

The Guardian

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OpinionUkraine

The Observer view on how Europe can step back from the brink of war

[Observer editorial](#)

A united diplomatic front is the best weapon to persuade Vladimir Putin against invading Ukraine



'It is of paramount importance that Vladimir Putin is forcefully reminded of the severe economic consequences Russia will face.' Photograph: SPUTNIK/Reuters

Sun 13 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

Europe stands on the [brink of war](#). The biggest conflagration since 1945 is now an all-too-real prospect. For many people, this seems incredible. How did we come to this? Are the terrible lessons of the Nazi era, of the Cold War invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, of Bosnia, Kosovo and of previous suppressions of free peoples by tyrannical leaders all now

forgotten? Hopefully not. And yet history, confounding reason, appears set to repeat itself.

As this dread maelstrom spins, the US, Britain and the Nato allies are united in three key respects. First, their intelligence services agree Russia has sufficient [military capability](#) around Ukraine's borders to mount a full-scale invasion, seize the capital, Kyiv, and force a change of government that better suits Moscow's interests. US president Joe Biden suggests an attack could come as early as Wednesday. Second, the western powers are unanimous in blaming this desperate situation on Russia's president. [Vladimir Putin](#), and only Vladimir Putin, they believe, will decide if, when, where and how an invasion takes place. At this point (and contrary to what Biden told the allies), it's unclear whether Putin has made a final decision. This is crucial. It means he may yet be dissuaded. It also means he, pre-eminently, will be to blame if the worst happens.

Third, the 30 Nato countries all agree they will not directly intervene militarily to assist [Ukraine](#). This controversial stance is certain to be re-examined endlessly, whatever happens in the coming days. Ukraine is not a Nato member. There is no legal obligation to help. No one (or almost no one) wants a third world war, as a slightly panicked Biden put it last week. Yet the possibility of being obliged to look on impotently as a young, newly independent, sovereign democracy with an inalienable right to choose its friends and alliances is trampled underfoot sickens the stomach. If this is indeed the outcome, the consequences will be far-reaching. What is the western alliance for, many will ask, if not to defend freedom against unprovoked aggression?

Such inquests are unavoidable and necessary – but will have to await events. Right now, a number of pressing priorities arise. Given the pessimistic intelligence evaluations concerning Putin's intentions, it is imperative the government move with the utmost urgency to ensure the safe [evacuation of British citizens](#) (and non-combatant military personnel and diplomats). In this respect, the Foreign Office has particular responsibility.

It is imperative the government move with the utmost urgency to ensure the safe evacuation of British citizens

There must be no repeat of the chaos that surrounded last year's withdrawal from Afghanistan, when hundreds of Afghans and dual nationals who had every right to expect assistance from Britain were abandoned to the Taliban. As [revealed by the *Observer*](#), thousands of emails pleading for help [went unanswered](#) as the Foreign Office was overwhelmed. This must not happen again. It's not enough simply to advise Britons to leave. Emergency evacuation flights should be laid on as necessary.

Coordinated western diplomatic efforts must also be stepped up to persuade Russia to back off. Biden's phone call with Putin on Saturday should be swiftly followed up. Emmanuel Macron, France's president, is best placed to do so. [When he met Putin](#) in Moscow last week they discussed how to settle some of the main areas of dispute, such as the future status of the eastern Donbas region. Macron should be encouraged to spearhead a diplomatic drive to avert disaster.

If diplomacy is to succeed, it must have the full backing not only of the UN but of all of Nato's leaders. That includes Boris Johnson, who has been outspoken in threatening Russia but has had little to say by way of constructive solutions. Much the same may be said of Britain's foreign secretary, Liz Truss, whose [disastrous diplomatic debut](#) in Moscow last week may have made matters worse. In casting himself as a Churchillian wartime leader at a pivotal moment in world affairs, the prime minister evidently hopes to distract public attention from the police investigation into lockdown partying in Downing Street. This is a vain hope. Johnson has been a marginal figure on the international stage as the Ukraine crisis has unfolded, accurately reflecting post-Brexit Britain's diminished influence. If he thinks the embattled streets of Kyiv offer him an escape route, he is mistaken.

It is of paramount importance, too, that Putin is forcefully reminded of the severe economic consequences Russia will face if he ignores international law, common sense and basic decency by attacking the people of Ukraine. Punitive sanctions on his regime, and him personally, must swiftly ensue – and Germany, Hungary, Austria and other waverers must fall into line. Britain, too, must finally act to curb [Russian money-laundering](#) in London.

It is to be profoundly hoped that [Russia](#) can yet be prevented from making a catastrophic mistake. For whatever doubts exist about Nato, about US motives, and about the wisdom of war-fighting in general – and there are many – the west did not seek nor does it want this fight. Ultimate responsibility plainly lies with Putin and with Putin's lies. This is Putin's conflict.

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OpinionPolice

The Observer view on the damaged credibility of Britain's police

[Observer editorial](#)

The Met's problems will not depart with Cressida Dick, nor are they restricted to London



'Cressida Dick has failed to grapple with the fact that policing attracts recruits with unsavoury motives.' Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Sun 13 Feb 2022 01.30 EST

Constabulary powers in the UK derive from the principle of [policing by consent](#). Articulated by the first commissioners of the Metropolitan police in 1829, it is the principle that the power of the police is granted not through the instruments of the state but by the consent of the public. Police derive their legitimacy solely through the approval and respect of the communities they serve.

The publication of the Macpherson inquiry report into the Met's handling of the murder of the black teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993 was a seminal moment for British policing. It exposed just how far its biggest police force had strayed from the principle of policing by consent and the extent of the appalling levels of institutional racism that had allowed the investigation into a racist murder to be so comprehensively bungled.

The report's findings should have led to a fundamental reset but, in recent years, the full extent of the institutional prejudices that live on in the Met have revealed themselves. Today, black people are nine times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police, up from five times more likely at the time [the report](#) was published in 1999. There have been yet more terrible failings. The rape and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving Met officer, jokingly dubbed "the rapist" by colleagues. The [convictions of officers](#) for [sharing images](#) of two murdered black women, Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman, and using "degrading and sexist" language about them. The failure of Met officers to take seriously the drugging and murder of men lured, using an online dating platform, by [Stephen Port](#), which a jury found allowed more killings to proceed. The [undercover Met officers](#) who lied to women and conducted long-term sexual relationships with them. The misogyny, bullying and sexual harassment revealed in a police watchdog inquiry into [Charing Cross police station](#), dismissed as "banter" by officers.

Many were hopeful that Cressida Dick would bring a change in culture at the Met ... but she has been a poor and defensive leader

Many were hopeful that Cressida Dick would bring a change in culture at the Met when she was appointed as the first female and openly gay commissioner five years ago. However, Dick has been a poor and defensive leader, putting loyalty to her rank and file – even when there is serious wrongdoing – far above her responsibility to win the consent of the public for policing in London. She has [denied there is still institutional racism](#) in the police and dismissed the findings of institutional corruption made by the independent panel that looked into the murder of [Daniel Morgan](#). Rather than engage with the criticism of the police, she has depicted opponents as "[armchair critics](#)". She has failed to grapple with the fact that policing attracts recruits with unsavoury motives who can take the opportunity to

abuse power that a police uniform creates. And she has failed to reform a culture in which loyalty to fellow officers is prized above all else, including professional standards. There are insufficient incentives for officers to build positive relations with local communities and whistleblowing is too often career-ending. Little wonder, then, that she has overseen a decline in trust in policing in the capital, particularly among women.

Dick's resignation, announced last week, is therefore long overdue. However, it would be a mistake to think replacing her is sufficient to reform the problems we see in policing, not just in London but across the country. The public inquiry into the Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust helped set in train a series of reforms to improve patient safety; policing desperately needs a similar light to be shone on its toxic cultures. There must be a statutory inquiry into the state of policing by public consent in England and Wales.

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NotebookUK news

Why not re-erect the statue of Edward Colston and topple it once a year?

[Tim Adams](#)



A report surveying what people wanted to do with the slave trader's memorial contains a few unusual suggestions



‘Those who believed it should be seen horizontally and graffitied, outnumbered those who believed it should be cleaned and upstanding.’

Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

Sat 12 Feb 2022 12.00 EST

Last week’s We Are Bristol History Commission report into the toppling of Edward Colston’s statue made [fascinating reading](#), not least because it put a credible number on the strength of feeling on either side of the most heated “culture war” – among those who wanted the statue toppled and those outraged by the act.

Nearly 14,000 people, more than half from [Bristol](#), responded to the commission’s invitation to complete a detailed survey on their feelings about the events of June 2020. Three-quarters agreed with the idea that the slave trader’s statue should remain on permanent display in a Bristol museum, while only 12% thought it should be restored to its plinth. Those who believed it should be seen horizontally and graffitied, in the state it was recovered from the harbour, outnumbered those who believed it should be cleaned and upstanding by five to one.

Some of the best reactions, however, came from those respondents who offered compromise solutions, novel ways of keeping both statue-dunkers

and pearl-clutchers happy. One of these suggested that the statue be split in two, “with one half of it returned to the plinth and the other half thrown back in the river”. Best of all, perhaps, was the proposition that “(after updating the plinth with an accurate plaque) we put Colston back up. Then once every year on the anniversary of his toppling we have a festival where we pull him down again and ceremonially throw him in the river.” What’s not to like?

You do the maths



Secrets of the universe or just a lot of geeky jokes? Stephen Hawking's blackboard on display at the Science Museum. Photograph: Isidora Bojovic/Science Museum Group

In 1980, Stephen Hawking was confident that a “final unified theory” of “life, the universe and everything” would be found in the next two decades. At a conference that year he assembled the theoretical physicists who seemed closest to establishing the idea of “supersymmetry”, linking the very smallest particles in the universe with the very largest forces. A blackboard from that conference, which preserves the doodlings of some of the world’s greatest minds, [went on display](#) last week in a new Hawking exhibit at the Science Museum in London. That it contains not killer equations but a series of crap in-jokes about the participants at the conference confirms my own unified theory: that Douglas Adams’s *Hitchhiker* books had nearly as much

to say about our ultimate place in the cosmos as those of his more illustrious contemporaries.

