Studio Ghibli collection. And then periods where I just wanted to watch a

film or a limited series with a clear story arc. And then there've been periods where I just couldn't watch anything with a strong narrative structure. And that's when I've gone to cooking shows. A friend of mine just told me that MasterChef: The Professionals has just started. And I told myself, I'm not allowed to begin it until I've finished Bake Off. There's something really comforting in that kind of show.

### **Which show are you looking forward to getting into?**

The Queen's Gambit is something everyone's talking about, but I'm prioritising [The Crown](#) at the moment, just because I've already started that. And I try not to watch more than one thing at a time.



Family fun ... Sian Clifford, Matthew Macfadyen and Michael Sheen in Quiz. Photograph: Matt\_Frost/ITV

### **Were you surprised at [the reaction to Quiz](#)?**

Oh, it was amazing. Amazing. In the midst of all this tragedy, so many people were at home and, for the first time in probably years, because of the nature of how we watch and consume things now, people were watching things as a family live on television. So our ratings were enormous, which was incredible.

It was a story that explored values that are very close to me. Looking at the truth and the justice system and giving these characters some much needed humanity and a voice in a narrative that has been one-sided for nearly 20 years. I loved the conversation it sparked, it was really thrilling. And somehow we managed to not upset anyone who was involved. Everyone felt they were represented fairly, which is down to [James Graham](#) as much as anything. I'm so proud to have been a part of it.

**You also [won a Bafta](#) for Fleabag – how was that?**

Even though it was an incredibly intimate and quiet ceremony, I'll never forget it. I got to share it with my friend. And it was a beautiful end to an 11-year chapter in my life with this character. Hopefully we can coerce Bafta into doing something for this year's nominees next year, maybe as part of next year's ceremony. It would be nice to get all those people together in a room. [Phoebe](#) and I spent 40 minutes in a digital waiting room with our wonderful fellow nominees and we just wanted to reach out to them. We were like it's such a shame that there's not going to be a big party where we can all just meet each other and connect. But I'm optimistic that something will happen.

*Quiz is available on the ITV Hub.*

Theatre

## 'Anything can happen at the seaside': the troupe who kept Britain grinning

Tony Lidington spent 30 years with the anarchic Pierrotters. He recalls trading songs for mackerel – and lifting spirits with a little lockdown flea circus



Knights in white satin ... the Pierrotters in Filey, Yorkshire. Photograph: Tony Lidington

Knights in white satin ... the Pierrotters in Filey, Yorkshire. Photograph: Tony Lidington

David Jays

Tue 29 Dec 2020 05.00 EST

Let's start with a pierrot dangling over the waves at Brighton. "A skinhead took offence at the fact we were camping it up on Brighton Palace Pier," says Tony Lidington, whose troupe, the Pierrotters, was a mainstay of seaside performance for almost three decades. Five men in white satin and pompoms were a tease to masculinity. "I invited him up to dance with us to The Way You Look Tonight," Lidington remembers, "and he started getting

a bit aggressive. He picked me up and ran off with me, and held me over the pier with my feet over the water. I said, ‘You’ll get the biggest laugh of the afternoon if you let me carry you back in.’ So he did, and I staggered back with him.”

Even the gentlest entertainment causes a ripple. Even a fleeting moment deserves a record. Even the staid British go merrily doolally when the sun shines. And Lidington, now 59, saw it with the Pierrotters and kept the receipts.

Every scrap of “Rotter” reminiscence now inhabits an online archive at the University of Exeter, [where Lidington teaches](#). It’s fitting that this repository of fun fetched up in academia, because the Rotters began in 1983, when Lidington was a student in Brighton, already enraptured by popular entertainment. He left the library, painted his face and moseyed out to the beach with the rest of the troupe. “We used to play to the fishermen who mended their nets under the Palace Pier,” he says on the phone. “As the sun went down we would sing to them, and in return they would give us mackerel. We’d cook it and get stoned.”



Changing the world in a transit van ... Lidington as Uncle Tacko.  
Photograph: Tony Lidington

He discovered pierrot performance from the inside. “The only way of really understanding it is to do it. To feel what it’s like to have the sand whipping in your face on Weston-super-Mare beach, or how to protect your instruments when it pisses down and everyone huddles in the bus shelters. Nobody writes about that.”

Lidington recalls that, another time on Brighton Pier, “This old lady goes, hello boys, you’re back! I asked, when did you last see us? She said, 1924.” Although pierrots romped through seaside towns during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they connect to older European and Afro-Caribbean traditions – “a vernacular British performance form, born of a global hybrid”. Minstrel troupes in blackface dominated the seaside until 1891, when a French show called L’Enfant Prodigue wowed the London stage. A concatenation of white-faced pierrots followed, entertaining millions but leaving little trace. The last British troupe, the [Ramblers of Clacton](#), hung up their pompoms in 1964.

The Pierrotters sang original songs and barnacled seaside standards, teased and wooed their transient crowds. “We were never trying to reproduce the past,” Lidington says. “We were always a reimagining, in the spirit of the age.” His age was the 1980s, when street arts adopted a post-punk flourish: “We wanted to change the world in a transit van.” The Rotters became increasingly well established and even played for the Queen (“I always advertised us as ‘by royal disappointment’”).

“The seaside is this wonderful, playful space where anything can happen,” he continues. “British people rush to the seaside to take off their clothes and their inhibitions, and at the end of the day the sea washes it all away.” Lidington shed his own inhibitions in the persona of Uncle Tacko: saucy, avuncular, haplessly marshalling the anarchic Rotters; you need a lot of front on the seafront.



Pier revue ... the Rotters on Southport Pier, 1993. Photograph: Tony Lidington

Lidington has had myriad incarnations – as historic clowns on stage and radio, and offering Punch and Judy, flea circuses and other itinerant delights to crowds. He and the fleas were the first seaside entertainers to lift this lockdown summer, bringing joy (plus vinyl mats and sanitiser spray) to Tynemouth, Dawlish and Exmouth. For fun-starved punters, “there was a great relief that they could smile again”.

In the longer term, Lidington hopes the archive will be a resource and inspiration. He argues that there is something radical in “trying to create extraordinary work for ordinary people. It’s about transforming the everyday.” He cherishes “the geology of popular pleasures: fairgrounds, circus, street theatre, hair braiding – all those things that everybody does but nobody acknowledges. That’s our intangible cultural heritage. That’s what makes us British, and I’m deeply proud of that sense of freedom, gay abandon and fun.”

Before we stop, I ask Lidington for one perfect sunny memory. He doesn’t hesitate. “It was on the banks of the Thames. We’d performed all day and were just walking back. On a bench there was a gran with her grandchild who was five or six. And he was bawling his eyes out, howling like only a

youngster can because they had to go home. I said, ‘Before you go, shall we sing you a song?’ We sang them a very slow, gentle version of By the Sea, and I told them about our day. We get to the end: the child isn’t crying, and the grandma *is* crying. I offer her my cheek, she goes to kiss it, I turn round and kiss her on the lips. That makes them laugh. And then we leave.” No coins, no applause. A shining moment for just two people. “We call those a WIAA – What It’s All About.”

[Book of the day](#)[Fiction](#)

## The Death of Francis Bacon by Max Porter review – last rites for a great artist



‘Flashback images of his own paintings and scenes of Soho debauch’: Francis Bacon in his studio in 1980. Photograph: Jane Bown/The Observer  
‘Flashback images of his own paintings and scenes of Soho debauch’: Francis Bacon in his studio in 1980. Photograph: Jane Bown/The Observer

A fragmentary, poetic reimagining of Bacon’s last days in Madrid reads like a private communion with the painter



[Tim Adams](#)

[@TimAdamsWrites](#)

Tue 29 Dec 2020 02.00 EST

The facts of the death of Francis Bacon were these: in April 1992, the artist, against his doctor's advice, took a trip to Madrid to visit his last great love, the young banker José Capelo, the subject of his final triptych of paintings. A few days after arriving in the city, Bacon, aged 82, was taken by ambulance to a convent hospital, suffering from familiar kidney and breathing problems. For six days until his death he remained in intensive care, looked after by a nun called Sister Mercedes. In those six days, the atheist Bacon received no visitors and, with limited Spanish, spoke only a few words. His body was cremated two days after his death, according to his wishes, at a municipal cemetery, without ceremony or mourners. As his biographer [Michael Peppiatt](#) noted: "A life filled with the extremes of human emotion and devoted to expressing them with utmost force had ended, almost anonymously, in utter silence."

[Max Porter: 'Writing allows me to worry about stuff better'](#)

[Read more](#)

This brief, fragmentary book by [Max Porter](#) is an attempt to fill the silence of those last six days from within the painter's head. Written in an allusive

and sometimes vividly poetic shorthand, it tries to capture in language some of the texture of Bacon's tormented canvases, as well as the chaos of his love life. The book is divided into seven chapters of no more than eight small pages. All the chapters begin with Bacon's invitation to his nurse to sit by his bedside while his mind staggers through the back alleys of his past and each ends with her invocation "intenta descansar", to get some rest.

At times, the staccato interior voice of Bacon, veering wildly from flashback images of his own paintings and scenes of Soho debauch, imagines his nurse in the role of one of his friends or lovers, a cast of characters that fleetingly recognises the masochistic and violent relationships with Peter Lacy, the Battle of Britain veteran, and George Dyer, the former East End gangster and muse. At one point on his deathbed, Bacon is imagined smelling the cologne of the photographer John Deakin in the chewing gum of his nurse; another time, he hears her read reviews by his detractors, notably John Berger's evaluation that "Bacon is a very remarkable but not finally important painter", to which the artist summons a typically scabrous response: "Oh naff off, you skag."

If this makes the book sound like an interior monologue in the manner of one of Robert Browning's deathbed confessional – the bishop ordering his tomb – it's not really that; the voice that Porter conjures is more a collection of fast-forward jump-cuts that seek to identify the cause and effect of Bacon's painting in sentences such as these: "Sticky, smells like turpentine, curdled cheese burps, trying to hold this still, just ill red holes in the dark, weeping, but there's a sense of still-living in the pink, despite the static sarsen weight of it, sunburnt Roman waiting to die in the Tuscan night, why not flea the lip of the... "

At one point in this wayward stream of consciousness, Bacon appears to engage in an imaginary interview with Porter, his medium, who sets out some of his reasons for writing this book, as if to an editorial meeting. "It's an attempt to express my feelings about a painter I have had a long unfashionable fixation with... an attempt to get art history out of the way and let the paintings speak."

In his first book, *Grief Is the Thing With Feathers*, a meditation on Ted Hughes and loss, Porter explored a similar kind of biographical obsession at

greater length, but you didn't need to know much of Hughes to recognise the associative power of Porter's language and imagery. Here, getting any foothold in the shifting scree of Porter's prose depends on a fairly intimate prior knowledge of Bacon's life and work. As a result, the book reads like brilliant notes towards a very private communion with the painter, which sometimes forgets that there might also be a reader listening in.

- *The Death of Francis Bacon* by Max Porter is published by Faber & Faber (£6.99). To order a copy go to [guardianbookshop.com](http://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply

Heritage

# Foie gras, truffles, birds drowned in brandy: a menu fit for Queen Victoria

A royal lunch served at Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire forms part of an exhibition on its kitchen



The kitchen at Waddesdon Manor. Photograph: Waddesdon Image Library  
The kitchen at Waddesdon Manor. Photograph: Waddesdon Image Library

Mark Brown Arts correspondent

Mon 28 Dec 2020 10.00 EST

By any standards it was an epic lunch: the finest soup, jellied trout and rice with prawns, quail stuffed with truffles and foie gras, chicken, beef, duck, asparagus, wonderful Viennese doughnuts, sweet soufflés decorated with gold leaf, and not forgetting tiny songbirds, which are either a luxurious delight, or a gastronomic disgrace.

The birds, called ortolans, weigh about an ounce and were hunted and kept in darkness for weeks to fatten up. They were then drowned in Armagnac, roasted and served sizzling to be eaten in a single hedonistic mouthful.

The [late chef Anthony Bourdain](#) once described eating an ortolan as a “sort of a hot rush of fat, guts, bones, blood and meat … really delicious”.

Today ortolan hunting is banned and eating them frowned upon, but in 1890 they were very much on the menu for what ranks as one of Queen Victoria’s favourite meals.



The lunch menu from Queen Victoria’s visit to Waddesdon in 1890.  
Photograph: Waddesdon Image Library

The story of the meal is to be told in a new display exploring the history and secrets of the kitchen at one of Britain’s grandest country houses, [Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire](#).

[Pippa Shirley](#), head of collections and gardens at Waddesdon, said kitchens were the “unsung heroes” of the UK’s mansions and country estates.

“There is just so much more interest now from the public in how these big houses worked, how they ran, so it is nice to be able to discover more,” she said.

“Downton [Abbey] has played a huge role, but I also think that people are more interested in their history, if you think of people using [Ancestry](#), or programmes like Who Do You Think You Are?.”

Waddesdon's kitchen was particularly impressive. The house was completed in 1883 as a weekend retreat for one of Britain's richest men, Lord Ferdinand de Rothschild.

It was at Waddesdon, now run by the National Trust, that Rothschild would host his lavish Saturday-to-Monday house parties with the finest food and drink as well, of course, as the [Sèvres porcelain](#) to eat off and [Gainsboroughs to admire on the walls](#).

In 1890, Victoria came for lunch, arriving at Aylesbury by train from Windsor. The menu for the royal visit is the only one that survived from the time.

As was the royal custom, the Queen ate separately from other guests. She was in the main dining room with her daughters while everyone else was in a smaller dining room. The Royal Artillery Band played jolly tunes between the two rooms.