Get down on it



‘I’d activate a favourite (alarmingly 1980s) playlist and dance around the kitchen island like nobody was watching.’ Photograph: Michael Crockett-VIEW/Alamy

Having started and abandoned a doomed series of “must get fit” regimes – couch to 5k and quickly back to couch – I thought I had stumbled on an inspired solution to my horribly sedentary work habits a month or two ago. My plan was this: every time I felt I was losing concentration in staring at my working-from-home screen – about every 17 minutes – I’d activate a favourite (alarmingly 1980s) playlist and dance around the kitchen island like nobody was watching for a couple of tracks, before returning to my desk.

The tactic seemed, and still seems, so promising on several levels – quick burst of endorphins, no Lycra or Peloton required, embarrassing only to immediate family – that I believed I might have discovered a unique health breakthrough. Inevitably, however, there’s a book that shows I’m far from a

pioneer. [Dr Peter Lovatt's *The Dance Cure*](#) promises to provide “the surprising secret to being smarter, stronger, happier”.

He assembles all sorts of disciples – from Captain Cook to Virginia Woolf to Debbie Harry – to evangelise versions of my intermittent boogie wonderland. “Let us read and let us dance,” Voltaire insisted. “These two amusements will never do any harm to the world!”

Tim Adams in an Observer columnist

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Observer comment cartoon

Boris Johnson

Russia delights in Boris Johnson being ‘in charge’ – cartoon

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OpinionCost of living crisis

Isn't it a bit rich for Kirstie Allsopp and her like to tell poor people how to live well?

[Catherine Bennett](#)



The solution to the cost of living crisis is structural, not fatuous tips from the wealthy



Location, Location, Location presenter Kirstie Allsopp has offered advice to aspiring homeowners as well as tips for cutting heating bills. Photograph: Ian West/PA

Sun 13 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

Is it fair that Mrs Johnson should, courtesy of her sublime nickname, Carrie Antoinette, have become the face of complacent privilege? Whatever her faults, as recently enumerated by Lord Ashcroft, they have yet to include the dispensing of fatuous lifestyle tips for the less fortunate. Her old advisory tweets on single-use plastic were aimed, after all, at everyone less environmentally enlightened than Mrs Johnson, not just at poor people.

Regardless of her taste in single-use interiors, parties and cake, Mrs Johnson has yet, publicly, to express the traditional Tory conviction that the struggling should welcome lifestyle advice from the prosperous. True, her husband has previously argued that “if having a baby out of wedlock meant sure-fire destitution on a Victorian scale, young girls might indeed think twice about having a baby”. But as the now married mother-of-two Mrs Johnson sometimes reminds us, it is sexist and retrograde to think she might be as ghastly as her partner.

If she's not Britain's Marie Antoinette, her elimination leaves at least two UK energy companies in contention – along with a variety of influencers, politicians and City functionaries urging less fortunate people to, among other things, work harder, freeze bread, put on another layer, ignore fraud, forget the parties enjoyed by their betters and refrain from asking for a pay rise. Not, surely, since the unlamented George Osborne was fomenting hostilities between hard-working "strivers" and undeserving "shirkers", have the unprivileged enjoyed so much free instruction on their habits and shortcomings and bread-storing practice. Deepening inequality, and the prospect of much more to come, promises, if anything, to reinvigorate a benevolent narrative that, while recognising the difficulties of the afflicted, remains firmly committed to the status quo.

"Let them wear socks" was recently, for instance, E.ON's way of reminding any customers unable to afford heating that they are freezing for the greater good. After a strikingly ungrateful reaction to its distribution of synthetic branded socks, labelled "heating down, CO₂ down", the company said it was "incredibly sorry for how we have made some people feel".

Members of the "Ovo family" of energy suppliers have likewise learned that, in the assessment of hardship, comfortable warmth is becoming the new flatscreen TV. Below a certain income level, is it really needed? If true poverty was regularly declared after the 2008 economic crisis to be incompatible with the presence of a large television, domestic heating was generally allowed to be a necessity. Unless it was just overlooked, being cheaper at the time? Last month, perhaps to avert consumer consideration of the more affordable alternative, an energy windfall tax, some Ovo customers were treated to its "simple and cost-effective ways to keep warm this winter".

If they could neither afford heating nor expect adequate assistance, poorer customers could help themselves with star jumps, doing chores and having "cuddles". As always in advice to this incurably prodigal class, the need for temperance had to be stressed: the "warming feeling from wine or whisky is temporary, as you'll soon lose heat from your core and end up feeling even colder".

Such advice, as Robert Tressell mentioned in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914), has the further benefit of suggesting that the poor, when they imitate the affluent, bring their problems on themselves. “The theories that drunkenness, laziness or inefficiency are the causes of poverty are so many devices invented and fostered by those who are selfishly interested in maintaining the present state of affairs...”

Once Netflix and gyms are counted as unwarranted luxuries, we are pretty much back in the world of Orwell’s *Wigan Pier*

Just as older or smaller TVs could once be tolerated in poor households, some heating is still acceptable. But how much? Among her recent hints for aspiring homeowners, which included shunning Netflix and gyms, and roaming Britain for any property unwanted by second-home buyers, the television celebrity [Kirstie Allsopp](#) also mentioned heating. Fuel poverty is a nightmare, she said, but “for those who aren’t in fuel poverty, if rising energy bills persuade them to turn their thermostat down to 17C that would be great. I keep my house at 17C.”

This miserable recommendation, though it must certainly help people like the Allsopps with two properties to maintain, would not work for everyone. The World Health Organization advises a minimum room temperature of 18C; higher settings for vulnerable groups. And this disregards evidence that women are typically [2.5C too cold](#) in temperatures comfortable for men.

As much as Allsopp is to be admired for proposals that could add up to a deposit, if adopted, within [less than 40 years](#), her message had, alas, an inescapable flavour of historical lectures on indigent improvidence. Once Netflix and gym membership are counted as unwarranted luxuries, we are pretty much back in the world of Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier*, frowning on sugar consumption and movie-going. At the same time, Seebohm Rowntree was [arguing](#) for the inclusion in working-class budgets of “sundries”, for instance a radio, alcohol, holidays, presents, football. “Working people are just as human as those with more money. They cannot live just on a ‘fodder basis’. They crave for relaxation and recreation just as the rest of us do.”

My tip, for what it's worth, is never to take budgetary advice from a fashion influencer, energy company, member of the English peerage or a governor of the Bank of England, all the more so when this coincides with a [cost of living crisis](#) to which the only solution is structural.

That said, it wouldn't hurt to hear some practical hints from Rishi Sunak. Although vast personal wealth combined with wilful-looking poor-blindness might appear, on the face of it, a clear qualification for Marie Antoinette status, that seems, in the light of his [fake discounts](#) and [fraud-tolerance](#), distinctly overgenerous. Sometimes, you can't help feeling, the fabulously rich are their own worst enemies.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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[For the record](#)UK news

For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 13 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

We regret that our headline ([‘I didn’t take virus seriously’, admits statistician](#), 6 February, p12) did not accurately reflect the remark made by Sir David Spiegelhalter. As the article itself made clear, the Cambridge University scientist had told BBC Radio 4’s *Desert Island Discs* that he was over-optimistic at the start of the coronavirus pandemic and did not take it “seriously enough”.

The US TV presenter Bill Maher is not a “Fox News host”; his show *Real Time* is broadcast by HBO ([Sure, let’s be wary of abuse of power, but do we really want to outlaw office romance?](#), 6 February, p47).

Xu Weiping, head of the development company ABP, was incorrectly referred to on second and subsequent mentions in an article as Weiping. In Chinese, family names come first so we should have called him Xu ([Boris Johnson’s flagship London dock scheme on brink of collapse](#), 6 February, p21).

An article ([Battle lines drawn over fight for the future of UK’s biggest pension funds](#), 6 February, p50) referred to “the fewer than 1 million people in the UK who are still able to pay into defined benefit schemes”. It meant to say “private” defined benefit schemes.

A recipe for potatoes with olive oil, garlic and rosemary ([Nigel Slater](#), 6 February, Magazine, p27) advised readers to “finely chop half the rosemary... and add to the onions”. That should have said, “add to the potatoes”. The onion instructions came later.

Other recently amended articles include:

[The Observer view on the EHRC decision on Scotland's gender recognition reforms](#)

[Sexual Revolution by Laurie Penny review – playing fast and loose with the f-word](#)

[How Radio 2 veteran Ken Bruce became a No 1 hit](#)

[Shock in France after giant trawler sheds 100,000 dead fish off coast](#)

*Write to the Readers' Editor, the Observer, York Way, London N1 9GU,
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[Observer letters](#)[Winter Olympics Beijing 2022](#)

Letters: magnificent Therese Johaug deserved her chance

Just because the Austrian skier was suspended for a positive drugs test doesn't mean we should belittle her comeback



Therese Johaug celebrates gold. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 13 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

The two pages allocated to coverage of the first full day's events in the Winter Olympics were tainted by an inexplicable pillorying of the Norwegian winner of the women's 7.5km+7.5km skiathlon, Therese Johaug ("[Tainted start as first gold of Games is won by banned doper Johaug](#)", Sport). Rightly suspended for 18 months for a positive drugs test and missing out on the 2018 Olympics, this amazing athlete has served her time and she won the event in magnificent style.

How did her victory taint the start of the Games? Is there a presupposition of recidivism in respect of an athlete who has broken the rules or do we, as an enlightened society, wipe the sheet clean after a fresh start? Her prowess was certainly acknowledged in the report but I have never fully understood the meaning of “damning with faint praise”. Now I do.

David Parton

Seaford, East Sussex

Disenfranchised by Dorries

Pity me, a poor disenfranchised voter living in the constituency of Nadine Dorries (“[And in the prime minister’s corner... Dorries, Dorries and more Dorries](#)”, News). We have an MP defending the indefensible; excusing the inexcusable; thickening the sickening smear on Keir Starmer; behaving like a Trump soundbite. She has taken no voter soundings. I have heard nothing in my conversations with friends and neighbours other than total revulsion at Boris Johnson’s behaviour. Yet Dorries is the banner waver for this dreadful man. Her interview with Charlie Stayt was horrifying.

MPs in this parliament seem interested only in their own skins and futures. Dorries is a prime example. My vote counted for nothing last time because our constituency suffers from serf syndrome, the condition that has plagued ordinary people for centuries. Lucky Tory constituents who have an MP with the courage to recognise the social damage this man has caused and will continue to cause unless he is replaced.

Michael Newman

Shefford, Bedfordshire

Give prisoners the vote

Gordon Cropper rightly says that “the prison service is an unpopular posting for civil servants” and “low in the estimation of politicians” (“Punishment without care”, [Letters](#)). This could be addressed by giving prisoners the vote, as most of the rest of western Europe does.

David Murray

Wallington, Surrey

I'll tell you who they were...

I read with interest both the [article](#) on Kenneth Branagh's film *Belfast* and subsequent letter ("[There is no 'they' in Northern Ireland](#)"). I don't entirely agree with the letter writer's comments on the issue of "they". To me as an 11-year-old child living in a "mixed" estate in a small town in Northern Ireland, there were three components to "they":

The "Tartan gang", thugs who ran up our road shouting obscenities to the Catholic families, breaking our windows and threatening to burn us out;

Our Protestant neighbours, once dear friends who retreated indoors and, when meeting us many months later, snubbed us. The most hurtful part was when my very best friend whom I had known since little, blanked me when I tried to speak to her a couple of months later. The Catholic families were dislocated in so many ways;

Agents of the state, the army and police who stood at the bottom of our road, motionless, passive while we were terrified, even though our mother assured us we would be safe as "the RUC and army would protect us". They did no such thing and we had to empty our houses and flee, allowing the marauding gangs to "pick a Fenian's house" for their friends and families. No counselling for us.

Also the letter writer uses the innocuous-sounding phrase "put out" in relation to people being intimidated and forced to flee their homes. "Putting somebody out" today means inconveniencing them but, believe you me, for my family and our Catholic neighbours it was a lot more than that; it was ethnic cleansing on religious grounds.

Superb I am sure it is, but I for one won't be watching Mr Branagh's film, as there will be far too many bad memories for me.

Name and address supplied

What about the tenants?

Zoe Wood's article exactly encapsulates the government obsession with property ownership ("[Thousands of renters in England could miss out on](#)

[council tax cut](#)”, News). At the core of its housing policy lies the dogma of possession: an “affordable” house is one that we can buy, albeit with help from the taxpayer; the idea that we need accommodation that is affordable to tenants is alien to the central dogma. It is entirely in line with this idea that many of the rebates will go to owners rather than tenants.

That the underlying policy results in a catastrophic rise in the cost of buying a house and an even more catastrophic shortage of rentable property appears irrelevant. The owner, landlord, whatever, is all-important and damn the rest.

Roger Iredale

West Coker, Somerset

So much for office romance

Stephanie Merritt draws on her own experience to demonstrate her reasons for being “on the side of workplace romances” (“[Sure, let’s be wary of abuse of power, but do we really want to outlaw office romance?](#)”, Comment). As a Gen Xer who “owes her existence” to a workplace romance, she writes in sympathy of those who lament the time before #MeToo, when “office flirtations” were less tightly regulated.

Merritt’s article centres around Jeff Zucker, who resigned from his job as president of CNN after his sexual relationship with a colleague was exposed. Merritt says the relationship was consensual, so there should be no problem. As he was president of a multinational news channel, reducing this to an “office romance” between “consenting adults” overlooks the gendered power relations this “scandal” reveals. Every outpouring of grief and support for Zucker is evidence of a sycophantic hero-worshipping that serves to keep everyone under the spell of a white male leader. The drama surrounding Zucker’s resignation from CNN is not about “romance”. It is a perverse symptom of free market capitalism, celebrity culture and addiction to power that has gone off the deep end.

Lorna Donoghue

London, SW2

Lovely Jubbly, Your Maj

Somewhere in the corner of heaven reserved for sitcom scriptwriters, John Sullivan is reading about the “Platinum Jubbly” commemorative china and wishing he could have lived just long enough to write a Platinum Jubilee special of *Only Fools and Horses* (“[I can't wait to celebrate the Queen's lovely Jubbly](#)”, Comment). You can just see Del and Rodders down Peckham market flogging the “limited edition” and “unique” tableware in time for the celebrations. Perhaps Sir David Jason, in his Del Trotter persona, will visit Buckingham Palace in June and present Her Majesty with a selection of the items. That would surely give her, and the nation, a laugh.

Paul F Faupel

Somersham, Cambridgeshire

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Opinion**Boris Johnson**

Lies come in all shapes and sizes. This government is familiar with them all

[Nick Cohen](#)



Charlatans now fill the void where we once had people of integrity and substance



‘The government knows liars can game a system whose rules mandate that the Speaker will allow a liar to lie...’ Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

Sat 12 Feb 2022 14.00 EST

This is a government that lies. It lies because it is led by a prime minister who long ago forgot the difference between truth and falsehood, assuming he ever knew it to begin with. It lies because the prime minister has always said whatever he needs to say to get a laugh, a vote, a cheque or a reprieve. It lies because the prime minister found that lying was easy – when he lost one job on the *Times* for lying he got a new job on the *Telegraph*, where he lied some more.

This is a government that lies. It lies because lying never harmed its leader’s political career and, when he was fired from a shadow junior ministerial position for lying on a small scale in 2004, he went on to win the Brexit referendum in 2016 by lying on a grand scale and then became prime minister in 2019 to lie on an epic scale.

This is a government that lies. It lies because it is a lame-duck administration of charlatans and clowns, an echoing void where the government of the country ought to be. It lies to make it from one scandal to

the next, from the scandal about wallpaper to the scandal about lobbying to the scandal about the partying to the scandal about Jimmy Savile to the scandal that will break this week and every week after that.

It lies because it knows it can never admit that the prime minister, his wife, aides and civil servants giggled and guzzled as millions suffered

This is a government that lies. It lies because none of the stories it tells itself make sense. It lies because Brexit has not made Britain great again, but brought nothing but trade barriers and clinging bureaucracy. It lies because austerity was a blunder and levelling up will be a chimera. It lies because it says it is the party of tax cutters but is raising taxes, and says it is the party of sound money but is allowing inflation to soar, and says it is the party of home ownership but is letting landlordism rip, and says it is the party of enterprise but is crushing productivity. It lies because it is easier to lie than accept the truth that its hopes have turned to ashes.

This is a government that lies. It lies because it knows it can never admit that the prime minister, his wife, aides and civil servants giggled and guzzled as millions suffered isolation and loss. It lies because it did not listen when the prime minister's own adviser warned that attacking the leader of the opposition with lies about "a horrendous case of child sex abuse" would be seen as the scurrilous act of a scoundrel leader.

This is a government that lies. It lies because it knows liars can game a quaint system whose rules mandate that the Speaker of the House of Commons will allow a liar to lie but will expel MPs who point out that the liar is indeed lying. It lies because broadcasters place balance above truth and if one guest says the world is round, they must rush to find another who will say it is flat.

It lies because the prime minister is the creation of the Tory press and its editors can no more bear to tell the truth about him than Caliban could bear the sight of his face in the mirror. It lies because thoughtful people think twice before condemning a liar for lying and provide cover for the prime minister whenever they wonder if he is just confused, or ill-informed or so lost in delusion he believes his lies as he tells them – as the best liars always

do. It lies because respectable society fears that throwing accusations of lying around will create a vicious, foul-mouthed country – without realising that they already live in the future they fear.

This is a government that lies. It lies because it knows that most people pay next to no attention to politics and will let it get away with lying. It lies because it knows many people think “all politicians are liars” and expect to be lied to. It lies because too few have learned the difference between politicians who stonewall, twist, brag and fall into groupthink and the Putin and Trump wannabes, who think that if leaders destroy trust in everyone and everything voters may stop believing that change for the better is possible and stick with the liars they know. It lies because it is gambling that a society where trust has evaporated will be easier to govern than a confident country that insists on high standards.

This is a government that lies. It lies because, despite all it says to the contrary, it quietly despises Conservative voters and thinks they are either such fools that they believe their leaders’ lies or such cynics that they admire the rat-like cunning their leaders display when they lay their false trails. It lies because a generation of amoral commentators assured it that the truth no longer mattered as the electorate had “baked in” the prime minister’s willingness to lie.

It lied last week as it lied every week. It lies to the Queen. It lies to Parliament. It lies to the electorate. It lies to itself

This is a government that lies. It lies because it instinctively understands what sociologists call “strategic lying” and the rest of us call “shit sticking”, shifts the news agenda on to its preferred territory. It lies because it knows Dominic Cummings was right to agree that when he told the lie that Brexit would deliver £350m a week to the NHS in 2016, or the prime minister told the lie this year that Keir Starmer failed to prosecute Jimmy Savile, they “trapped” their opponents into spreading the lies as they refuted them.

It lies because it cannot admit the existence of the world in front of its eyes. It ignored a fraud epidemic last week, so it could pretend that crime is

falling. It went on to ignore the sharpest collapse in living standards in 30 years so it could pretend the economy was booming.