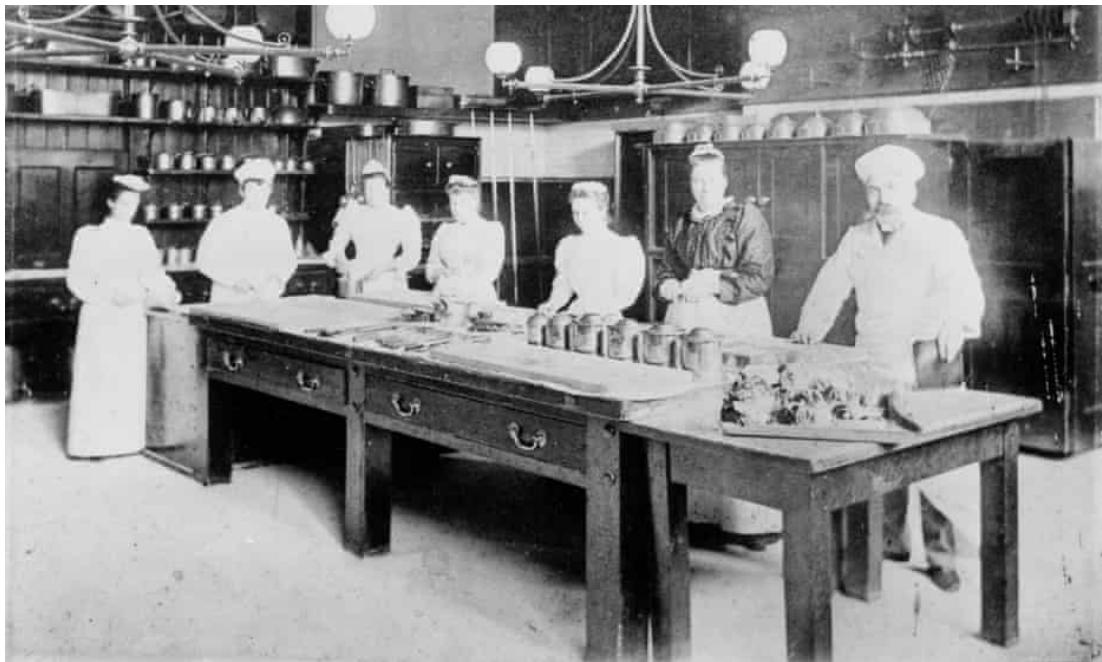
Victoria evidently enjoyed herself, with Rothschild later noting: "The royal appetite is proverbial, and it was not until about half past three that the Queen ... reappeared." His butler reported that her majesty had returned to the cold beef for a second helping.

The meal made quite an impression on the Queen, Shirley said. "We know that she sent people from Windsor to learn secrets from the Waddesdon kitchen. The standard of cuisine was very, very high."

The menu will go on display along with photographs that curators hope will help fill in gaps in knowledge about the people who worked in the kitchen.

"We have rather less information than you might imagine about the staff here, and it would be nice to know more about the servants and their lives," Shirley said.

A grainy black and white photograph, taken around 1900, shows how accurately the Waddesdon kitchen was restored in the 1990s, but curators would love to know who the people gathered round the table are.



Kitchen Staff about 1900 (c) Photograph: Waddesdon Image Library

Rothschild died in 1898 and the running of the house was passed to [his sister Alice.](#)

Catherine Taylor, Waddesdon's head archivist, said she was fairly certain Alice's chef at the time was a Monsieur Bonnar, of whom very little is known apart from he died in a car accident in Brighton in 1915.

According to the scant records which do exist, other kitchen staff members were called Annie Gough, Susan Smith, Susan Cole and Fanny Sams.

Taylor said: "If you have been researching your family history or know of ancestors who worked at the manor at this time, we'd be delighted if you got in touch. Especially if you have any old family photos that may help us to identify the individual members of our turn-of-the century kitchen brigade."

- [History of the Manor Kitchen is at Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire, 3 February-7 March](#)

[Explain it to me quickly Alec Baldwin](#)

## Why is everyone saying Hilaria Baldwin may not be as Spanish as she seems?

The internet has been perplexed by a video in which Baldwin appeared to discard her Spanish accent



Hilaria Baldwin Photograph: Mike Coppola/Getty Images for Turner

Hilaria Baldwin Photograph: Mike Coppola/Getty Images for Turner

[Elle Hunt explains it to Mike Ticher](#)

Tue 29 Dec 2020 00.32 EST

### What is going on with Hilaria Baldwin supposedly being fake Spanish?

Glad you asked – but there is a lot to cover. Starved of celebrity gossip and, well, all human interest all year, the internet has seized on the suggestion that Alec Baldwin's wife has – at the very least – habitually over-stated her connection to Spain. I appreciate it doesn't sound like much but, look, in 2020 we take what we can get.

## **I understand Hilaria is Alec Baldwin's wife. But that's about all I do understand. Where did all this start?**

A few days before Christmas, Hilaria [gave her Instagram followers](#) the gift of a Leibovitz-style photo of her wearing lacy black underwear and holding her bemused-looking baby. The rambling caption suggested that this was in promotion of a lavender ointment cream she claimed at least nominal role in developing.

**I'm as bemused as the baby. To quote the top-rated comment beneath Hilaria's post: "What is your point?"**

We're getting there. It started to become a saga when the comedian Amy Schumer shared the post on her own Instagram, cracking a joke in the caption that she looked equally glamorous with her own newborn. Schumer later deleted the post after it sparked widespread ribbing and Hilaria took offence. They've since made up.

**That's a relief. What did Hilaria say?**

She posted [a rambling four-and-a-half minute video](#) in which she suggested that she had been the victim of body-shaming, writing in the caption: "Love a good joke – don't think this should have been a big deal" – two points which no doubt all of us can get behind.

**So far this doesn't seem to be about, you know, the Spain bit.**

This is the thing. Bored and observant people on the internet noticed that the Spanish accent with which Hilaria had spoken in the past was mysteriously absent from her verbose video.

**She has a Spanish accent, because she is Spanish, I assume.**

Well, until recently, Hilaria's speakers profile on the CAA website [said she was](#) "born in Mallorca, Spain and raised in Boston". She has said her family [lived in Mallorca](#), and she moved to the US at age 19 to go to university (and so knew "no pop culture"). She also identifies herself in her Instagram bio as "mama to five Baldwinitos" – Leonardo, Carmen Gabriela, Rafael, Romeo Alejandro and Eduardo Pau.

But the video resurfaced historic speculation about Hilaria's Spanish heritage, causing internet detectives to start working overtime – Christmas be damned.

Material was unearthed of her American-seeming mother [talking about her own childhood](#) in Massachusetts; and [the obituary of her paternal grandfather](#), describing family roots in Vermont that predate the American Revolution.

Hilaria was also [identified online](#) as a 1992 graduate of the Cambridge School of Weston, suggesting she did not move to the US at 19. There, say people [claiming to be her former classmates](#), she went by Hillary.

“You have to admire Hilaria Baldwin’s commitment to her decade-long grift where she impersonates a Spanish person,” [tweeted @lenibriscoe](#), before sharing clips of Hilaria [speaking of married life](#) (“it feels really different”) with a marked Spanish accent and apparently [forgetting, on a cooking show](#), the English word for cucumber.

“This woman grew up in Massachusetts,” @lenibriscoe tweeted.

From a review of her podcast. This woman also claimed to have moved to the United States because she wanted to go to NYU .  
[pic.twitter.com/zuEWMNkTBT](https://pic.twitter.com/zuEWMNkTBT)

— elena ilana alana alina elana (not) (@lenibriscoe) [December 21, 2020](#)

Yes, as drama and intrigue go, it is low stakes – but many people seized on it as exactly what they needed at the end of a high-stakes year.

I just want to thank the universe for this whole Hilaria Baldwin thing. It's been a real fucking mess of a year and we deserve this.

— Jill Twiss (@jilltwiss) [December 27, 2020](#)

**So does Hilaria – or Hillary – really have no link to Spain at all?**

Hilaria's parents live in Mallorca, and have done since 2011, according to [Page Six](#).

And as writer Tracie Egan Morrissey pointed out in [her comprehensive Instagram reporting](#) on this saga – according to [his online company profile](#), her father did study Spanish literature and visited the country frequently.

### **Has Hilaria responded?**

Oh yes. She addressed the question [in another Instagram video](#) – this one is seven-and-a-half minutes long. To summarise, Hilaria says the discrepancies in her biography can be explained by inaccurate reporting, which she has endeavoured to correct; and personal insecurities about her (justifiable) claim to Spain.

Hilaria confirms she was born in Boston but as a “different kind of Bostonian”, having spent time in Spain while growing up (those frequent visits!) and speaking both languages. Most of her family lives there now and calls her Hilaria, making it habitual for her – though she will also answer to Hillary.

As for her accent, Hilaria denies putting it on: it simply changes, she says, depending on how much Spanish she has been speaking in the recent past. “This is something that I’ve always been a little bit insecure about, but I’ve decided maybe 2021 we will get over that.”

### **We can only hope.**

And by “definitely addressing it very openly right now”, Hilaria says, she is starting as she means to go on. The speculation troubles her because “my thing is about being authentic — and then if people say I’m not being authentic, it hurts my feelings”.

She concludes where we started off: “I don’t really understand why it’s turning into such a big thing.” Shortly afterwards, Hilaria returned to Instagram to dispense further clarification, [over six and half more minutes](#).

“I love you,” her husband commented.

## **Is that all Alec has had to say?**

Oh, no. He has posted [his own video](#), captioned “Consider the source”. It is eight-and-a-half minutes of him railing against media companies, preceded by a frosty festive greeting.

## **Amy Schumer must feel awful about all this.**

She posted a photo of herself looking wistful in a large-brimmed sunhat and sunglasses, [with the caption](#): “I get it. I went to Spain a couple times and loved it too.” Schumer concluded with a cucumber emoji – then later deleted the whole thing.

## **‘Deleted the whole thing’ – now she’s talking my language.**

## Television & radio

# From The Crown to Devs: your favourite TV of 2020

We asked you to tell us about some of your favourite TV shows from this year

- [The Guardian's 50 best TV shows of 2020](#)



Emma Corrin in a scene from The Crown. Photograph: Des Willie/AP

Emma Corrin in a scene from The Crown. Photograph: Des Willie/AP

[Guardian readers](#) and [Edna Mohamed](#)

Mon 28 Dec 2020 06.00 EST

## The Crown (Netflix)

**'An amazing job of their portrayals': Jackie Harding, 60, writer, the Netherlands**

Being a Brit of a certain age I was a huge fan of Princess Diana and although I'm very aware that this show is fiction, not fact, it does come across as very believable. The cast does such an amazing job of their portrayals it is difficult at times not to think you are watching a reality show!

## **Dark (Netflix)**

**'Brilliant stuff': Michael, 42, digital marketing freelancer, Edinburgh**

Season three was a breathtaking finale to one of the best shows I've ever seen. With its hugely complex plot and timelines, I felt sure that the ending would inevitably disappoint through having to compromise or fudge some of the 'rules'. Not a bit of it. It remained compelling and true to itself until the final seconds and was probably the most satisfactorily wrapped-up story it could have been. Brilliant stuff.

## **Industry (BBC Two)**

**'Fantastically well-written': Jack, London**

It was much more nuanced and interesting than the sex and drugs headlines suggested. I read it as an often painful, and sad, statement on our class system. Absolutely brilliant TV. Fantastically well-written.

## **I May Destroy You (BBC One)**



Michaela Coel in *I May Destroy You*. Photograph: Natalie Seery/BBC/Various Artists Ltd and FALKNA

### **'Unforgettable': Victoria, archive producer, Lichfield**

It was groundbreaking and the most innovative programme I've seen on TV since *Twin Peaks: the Return*. The final episode which played out the different scenarios for how Arabella dealt with her ordeal was incredible, and unforgettable television.

### **'Wow': Sarah, academic, Twickenham**

Magnificent, startlingly original, compelling and intelligent. Wow, Michaela Coel is a genius.

## **Schitt's Creek (Netflix)**

### **'The costumes were superb': Anonymous, Bath**

Wonderful story with fantastic characters. Each member of the rich family learn about themselves and each other and as a result, become a very closely-knit family. The costumes were superb and I loved the way nobody

in the small town batted an eyelid at the outrageousness of them. Not just a happy ending but one with meaning.

## **Gogglebox (Channel 4)**

**'The most consistently topical and funny program': Tony, retired, Droitwich Spa**

It is by far the most consistently topical and funny program on TV. There's a little acting going on but it's just as you would expect in any household situation without cameras. The best ones for me are Giles and Mary and the Caravan lot but the brother and sister [Sophie and Pete] are always very clever with their observations and humour.

## **Le Bureau des Légendes/The Bureau (Amazon)**

**'Decent people trying their best to make things better': Adrian, Sydney**

It's based around true-life events inside the French secret service, DGSE. The beautifully produced show highlights the incredible danger and pressure these civil servants get put under whilst trying to live normally. The show has fantastic plots but more importantly, it is about decent people trying their best to make things better.

## **Unorthodox (Netflix)**



Amit Rahav and Shira Hass in *Unorthodox*. Photograph: Anika Molnar/AP

### **'A beautiful story': J, London**

By far the best show of the year. A beautiful story that made us learn more about a historically underrepresented community.

## **Tales from the Loop (Amazon)**

### **'It's stayed with me all year': Mike, 57, librarian, Melbourne in Australia**

A beautiful adaptation of Simon Stalenhag's haunting illustrations. Full of warmth, humanity, mystery and emotion. It has stayed with me all year; its emotional final episode is still resonating. Not just one of my favourite TV shows of the year but one of the most beautiful works of filmed drama I have ever seen.

## **Two Weeks to Live (Sky One)**

### **'Clever twists throughout': Phil Fenerty, Southport**

A comedy-drama which gave Maisie Williams the chance to show that she had more in her repertoire than looking moody and throwing knives. It helped that the writing was cleverly balancing deep peril, high drama and broad comedy in equal measure. The supporting cast was outstanding, and there were clever twists throughout.

## **The Queen's Gambit (Netflix)**

**'It has characters you can feel' - Stephen Tyler, programme director, West Sussex**

Brilliant, engaging, well-paced and beautifully shot. It's a great story and has characters that you can feel.

**'Stunning': Chris, Los Angeles in the US**

Visually and cerebrally stunning. Can we please get a second season that focuses on Moses Ingram's Jolene?!

## **Lovecraft Country (Sky Atlantic)**

**'I've been recommending it to friends': Viki,50, research project manager, Sale**

I don't really like horror but I loved this. The blending of sci-fi with the real-life horrors of Black Americans was very powerful. The acting was top-notch. This is the series I've been recommending to so many of my friends.

## **Strictly Come Dancing (BBC One)**



Bill Bailey and Oti Mabuse during the final of Strictly Come Dancing 2020.  
Photograph: Guy Levy/BBC/PA

### **'It's about happiness': Sara, Liverpool**

It's something happy to watch on TV instead of all the negative news broadcasted to us all which increases people's anxiety levels and causes mass hysteria. I love that Strictly is about happiness made by all the celebrities that participate in the programme, and good memories that they will treasure forever.

## **Normal People (BBC Three)**

### **'Surprisingly immersing': Anonymous, Germany**

I am a much older viewer so it was surprisingly immersing for me since it tells a story of young love and relationships. Still, it threw me way back to my 20s, to confusing emotions, irrational behaviours, and the longing to find that one person, that understands everything. A beautiful film version of the book with two intense main actors I could not look away from.

## **Devs (Amazon)**

### **‘Fascinating’: Nick Smale, Stockport**

The Alex Garland drama about strange goings-on at a Google-esque California tech company explored a real and fascinating scientific and philosophical issue: free will vs determinism. I thought they did it in an interesting and dramatic fashion that couldn’t have been done any other way.

### **Ted Lasso (Apple TV+)**

### **‘Breath of fresh air’: Benjamin Hendy, Southampton**

At first, it felt like a gentle and pleasant comedy but the longer it went on it became clear it was a show with real heart and maturity. In a year in which so much in the world has been negative, the way in which Ted Lasso deals with every negative thing with resounding positivity was a breath of fresh air.

## 2020.12.29 - Lifestyle

- [The who said it in 2020 quiz From vomit drafts to God's appointment](#)
- [Home alone? 10 of the best ethical pyjamas for winter](#)
- [Food and drink The Danish New Year's Eve dish that links my ancestors and me – plus the recipe](#)
- [Your problems Southern Water failed to fix leak that made basement damp](#)
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# The who said it in 2020 quiz: from vomit drafts to God's appointment

[G2 quiz of 2020](#)

[Life and style](#)

# The who said it in 2020 quiz: from vomit drafts to God's appointment

Match each inspirational, embarrassing or amusing quote to the celebrity from which it emerged



Composite: AP/Getty Images/PA/Reuters?David Vintiner/Guardian Design  
“Our house is still on fire. Your inaction is fuelling the flames by the hour. And we are telling you to act as if you loved your children above all else.”

George Clooney

Melania Trump

Greta Thunberg The Swedish environmentalist campaigner addressed the World Economic Forum’s annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, in January.

David Attenborough

"As of 9am today, there have been three hundred thousand and thirty-four, nine hundred and seventy-four thousand tests carried out."

Priti Patel The home secretary demonstrated her worldbeating maths skills at a Downing Street daily briefing on Covid-19 in April.

Matt Hancock

Dominic Raab

Rachel Riley

"And it's gone! Mabel takes it ... a famous win built on patience and sheer belief. For Olive, only thoughts of what might have been, but only herself to blame. She's given this one away and that will hurt most of all."

Andrew Cotter The BBC commentator, bereft of sports on which to commentate, turned his attention to his labradors in April.

Clare Balding

John Motson

Popeye

"I don't think I'm so different and I don't think there's one rule for me and one rule for other people."

Boris Johnson

Dominic Raab

Dominic Cummings The prime minister's chief adviser told journalists in May that he did not regret driving 260 miles from London to Durham during lockdown.

The Queen

"We will be with our friends again; we will be with our families again; we will meet again."

Vera Lynn

Jennifer Aniston

The Queen Queen Elizabeth evoked the spirit of the second world war in her address to the nation in April. Vera Lynn, who sang We'll Meet Again, died in June.

Danny Dyer

"Let's see if the appointing is at 2020 or if it's 2024 – because God appoints the president. If I win in 2020, then it was God's appointment. If I win in 2024, then that was God's appointment."

Joe Biden

Donald Trump

Ivanka Trump

Kanye West The artist also known as Yeezus opened up to Forbes magazine in July about his bid for the White House.

“I call my initial drafts ‘vomit drafts’. They’re not intended to be good, pretty or entirely sensible. They’re a first attempt. So you should just do it and expect it to be shit. Then keep going. It will get better.”

Ian McEwan

Michaela Coel The actor, writer and director spoke to the Sunday Times in July about creating I May Destroy You, one of the TV events of the year.

Jared Kushner

Sally Rooney

“If you look back at anything that I’ve said ... what ends up being inflammatory, it seems, is people’s interpretation of it. But if you listen to what I actually say, it’s not controversial.”

Katie Hopkins

David Icke

Dominic Cumming

The Duchess of Sussex Meghan responded to criticism of comments she made about the US election in an online conference, hosted by Fortune magazine, in September.

“Who gives a fuck about Christmas stuff and decoration? But I need to do it, right?”

Santa Claus

Melania Trump The US first lady moaned about her role to her (former) friend Stephanie Winston Wolkoff, who taped the conversation and released a recording of it in October.

Sadiq Khan

Nigella Lawson

“Are we all just going to go about our day knowing that 1.5 million seven to 16-year-olds need our help and our voice?? We need a long-term framework to protect our children, not another sticking plaster.”

Boris Johnson

Marcus Rashford The Manchester United FC and England forward tweeted this in October in his campaign to end child hunger.

Gavin Williamson

Ivanka Trump

You got...

V poor, repeat the year. I know! 2020! Ha!

Sad! You're spending too much time consuming news. Get out more ... oh no, you can't.

Good work. You're listening, but may actually have a life of your own.

Not great. Pay attention, yes, you at the back. And clean your ears out.

Challenge your friends

Submit answers

# **Home alone? 10 of the best ethical pyjamas for winter – in pictures**

The best ethical pyjamas on the high street Photograph: Comp

Food and drink

# The Danish New Year's Eve dish that links my ancestors and me – plus the recipe



Chef Trine Hahnemann (fourth from right) sitting down for a festive meal.  
Photograph: Columbus Leth

Chef Trine Hahnemann (fourth from right) sitting down for a festive meal.  
Photograph: Columbus Leth

Chef Trine Hahnemann on cod with mustard sauce – and the memories of visits to family in Ærøskøbing it brings back

[Trine Hahnemann](#)

Tue 29 Dec 2020 02.00 EST

Ærø is a small island in southern Denmark. To get there you need to take a ferry from Svendborg. I have boarded that ferry many times – I always feel a sense of belonging. My father comes from Ærø. And I have fond memories from when my grandfather, called *farfar*, was alive and I would visit him.

The ferry takes you to Ærøskøbing – a quaint town with cobbled streets and tiny old houses in lots of different colours. When I arrive, I am immediately transported into another world, where time seems different.

Ærø represents my family's history, which is very much linked to food, both everyday eating and celebrations. As a little girl I would often spend New Year's Eve with my *farfar*. One year I was snowed in when visiting for Christmas: the sea was frozen solid between Ærø and the main island of Funen, and nobody could get off. To celebrate New Year's Eve, we went for dinner at my Aunt Sarah's house. Every year she would serve cod with mustard sauce and a range of accompaniments. I will never forget the first time I was introduced to this traditional dinner.



Sea shore houses on the island of Ærøskøbing. Photograph: Alamy

The whole atmosphere felt special: the quietness in the dining room; the table set with beautiful white linen, Royal Copenhagen china and crystal glasses; the way my aunt carried in the big serving platter with the whole boiled cod, head and tail, and placed it at the centre of the table.

Aunt Sarah had almost black hair and dark eyes. She gathered family and friends around her, and I liked to be near her. I knew from early on that she was the one with knowledge, that she could cook.

This dish connects me to Ærø and my ancestors, and since that new year, my love for cod has never left me

I remember not saying anything, just savouring the moment with the silky pieces of cod and warm, smooth sauce on my plate, while all the little bowls with bacon, beets, horseradish and egg were passed around. We waited for the moment; nobody ate before my aunt said: *velbekommen*.

I remember walking home later with my *farfar* through a wintry Ærøskøping, spellbound after that wonderful meal, footsteps muffled by the squeaky snow under our feet.

I still visit Ærø in the winter: I cook, read books and go for long walks. The place seems empty – all the action is inside the kitchens.

I drive to a nearby harbour and buy fish directly from a fishing boat, then make all the condiments and the old-school sauce. The dish sums up Danish winter produce: cod, beetroot, spinach, pork, eggs and the two most important spices in our cooking: horseradish and mustard.

This dish connects me to Ærø and my ancestors, and since that new year celebration, my deep love for cod has never left me.



Photograph: Romas Foord/The Guardian

# Boiled cod with mustard sauce

Serves 4

**800g potatoes**

**800g cod fillet or loin**

**Salt and freshly ground pepper**

**2 tbsp finely chopped parsley**

Accompaniments

**1kg winter spinach**

**4 eggs**

**100g of bacon, cut into small cubes**

**100g pickled beetroots**

**4 tbsp freshly grated horseradish**

For the mustard sauce

**30g butter**

**3 tbsp flour**

**300ml fish broth (from the cod) or water**

**3 tbsp wholegrain mustard**

**100ml heavy cream**

Boil the potatoes and keep them warm. Rinse the spinach thoroughly and have ready to steam. Boil the eggs, then chop them roughly, fry the bacon until crisp, and cut the beetroot into very small cubes.

Place the cod in a saucepan with 300ml water and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Bring to boil then simmer for about five minutes.

When everything is ready, prepare the sauce. Melt the butter in a small saucepan, then add the flour and stir until it becomes a smooth paste. Add the fish broth a little at the time, stirring until all the lumps are gone. Add the mustard and cream, stir again until the sauce is smooth, and season with salt and pepper. Now wilt the spinach in a separate pan until it collapses.

Serve the cod on a big platter sprinkled with the chopped parsley. Put the spinach, eggs, bacon, beetroot, horseradish and mustard sauce in little dishes

and serve on the side with the potatoes.

- *Chef and food writer Trine Hahnemann runs [Hahnemann's Køkken](#), a bakery, shop and cookery school in Copenhagen. Her latest book is Scandinavian Green ([Quadrille](#)), available at the [Guardian Bookshop](#) for £22.62*

[Your problems, with Anna TimsMoney](#)

## Southern Water failed to fix leak that made basement damp

Tens of thousands of litres of water are escaping in a water-stressed area



Litres of water were escaping from a manhole but no one came to fix it.

Photograph: Grethe Ulgjell/Alamy

Litres of water were escaping from a manhole but no one came to fix it.

Photograph: Grethe Ulgjell/Alamy



[Anna Tims](#)

Tue 29 Dec 2020 02.19 EST

**For the last two weeks the manhole outside our neighbour's property has been leaking in a steady flow. We are now getting damp coming through our basement walls.**

**Southern [Water](#) sent someone to investigate but it was impeded by my neighbour's scaffolding. He immediately took it down, but Southern has not reappeared, despite numerous calls from us. Customer service is like pushing jelly uphill and tens of thousands of litres of water are disappearing.**

**DG, Brighton**

Southern Water conjured up a technician within a day of my contact and the job was completed in two hours – less time than you spent trying to get hold of the company. Its recalcitrance is disgraceful especially since, as, it admits itself, the south-east is a water-stressed area.

The blame, predictably, is attached to Covid. “Restrictions and changed working practices have made call-outs more difficult and occasionally it has taken longer than normal to make repairs,” it says, before thanking you for your patience. If the leak has damaged the properties, Southern says you

need to report it to your insurer. So although the leak is fixed, you face more hours of admin.

*If you need help email [your.problems@observer.co.uk](mailto:your.problems@observer.co.uk). Include an address and phone number. Submission and publication are subject to our [terms and conditions](#)*

[Inside the GuardianGadgets](#)

## How we are changing the way we rate sustainability of consumer electronics

Under the new criteria, products will lose marks if they do not meet a certain threshold for progress



Apple has been publishing environmental impact assessments for its main products for a few years but still does not for accessories such as AirPods and other high-volume items. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Apple has been publishing environmental impact assessments for its main products for a few years but still does not for accessories such as AirPods and other high-volume items. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

*[Samuel Gibbs](#) Consumer technology editor*

Tue 29 Dec 2020 02.00 EST

When we first started looking at the sustainability of consumer electronics at the beginning of 2019, we soon discovered that reliable information was very hard to find. It was difficult to establish which smartphones, tablets, headphones and other items were even capable of being repaired, let alone how long they might last or whether they contained recycled materials.

The status quo was very much “don’t ask, don’t tell”. Upon asking, very few manufacturers even had records of the relevant information. Fewer still made it available for public consumption.

So at the start of 2020, to try to create change for the better, we began including sustainability information alongside product performance for all [our standalone consumer technology reviews](#). We looked at repairability, the battery lifespan and ease of replacement, the software lifecycle, its material construction and the availability of trade-in and recycling schemes.

The aim was to give readers a fuller picture of the product so they could weigh what was most important to them and make an informed decision.

Products from manufacturers that were making good progress on any of the sustainability fronts were awarded bonus marks as a way of highlighting them above competitors, with the [Fairphone 3+](#) a prime example: a reasonable smartphone made exceptional by its ease of repair, inclusion of recycled materials and ethical manufacturing.

## Blood out of a stone



Samsung’s Galaxy Buds Live are repairable, the battery can be changed and they contain recycled materials, but discovering that is not straightforward.

Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

At the start, retrieving information from of the various product manufacturers was like getting blood out of a stone. Even after weeks of arguing and delays, it could often turn out that they were indeed making progress, seeking to include recycled materials, make the products more repairable and sustainable. They just didn't want to tell anyone.

For many manufacturers, doing good things in the background that are financially viable is far less risky than going on the record when things in the supply chain can change and put them in difficult positions. Technology firms would often rather stay silent than confirm or deny anything.

It is still hard to find the required information to make an informed decision on how sustainable a product truly is, but after a year of pressure from the Guardian we are making progress. Apple has been [publishing environmental impact assessments](#) for its main products for a few years – it still disappointingly does not for accessories, which include AirPods and other high-volume items – but now others are joining suit. Google recently [began publishing](#) similar breakdowns, [as did Microsoft](#).

Manufacturers are making use of recycled materials too. Google's pledge to include recycled material in all its products by 2030 has already resulted in recycled plastic and metal making it into its [phones](#) and [speakers](#), while [Amazon's new Echo speakers](#) include significant amounts. Many of the best high-volume items such as smartphones are more repairable than ever, even if it means using specialist tools that ultimately requires the manufacturer to carry out the fix rather than the owner or a third-party.

Even in challenging categories such as true wireless earbuds, there is movement to make them less disposable. The batteries in [Samsung's Galaxy Buds Live earbuds](#) can be replaced and they contain post-consumer recycled plastic.

## Good cop becomes bad cop



The Fairphone 3+ is one of the most repairable, sustainable and ethical smartphones you can buy, but isn't as feature-rich as its rivals. Photograph: Fairphone

But these are just baby steps and there is a long way to go. So starting from January 2021, our assessment criteria for sustainability will be flipped from positive to negative. If a product does not meet a certain threshold for progress on the sustainability front it will lose marks, meaning that rather than the good products being awarded more, the bad products will be marked down.

Based on 2020's performance, that will undoubtedly see a large range of products from both small and big companies being marked down. The Guardian operates a five-star rating scheme, so expect to see many more three and four-star products that, despite being excellent on most fronts, are not good on sustainability.

Equally, those products that exist purely to be sustainable also have to be good for other reasons – it's not enough any more to make a repairable, sustainable device if it doesn't work very well in the first place.

The sustainability of the products we buy and use has never been more important, not just for the planet but for our cash-strapped wallets. Products

that are great now and will go the distance for years to come are better for everyone. I hope the Guardian's consumer technology reviews are useful in guiding you to that end.