It lied last week as it lies every week. It lies to the Queen. It lies to parliament. It lies to the electorate. It lies to itself. It lies as a matter of policy. It lies as a matter of course. It lies when it doesn't need to lie. It lies because it doesn't know what else to do. It lies because it is all it can do. This is a government that lies.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/feb/12/lies-lies-and-more-lies-a-government-built-on-lies-is-incapable-of-anything-else>

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- ['It is necessary' Cressida Dick critics touched by Met police scandals welcome her resignation](#)

Cressida Dick

Dame Cressida Dick forced out of scandal-hit Met police

Chief to leave role two years early after London's mayor accused her of failing to deal with misogyny and racism in the force

- [Latest updates: Dame Cressida Dick to stand down – live](#)

01:53

'No choice but to step aside': Cressida Dick resigns as Met police chief – video

Vikram Dodd Police and crime correspondent

Thu 10 Feb 2022 16.52 EST

Cressida Dick has been forced out as head of the [Metropolitan police](#) after London's mayor accused her of failing to deal with a culture of misogyny and racism within Britain's biggest force.

Dick's dramatic resignation was announced just hours after she told a radio phone in that she would stay in post and had a plan to rid the Met of its toxic culture. But when City Hall let her aides know the plan was inadequate, the commissioner decided to boycott a showdown meeting set for 4.30pm and quit instead.

Khan had put Dick "on notice" last Wednesday that she had to rapidly reform Scotland Yard or lose his support for her leadership. His confidence in her was shaken to breaking point by a scandal at Charing Cross police station where officers shared racist, sexist, misogynistic and Islamophobic messages. Two of the officers investigated were promoted, while nine were left to serve in the Met.

Her resignation comes less than three weeks after the Met announced a criminal inquiry into lockdown parties in Downing Street, which could lead to the prime minister and dozens of staff being fined.

Dick, the first female leader in the Met's 193-year history, has led the force since 2017, with her five-year term as commissioner due to end in April this year. Her contract was extended by two years to 2024 only last September by the home secretary, Priti Patel, which Khan endorsed.

But Whitehall sources made clear on Wednesday that if Dick lost the confidence of the mayor they would not fight to save her.

In a statement Dick made clear she had been forced out: "It is with huge sadness that, following contact with the mayor of [London](#) today, it is clear that the mayor no longer has sufficient confidence in my leadership to continue. He has left me no choice but to step aside as commissioner of the Metropolitan police service.

"At his request, I have agreed to stay on for a short period to ensure the stability of the Met and its leadership while arrangements are made for a transition to a new commissioner.

"Undertaking this role as a servant of the people of London and the UK has been the greatest honour and privilege of my life."

Ahead of Thursday's crunch meeting, the commissioner decided she could do no more to reassure the mayor, and attending the meeting was pointless. She was aware the government would not step in to save her if she lost the mayor's confidence, and would expect her to resign.

Sources at the Home Office and City Hall have both told the Guardian of mounting despair at the Met lurching from crisis to crisis over the past few months.

Public confidence has dropped alarmingly among London's public. For Priti Patel, the Met's disasters under Dick – which some see as self inflicted and a result of her alleged "defensiveness" – cause concern because they are dragging down confidence in law and order across the country.

Khan effectively picked Dick as commissioner in 2017, thrilled by the historic legacy of the first woman commissioner in the history of the Met, which was founded in 1829.

In his statement, Khan said: “Last week, I made clear to the Metropolitan police commissioner the scale of the change I believe is urgently required to rebuild the trust and confidence of Londoners in the Met and to root out the racism, sexism, homophobia, bullying, discrimination and misogyny that still exists.

“I am not satisfied with the commissioner’s response.

“On being informed of this, Dame [Cressida Dick](#) has said she will be standing aside. It’s clear that the only way to start to deliver the scale of the change required is to have new leadership right at the top of the Metropolitan police.

“I will now work closely with the home secretary on the appointment of a new commissioner so that we can move quickly to restore trust in the capital’s police service while keeping London safe.”

The souring of relations with Khan to the point where they became terminal came after the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) revealed [shocking details of messages shared by Met officers](#) between 2016 – the year before Dick became commissioner – and 2018.

The London mayor was angered because, of the 14 officers investigated at Charing Cross police station, nine remain in the Met. Furthermore, two were promoted from constable to sergeant, one of whom had attended a misconduct meeting.

After details of the sickening messages – including remarks about the deaths of African babies – were made public, the mayor called Dick to a meeting where 90 minutes of discussions left him unsatisfied. One City Hall source said: “In short, she just didn’t get it.”

The Met commissioner is picked by the home secretary who has to have due regard for the views of London’s mayor, who is also the police and crime

commissioner for London.

The move by Khan to say he had no confidence in Dick was a bold and risky one, and it was clear some in the Met thought it was wrong. Ken Marsh, chair of the powerful Met Federation, representing rank and file officers, said: “Her removal leaves a void in the leadership of London and UK policing at what is a critical time.

“Cressida Dick should have been given the opportunity and the necessary time to build back trust in the Metropolitan police service. She has been denied that. She should have been treated better.”

A series of scandals that raised questions about the police’s treatment of women also helped diminish Dick’s commissionership.

The Met leadership’s handling of the murder of [Sarah Everard](#) in March 2021 by a serving Met officer also caused consternation in City Hall and government.

After her killer was sentenced to a whole-life term in September 2021, the Met leadership was expected to show it understood the concerns. Instead, it was mocked after saying that women who were worried about an officer approaching them could wave down a bus.

The Met announced its own inquiry, as have the government.

Ruth Davison, of the charity Refuge, backed Dick’s ousting: “Cressida Dick presided over an institution that saw police officers displaying misogynistic behaviour and committing horrific acts of violence against women, time and time again.

“But one resignation at the top doesn’t mean the police have solved their misogyny problem. The police service in this country needs root and branch reform.”

Dick was also personally criticised for the obstruction of an official inquiry into police corruption. The panel investigating the 1987 unsolved murder of Daniel Morgan lambasted Dick and labelled the Met as “institutionally corrupt”, which Dick denies.

A big expansion of stop and search resulted in falling confidence in policing in black communities, and confidence generally in the Met fell dramatically during Dick's term in office.

Highly intelligent and hard working, Dick, who earned a £230,000 salary, was said to have the demeanour of a civil service permanent secretary rather than a stereotypical police officer.

It is unclear how long she will stay as a caretaker commissioner – some sources have suggested just weeks.

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Cressida Dick

Misogyny in Met played key role in downfall of Cressida Dick

Commissioner-led series of missteps that eroded confidence and loyalty came before dealing with toxic culture



Many praised Cressida Dick's work ethic but critics say she never acknowledged the scale of misogyny that runs through the Met. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

[Alexandra Topping](#)

Fri 11 Feb 2022 03.44 EST

The mayor of London's statement on the resignation of Cressida Dick made it clear: a toxic culture within the police, including a persistent seam of misogyny, played a big role in the [Metropolitan police](#) commissioner's downfall.

It is remarkable that the outrage that consumed the force after the murder of [Sarah Everard](#) by a serving police officer Wayne Couzens in March last year, was only one scandal among many to have shaken women's faith that the service was there to protect them.

While Dick had little control over the events that engulfed her, she led a series of missteps that further eroded confidence in her leadership, particularly among women.

In the days that followed Everard's death the Met was criticised for [banning a peaceful vigil in her honour](#), and when a vigil [went ahead without their blessing](#), the image of a woman being held down by officers was beamed across television screens.

"A rotten culture stems from rotten leadership – so it's good news that she has finally resigned," said Anna Birley, of Reclaim These Streets who organised the original vigil.

Many who worked with Dick praised her work ethic and intelligence, but she never seemed to fully acknowledge the scale of misogyny that critics insisted ran through her force.

In June, on the day that one of her officers pleaded guilty to the kidnapping and rape of Everard, Dick badly missed the mark [in a speech to the Women's Institute](#), causing anger by seeming to minimise the problem, saying the force had the occasional "bad 'un" within its ranks.

In December, she had to apologise again when [two Met officers were jailed after taking pictures of two sisters](#), Nicole Smallman, 27, and Bibaa Henry, 46, found stabbed to death in June 2020.

Their mother, Mina Smallman, who said racism was a factor in the Met's initial bungling of the search for her daughters, described the officers actions as a betrayal of "catastrophic proportion".

"Those police officers felt so safe, so untouchable, that they felt they would take photographs with our murdered daughters," she said.

And then, as a new year started, Dick's leadership was struck by another blow. A fiercely critical report by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) unveiled [shocking details of officers sharing messages about hitting and raping women](#), as well as the deaths of black babies and the Holocaust. "You ever slapped your missus? It makes them love you more," wrote one. "They are biologically programmed to like that shit." The Met's response? "We do not believe there is a culture of misogyny in the Met."

The IOPC disagreed, saying: "We believe these incidents are not isolated or simply the behaviour of a few 'bad apples'."

Dick was the first female and first openly homosexual officer to lead the country's biggest force, but Khan made it clear that he had no confidence she would be the person to "root out the racism, sexism, homophobia, bullying, discrimination and misogyny that still exist" in the Met.

Harriet Wistrich, director of the Centre for Women's Justice, said: "The problem with Cressida as the first female to rise to the top of the most difficult job in policing, is that in order to do so she had to put loyalty to her officers above all else."

She added that after "mounting evidence of a police service littered with appalling misconduct", there were too many officers accused of violence and abuse still in their jobs and of whistleblowers victimised instead of listened to. "Cressida Dick's response to these series of stories has been wholly inadequate."

So, what now? An independent review of culture and standards in the Met by Lady Louise Casey, will focus on the force's vetting, recruitment and training procedures. At the same time an independent inquiry chaired by Dame Elish Angiolini QC will look at Couzens' actions during his career, and whether any red flags were missed or allegations made against him mishandled.

Whoever takes on this role at a tumultuous time for the Met will know that more apologies are likely to be needed. Ruth Davison, the CEO of the

domestic abuse charity Refuge, said on Thursday: “One resignation at the top doesn’t mean the police have solved their misogyny problem.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/11/misogyny-in-met-police-played-key-role-in-downfall-of-cressida-dick>

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Cressida Dick

‘It is necessary’: Cressida Dick critics touched by Met police scandals welcome her resignation

Departing commissioner’s handling of controversies including Daniel Morgan and Sarah Everard cases draws sharp criticism



Departing Metropolitan police commissioner Cressida Dick has been embroiled in a series of controversies since taking up her role in 2017.
Photograph: Frank Augstein/AP

[Tom Ambrose](#)

Thu 10 Feb 2022 20.15 EST

As [Cressida Dick](#) confirmed she will be leaving Scotland Yard in the coming weeks, those affected by the controversies during her tenure welcomed her resignation.