[What lockdown taught me](#)[Parents and parenting](#)

## **Giving birth seemed to spell disaster for my mental health. Were my anxieties unfounded?**

I feared isolation, sleep deprivation and an end to the activities that had been keeping me well. I never expected to be filled with such love and wonder



Isabel Hardman with her son, Jacob, in Richmond Park, west London, in November. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Isabel Hardman with her son, Jacob, in Richmond Park, west London, in November. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

[Isabel Hardman](#)

[@IsabelHardman](#)

Mon 28 Dec 2020 08.00 EST

I hadn't expected to have a baby. But when I turned out to be wrong about that, I found myself expecting the whole thing to be a disaster. It wasn't just that people tend to be rather negative about what early parenthood entails, focusing on the sleepless nights and endless nappy changes. It was also

because I had a mental illness that I thought would make it impossible for me to cope at all, let alone enjoy motherhood. Neither had I expected to be giving birth in the middle of a pandemic, in which I would be cut off from much of my support network.

In the three years since I was diagnosed with [post-traumatic stress disorder](#), as a result of a serious trauma in my personal life, I had spent a great deal of time trying to work out how to manage my illness. I planned my weeks around activities that research told me would help mend my mind a little. I knew that cold-water swimming, for instance, appears to help us control the fight-or-flight instinct that often goes so awry in mental illness. [I knew that running could encourage the body to produce chemicals that lift the mood](#). I had discovered that birdwatching and looking for wild flowers were much more effective for me than mindfulness apps, with their calls to sit in silence in a room. I had just written [a book about the healing power of outdoor pursuits](#) and was starting to feel mildly in control of my life.

But then, in September 2019, after feeling so nauseous on live television that I feared I might vomit on the politician sitting next to me, I took a pregnancy test, just to be sure. It was positive. Everything was going to change again.

As soon as I knew my son existed, I was desperate to meet him. But I was also frightened. I knew that new motherhood would mean sleep deprivation, which has long been a trigger for my health to deteriorate. I wouldn't have the same time to dose up on the outdoor activities that were keeping me sane. All the usual anxieties accompanying pregnancy were compounded by my fear that, having told myself I would never be a mother, I was now doomed to be a useless one.

When lockdown was announced, my panic increased. Would I even be allowed to leave the house with my baby, once he had arrived? Back in March, there was talk of restricting daily exercise to just a couple of hundred metres from someone's home. An already terrifying prospect seemed to be growing worse.

My illness had wreaked havoc for long enough: it seemed much nicer when my fat little baby was responsible instead

My son, Jacob, was born on 12 May, while Britain was still in lockdown. My mental health had progressively deteriorated as I approached my due date and I had been in my own personal lockdown for much of early 2020. This meant my mental state was monitored carefully during my very long and difficult labour at Kingston hospital in south-west London. We were lucky with our maternity unit: Kingston allowed partners to be present before, during and after the birth; friends giving birth at other hospitals were forced to stay on the postnatal ward alone for days, their partners banned from visiting.

I am writing this sitting on a slightly soggy fallen tree in Richmond Park, my now-enormous baby snoozing happily in his pram. None of the things I had expected while I was expecting came to pass. Motherhood has not been easy, but I discovered gaping lacunae in my friends' accounts of having a newborn baby, which seemed to gloss over its wonder. No one had explained to me that I would feel a love so weighty that I often couldn't hold my son without weeping. No one had mentioned those moments in the middle of the night when, as I was struggling to keep my eyes open, I would hear Jacob let out a little sigh of contentment.

In many ways, living with a mental illness is a good preparation for parenthood. I was already accustomed to my life feeling out of control and the best-laid plans disintegrating on a daily basis. My illness had wreaked this havoc for long enough: it seemed much nicer when my fat, curious little baby was responsible instead. Leaving the house is a struggle when you have a tiny baby, but I was used to isolation, which is so often a result of illnesses that make you depressed and anxious. I found the restrictions imposed by the pandemic less noticeable, too, because I had spent so much time voluntarily alone.

As the summer went on, I learned that it would still be possible to look after my mental health even with a tiny, sometimes cross, always demanding baby. I would just need to be creative. No, I couldn't go for two-hour runs or disappear for a lazy afternoon swim at the drop of a hat. But it was still easy to calm my mind by getting outdoors.

In the weeks after Jacob's birth, I would hobble through my local woodland

with him in the pram or a sling. The pace at which my recovering body permitted me to move meant I noticed even more about my surroundings: the cleanliness of the early summer leaves, the nuthatch zipping up a tree trunk, the bee hovering by the entrance to a foxglove flower. There were many days when the baby slept better when outside in the pram. When awake, he seems calmer when we are outdoors. He doesn't let me stand still for an hour to photograph a kingfisher, as I used to do in my childless days, but I spend even more time walking and discovering local wildlife than I did before. I now have the added benefit of seeing my baby's utter delight on encountering a loudly honking goose up a tree, as we did on the Thames Path the other day.

I am running out of fingers on which to count the months of good mental health I have enjoyed. Some of this is down to luck, but it helps that the NHS does a better job of looking after new mothers with psychiatric problems than it does with the general population. When I became seriously depressed mid-pregnancy, I was in a psychiatrist's consulting room within a fortnight (previously, I had been told to expect a year's wait) and referred immediately for cognitive behavioural therapy. I am still being regularly monitored by the perinatal psychiatric team, I am still on the highest possible dose of my antidepressant and I can start therapy again at any time.

I expect that at some point my mental state will fall off a cliff again. But if there is one thing I have learned from becoming a mother in lockdown, it is that I will learn a new way of coping with whatever comes along next, no matter how unexpected.

## **2020.12.29 - Take part**

- [UK students Will you be returning to university in January?](#)
- [Tell us What do you think of the Brexit deal?](#)
- [UK delivery workers Share your experiences this Christmas](#)
- [Shrewsbury and Telford Have you been affected by the maternity scandal?](#)

## Students

# UK students: will you be returning to university in January?

We'd like to hear from students who are thinking of leaving university due to the pandemic

## Guardian community team

Tue 22 Dec 2020 11.19 EST Last modified on Tue 22 Dec 2020 11.21 EST



First year student at Falmouth University Helena Crate returning home to Suffolk from the Falmouth University Penryn campus. Photograph: Hugh Hastings/Getty Images

Students across the UK have seen their university experience reduced to online lectures, and [endured lockdowns on campus and in halls](#). Many have reported [mental health issues and feelings of isolation](#).

We'd like to hear from students who have decided they no longer want to return to university in January.

# Share your experiences

You can get in touch by filling in the form below. Your responses are secure as the form is encrypted and only the Guardian has access to your contributions. One of our journalists will be in contact before we publish, so please do leave contact details.

*If you're having trouble using the form, click [here](#). Read terms of service [here](#).*

Brexit

## Tell us: what do you think of the Brexit deal?

We'd like to hear what our readers think of the news that the UK and the EU have agreed on a Brexit deal

Guardian community team

Thu 24 Dec 2020 10.17 EST Last modified on Thu 24 Dec 2020 10.19 EST



A union flag flies on top of the Victoria Tower, part of the Palace of Westminster in London. Photograph: Daniel Sorabji/AFP/Getty Images

The [UK and the EU have struck an agreement](#) on the UK's future trading and security relationship with the European Union on Christmas Eve, four and half years after the country voted to leave the European Union, and just over a week before the end of the Brexit transition period.

As the country leaves the single market and customs union on 31 December, new arrangements allowing for tariff-free trade in goods and close police

and judicial cooperation will come into force.

We'd like to hear what people think of the deal and how it might affect them.

## Share your experiences

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Christmas

## Share your experiences of being a UK delivery worker this Christmas

We'd like to hear from the people who will be working around the clock to deliver this year's festive season

Guardian community team

Tue 8 Dec 2020 07.02 EST Last modified on Tue 8 Dec 2020 07.06 EST



A delivery driver packing a full white van with parcels. Photograph: Britpix/Alamy Stock Photo

As the country prepares for a very different kind of Christmas, many people will be shopping online this year instead of hitting the stores in person to stock up on presents and festive treats.

We would like to hear from couriers and delivery workers about the year they have had and their work in the run-up to Christmas.

# Share your experiences

You can get in touch by filling in the form below, anonymously if you wish. Your responses are secure as the form is encrypted and only the Guardian has access to your contributions. One of our journalists will be in contact before we publish, so please do leave contact details.

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## Hospitals

# Have you been affected by the maternity scandal in Shrewsbury and Telford?

We would like to hear from people who were affected by the failures at Shrewsbury and Telford hospitals

## Guardian community team

Fri 11 Dec 2020 04.41 EST Last modified on Fri 11 Dec 2020 12.28 EST



A patient transport ambulance leaving the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, Shropshire. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

A report into one of the biggest scandals in the history of the NHS found [failures at Shrewsbury and Telford hospitals](#) (SaTH) that led to the deaths and harming of mothers and babies from 2000-2019.

It recommended that urgent changes are needed in English hospitals to prevent stillbirths, avoidable baby deaths, and neonatal brain damage.

We would like to hear from people who were affected by the failures at SaTH.

## Share your experiences

You can get in touch by filling in the form below, anonymously if you wish. Your responses are secure as the form is encrypted and only the Guardian has access to your contributions. One of our journalists will be in contact before we publish, so please do leave contact details.

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## 2020.12.29 - Explore

- ['People are terrified' A coronavirus surge across California's prisons renews calls for releases](#)
- [America Coronavirus sharpens already stark economic inequalities](#)
- ['Miners out, Covid out' Threats to indigenous reserve in Brazil grow](#)
- [Joe Biden How his cold war experience will shape his approach to Russia](#)
- ['What about justice?' Chagos Islanders pin their hopes on Biden](#)
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US prisons

## ‘People are terrified’: a coronavirus surge across California’s prisons renews calls for releases



San Quentin state prison. Almost 10,000 people in California state prisons have Covid-19. Photograph: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

San Quentin state prison. Almost 10,000 people in California state prisons have Covid-19. Photograph: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

More than 32,000 people in the overcrowded system have tested positive for the virus since the pandemic began

*Abené Clayton in Oakland*

Tue 29 Dec 2020 06.00 EST

Nine months since the emergence of the coronavirus, every one of California’s 35 state prisons is battling cases, a grim milestone in the state’s epidemic.

California's prison system has seen a system-wide rise in Covid-19 infections in past weeks, paralleling the intense [recent surge](#) in coronavirus cases across the state. Almost 9,500 people in the state's prisons have Covid-19, with most of the state's facilities facing over 100 [infections](#).

[One in every five prisoners in US has tested positive for Covid-19](#)  
[Read more](#)

The rise in cases across the prison system is sparking renewed calls for the early release of thousands of prisoners at risk of developing serious complications from Covid-19. And it is elevating urgent [questions about early vaccine access](#) for people in the system.

"In the last nine months the state had a chance to do the right thing, they didn't and now people inside are terrified," said Dr Hadar Aviram, a professor with UC Hastings Law.

## 'What if he dies in there?'

Since the start of the pandemic, more than 38,000 people in California's overcrowded state prison system have tested positive for coronavirus, according to the California department of corrections and rehabilitation's own count, and at least 114 have died. The virus has spread like wildfire in the overcrowded facilities, and prison authorities have faced criticism for exacerbating its spread through chaotic guidelines and ill-advised prison transfers.

More than a third of all infections have occurred since the beginning of November, marking a dramatic escalation of the humanitarian crisis unfolding behind bars. Alicia Rhoden, who [spoke with the Guardian in April](#) about her fears for the health of her husband, Bruce, said he was one of thousands of prisoners to contract the virus in November.

Bruce, who is 62 and is serving the final year of a four-year sentence for assault with a deadly weapon in Wasco state prison, suffers from a long list of health issues, including HIV and diabetes. Rhoden said she learned that her husband was sick in early December, almost a month after his original diagnosis. In a letter to his wife, Bruce said he spent nine days in an outside

hospital before returning to Wasco and being placed in isolation for five days.

The Guardian contacted CDCR about the Rhodens' experience. A spokesperson says they cannot comment on anyone's personal medical information.

With 414 Covid cases at the facility and Bruce now on blood thinners to treat hemorrhaging that has emerged in his leg, Rhoden said she can't help but wonder, "What if he dies in there?"

As cases in state prisons far exceed those in the rest of California – the case rate for the state's prison population on 26 December was 390 per 1,000, for Californians in general, it was 53 per 1,000 people – and the death count is on the rise, family members and advocates are putting renewed pressure on state leaders to release thousands of prisoners. Expanded releases, they argue, would both reduce overcrowding and protect medically vulnerable people in the system.

CDCR says it has already released about 18,300 people early this year through pandemic-related relief programs targeting medically-vulnerable prisoners and people with less than a year left on their sentence. But most prisoners serving time for violent offenses are excluded from the measures, drastically limiting the number of people who qualify.

At the height of the pandemic, the number of early releases has slowed significantly. From 21 October to 16 December, 625 people were released early, CDCR data indicates. Releases under the relief program for medically vulnerable prisoners have been limited as well. Since early-July, just 63 people were released under the program solely because they were medically high-risk and just four have gotten medical reprieves from the California governor, Gavin Newsom.

On Monday, Newsom said he is reviewing individual cases on a weekly basis, and vowed to follow protocols such as conducting risk assessments and notifying victims before letting people go. "I simply will not en masse release people without looking individual by individual," he said. "I respect

those who want to bypass protocols but we are moving in a different direction.”



Demonstrators calling for mass prison inmate releases protest outside of Gavin Newsom’s mansion in Fair Oaks, California. Photograph: Daniel Kim/AP

A CDCR spokesperson said that the number of people who were released because of medical vulnerabilities appears low because some fit into multiple categories, like being 180 days or less away from release. But advocates argue the programs simply don’t include enough people.

“I think CDCR believes what they’re doing is reasonable and sufficient,” said James King, a state campaigner for the Ella Baker Center, a San Francisco Bay Area-based social justice nonprofit. “But they’re ignoring the biggest cohort of people who need to be released: lifers who have served 30-40 years. There are some young people who are getting out a few weeks early. But the most vulnerable are still in there fighting tooth and nail via the courts.”

Attorneys and advocates say that political will and the threat of public backlash and scrutiny are the main drivers behind the disqualification of those with certain convictions, even though people over 60 years old and

those serving life sentences have the lowest rate of reoffending after release, according to the CDCR's most recent recidivism [report](#).

"I don't think there's another reason to not release them besides political backlash. Some are sex offenders, some are lifers who were convicted of murder and there's general reluctance of politicians to release these people," said Donald Specter, the main lawyer in a lawsuit that aims to reduce California's prison population.

Expanding the criteria for early releases to include people serving long sentences for violent convictions is now at the center of two decades-old lawsuits that seek to eliminate prison overcrowding. An emergency [motion](#), filed by Specter's law office early in late-March, to speed up a 2011 depopulation was denied.

"The bottom line is: there are still thousands of people who are at very high risk of death trapped in a prison system where there's no way that they can avoid the virus," said Specter.

## Vaccine debates

Earlier this month, Kirsten Roehler's father, Fred, became one of over 800 people to contract Covid in a California state prison in Los Angeles county. Serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole for a 1981 murder conviction, Fred, 78, is ineligible for any of the early release programs. His only path to release would be an intervention from the governor's office.

"It would be scary if he got Covid while he was out here but it's terrifying knowing that he's positive there, and if he gets really sick CDCR would have to take him to a hospital that's already [overrun](#)," Roehler said. All three of California's worst hit prisons, including the state prison where Fred is held, are located in counties where the intensive care unit capacity of hospitals is already severely strained.

Meanwhile, lawyers and doctors are imploring California officials to prioritize [vaccinations](#) for incarcerated people given the intensity of the outbreaks.

However it is unclear where the majority of incarcerated people fall on California's priority list. CDCR recently received an allotment of the Covid-19 vaccine and said it plans to dole it out based on the state's guidelines, which give [priority](#) to correctional facility hospitals. Sixty-five employees and incarcerated people in the California Health Care Facility in Stockton, where the state's most medically needy are housed, have volunteered to be vaccinated, [according to](#) Steve Crouch, the director of public employees for the International Union of Operating Engineers, a union that represents prison maintenance and mechanics employees.

Even when the vaccine becomes available to prisoners, Hadar Aviram, a professor with UC Hastings Law, worries many may be reluctant to accept it given the prison system's track record during the pandemic.

"CDCR has proven that they don't have people's health and safety in mind. People call me to say their loved ones in prisons won't trust that a CDCR doctor with a clear liquid wants the best for them," Aviram said.

CDCR maintains that it is doing everything it can to keep people healthy while they consider more releases and the vaccine becomes widely available.

But for Elsie Lee, the reluctance to release people with violent offenses, ambiguity around vaccines and the possibility of more dangerous transfers feel like weights hanging over her head.

Lee's husband, Wilbert, is 50 years old and tested positive for Covid-19 in late-June in San Quentin state prison. With her nonprofit Sistas with Voices, Lee has been organizing protests and letter writing campaigns hoping to convince lawmakers to push through more releases. However, the efforts have left her feeling as though she's "yelling at a brick wall".

"We're screaming and hollering and we feel like we're chipping at little pieces on a brick wall but it won't budge," said Lee. "At this point everyone who can do something is trying to do it."

[US income inequality](#)

# Coronavirus sharpens America's already stark economic inequalities

Analysts predict a holiday retail boom even as unemployment hits shocking levels, particularly for Black and brown workers

[Alexandra Villarreal](#)

Tue 29 Dec 2020 06.00 EST Last modified on Tue 29 Dec 2020 06.02 EST



Hundreds of cars wait in line at a food distribution event amid the coronavirus outbreak in Austin, Texas, last month. Photograph: Jordan Vonderhaar/Rex/Shutterstock

**Sign up for the Guardian's First Thing newsletter**

Walter Almendarez doubts there will be any presents beneath his artificial Christmas tree – not for his daughter, his nephews or anyone else.

Back in March, Almendarez reread an email over and over again, trying to process the news that he had just been let go from Los Angeles's Chateau

Marmont, where he had worked for over two decades. He was among more than 200 people fired by the swanky hotel in one fell swoop.

“It was just terrible, the way they did it,” he said.

Widespread local shutdowns made finding a new job practically impossible, and soon, he used up his 401(k) retirement savings just trying to pay the bills.

Like Almendarez, tens of millions of people across America are struggling to make ends meet in an economy devastated by the impact of efforts to control the coronavirus pandemic. Yet at the same time millions of other Americans are enjoying an end-of-year spending spree. The National Retail Federation is projecting that holiday sales will jump between 3.6 and 5.2% this year compared with 2019, with consumers collectively spending well over \$750bn.

Those startling discrepancies represent a stark example of how the pandemic has exacerbated America’s already chronic inequalities, amid a widespread awakening to the country’s deep-rooted problems with economic and racial injustice.

“It is definitely something that has increased disparities between white and Black, between those well-off and less well-off – high wage, low wage. All of those things have been absolutely pulling apart,” said Elise Gould, a senior economist at the Economic Policy Institute (EPI).

During the pandemic, 651 billionaires have accrued more than \$1tn in additional wealth – enough to send every American a \$3,000 check and then some. But so far, that prosperity has not trickled down to 26.1 million US workers, who in November were still wrestling with direct impacts from the economic downturn, including unemployment and drops in pay.

Those hardships have disproportionately fallen on Black and brown people, who were less likely to be able to work from home even pre-pandemic. In the third quarter of 2020, the unemployment rates for Black people and Latinos were 13.2% and 11.2% respectively, compared with 7.9% for white people.

The slowdown has also caused a “[shecession](#)” for women, especially women of color, who have been [overburdened with caretaking responsibilities](#) while simultaneously watching their industries flounder.

As Americans struggle to pay rent or buy food, “the worst suffering” people can experience “could really be heading for us as we go into the end of the year”, warned Amanda Fischer, policy director at the Washington Center for Equitable Growth, [a research and grant-making non-profit](#).

Early into the pandemic, Congress’s Cares Act, which provided \$2.2tn in coronavirus aid, proved “one of the most effective anti-poverty tools we’ve seen in American history”, Fischer said. But those provisions were only temporary, and once they vanished, vehicles lined up outside [food banks](#) while [renters fell months behind on their bills](#).

Then, when the US economy started to rebound, it did so through a “K-shaped” recovery, benefiting the rich and leaving [behind](#) almost everyone else. The stock market – where [about 80%](#) of wealth has historically been owned by the top 10% of households – continued to [surge](#), and CEOs projected widespread [confidence in the economy](#), despite many of them expecting to reduce their workforce and let wages stagnate.

High earners also fared well, with the employment rate for those making over \$60,000 eventually eclipsing what it had been near the beginning of 2020, according to [not-for-profit organization Opportunity Insights](#).



A man sits on the Wall Street bull near the New York stock exchange, which has continued to surge despite the economic crisis. Photograph: Spencer Platt/Getty Images

Meanwhile, by mid-October, the employment rate among workers earning less than \$27,000 had plummeted by 19% compared with January levels. And, as shoppers browsed online, jobseekers expecting a holiday boom were instead hit by seasonally adjusted "[notable losses in retail hiring](#)", according to a December post by EPI.

Now, with millions of Americans still suffering even as a resurgent virus forces a new slew of lockdowns, critics are blasting Congress's relatively modest proposed aid package, which includes a \$300 supplemental weekly jobless benefit and \$600 stimulus checks.

"It's not enough. People are hungry. People are homeless," said Anna Gifty, co-founder of the Sadie Collective, which aims to [boost diversity in economics and related fields](#).

In an 11th-hour reversal against his own party, Donald Trump joined calls on Congress to instead offer \$2,000 stimulus checks. He decried the legislation as a "disgrace", much to the delight of Democrats, who have long advocated for a heftier aid package.

“House Democrats have fought for months to provide relief to the American people, which Republicans rejected at every turn,” said Steny Hoyer, the House majority leader. “Now that the president has agreed to direct payments of \$2,000, we will ask for unanimous consent to pass a bill this week to give Americans this assistance.”

But while Capitol Hill battles it out, Almendarez is one of many distressed breadwinners bearing the brunt of their inaction, and he wishes the government would do more to help.

With about \$270 worth of unemployment benefits a week, his family cannot afford their housing payments right now, much less the ingredients for their favorite holiday meal.

“We’re hurting,” he said. “And of course the country’s hurting also, because people don’t have money.”

[Biodiversity: what happened next?Brazil](#)

## 'Miners out, Covid out': threats to indigenous reserve in Brazil grow

Illegal goldminers supported by Bolsonaro bring environmental destruction and coronavirus to Yanomami communities

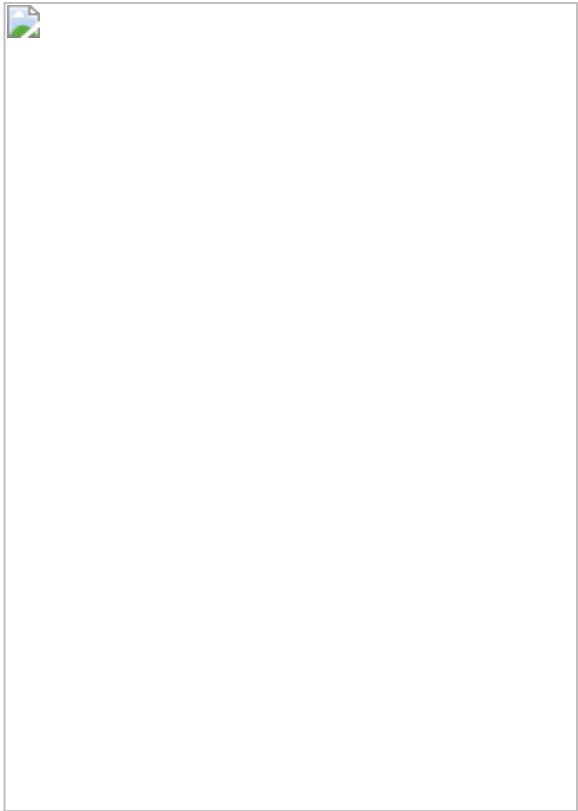
- ['Like a bomb going off': why Brazil's largest reserve is facing destruction](#)
- [Read more in our series Biodiversity: what happened next?](#)



A projection on Brazil's National Congress building with drawings of the Yanomami *xapiri*, the spirits of the forest, during a protest calling for the eviction of illegal goldminers from the Yanomami reserve. Photograph: Adriano Machado/Reuters

A projection on Brazil's National Congress building with drawings of the Yanomami *xapiri*, the spirits of the forest, during a protest calling for the eviction of illegal goldminers from the Yanomami reserve. Photograph: Adriano Machado/Reuters

The age of extinction is supported by



### About this content

Dom Phillips in Rio de Janeiro

Tue 29 Dec 2020 02.30 EST

A petition with 439,000 signatures demanding “[miners out, Covid out](#)” of the Yanomami reserve in Roraima state was handed to Brazil’s congress this month as shamanic images were projected on to the building’s exterior. With Covid-19 ravaging the Yanomami population since the first death from the disease was [reported in April](#), the existence of the “garimpeiros”, or goldminers, has brought even greater threats to the reserve.

The estimated 20,000 miners were already blamed for bringing alcohol and prostitution into the Yanomami reserve, where they have worked illegally for decades, clearing forests and polluting rivers with mercury used in separating out the gold. The [destruction wreaked by their work](#) has increased since far-right president Jair Bolsonaro took office – and they have kept working during the pandemic.

“The *garimpeiros* are the principal vector. They enter with light Covid symptoms and bring it to the Yanomami indigenous reserve,” says Dário Kopenawa, vice-president of the Yanomami association Hutukara and son of its director, Davi Kopenawa.



Illegal mining taking place on Yanomami indigenous land. Photograph: João Laet/The Guardian

Last month, [a report](#) produced by indigenous associations and campaigners claimed a rise of more than 250% in Covid-19 cases in Yanomami territory from August through October. It counted 1,202 cases and 23 suspected Covid-19 deaths among the reserve’s 27,000 people.

The *garimpeiros* are increasing, Covid is increasing, where is the government help?

*Júlio Ye’kwana*

But instead of removing the *garimpeiros*, the government closed an army camp on the Uraricoera River, leaving nearby [mining pits that the Guardian visited in 2019](#) to work undisturbed. In June, it staged an expensive ministerial visit with 18 journalists. [Yanomami women were made up, had their nails painted and were given clothes](#). Chloroquine – a malaria drug touted as an unproved treatment for Covid-19 – was handed out.

“This was just a chloroquine campaign,” says Kopenawa. “The main *garimpeiro* sites are still working.”



An indigenous Yanomami woman has her makeup done ahead of a visit by government ministers. Photograph: Nelson Almeida/AFP/Getty Images

After [federal prosecutors began investigating the visit](#), a second health expedition took place without the media in attendance. “Doctors and other health professionals were taken to the Yanomami indigenous reserve … the missions took equipment, tests and medicine,” the health ministry said. On December 21, the ministry said there had been 1,142 coronavirus cases in the reserve and that there had been ten deaths.

['Like a bomb going off: why Brazil's largest reserve is facing destruction](#)  
[Read more](#)

While the Bolsonaro government would like to silence the international chorus of outrage over rising deforestation and fires in the Amazon because it is bad for farming exports, deforestation has surged to [a 12-year high](#). Bolsonaro has promised to legalise *garimpeiro* work in indigenous reserves – some of the best protected Amazon areas. In February his government sent a bill to congress, and *garimpeiro* leaders have met government officials in recent weeks, as pressure ramps up to approve the bill.

In a bid to quell rising international approbation, Brazil's vice-president, Gen Hamilton Mourão, who heads its Amazon council, flew foreign diplomats to some of the Amazon's most protected areas in November – a trip environmentalists [called a “sham”](#). Despite being flown to a military base in Maturacá in the Yanomami reserve, the diplomats were not shown any *garimpo* sites.

“The living forest is our life. It gives hunting, fishing and traditional medicines,” says José Mario Goes, president of the local indigenous association, Ayrca. “We want the forest protected from land-grabbers, *garimpeiros*, farmers.”



Ye'kwanas from Waikás indigenous village are growing cacao beans to make chocolate. Photograph: João Laet/The Guardian

Yanomami leaders are creating alternatives to the lure of gold. On the eastern side of the reserve, villagers planted thousands more cacao seedlings this year in an ongoing project with Brazilian non-profit group Instituto Socioambiental [to produce organic chocolate](#) and eventually provide a sustainable income. A first run of 1,000 bars of Yanomami chocolate sold out. A second harvest of 20kg of cacao has been delivered to chocolate maker César de Mendes, who plans to make another 400 bars with it.

But with no sign of the *garimpeiros* leaving, indigenous leaders continue to fear for their people.

“The authorities should help indigenous people take care of nature, not destroy it,” says Júlio Ye’kwana, president of the Ye’kwana tribe’s Wanasseduume association. “The *garimpeiros* are increasing, Covid is increasing, where is the government help? There is none.”