“The first time I dealt with Cressida Dick was in 2012 and since then all she has done in relation to my family is just delay, obstruct and disappoint on a huge level,” said Alastair Morgan, who has spent decades campaigning for justice for his murdered brother.

The private detective Daniel Morgan was killed with an axe in a pub car park in Sydenham, south-east [London](#), in 1987. The Met was described as “institutionally corrupt” and Dick was personally censured for obstruction by an independent inquiry.

Morgan continued: “Although I think it is a shame that we are seeing another commissioner disappear under a cloud of smoke, it is necessary. My only anxiety now is who is going to replace her and face the massive job in front of them of rebuilding confidence in the Met.”

Dick has also faced criticism of failure to act on complaints of institutional sexism and misogyny within the Met’s ranks.

When Sarah Everard’s killer, a serving Met officer, was sentenced to a whole-life term in September 2021, the Met leadership was mocked for saying that women who were worried about an officer approaching them could wave down a bus.

[Dick pledged](#) to “do all I can to improve women’s safety and reduce the fear of violence”, but she was also criticised for her handling of a vigil held for Everard which resulted in clashes and arrests. Patsy Stevenson, who was detained, said she was pleased Dick had stepped down.

She added, however: “We need to focus as well on this not being a token gesture. This does not fix anything, and I just hope that whoever is in charge next understands that radical change needs to be implemented to fix the systemic issues within the Met.”

Campaign group Reclaim These Streets, which is bringing a legal challenge against the force over its handling of the vigil, simply tweeted: “Good riddance.”

Meanwhile, the feminist group Sisters Uncut said: “Cressida Dick is resigning but she is leaving behind an institution that is rotten to the core.”

Other scandals had included the handling of the murders of sisters Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman in a north London park in June 2020.

Two PCs who were stationed at the crime scene were jailed for taking photographs of their bodies and sharing them with friends and colleagues on WhatsApp.

The force’s apologies were angrily rejected by their family. In her victim impact statement their mother, Mina Smallman, said: “Those police officers felt so safe, so untouchable, that they felt they would take photographs with our murdered daughters.” She also believed racism was a factor in the lack of initial search by the force when the women were reported missing.

It also emerged that a Met officer disciplined after an inquiry into misogynistic and racist messages was promoted. Messages about hitting and raping women were shared by up to 19 officers based mainly at Charing Cross police station.

Harriet Wistrich, director of the Centre for Women’s Justice charity, said: “There were far too many stories of officers accused of violence and abuse still in their jobs, and of whistleblowers victimised instead of listened to.”

Wistrich said Dick “rose to the top of the Met, only to preside over an institution where misogynists, racists and homophobes can hold on to their jobs when they are meant to be tackling crime”.

She added: “The problem with Cressida as the first female to rise to the top of the most difficult job in policing is that in order to do so she had to put loyalty to her officers above all else.

“Any future leader of the Met must be able to listen to victims and be prepared to tackle the culture of misogyny and racism that pervades the underbelly of Met policing.”

Ricky Waumsley, whose partner Daniel Whitworth was murdered by serial killer Stephen Port, also welcomed Dick's resignation.

He said: "When I was let down by the Met police because of their blatant homophobia towards the four victims that Stephen Port killed, and the inquest concluded that the Met failures 'probably' contributed to their deaths, I held Cressida accountable for these failures and made a statement that she should 'resign with immediate effect', so I am glad."

The former chief crown prosecutor for north-west England Nazir Afzal said that he took "no joy" in calling for Dick to resign on several occasions. He tweeted: "She was an excellent investigator. But she became a human shield for the Govt. The problems in policing are bigger than one person".

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/11/it-is-necessary-cressida-dick-critics-touched-by-met-police-scandals-welcome-her-resignation>

2022.02.11 - Spotlight

- Living in a woman's body I was obsessed with being thin, then I became pregnant and felt invincible
- 50 gigs that changed music Ziggy bows out, Madonna scares the pope and Dylan goes electric
- 'What took so long?' How the papers covered the resignation of Cressida Dick
- Timeline A commissioner dogged by controversies
- 'I can see into the lives of North Koreans' The professor who reads washed-up rubbish

Living in a woman's bodyDiets and dieting

Living in a woman's body: I was obsessed with being thin, then I became pregnant and felt invincible

After years of disgust, I saw the possibility of beauty in my body just as it is.
Now I am the happiest I have ever been



'For decades I saw my body as defective.' Illustration: Ngadi Smart/Studio Pi/The Guardian

Jessica Fostekew
Fri 11 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

My body is an accordion. Not because it sounds horrible. I mean, it does. It clicks and cracks and honks, and when I try to sing nicely my son screams from the pit of his soul, like I've brandished an axe. No, what I mean is, it's

like an accordion because, for 32 years I was squeezing her in. In and in, for a half-life.

On a [BMI](#) chart, I've always been "obese" – technically, ill. So for decades I saw my body as defective, disappointing and disgusting. If I looked at it, I felt the kind of hatred and repulsion I normally reserve for racists or people who say "hashtag justsayin'" out loud.

From age nine to 32, I adhered to every type of [diet](#). I didn't miss out the one you think would shrink me; I did that one, too. Several times. I lived in a cycle of starvation, control and obsession, followed by bingeing and sometimes purging. That's what serial dieting is: disordered eating lite.

Then, bang! An explosion of change. I got pregnant with my son, and my physical metamorphosis cast a spell. Suddenly, my bigness had a purpose and I felt like a king: invincible, glorious. I stripped in swimming pool changing rooms without a single care, like a thin person or a Spanish person, or a man. It felt delicious.



A new sense of purpose ... Jessica Fostekew. Photograph: Joanne Warren

It didn't last, but it had sown a beautiful seed in me. Not of self-love or self-worship – I don't believe such perfectionistic grandeur is necessary or

useful, or sometimes even honest – but of gratitude and acceptance. The possibility of seeing some beauty in my body just as it is, at any given time.

Many things happened over the next two years to compound this feeling. Firstly, I discovered [weightlifting](#), which brought me joy and power and had fuck all to do with losing weight. In fact, I grew and continue to grow brilliant muscles. I also discovered a burgeoning, freeing pansexuality smashing its way into my formerly heterosexual life. Lastly, and surely not by complete coincidence, I underwent a complete reeducation about food and eating. I discovered the incredible [Intuitive Eating](#) and [Health at Every Size](#) movements. I found big, beautiful bodies being proud on Instagram. I had some good therapy.

I host a podcast about eating and, fewer than 50 guests in, I realised that virtually every woman I spoke to had, at some point, made themselves sick. To be thinner. The normality of it slapped me; the universality of it as a female experience.

I stripped in changing rooms without a single care, like a thin person or a Spanish person, or a man

I realised that millions of women, like me, were trapped in misery by a lie that has been woven into our DNA for generations: the value of thinness. Because miserable women are quiet and cowed and, best of all, we'll buy anything you promise will fix us.

Well, my eyes are open now. And my wallet is closed. I'll take this body in a large, bitches. Don't get me wrong, I'm not immune to the noise that suggests my body is better when it's smaller, but I am the happiest and the healthiest that I have ever been. I'm really fit and really strong, and I eat many varied and wonderful nutritious foods. I'm slowly, lovingly, filling her back up. This accordion. Hearing her sigh. Stretching her, yes. Growing her. And I cannot believe that, in 2022, it still feels transgressive to glory in that.

[Jessica Fostekew](#) is a comedian, actor and writer

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[Music](#)

Ziggy bows out, Madonna scares the pope and Dylan goes electric: 50 gigs that changed music



(Left to right, top to bottom) Ariana Grande, Freddie Mercury, Ozzy Osborne, Stormzy, Prince, Billie Eilish, David Bowie, Flavor Flav, Elton John, DMX, L7, Madonna, Beyoncé, Daft Punk, Johnny Rotten, BB King, Diana Ross and Céline Dion. Composite: Guardian Design/Getty

Images/Rex

Manchester/WireImage/Redferns/NY Daily News/PA

Features/Reuters/One

Love

Five decades after David Bowie's seminal tour, our music writers reflect on the concerts that have left a mark, from Billie Holiday to Billie Eilish

[Laura Barton](#), [Ben Beaumont-Thomas](#), [Lloyd Bradley](#), [John Fordham](#),
[Michael Hann](#), [Alim Kheraj](#), [Joe Muggs](#), [Alexis Petridis](#), [Dave Simpson](#) and
[Laura Snakes](#)

Fri 11 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

Billie Holiday

Café Society, New York City, early 1939

The 23-year-old Billie Holiday was mostly unknown outside the jazz loop when she began her 1939 residency at this liberal New York club. Her understated, delicately implacable debut of Strange Fruit, a terrifying depiction of lynchings in the south, made a unique new vocal sound famous worldwide. *John Fordham*

The birth of bebop

Minton's Playhouse, New York City, 1941

Rising young originals such as Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and the guitarist Charlie Christian lived off commercial swing gigs in 1941, but they forged the revolutionary modern jazz style called bebop in tumultuous after-hours Harlem jam sessions, where Thelonious Monk and the drums innovator Kenny Clarke were in the house band. *JF*

Buddy Holly and the Crickets



Buddy Holly (*left*) and the Crickets. Photograph: V&A Images/Getty Images

UK tour, March 1958

Britain had never seen a rock band before March 1958. Then, for 25 consecutive nights, came the first true rock band – two guitars, bass and drums, a revolution in horn-rimmed specs. A schoolboy [Keith Richards](#) caught a London show, but many more future stars would see Buddy Holly on TV during his visit, when he appeared on Sunday Night at the London Palladium. *Michael Hann*

Judy Garland

Carnegie Hall, New York City, 23 April 1961

Forty years into her career, Garland's lavish performance to a star-studded audience is often regarded as the greatest night in showbiz history. Through a combination of vocal prowess and self-deprecation, she set the bar for concert orchestra performance. The recording made Garland the first woman to win the Grammy for album of the year. *Laura Barton*

Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Muddy Waters



Sister Rosetta Tharpe. Photograph: TV Times/Future Publishing/Getty Images

Whalley Range, Manchester, 7 May 1964

It was the brilliant idea of the Granada TV producer Johnnie Hamp to film a selection of blues greats in south Manchester's derelict Wilbraham Road railway station, mocked up to look like the deep south, with "wanted" posters, washtubs and even goats and chickens. About 200 people arrived by rail to see the Gospel and Blues Train: Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson, Cousin Joe, Otis Spann and the duo Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee giving intense performances on the platform.

Waters was mobbed by blues-mad youngsters. Tharpe arrived in a pony and trap and seized the opportunity presented by a Mancunian downpour to strap on an electric guitar and launch spontaneously into Didn't It Rain? Countless musicians, including Mick Jagger, Jimmy Page and John Paul Jones, subsequently told Hamp they were influenced by the show, which broadcast to millions and was instrumental in taking the blues explosion to the mainstream. *Dave Simpson*

Bob Dylan

Newport folk festival, Rhode Island, 25 July 1965

It was a Sunburst Fender Stratocaster that stole the show at Newport in 1965. Dylan's decision to play an electric guitar on a largely acoustic bill stunned the crowd, with many booing and jeering. Audiences for his world tour were similarly polarised, one disgruntled heckler in Manchester yelling: "Judas!" at the former folk hero. Essentially, it was the birth of folk rock – the real-time expansion of a genre. *Laura Barton*

Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons



Frankie Valli (*left*) and the Four Seasons. Photograph: Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy

Franklin & Marshall College, Pennsylvania, 1966

A show in a college gym was the breakthrough that made arena rock possible. The PA system supplied by the Clair brothers so impressed Valli that he took them on tour as his personal sound engineers. Other artists noticed the quality and soon they were in demand. Their sound systems spurred rock's spread to the big halls. *MH*

The Velvet Underground

The Dom, New York City, 7 April 1966

A former Polish wedding hall hosted the birth of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable. Andy Warhol showed films and worked the lights, his “superstars” danced and the Velvet Underground played at a volume witnesses tended to describe in terms of violence: rock music as envelopment and sensory assault. *AP*

The Beatles

Candlestick Park, San Francisco, 29 August 1966

The Beatles’ final real gig wasn’t a great show. The stadium was half-empty, the band at the end of their tether, struggling to recreate the sound of their latest recordings. But it represented a shift in rock music: no more Beatles gigs meant more time in the studio – and albums that would change everything, again. *Laura Snapes*

The 14 Hour Technicolor Dream

Alexandra Palace, London, 29 April 1967

British counterculture’s coming-out ball. Every one of the country’s psychedelic luminaries played – Pink Floyd, Soft Machine, Tomorrow and the Pretty Things among them. Performance art was provided by Yoko Ono, while the sense that the audience was as much part of the spectacle as the artists presaged 80s rave culture. *AP*

Big Brother and the Holding Company



Janis Joplin at Monterey as part of Big Brother and the Holding Company.
Photograph: Paul Ryan/Getty Images

Monterey pop festival, California, 17 June 1967

Arriving at Monterey with a lesser-known San Francisco psychedelic bluesy rock band, 24-year-old Janis Joplin gleefully demolished every stereotype of the “demure” female singer. The hard-living, hard-rocking Texan’s raucous, gut-wrenching performance attracted international attention and has been described as one of the greatest ever. *DS*

Terry Riley

Philadelphia College of Art, 17 November 1967

Not the birth of minimalism, but certainly its breakthrough. Riley’s eight-hour set of tape manipulation and organ pulses, played to an audience seated on hammocks and cushions, generated an early recording of his classic *Poppy Nogood* and set the pace for electronic experimentalism in chill-out environments decades ahead. *Joe Muggs*

James Brown

‘Are we together or we ain’t?’ James Brown calms stage invaders on 5 April 1968.

Boston Garden, 5 April 1968

The night after the assassination of Martin Luther King, violent protests spread across many US cities. In Boston, Brown's show was almost cancelled for fear it might become a hotspot for public outcry. Instead, the show was repurposed: broadcast live on TV and radio in an effort to ease the grief and tension. Fans climbed on stage as he sang I Can't Stand Myself (When You Touch Me); police officers rallied. Brown paused the song. "I'll be fine," he told the officers, then turned to the stage invaders: "You're not being fair to yourselves and me, or your race. Now, I asked the police to step back, because I think I can get some respect from my own people ... Are we together or we ain't?" The crowd cheered. The fans climbed down. Brown turned to the drummer: "Hit that thing, man." *Laura Barton*

Mahalia Jackson and Mavis Staples

Harlem cultural festival, New York City, 13 July 1969

Effectively buried until the 2021 documentary [Summer of Soul](#) resurrected its memory, the 1969 Harlem cultural festival was possibly the greatest selection of black talent ever assembled, from Sly Stone and Stevie Wonder to Nina Simone. If you had to pick a highlight, Mahalia Jackson and Mavis Staples' charged performance of Take My Hand, Precious Lord might be it.
AP

Jimi Hendrix



Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock. Photograph: Henry Diltz/AFP/Getty Images

Woodstock festival, New York, 18 August 1969

Often cited as the gig that defined the 60s, the countercultural festival attracted half a million people to upstate New York. Hendrix's deconstruction of The Star-Spangled Banner was interpreted as a protest at the Vietnam war, while "three days of peace and love" showed that people power could change history. *DS*

The Who

The University of Leeds, 14 February 1970

A Leeds Civic Trust blue plaque outside [the university's refectory](#) now honours the site of the incendiary live performance of the post-Tommy, Keith Moon-era Who captured on Live at Leeds, often cited as the greatest live rock album. *DS*

Elton John

The Troubadour, Los Angeles, 25 August 1970

Not quite overnight success, but close: Elton John walked on to the stage of a celebrity-packed Troubadour a largely unknown British singer-songwriter, and walked off it a star. Aside from the music, a backstage decision to wear

an outrageous outfit and a burst of energetic showmanship midway through the gig helped: two lessons he has never forgotten. *AP*

BB King

Cook County jail, 10 September 1970

Two years after Johnny Cash's turn at Folsom prison, the blues legend King performed in Chicago to an audience of 2,000 prisoners, mostly young and black. A subsequent live album highlighted the dire conditions at the jail, helping bring about prison reform, which became a lifelong cause for King.

Laura Barton

Aretha Franklin



Aretha Franklin at Fillmore West. Photograph: David Tan/Shinko Music/Getty Images

Fillmore West concert hall, San Francisco, 5-7 March 1971

Franklin's appearance at Fillmore West wasn't a star-making performance – she was already very much a star – but it featured the Queen of Soul at the peak of her powers, actively seeking to build a bridge to a post-hippy audience, covering Stephen Stills, Bread and the Beatles. Judging by the crowd's reaction, it worked. *AP*

David Bowie

Hammersmith Odeon, London, 3 July 1973

The moment when David Bowie appears to announce his retirement during this show is astonishing: the crowd's screams become a vast howl of disappointment, peppered with yells of "No!" Did he mean it? Obviously not: even if he was just announcing the end of the Ziggy Stardust era, why was he on stage at the Marquee Club in London in full Ziggy drag three months later?

It didn't matter. The announcement – before a crowd so febrile that, according to one eyewitness, audience members were pleasuring themselves as he played – wasn't just a guaranteed headline, but an extraordinary piece of staging, an act that left everyone racing to catch up: very Bowie. It is hard not to wonder if he had it in mind when he was dying, too: the way he seemed to stage-manage his passing was all those things as well. *AP*

Bob Marley & the Wailers



Bob Marley at the Lyceum. Photograph: Michael Putland/Getty Images

The Lyceum, London, 17-18 July 1975

Probably the most dynamic and exhilarating reggae concerts ever. Perhaps

more importantly, the presentation was familiar enough to the rock establishment to allow them to feel comfortable with roots reggae. The album recorded at these shows put Marley on the path to global superstardom. *Lloyd Bradley*

The Last Waltz

Winterland Ballroom, San Francisco, 25 November 1976

This Thanksgiving Day show was billed as the Band's "farewell concert appearance". Across its remarkable five hours, they were joined by many of their contemporaries, including Bob Dylan, Muddy Waters, Van Morrison, Neil Young and Joni Mitchell – jamming, improvising and high-kicking through an astonishing display of musicianship and camaraderie. The show was later released as [a seminal documentary](#) by Martin Scorsese. *Laura Barton*

Sex Pistols

River Thames, 7 June 1977

Insurrectionary publicity stunts don't come better than punk's prime movers playing on a boat sailing past the Houses of Parliament during the Queen's silver jubilee celebrations. Their manager, Malcolm McLaren, was among those arrested. Moral pandemonium ensued as God Save the Queen shot to No 2. Or was it really No 1? *DS*

Burning Spear

The Rainbow theatre, London, 26 October 1977

When Winston Rodney came out on stage, raised his arms and asked: "Do you remember the days of slavery?" the "Yes!" from the 3,000-strong, almost entirely black crowd nearly raised the roof. It set the tone for an evening that reclaimed roots reggae for its primary audience. *Lloyd Bradley*

Black Sabbath/Van Halen

Sheffield City Hall, 16 May 1978

No one hails Black Sabbath's final UK tour with [Ozzy Osbourne](#). What they

remember is the support band. An old, tired, bloated Sabbath were destroyed night after night by Van Halen, who showed the future of hard rock – sunny, exciting, glamorous. Here was generational change embodied in the time it took for one gig to unfold. *MH*

Kate Bush



Kate Bush at the London Palladium. Photograph: Pete Still/Redferns

Tour of Life, April-May 1979

Notable for being Bush's only live tour (until 35 years later, when she made her surprise live return with the After the Dawn residency), these dates set in motion a straight line from Bush to Britney Spears and beyond. Intent on singing and dancing (fully choreographed) at the same time, Bush pioneered the invention of the head mic (hers fashioned from a coat hanger) and the modern pop show was born. *LS*

The Specials, Madness and the Selecter

2 Tone tour, autumn 1979

Named after Jerry Dammers' Coventry label and kicking off in Brighton, the 2 Tone tour unleashed the Specials, Madness and the Selecter on 40 UK dates, a blur of legs, arms and adrenaline. Scenes of euphoric dancing

ensued as black and white youth came together to celebrate a chart-conquering, multicultural pop phenomenon. *DS*

Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela



Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela. Photograph: Gallo Images/Getty Images

Lesotho, 28 December 1980

In South Africa's apartheid era, the tyrannically segregationist laws of the country's white government forced many black African artists into exile. The singer and campaigner Miriam Makeba and the jazz trumpeter and composer Hugh Masekela were international stars who hadn't seen family or home for 20 years when the businessman and fan Victor Maloi funded a defiant comeback on their oppressors' doorstep.