*Find more [age of extinction coverage here](#), and follow biodiversity reporters [Phoebe Weston](#) and [Patrick Greenfield](#) on Twitter for all the latest news and features*

## Joe Biden

# How Joe Biden's cold war experience will shape his approach to Russia



Joe Biden, then US vice-president, shakes hands with Vladimir Putin during their meeting in Moscow in March 2011. Photograph: Alexander Natruskin/Reuters

Joe Biden, then US vice-president, shakes hands with Vladimir Putin during their meeting in Moscow in March 2011. Photograph: Alexander Natruskin/Reuters

President-elect's formative years of going toe-to-toe with the USSR on arms control hint at how he may deal with Putin



*[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow*

Tue 29 Dec 2020 00.00 EST

It was 1988, near the end of the cold war, when then-senator [Joe Biden](#) made yet another visit to the Soviet Union for talks on arms control. By that time, he felt comfortable enough in Moscow to bring a guest into the room: his teenage son.

“Would you mind my son, Hunter Biden, sitting in and listening? The gentleman is interested in international affairs and diplomacy,” he said, according to Victor Prokofiev, the Soviet foreign ministry interpreter at the meeting.

A photograph from the meeting shows Biden’s son seated at the head of the table as his father and Andrei Gromyko, the chairman of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, discussed ratifying the international nuclear forces treaty.

“That was extremely unusual,” Prokofiev said. “It was particularly striking to me as a Soviet person.”

When he enters the White House next month, Joe Biden will bring nearly half a century of foreign policy experience with him, making him one of the most seasoned envoys ever elected president. “Joe knew the Soviet Union,

knows [Russia](#), has experience with [Vladimir] Putin, and understands what's possible and what's probably not," said former senator Bill Bradley, who visited Moscow with him in 1979.

Boasting of those credentials, Biden for a time recalled sitting briefly across from Leonid Brezhnev in the Kremlin in 1979 before negotiations with Alexei Kosygin, the Soviet premier. "Brezhnev looked grey; we didn't know it but he was already sick and dying. The Soviet president excused himself after introductions and turned the meeting over to Kosygin," Biden wrote in a 2007 memoir. He [repeated the story to Putin](#) four years later.

But Andrei Kozovoi, a historian at the University of Lille and author of a forthcoming biography of the Soviet leader, noted in [a detailed look at the delegation](#) that Brezhnev never mentions meeting those US senators in his diaries. Nor does his secretary, or anyone else on the trip.

"Brezhnev was in no meeting that I was in and I was in all the delegation meetings on that trip," said Bradley. Former senator Carl Levin also confirmed that Brezhnev was not there. Biden's transition team did not respond to a request for comment.

Biden has faced scrutiny before over claims about his foreign adventures. During the Democratic primary race earlier this year, he repeatedly asserted that he was arrested in apartheid South Africa while trying to visit Nelson Mandela in prison. US newspapers investigated and [debunked the story](#) and Biden eventually acknowledged: "I wasn't arrested, I was stopped. I was not able to move where I wanted to go."

Brezhnev's cameo in his memoirs lends a young Biden gravitas. But at the time, said Kozovoi, Biden was just "one tiny little cog in the Carter 'detente machine'", sent to Moscow to help allay domestic concerns about the Salt II treaty. Few Soviet officials mention the president-elect in their memoirs, and Soviet press clippings curtly note the senators arrivals in Leningrad and Moscow. Bradley recalled the meeting with Kosygin, which lasted three hours, as substantive, and said the delegates also met with foreign ministry officials and had lunch with a senior military official.

But in those early trips, Biden cultivated a pugnacious style in his meetings with Soviet leaders that became his hallmark. If Donald Trump came to Moscow chasing real estate deals and Bernie Sanders sought to join the peoples of Burlington and Yaroslavl, then Biden's formative years here were the decades he spent showing he could go toe-to-toe with Kremlin officials on arms control.



Joseph Biden (right) sits opposite Andrei Gromyko, chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, during negotiations in Moscow in 1988 to ratify the international nuclear forces treaty. Photograph: TASS/Getty Images

It is a role he'll reprise next month with Putin as the new strategic arms reduction treaty, a deal he helped move through the Senate as vice-president in 2010, is set to expire.

"I'm from Delaware and we have a saying – you can't shit a shitter," Biden told Kosygin in 1979, Levin recalled. Asked how it had sounded in Russian, an interpreter said: "You can't fool a comrade." Biden apparently liked the phrase to repeat it nearly verbatim – "you can't bullshit a bullshitter" – during his next trip in 1984.

But he is remembered in Russia as a proponent of detente who sought to bridge the gap between Moscow and Washington even as relations collapsed in the early 1980s. Pessimists say the mutual distrust now may be worse.

“If we had the Biden of the 1970s and 80s [in the White House], people would not be worried,” said Sergey Karaganov, a prominent foreign policy expert who said he had played a minor role in organising trips attended by Biden in the 1980s.

He recalled the impression Biden made then: “American, good-looking, establishmentarian left-of-centre”.

Biden’s appeal is immediately visible in a [1979 television interview](#) that went viral in Russia after his reelection. “I think the prospects for Soviet-American relations are good,” Biden says earnestly before jumping into shop talk on Salt II (it ultimately failed but both sides abided by limits on the number and type of missiles until 1986).

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980 sent relations between the White House and the Kremlin into a deep freeze. Biden only returned to Moscow in 1984, joining then-senator William Cohen to bring a private message from Ronald Reagan regarding a “new approach to arms control”.

By all accounts, the two took their mission deadly seriously. Reagan wrote that the two had “been to Russia and are all wrapped up in ‘arms reductions’. I suspect that at least one of them (J.B.) doesn’t believe I’m sincere about wanting them.” Two years later, Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev seriously discussed eliminating all nuclear weapons during the Reykjavik summit.

Biden returned with a delegation and his son in tow in 1988 to discuss ratification of the international nuclear forces treaty with Gromyko, his Soviet counterpart. The treaty had already been signed. “This was pretty much a well-organised, pre-orchestrated and pre-engineered meeting where everyone watches his language,” Prokofiev, the translator, said. The INF, which in effect banned nuclear missiles that could be launched from the Soviet Union into [Europe](#) and vice versa, is one of several key agreements that the US has left under Trump.

Biden's next big visit to Moscow would not come for another 20 years, by which time Putin had dominated Russia's politics for a decade and even a reset of relations had soured. The conversation had shifted since the cold war, too, from arms control and military balance to questions about democracy promotion and the economy.

But Bradley said that decades of policy experience were still relevant. "Joe is not manipulatable," he said, recalling Trump's meeting with Putin. "If there was a chance for a new relationship with Russia, it really stands a better chance of coming with Biden than with Trump."

Sizing up Putin in 2011, Biden recalled giving him some straight talk: "Mr Prime Minister, I'm looking into your eyes, I don't think you have a soul." (In remarks from 2001 that have aged poorly, George W Bush said he had looked into Putin's eyes and seen his "soul".)

"We understand each other," Putin responded, according to Biden.

But he had also told opposition leaders (and by some accounts Putin himself) that he should not run for a third term.

Several Russian analysts said that had crossed a red line.

"Putin remembers personal attacks," said Karaganov. "He will never forget that."

Global development

## 'What about justice?': Chagos Islanders pin their hopes on Biden

Decades after the US took over the territory for a military base, families separated and forced to leave their homes are still waiting for compensation



Laurenza Piron was permanently separated from her family when she was sent to the Seychelles 50 years ago. Photograph: Katie McQue

When Laurenza Piron was forced from her home in the [Chagos Islands](#) in 1970, she was sent on a boat to the Seychelles. Her parents and siblings were sent to Mauritius. It was two decades before they located one another again, and even then none of them could afford a reunion. So Piron, now 76, never saw her family again.

“I wanted to go, but I didn’t have the money,” says Piron. “Compensation should have been paid. If it had, there wouldn’t be such hardship.”

Piron was among 1,500 people made to leave [the Chagos Islands](#), on the Indian Ocean archipelago, by the US and British militaries. The UK, which

owned the land, had leased the largest island, Diego Garcia, to the US to build a military base.

Last year, the international court of justice in The Hague [ruled](#) that the continued British occupation of the islands was illegal.

In the 1970s, the UK gave the Mauritian government £4.65m to distribute to the Chagossians in compensation, but no money was paid to people sent to the [Seychelles](#).



This photograph from 1971 shows people on Diego Garcia island receiving the news that they are to be deported to Mauritius and Seychelles.  
Photograph: Chagos Refugee Group/Getty

Those exiled are hoping that will change as they file a new petition through the US Foreign Claims Act, which awards compensation for noncombatants' injury, death or property damage by US military personnel overseas.

"Based on the [2019] [UN ruling](#) there is an illegal occupation of the Chagos Islands," says Jonathan Levy, a US-based lawyer representing the Chagossians in the petition. "We're saying to the government: you owe damages to the Chagossian people for operating a military base on their property."

In October, the US Department of the Air Force rebuffed a first attempt, stating: “It has been determined that payment of the claims is not in the interests of the US government.” However, the legal team is planning a new legal action after president-elect Joe Biden takes office in January.

“The incoming Biden administration seeks to change US foreign policy, and the Chagos archipelago is a good place to begin by recognising the claims of the Chagossians to their property and land and by paying a small restitution, given the immense value the rent-free use of Diego Garcia has provided the United States for the past five decades,” says Levy.

Travel brochures depict the Seychelles as an island paradise, an oasis of golden beaches and crystal clear waters. But for Chagossians, it has been a place of discrimination, poverty and homelessness.



Jean-Joseph Piron slept beneath a coconut tree when his family arrived in the Seychelles when he was a child. Photograph: Katie McQue

When Piron first came to the Seychelles with her husband and three children, they slept on the ground beneath a coconut tree.

“To go to school with no shoes, it would take an hour to walk there,” says Laurenza’s son, Jean-Joseph, 55, who was five years old when he arrived on the island. “On the way, we would pick fruits from the trees and that would

be our breakfast because we had no money to eat. Concentrating in lessons was impossible on an empty stomach," he explains, through tears.

## Timeline

### **Chagos Islands**

Show Hide

1793

#### **France establishes colony**

Diego Garcia is made home to a French colony using slave labour on plantations

1814

#### **Britain takes control**

[Mauritius](#) and the Chagos Islands are ceded to Britain at the end of the Napoleonic Wars in the Treaty of Paris

1965

#### **Becomes part of British Indian Ocean Territory**

Before independence is granted to Mauritius, the UK separates the Chagos archipelago from Mauritius, creating British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT).

1966

#### **Military deal with US**

Britain allows the US to use the largest island, Diego Garcia, as a military base in exchange for a discount on the purchase of Polaris missiles.

1971

#### **Expulsions begin**

Forced expulsion of around 1,500 Chagossians begin as access to food supplies is restricted. Most are moved to Mauritius or the Seychelles.

1978

### **Compensation is offered**

Chagossian refugees in Mauritius were paid compensation, and more offers followed contingent on them signing agreements not to return to their homes.

2002

### **Resettlement to the UK**

British passports are granted to some Chagossians. Many move from Mauritius to Crawley. A UK government feasibility study into resettlement concludes it would be expensive and difficult.

2010

### **Wikileaks revelations**

A Marine Protected Area is established around the Chagos Islands. [Documents published by Wikileaks](#) show a UK diplomat saying that “establishing a marine park would, in effect, put paid to resettlement claims of the archipelago’s former residents”.

25 February 2019

### **Government actions ruled illegal**

[International Court of Justice rules](#) that the agreement to separate the Chagos Islands from Mauritius in 1965 prior to decolonisation was unlawful.

22 May 2019

### **UN defeat for the UK**

The United Nations general assembly [overwhelmingly backs a motion condemning Britain's occupation of the islands](#). The vote, which left the UK diplomatically isolated, set a six-month deadline for the UK to withdraw from the archipelago and for it to be reunified with neighbouring Mauritius.

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Many Chagossians in the Seychelles were taunted by the locals, told to go back to where they came from. They were called *anara*, which meant uncivilised, dirty and unvaccinated.

The family have always struggled to make ends meet. Piron's husband found work as a fisherman, and eventually the family was able to build a small homestead in the forest, not far from the coconut trees they had slept under.

"We never lacked food on the [Chagos] islands. If we needed fish, we would go get some from the ocean," says Piron, but she adds: "Life is hard here, very hard. I struggle."

The military chased my family with guns. They didn't want to leave the island. It's a sad story

*Cyril Bertrand, 72*

Georgette Gendron, 67, from Diego Garcia, came to the Seychelles aged 12, with her parents and five siblings. With nowhere to go, the entire family lived in a cramped single room in the basement of a relative's house.

"There was no house, no food, nothing. Can you imagine being told to just go, with no place, with all those kids. We were just like refugees," says Gendron. "My mama was very miserable. She had health problems. There was a time when papa didn't have work."

Cyril Bertrand, 72, happened to be in the Seychelles for medical treatment when the Chagos Islands were closed. His family – seven siblings and his father – were sent to Mauritius.

"The military chased my family with guns. They didn't want to leave the island. It's a sad story," he says.

Bertrand settled in the Seychelles, got married, found a job, and was among the few who could afford to visit his family in Mauritius. Many Chagossians aren't so fortunate, he says.



Cyril Bertrand, now 72, was permanently separated from his family. He was in the Seychelles for medical treatment when the rest of his family were deported to Mauritius. Photograph: Katie McQue

Many of the first generation of the exiled population are elderly, poor and coming to terms with the prospect of never seeing their homeland again. “Most of them die here in Seychelles,” says Bertrand. “They never get to Mauritius. Even though they have family there.”

In 2016, the British government unveiled a £40m support package for community projects for Chagossians living in the UK, Mauritius and Seychelles, to be paid over a decade. So far less than [2% of this fund has been distributed.](#)

The Chagossians interviewed said they had not benefited from the money.

“Compensation would mean we could have had a better life here,” says Gendron. “The wrongs should be corrected. What about justice?”

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[Donald Trump](#)

## **Alternative facts, witch-hunt, bigly: the Trump era in 32 words and phrases**

His rally speeches and manic Twitter feed conjured new slogans and insults or revived incendiary words



Donald Trump. Photograph: Tom Brenner/Reuters

Donald Trump. Photograph: Tom Brenner/Reuters



*[David Smith](#) in Washington*

*[@smithinamerica](#)*

Mon 28 Dec 2020 02.00 EST

Donald Trump not only changed much about campaigning, governing and the ways of Washington, even the language of American politics has altered during the Republican's tenure. Trump's rollicking rally speeches and manic Twitter feed conjured new slogans and insults or revived incendiary words with long histories; his allies, opponents and chroniclers searched for new phrases to describe the indescribable. Here is a glossary of some of them from the past five years:

### **alternative facts**

[Coined by Kellyanne Conway](#), the White House counselor, during [a Meet the Press interview](#) in January 2017 to defend press secretary Sean Spicer's the false assertion that Trump drew the biggest inauguration crowd ever. Together these formed the original sin of the Trump presidency, culminating in his coronavirus and election denialism.

### **alt-right**

A far-right movement based on white nationalism and antisemitism. One of its leaders, Richard Spencer, described it as “identity politics for white

people”. When Steve Bannon was running Breitbart News, he called it “the platform for the alt-right”. Bannon went on to become Trump’s chief strategist during his first race for the White House.

## American carnage

[In his inaugural address](#), Trump painted a dark picture of poverty in inner cities, rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones and crime and gangs and drugs, promising: “This American carnage stops right here and stops right now.” But the phrase came back to haunt him, especially when the coronavirus pandemic killed hundreds of thousands of people.

## America first

Trump’s central promise of self-interest [galvanised his base](#) and dismayed critics. He followed through on withdrawing from the Paris climate accords, renegotiating trade deals and leaving the US isolated on the global stage. The phrase also had jarring associations with a 1940s movement to keep the US out of the second world war that came to be accused of antisemitism.

## Antifa

An amorphous and leftwing anti-fascist movement demonised by Trump and fellow Republicans. Its followers have used aggressive tactics including physical confrontations to intimidate groups they regard as authoritarian or racist. [Joe Biden remarked](#) during a presidential debate: “Antifa is an idea, not an organization.”

## bigly

Legend has it that Trump first deployed this word during the first presidential debate against Hillary Clinton in 2016. “I’m going to cut taxes bigly, and you’re going to raise taxes bigly,” he said, or at least that was how [some people heard it](#). Others reckoned he must have said “big league”. But the word “bigly” does appear in the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

## China virus

Trump complained that Covid-19 had multiple names but more often than not settled on the racist terms “China virus” and “kung flu”, putting Asian Americans at risk of hostility and persecution. He insisted: “Asian Americans are VERY angry at what China has done to our Country, and the World.” But even Conway rejected the term “China virus” as “wrong” and “highly offensive”.

### **collusion**

The first half of Trump’s presidency was dominated by special counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation into his campaign’s alleged collusion with Russia. In the end, Mueller stopped short of asserting that collusion took place – prompting Trump’s defenders to cry “collusion delusion” – but did make a persuasive case that the president obstructed justice.

### **deep state**

Trump pushed the conspiracy theory that bureaucrats within the political system effectively run a secret government that plots against democratically elected officials. Others came to see civil servants, judges and national security personnel as a bulwark of democracy. “Thank God for the deep state,” John McLaughlin, a former deputy and acting director of the CIA, [remarked last year.](#)

### **disinformation**

Typically defined as the dissemination of deliberately false information, it took flight with Russia’s social media attack during the 2016 election. Trump pushed disinformation about the economy, coronavirus, election and countless other topics. The willingness of Republicans and conservative media to do likewise raised fears of a fundamental breakdown in trust in government institutions and the media.

### **enemy of the people**

In a characteristic shock tactic, Trump used this [historically loaded phrase](#) regularly to attack the media. Its lineage dates back to 1789 when French revolutionaries threw it at those who opposed them. In the 20th century it

was embraced by autocrats from Stalin to Mao to justify their bloody purges. The danger of such rhetoric was evident in Trump supporter [T-shirts that said:](#) “Rope. Tree. Journalist.”

### **fake news**

The term was popularised by BuzzFeed News media editor Craig Silverman to describe unverified claims and online rumours. But in January 2017, Trump, then president-elect, [told CNN's Jim Acosta](#) at a press conference: “You are fake news.” From that moment on, he coopted and weaponised the phrase to dismiss media reports he did not like.

### **failing**

One of Trump’s favourites on Twitter and elsewhere, particularly when referring to the New York Times. In fact the Times thrived during his presidency and now has more than 7 million paid subscribers. He remained obsessed with the coverage of him in his home town paper.

### **false and misleading**

This became frequent media shorthand for Trump’s distortions. The Washington Post’s fact checkers even kept count: by 11 September, [it noted](#), he had “made 23,035 false or misleading claims”. But from January 2017 onwards, when the New York Times [ran the headline](#), Meeting With Top Lawmakers, Trump Repeats an Election Lie, media outlets became bolder about calling a lie a lie.

### **globalist**

This was the dark side of “America first”. Trump’s defenders claimed he was using the term to condemn globalisation and its devastating effects on American workers. But critics heard a dog whistle for racist, antisemitic and antigovernment conspiracy theorists including the alt-right. George Soros, a billionaire philanthropist, was among the targets of anti-globalist bigotry.

### **hoax**

Trump described climate change, the Russia investigation and his impeachment as a hoax. Brian Stelter, host of CNN's Reliable Sources programme, [noted in August](#) that the president had already used the word more than 250 times this year. When Stelter published a book, he naturally called it Hoax: Donald Trump, Fox News, and the Dangerous Distortion of Truth.

## Javanka

A conflation of Jared Kushner and his wife Ivanka Trump, both senior advisers to the president, both lightning rods for scorn and ridicule. Hopes that, as supposed New York liberals, they would restrain Trump's worst impulses were dashed over and over. "They are the Faustian poster couple of the Trump presidency," [wrote Frank Bruni](#) in the New York Times.

## lock her up!

Along with "build that wall", this became the classic chant at Trump's rallies in 2016, when he ran against Hillary Clinton and, more unexpectedly, persisted through to 2020, when Joe Biden proved harder to categorise. The phrase was condemned for normalising the idea of a president seeking to jail his opponent.

## loser

This is one of Trump's go to insults, slung at everyone from the media to the Lincoln Project to former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg. But it rebounded on him last September when [the Atlantic magazine reported](#) that he had referred to America's war dead as "losers" and "suckers". Two months later, Trump, who was all about "winning", became a loser himself in November's election.

## Maga

Short for "Make America great again", a slogan borrowed from Ronald Reagan that Trump made his own at rallies, [on hats](#) and on endless other merchandise. The "Maga nation" became a way to describe a country within

a country, one that was seething with anger, nativist populism and contempt for liberals and fact-based reality.

## **Never Trumper**

The Never Trump movement was a failed attempt among Republicans and other conservatives to deny Trump the party's nomination in 2016. But it marched on through his presidency and found expression in groups such as [the Lincoln Project](#) and Republican Voters Against Trump that opposed him in 2020.

## **norms**

Trump bent, broke, shattered, shredded and trampled on norms from start to finish, prompting the lament: "This is not normal." It was another way of saying that he crossed every line, pushed every envelope and violated every unwritten rule. It led some commentators to suggest that at least some of those rules [should now be written down](#).

## **owning the libs**

A symptom of negative partisanship, this political performance art is all about goading, shocking and outraging liberals, especially on social media. Its patron saint was [Trump's son Don Jr.](#) "He is there only to engage in that performative dickery that is lib owning in the Trump world," said Rick Wilson, a co-founder of the Lincoln Project.

## **quid pro quo**

The Latin phrase, which means "something given or received for something else", was [uttered frequently](#) during Trump's impeachment hearings. He denied promising to unfreeze military aid to Ukraine in return for that country announcing an investigation into Biden.

## **resistance**

The resistance to Trump's presidency made a stunning debut with the women's march in January 2017 and just kept going, energising grassroots groups such as Indivisible, diverse political newcomers such as [Alexandria](#)

Ocasio-Cortez and protests over Trump's supreme court picks. The Resistance also happened to be the name of the good guys in the new Star Wars trilogy.

### **sad!**

Another familiar Trump refrain, as in “Governor Cuomo has completely lost control. Sad!”, “Biden will also raise your taxes like never before. Sad!” and “These are “Organized Groups” that have nothing to do with George Floyd. Sad!” History will surely judge he did more for exclamation marks than any other president.

### **seriously not literally**

“[T]he press takes him literally, but not seriously,” [wrote Salena Zito](#) in the Atlantic magazine in September 2016, “his supporters take him seriously, but not literally.” This phrase hovered over much early debate about the meaning of Trump, although critics came to argue that his malign conduct should be taken both literally and seriously.

### **soul**

In 2018 historian Jon Meacham wrote the book The Soul of America: The Battle for Our Better Angels. Biden, an admirer of the book, characterised his presidential campaign as a [“battle for the soul of America”](#) (Meacham reportedly had a hand in his speeches) and tweeted on 16 December: “In this battle for the soul of America, democracy prevailed.” Right on cue, the latest Pixar animated film is called, simply, Soul.

### **split screen**

A well-worn phrase that captured the division, partisanship and polarisation of the Trump years, especially the notion of two distinct media bubbles. There were moments when CNN and Fox News seemed to occupy different universes. Carl Bernstein, whose reporting on the Watergate scandal with Bob Woodward helped bring down Richard Nixon, said America had entered a [“a cold civil war”](#).

### **triggered**

This word became a football in the Trump-fuelled culture wars. People have legitimate reasons to feel “triggered” by examples of racism or other abuses. But rightwing trolls seized on terms like “triggered” and “woke” to mock liberals as “snowflakes”. Donald Trump Jr [penned a book](#) called Triggered: How the Left Thrives on Hate and Wants to Silence Us.

### **unprecedented**

Arguably the most overused word of the past five years. A CNN book chronicling the 2016 campaign was entitled Unprecedented: The Election That Changed Everything; just last week, on 15 December, [Biden accused Trump](#) of an “unprecedented assault on democracy”. Weary journalists were left scrambling for synonyms.

### **witch-hunt**

The phrase, which conjures images of women being put on trial and thrown into water amid hysteria reminiscent of Arthur Miller’s play [The Crucible](#), became a staple of Trump’s defence against the Russia investigation and Ukraine-related impeachment. Casting himself as a perpetual victim, more than one tweet simply yelled: “Witch-hunt!”

Biodiversity: what happened next? Plants

## Call the cavalry! Horses ride to rescue of an inner city garden

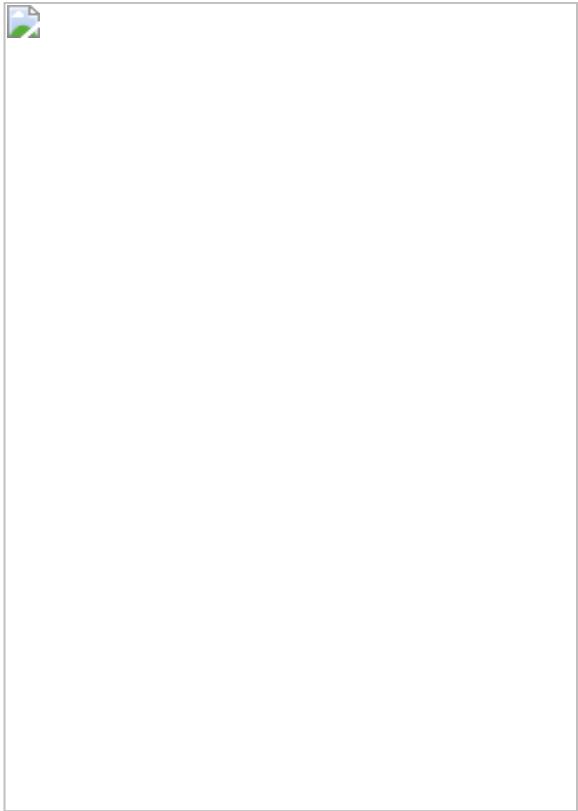
Mounted City of London police receive a surprise order: to help trample in wildflower seeds at the Barbican

- [‘Nature survives in the tiniest corners’: the City of London’s wild heart](#)
- [Read more in our series Biodiversity: what happened next?](#)



Plant force ... PC Ben Ballard, right, riding Clyde, and PC Jo Brown on Iris create divots and trample in seeds at the Barbican Wildlife Garden.  
Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Plant force ... PC Ben Ballard, right, riding Clyde, and PC Jo Brown on Iris create divots and trample in seeds at the Barbican Wildlife Garden.  
Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian  
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[About this content](#)

[Phoebe Weston](#)

[@phoeb0](#)

Mon 28 Dec 2020 01.30 EST

It's not often that the City of London's police horses are asked to trample on someone's garden. But when the request came, it wasn't made by a spiteful neighbour but a group of community wildlife gardeners who wanted divots in their grass.

"Normally, we get terribly told off for going anywhere near grass," says PC Ben Ballard, who rode Clyde around [Barbican Wildlife Garden](#) at the

beginning of December, with his colleague Jo Brown riding Iris. “This assignment today is a particularly unusual one – unfortunately we did some offloading of manure on the way because they might actually have appreciated that.”

The garden’s lead volunteer, Jo Rodgers, wanted grazing livestock to come and stamp in autumn seeds but there are none in London’s financial district. Instead, she called in the local police horses who came and walked around it for 30 minutes as part of their community engagement work. “In the countryside, you graze animals after you’ve cut the grass to help churn up the soil. We tried to think about getting in sheep or goats, and then we thought, ‘Horses!, we have them locally!'” she says.



Poppies, corncockles, oxeye daisies and cornflowers growing in the Barbican Wildlife Garden. Photograph: Allison Parkes/Handout

Grazing animals play an essential role in maintaining traditional wildflower meadows because their hooves create dips and furrows that help push seeds into the soil and create microhabitats. More than 97% of the UK's wildflower meadows have been lost since the second world war.

The [Barbican garden is a fifth of the size](#) of a football pitch and half a mile from St Paul's Cathedral. It was created on the remains of a building

bombed during the blitz. The meadow is about 10 years old, and already has poppies, cornflowers, oxeye daisies, bristly ox-tongue and marjoram, most of which are self-seeded. Toadflax and viper's-bugloss are new arrivals this year. "When you walk in, you think: 'Oh, just a bit of grass,' but it's an awful lot more than a bit of grass," says Rodgers. "You have to be on your hands and knees to see them, but we've probably counted 200 species of invertebrate."

As well as pushing in seeds, keeping the grass nibbled down in autumn gives wildflowers a better chance of coming up, and little gaps in the sward make space for flowers to get established. Animal dung is also a good fertiliser.

Those horses at the Barbican are a fantastic reminder of how animals and plants make our landscape what we want it to be

*Phoebe Miles, Plantlife*

"I think it's a wonderful thing to think that traditional land management practices are being remembered in the heart of our cities," says Phoebe Miles, a Magnificent Meadows project manager at PlantLife. "The image of those horses at the Barbican centre is a fantastic reminder of how animals and plants very much make our landscape what we want it to be. And that we can reintroduce them if we think creatively."



PCs Ballard and Brown with Clyde and Iris at the garden, built on a second world war bomb site. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Without access to grazing animals – and with horses not recommended for the average garden due to their heavy hooves – Miles recommends [getting people to trample in seed instead](#). Animals don't make an even, homogeneous cut – unlike the blade of a mower – and Miles says you can replicate this patchy, mosaic effect by doing “a little bit of a bad job” of the mowing. “Put your mower on a couple of different settings to have slightly different heights, and also leave a patch of longer grass somewhere. That gives invertebrates a little refuge,” she says.