In Lesotho, at Christmas time in 1980, a stadium crowd of 75,000 – with thousands more thronging into the tiny country's streets to share the vibe – attended a historic event. The artists could behold their homeland from the stage – on which Masekela was reunited with his 90-year-old grandmother. A jubilant and political setlist included Makeba's *The Healing Song* and *Soweto Blues* ("Just a little atrocity / Deep in the city") and the churning,

train-mimicking migrant workers' lament Stimela, a Masekela concert staple for the rest of his life. *JF*

Kraftwerk



Kraftwerk on tour in 1981. Photograph: Gie Knaeps/Getty Images

Computer World tour, 1981

This world tour offered a glimpse into the future, combining purely electronic pop and visual technology. The band synchronised films to their music, played handheld miniature keyboards during Pocket Calculator and performed Robots alongside identically dressed humanoid replicas of themselves. *DS*

Diana Ross

Central Park, New York City, 21 July 1983

Sometimes everything going wrong can turn a gig into a memorable event, as when torrential rain broke out just after Ross took the stage here. She battled on for 45 minutes while the audience surged and fought among themselves. Probably better experienced on screen than in person, a rain-lashed Ross belting out Ain't No Mountain High Enough is quite a sight. *AP*

Whodini

The Haçienda, Manchester, 28 October 1983

Four years after [Rapper's Delight](#), hip-hop was still alien to most UK kids. So, seeing breaking, body-popping rappers Whodini – then superstars, yet barely out of their teens – in the flesh was transformational. Playing at the electro evangelist Greg Wilson's night, they were true cultural ambassadors.
JM

Wham!



Wham! fans take in their first show at the Workers' gymnasium.
Photograph: Peter Charlesworth/LightRocket/Getty Images

Workers' gymnasium, Beijing, 7 April 1985

For the Chinese government, the first visit by a western group signalled its willingness to open its commerce to capitalism. But it made a different kind of impact: Rose Tang, who was at Tiananmen Square in 1989, later said that seeing Wham! made young Chinese people realise that rebellion was possible. *MH*

Live Aid

Wembley stadium, London, 13 July 1985

Almost every major rock act played Bob Geldof's "global jukebox", held simultaneously in Wembley and John F Kennedy stadium in Philadelphia and broadcast to a billion people. Raising millions for famine relief, it created a new generation of superstars as Queen and U2's epic performances ushered in the era of the mega rock event – and enshrined the white saviour act. *DS*

Public Enemy

Hammersmith Odeon, 1 November 1987

Public Enemy weren't even the headliners of the Def Jam package tour, but when their performance at Hammersmith was played on the BBC's A Fresh Start to the Week, it was a revelation. Armed paramilitaries on stage? What?! Bring the Noise, played months before it was released, was hip-hop as no one in Britain had heard it. *MH*

The Shamen

Synergy tour, 1989-91

Fearless psychotropic explorers, the Shamen turned their tour into an acid house club on wheels. Featuring live sets from Irresistible Force (AKA Mixmaster Morris), Meat Beat Manifesto and newbies Orbital, it was the seed from which 90s arena dance – Leftfield, Underworld et al – grew. *JM*

Madonna



Madonna on the Blond Ambition tour. Photograph: John Roca/Rex Features

Blond Ambition tour, April-August 1990

Touring her fourth album, *Like a Prayer*, Madonna altered the blueprint for modern pop shows with this combination of narrative, choreography, high production values and fashion. That it was also a taboo-busting exploration of sexuality and religion only solidified its legacy: she nearly got arrested in Toronto for simulating masturbation, while Pope John Paul II called it “one of the most satanic shows in the history of humanity”. *Alim Kheraj*

L7

Reading festival, 30 August 1992

Bands being pelted by objects is common at Reading – less so is bands fighting back, as L7 did in spectacular fashion. Donita Sparks hoicked out her tampon and hurled it at the crowd, proving that long-patronised “women in rock” weren’t going to be underestimated any more. *Ben Beaumont-Thomas*

DMX

Woodstock festival, New York, 23 July 1999

[This performance](#) to an infinite sea of boiling bros showed how far hip-hop

had crossed over into white middle America – and how much the white artists on the bill borrowing from it still had to learn. Even on YouTube footage, DMX's throaty holler remains singular and gorgeous. *BBT*

Roll Deep

Sidewinder, Milton Keynes, 9 November 2002

Although grime wasn't even accepted as a term in 2002, the sound was fully formed. Dizzee Rascal, Wiley, Flowdan and Jamakabi, plus DJs and the singer Gemma Fox, managed only 20 minutes of their allotted hour before things got too rowdy and the show was cut, but the energy echoed for years.

JM

The Dixie Chicks



The Dixie Chicks – now the Chicks – in 2003. Photograph: Pictorial Press/Alamy

Shepherd's Bush Empire, London, 10 March 2003

Natalie Maines' [onstage criticism of George W Bush](#)'s decision to invade Iraq got country music's most successful women blacklisted by radio stations, dropped by sponsors and subjected to death threats. Nevertheless,

the band – now the Chicks – paved the way for more outspoken female country artists, from Taylor Swift to Miranda Lambert. *Laura Barton*

Céline Dion

A New Day residency, Caesars Palace, Las Vegas, 25 March 2003

It was Liberace who invented the Vegas residency and Dion (DiMucci) who revived it, but it was Céline Dion who turned Caesars into the stage for a glorious pop comeback. Her initial five-year run was followed by a further eight years – and prompted copycat turns by Britney Spears, Pink and Katy Perry. *Laura Barton*

Taylor Swift



Taylor Swift and Craig Wiseman at the Bluebird Cafe in 2018. Photograph: John Shearer/Getty Images for 13 Management

Bluebird Cafe, Nashville, 4 November 2004

Swift played three songs at the bijou Nashville institution aged 14 and was spotted there by her future label boss (and future foe) Scott Borchetta. By no means the only artist to get discovered at the venue, she was the first to blow that coffee-shop intimacy stadium-sized, addressing thousands of fans as if

they were friends sharing hot chocolates in between her glittering country-pop hits. *LS*

Daft Punk

Coachella festival, California, 29 April 2006

Despite the best efforts of umpteen DJs and performers, dance music remained an underground phenomenon in the US until Daft Punk arrived at Coachella. Their rapturously received audiovisual extravaganza begat the American EDM explosion, a topic on which Daft Punk remained tight-lipped until the end. *AP*

Prince

Super Bowl half-time show, Miami, 4 February 2007

Any number of shows from Prince's later years could make this list – his O2 residency, [his Hit and Run guerrilla gigs](#) – but for sheer "I'm back" bravado, his rain-soaked Super Bowl performance wins. His recording career had faltered, but this astonishing display of hits, guitar pyrotechnics and unexpected covers offered a very public reassertion of his genius. *AP*

Jay-Z



Jay-Z at Glastonbury in 2008. Photograph: Frantzesco Kangaris/EPA

Glastonbury festival, Somerset, 29 June 2008

Noel Gallagher should have known better than to underestimate the showmanship of rap's No 1 superstar. He had led a pre-festival chorus of opinion that hip-hop wasn't meant for Glastonbury; Jay-Z responded with a sarky cover of Wonderwall and an arsenal of anthems, cementing rap in mainstream British culture. *BBT*

Ariana Grande

One Love Manchester, Old Trafford cricket ground, 4 June 2017

Has a pop star ever exhibited such fortitude? Less than two weeks after the bombing at the singer's Manchester Arena show that [killed 22 people](#) and injured hundreds more, Grande performed for a 50,000-strong crowd and became a symbol of bravery. She had planned a sombre setlist in respect of the victims, but a conversation with the mother of the 15-year-old victim Olivia Campbell led the singer to scrap it: "She told me that Olivia would have wanted to hear the hits," Grande said on stage – so that is what she delivered.