['Nature survives in the tiniest corners': the City of London's wild heart](#)

[Read more](#)

PlantLife has just received a [£900,000 grant](#) as part of the government’s Green Recovery Challenge fund to restore 500 hectares of species-rich grassland in England within the next 18 months.

For Clyde and Iris, who are based at Wood Street police station stables, a trip to the Barbican garden was a change from their usual counter-terrorism duties, which involve standing around landmark sites to deter potential hostile reconnaissance. They also fight crime by being in areas with a high incidence of phone snatches, bike thefts and shoplifting. “We’ve got a nice eagle-eye position,” says Ballard.

Clyde, an 11-year-old Clydesdale cross, and Iris, a nine-year-old Irish draught, enjoy meeting people but they have a threshold below which they get bored, “just like children”, says Ballard.

“During the big lockdowns, we’re kind of one of the friendly faces, we’re the only people some people see,” adds Ballard. “So we reassure the community and make sure people are OK.”

*Find more [age of extinction coverage here](#), and follow biodiversity reporters [Phoebe Weston](#) and [Patrick Greenfield](#) on Twitter for all the latest news and features*

## 2020.12.29 - In pictures

- [Monday's best photos Storm Bella cleanup and a ray of light](#)
- [England weather Bank holiday snow replaces storms](#)
- [Scotland Dogs to the rescue](#)
- [Ice swims and animals in the snow The weekend's best photographs](#)
- [The big picture The women of Water Valley, Mississippi](#)
- [2020 visions Daily drawings of a very strange year](#)

# **Storm Bella cleanup and a ray of light: Monday's best photos**

The sun reflects off the windows of One World Trade Center in New York City. Photograph: Gary Hershorn/Getty Images

# **England weather: bank holiday snow replaces storms – in pictures**

Snowfall in Keele. Photograph: Carl Recine/Reuters



[The Guardian picture essay](#)

## Dogs to the rescue in Scotland – in pictures

Search and rescue dog, Molly, looks for a mock casualty.

Best photographs of the day

## **Ice swims and animals in the snow: the weekend's best photographs**

Red deer stop in the snow alongside the A82 in Glencoe, Scotland.  
Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA

The big picture[Knitting](#)

## The big picture: the women of Water Valley, Mississippi



From the series Knit Club by Carolyn Drake, published by TBW Books.  
Photograph: © The artist/Magnum Photos

From the series Knit Club by Carolyn Drake, published by TBW Books.  
Photograph: © The artist/Magnum Photos

Photographer Carolyn Drake finally found a way to capture the town she had fallen for after she joined the local knit club



[Tim Adams](#)

[@TimAdamsWrites](#)

Sun 27 Dec 2020 02.00 EST

Water Valley in Mississippi is a town of about 3,000 people. People move there or stay there because they fall in love with the gothic revival Victorian houses, which exist in various states of renovation or decay. One of those people was photographer [Carolyn Drake](#), who settled in Water Valley a few years ago, having returned from a decade of travelling in Russia and Asia, including a spell living and photographing in Uighur villages on the edge of the Taklamakan desert.

Drake spent two years in Water Valley hardly picking up her camera. She wasn't sure how to photograph the place without it looking like a New Yorker's view of "the south". It was only after she became part of a knitting circle, an insider, sitting on her friend Katharine's porch drinking IPA, stitching rugs, listening to true crime podcasts, that she found a way to do that. *Knit Club*, her strange and powerful book of photographs of the women of Water Valley, is the result.

This picture, in which her fellow knitters and quilters are obscured by flowers, captures one of the themes of her book, an extreme playfulness with ideas of motherhood and femininity – ideas she had tended “to run away

from with her camera". In the collaborative community of the knit club she began to question why she resisted those ideas. Some of her photographs are taken in abandoned houses, some in dusky woodland; several suggest mysterious sisterly ritual. In most, Drake has suggested, the women's faces are obscured to avoid replicating the male gaze. There are no captions, but brief fragments of quotation in the book, from the knitters. Katharine, for example, says: "I live right in the middle of town, so everybody sees us sitting out here. A couple of my friends' ex-husbands, they just hate it. They're like: 'These chicks are up to no good.' Maybe they're right."

*Knit Club is published by TBW Books*

# **2020 visions: daily drawings of a very strange year – in pictures**

A detail from Day 134 by artist Jolie Goodman.

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Brexit

## UK shoppers face Brexit duties on holiday and online purchases

UK shoppers may have parcels held at post office until fees paid as red tape introduced from 1 January



The Calais Wine Superstore in 2019. Unlimited alcohol allowances are ending, heralding the death of 'booze cruises'. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

The Calais Wine Superstore in 2019. Unlimited alcohol allowances are ending, heralding the death of 'booze cruises'. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

*Lisa O'Carroll* Brexit correspondent  
[@lisaocarroll](https://twitter.com/lisaocarroll)

Mon 28 Dec 2020 12.40 EST

Holidaymakers or online shoppers who buy items from the EU that are valued at more than £390 will have to pay customs duties, the government has revealed.

VAT and handling fees may also apply on some items, while parcels may be held up in post offices until all duties and fees have been cleared by the recipient in the UK.

The additional red tape and charges from 1 January will be one of the [most visible consequences of Brexit for consumers](#), hitting them in just the same way as business, albeit on a smaller scale, with implications for online shopping.

It will also herald the end of [“booze cruises” to the wine shops of Calais](#) to stockpile drink for special occasions, as unlimited alcohol allowances are ending. Alcohol from the EU for personal consumption will be restricted to 42 litres of beer, 18 litres of wine and 4 litres of spirits or liquors over 22% in alcohol. Personal tobacco allowances will be limited to 200 cigarettes.

Posting to friends and family in the EU including Ireland is also going to become more bureaucratic. Those sending parcels from 1 January will be required to complete [customs declaration forms](#), CN22 or CN23, detailing the type of good, its value and its weight.

**CUSTOMS DECLARATION**  
Complete in **BLOCK CAPITALS**.  
Further guidance at [royalmail.com/customs](http://royalmail.com/customs)

**CN 22**  
May be opened officially  
Great Britain

Sender's Name			
Sender's Address & Postcode			
Contents Tick all that apply	<input type="checkbox"/> Gift	<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Sample	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Documents	<input type="checkbox"/> Returned Goods	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sale of Goods	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
Description of contents	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Value (GBP)
Total			
Commercial items only; if known enter HS tariff no. & origin			
If applicable, VAT reg number			
I, the undersigned, whose name and address are given on the item, certify that the particulars given in this declaration are correct and that this item does not contain any dangerous article or articles prohibited by legislation or by postal or customs regulations.			
Sign & Date			
	CN22A	(Jan 20)	

CN22 form that must be completed for all parcel post to the EU from 29 December. Photograph: Lisa O'Carroll

Letters and documents can be sent to the EU as normal but the Post Office is advising customers to complete customs declaration forms on all goods destined for the EU from 29 December so the parcels are Brexit-compliant on arrival.

Royal Mail says all consumers who receive goods from the EU will have to ensure they comply with customs regulations and warn they may have to pay duty, VAT or handling fees before they can pick up their package.

This could have inconvenient consequences for online shopping for UK customers buying goods from the EU and for EU residents buying goods from the UK.

Newly published government guidance on [bringing.goods into the UK](#) spells out the post-Brexit rules.

Goods up to the value of £390, or £270 for those arriving by private plane or boat, will be allowed through the green channel at airports. The notice states: “If a single item is worth more than your allowance you pay duty or tax on its full value, not just the value above the allowance.”

Those importing goods purchased on a holiday or a business trip will be charged 2.5% duty on goods worth between £390 and £630, with other rates applying for more expensive goods depending on the type of good. Any amount over will incur excise duty and VAT.

There may also be VAT charges and handling fees depending on the value of the item they are sending and whether it is a gift or commercial goods, said Royal Mail.

It said: “For items under £135 (with the exception of gifts), VAT will be collected directly when they buy the goods online. For goods with a value over £135 (and gifts over £39), Royal Mail may collect the VAT and customs duties from the customer prior to delivery. These charges are applied on behalf of HM Revenue & Customs.”

The government says it is “well placed” to manage the impact of changes to customs processing which already apply to goods going to non-EU

countries, adding: “We are working closely with government and other stakeholders to ensure that all cross-border mail continues to flow efficiently.”

[Coronavirus](#)

# England school reopening in doubt with ministers divided

Education secretary under pressure to rethink plan for millions of pupils to return

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

[Jessica Elgot](#), [Ben Quinn](#) and [Natalie Grover](#)

Mon 28 Dec 2020 14.02 EST First published on Mon 28 Dec 2020 05.44 EST



Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, is said to be facing opposition from senior colleagues alarmed at the prospect of reopening schools.  
Photograph: James Veysey/Rex/Shutterstock

Plans for millions of pupils in England to begin a staggered return to school from next week hang in the balance as a debate rages within the government over the risk of a surge of infections, with the NHS already [buckling under the strain](#).

The education secretary, Gavin Williamson, is understood to be mounting a “rearguard action” against what one source described as “senior colleagues” who have been alarmed by advice that reopening schools will make it impossible to keep [the R number](#) below one.

Opposition to schools reopening next week is also growing from teaching unions. The UK’s largest has said the reopening of schools in England should be delayed for at least two weeks amid mounting concern about the new strain of Covid-19 [spreading from London and the south-east](#).

The pressure grew as NHS England said it had [a record 20,426 people in hospital being treated for Covid-19](#) as of 8am on Monday, surpassing April’s peak of 18,946. Health officials in Wales and Scotland have also said they fear becoming overwhelmed.

Williamson’s allies have been consulting MPs to see if they may publicly come out in favour of schools opening on time. He is understood to be raising concerns about the effect on summer exams in [England](#) if more learning hours are lost.

Play Video

0:41

A-level exams will 'absolutely' go ahead in 2021, says Michael Gove – video

He has privately emphasised he believes school leaders would find it difficult to reopen schools again after a short closure because of the impact on parent and teacher confidence. The Department for Education has said the return to schools is being kept “under review”.

The Cabinet Office minister, [Michael Gove](#), said the government was still confident of its timetable, though he admitted school reopenings involved “trade-offs” with other coronavirus restrictions. There have been reports that the government was advised by the Scientific Advisory Group for

Emergencies (Sage) that keeping schools open in January would make it impossible to keep the R number below 1.

New figures recorded on Monday showed there had been 87,000 deaths involving Covid-19 in the UK. A further 357 people have died, as cases across the UK [rose by 41,385](#) – the highest daily total for new infections.

Gove said he expected year 11 and year 13 pupils to go back to classrooms next week, with the others returning later in the month and all schools with secondary-age pupils “being offered the opportunity” to roll out a mass testing regime from 4 January.

“Teachers and headteachers have been working incredibly hard over the Christmas period since schools broke up in order to prepare for a new testing regime – community testing – in order to make sure that children and all of us are safer,” he told Sky News. “We do keep things under review but that is the plan.”

Gove told the BBC it was “our intention to make sure we can get children back to school as early as possible ... We are talking to teachers and headteachers in order to make sure we can deliver effectively. But we all know that there are trade-offs.”

Boris Johnson has previously refused to rule out further school closures, telling a Downing Street press conference before Christmas he wanted schools to reopen “if we possibly can”.

But headteachers, including those who had spent much of the Christmas break working on how the testing would operate on site, said there was still confusion about how the flagship plan, designed to provide assurances, would work.

“I have no idea how we are going to manage it – there is no clear detail. A DfE webinar on 23 December just quoted from the handbook which landed with us as we broke up,” said Rebecca Poole, the headteacher of Hampton High in London.

Teaching unions called for the publication of updated safety guidance in light of the rapid spread of a new variant and moves to give staff priority access to the vaccine.

“Our worry is that they won’t make the right decision today and do what they have done all the way through the pandemic, which is to take an ideological line and get schools back before the testing programme can be properly put in place,” said Mary Bousted, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union (NEU).

“Many schools will still not be operating the testing programme if they are to open again on 4 January. Then in two or three weeks we would have to go into a longer shutdown as a result.”

While industrial action is not an option, she said the NEU would be strongly advising members that they have a legal right to work in a safe environment.

The general secretary of the NASUWT union, Patrick Roach, wrote to the education secretary to ask that schools be allowed to move to remote learning for all pupils, except those deemed to be vulnerable or the children of key workers, in the highest-tier areas. Roach called for teachers and other staff to be given priority access to the Covid-19 vaccines.

Government deliberations are expected to be influenced by two preprint studies that suggest closing schools is inevitable, including an analysis from London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine researchers who [modelled the impact of the fast-spreading UK variant](#) of Sars-CoV-2, – the virus that causes Covid-19.

They found that the only scenario that reduced the peak intensive care burden below the levels of the first wave was to impose the tier 4 system across England after Boxing Day and close schools until the end of January, as well as vaccinating 2 million people a week.

“If our parameter estimates are correct … it seems like [tier 4] alone isn’t enough, so something else might need to be done on top of that. And we’ve looked at school closures because that’s sort of the next obvious thing to do on top of those restrictions,” said the lead researcher, Dr Nick Davies, who

is a member of the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling (SPI-M), which feeds into Sage.

Susan Michie, a professor of health psychology at University College London and a member of the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Behavioural Science, a Sage subcommittee, said emerging data suggested transmission rates were going up everywhere, hospitals were being overwhelmed and thus the only way forward was a national lockdown, including the closure of schools.

“The government also needs to listen to Sage advice about what needs to happen to make schools safe,” she said.

The Scottish government has said schools in Scotland will only reopen fully on 18 January if the spread of the new strain is managed. In Wales, the majority of pupils are due to have face-to-face teaching again by 11 January.

Robert Halfon, the chair of the education select committee, also said teachers should be given priority for vaccinations to help keep schools open. “When these decisions are made, the risks should also be measured of children being kept at home, the risk to their learning, their mental health and safeguarding, as well as the pressures on parents and their work and mental health.”

Meanwhile, parliament is to extend its recess for an extra week, amid concerns about MPs travelling across the country after the Christmas break. MPs are expected to vote on the extension – which will last until 11 January – when the house is recalled on Wednesday to vote on the EU trade and security agreement.

The shadow education secretary, Kate Green, said parents would be anxious about reports that government scientific advisers had lobbied for extended school closures.

“The government is failing to be honest with parents and pupils about the return of schools in January,” Green said, but stopped short of calling for a delay to the restart.

A government spokesman said: “We want all pupils to return in January as school is the best place for their development and mental health, but as the prime minister has said, it is right that we follow the path of the pandemic and keep our approach under constant review.”

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