It transformed a moment of tragedy into an opportunity for defiance. Joined by big names such as Justin Bieber, Katy Perry and Liam Gallagher, Grande

and the crowd danced, sang, laughed and cried through their grief. “This evening has been so light and so filled with fun and love and bright energy,” Grande said, summarising what made One Love Manchester a unique act of resistance. *AK*

Lorde



Lorde at Manchester Apollo on the Melodrama tour. Photograph: Myles Wright/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Melodrama tour, September 2017-November 2018

The euphoric world tour for Lorde’s second album featured a floating room designed by Es Devlin in which the New Zealand singer and dancers acted out the drama of a house party. Months later, Lorde accused Kanye West and Kid Cudi of stealing her stage design. They denied it; meanwhile Devlin expressed her interest that both acts were “responding to our disjointed times”. A symbol for this era of precarious pop. *LS*

Beyoncé

Coachella festival, California, 14 April 2018

This spectacular feat of artistic and musical ingenuity disrupted and decolonised homogenous modern festival culture. Drawing on the traditions

of historically black colleges and universities, black feminism and a reverence and sense of restitution for Beyoncé's black musical forebears, it redefined the festival headline set. *AK*

Stormzy

Glastonbury festival, Somerset, 28 June 2019

The most potent moment of this set – a grand production featuring BMX bikers, ticker tape and a ballet interlude – was probably when Stormzy recited a list of 52 British MCs, charting the breadth of homegrown rap. His platforming of the scene was modest and generous, but Stormzy's statuesque performance was its own form of evangelism. *BBT*

Billie Eilish

American Airlines arena, Miami, 9 March 2020

On the first night of her world tour (which was curtailed by the pandemic days later), [Eilish unveiled the Not My Responsibility video](#), in which she rejected the toxic narrative surrounding her body image. It showed gutsy self-assurance to implicate her audience and say: I am not yours. This pointed separation of church and state broke the generations-old contract between teen stars and their spectators and exemplified Eilish's self-preservation-first interpretation of pop stardom. *AK*

This article was amended on 11 February 2022. An earlier version said the blue plaque commemorating the Who's 1970 performance at the University of Leeds was commissioned by English Heritage. In fact, it was the work of Leeds Civic Trust.

Please share your legendary concerts below.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/feb/11/ziggy-bows-out-madonna-scares-the-pope-and-dylan-goes-electric-50-gigs-that-changed-music>

UK news

‘What took so long?’: how the papers covered the resignation of Cressida Dick

While many front pages say the Met chief was ‘forced out’, some cheer her departure after a series of ‘catastrophic blunders’



How some of the papers covered the resignation of Met chief Cressida Dick on Friday. Composite: UK newspapers, Twitter

[Martin Farrer](#)

Thu 10 Feb 2022 20.59 EST

The departure of [Cressida Dick](#) as Britain’s most senior police officer is the main story in most of the papers on Friday, although there is some difference in emphasis about whether she deserved her fate.

The **Guardian** led with the line that the Metropolitan police commissioner had to leave because London’s mayor, Sadiq Khan, lost confidence in her

ability to reform the scandal-hit force.

[“Met police chief forced out over toxic culture failings”](#), its main headline reads, reporting that Dick quit when she realised that her plan to tackle a culture of misogyny and racism among the ranks did not pass muster at City Hall.

Guardian front page, Friday 11 February 2022: Met police chief forced out over toxic culture failings pic.twitter.com/nG1GzyuQ0a

— Guardian news (@guardiannews) [February 10, 2022](#)

The **Times** splash headline says “Scramble for new Met chief after Dick quits” and reports that her resignation had “blindsided” the home secretary, Priti Patel, who now has to find a new chief at a time when the force is investigating her boss, Boris Johnson, over the Downing Street parties scandal. An analysis says it was a “dramatic fall for a police officer once widely regarded as the best of her generation”, but who had become engulfed in scandal.

The Times: Scramble for new Met chief after Dick quits
[#tomorrowspaperstoday pic.twitter.com/Mqk40n5Kca](#)

— Helena Wilkinson (@BBCHelena) [February 10, 2022](#)

The **Telegraph**’s main story says “Cressida Dick forced out as head of the Met” and chief reporter Robert Mendick also raises the nagging question about what Dick’s resignation might mean for the under-pressure prime minister.

“For Mr Johnson, it remains unclear whether the departure of a commissioner who had his full backing when her contract was up for renewal only last year will have devastating consequences for his career,” Mendick writes.

The front page of tomorrow's Daily Telegraph:

'Cressida Dick forced out as head of the Met'[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)

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

— The Telegraph (@Telegraph) [February 10, 2022](#)

Other papers have a different take, typified by the **Mail's** splash headline, which is: "Calamity Cressida fired – but what took so long?". It says she was responsible for "catastrophic blunders" such as failing to root out Sarah Everard's murderer Wayne Couzens from the ranks that have "wrecked public trust in police".

Friday's [@DailyMailUK](#) [#MailFrontPages](#)
pic.twitter.com/JK6dW2Ha8Z

— Daily Mail U.K. (@DailyMailUK) [February 10, 2022](#)

The **Express** leads with "Fears grow for Queen as Charles gets Covid", but it has picture of Dick on its front page and the headline is along the same lines as the Mail's: "Scandal hit Yard chief Cressida Dick FINALLY quits".

Tomorrow's front page: Fears grow for Queen as Charles gets Covid[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) <https://t.co/4dK5kXmtsO>
pic.twitter.com/Zy0eE7onsd

— Daily Express (@Daily_Express) [February 10, 2022](#)

The **i** goes with the line that Dick had announced her intention to stay in the post earlier on Thursday, only to later realise that Khan was not going to back her. "Defiant Met chief forced out of Yard".

Friday's front page: Defiant Met chief Cressida Dick forced out of Yard[https://t.co/0R3p5zwc7m#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)
pic.twitter.com/0eDGiHhfrr

— i newspaper (@theipaper) [February 10, 2022](#)

The **Metro** leads with “Cressida ditched” while the **Yorkshire Post** has the main headline “Dick quits as Metropolitan police chief”.

Tomorrow's Paper Today □

CRESSIDA DITCHED

□ Met's chief is forced out... after saying: 'I'm not going.' [#tomorrowspaperstoday](#) pic.twitter.com/qbCSw0TJcv

— Metro (@MetroUK) [February 10, 2022](#)

The **Mirror** leads on “Queen Covid scare” but has a small story on its front and the headline “Top cop Dick forced out”.

Tomorrow's front page: Queen Covid scare [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) <https://t.co/buN8GkeIIu> pic.twitter.com/oqfaNWlk3s

— The Mirror (@DailyMirror) [February 10, 2022](#)

Ditto the **Sun**, which leads on a royal line but says in a secondary story that the Met chief has paid the price for a series of damaging stories. “Dick axed for scandal at Met”, it says.

The **FT**'s main front-page picture is of the outgoing police chief and the headline “Dick forced to quit after report into sexism and racism at Met”. But its main story is “Johnson looks for investment ‘big bang’ with regulatory deal”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/11/what-took-so-long-how-the-papers-covered-the-resignation-of-cressida-dick>

Cressida Dick

Cressida Dick timeline: Met commissioner dogged by controversies

First female head of UK's biggest police force faced criticism over Operation Midland, Sarah Everard's murder and the death of Daniel Morgan



Cressida Dick delivers a statement outside the Old Bailey, where police officer Wayne Couzens was sentenced following his murder of Sarah Everard. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

[Tom Ambrose](#)

Thu 10 Feb 2022 16.16 EST

Dame Cressida Dick joined the [Metropolitan police](#) almost 40 years ago, while she rose through the ranks and became the first female commissioner of the force, her time has been marked by controversy.

1983 – Dick joins the Met as a constable, patrolling a beat in west [London](#). She is promoted to chief inspector within a decade.

1995 – She transfers to Thames Valley police, where she spent time working as area commander for Oxford.

2001 – Dick returns to the Met as a commander and becomes the head of Operation Trident in 2003. It is credited with reducing the number of drug gangs operating in London.



The shrine to Jean Charles de Menezes outside Stockwell Tube station, south London, where the shooting took place in 2005. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

22 July 2005 – Dick is the commander of Operation Kratos and in the aftermath of the 21 July London bombings – exactly two weeks after the 7/7 attacks – she was gold commander in the room during the fatal shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes. The 27-year-old Brazilian national was repeatedly shot in the head at Stockwell tube station by officers who mistook him for a suicide bomber.

While the Met was found to have made catastrophic errors that led to De Menezes's death, Dick was cleared of any “personal culpability” for the

tragedy. The De Menezes family would later call for Dick to be barred from leading the Met.



Assistant Commissioner Cressida Dick in 2009 Photograph: EPA

2011 – In July, Dick is appointed assistant commissioner, specialist operations, and oversees security during the 2012 Olympics in London. Later that year, she is appointed acting deputy commissioner. However, a strained relationship with the then commissioner, Bernard Hogan-Howe, sees Dick leave the Met for a role in the Foreign Office.



New Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick at New Scotland Yard, 22 February 2017 Photograph: Peter Nicholls/Reuters

22 February 2017 - Dick becomes the first female head of the Met, completing a remarkable career comeback. She vows to reform the force but faces immediate challenges in her first year following the terrorist attacks at Westminster, London Bridge and Finsbury Park.

December 2019 – Dick was referred to the police watchdog over her handling of Operation Midland, the force's investigation into allegations of child sexual abuse by members of the British establishment. The inquiry lasted a year and a half, cost £2.5m, and ended without a single arrest.

However, the Independent Office for Police Conduct cleared Dick of allegations relating to the investigation, finding no evidence that she had “deliberately misled the public”.



Sisters Bibaa Henry (left) and Nicole Smallman. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

June 2020 – Sisters Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman are murdered in a north London park. There is initial criticism of the force over their poor response to reports the women were missing. Their bodies were found by family members.

[Two PCs who were then stationed at the crime scene were later jailed for taking photographs of their bodies and sharing them with friends and colleagues on WhatsApp.](#)

An apology was angrily rejected by the victims' family. Their mother, Mina Smallman, said the officers "dehumanised our children" and said she believed racism was a factor in the lack of initial search.

September 2020 - Dick faces calls to resign by Black Lives Matter activists who say she has "failed to acknowledge" racism within the force.



Sarah Everard, who was killed by serving Met officer Wayne Couzens
Photograph: Metropolitan Police/Reuters

March 2021 – Dick's handling of the murder of Sarah Everard by serving [Met officer Wayne Couzens](#) caused anger and frustration in City Hall and government.

After her killer was sentenced to a whole-life term in September 2021, the Met leadership was expected to show it understood the concerns. Instead it was mocked after saying that women who were worried about an officer approaching them could wave down a bus. The Met announced its own inquiry, as have the government.



Police detain a woman as people gather at a memorial site in Clapham Common Bandstand, following the kidnap and murder of Sarah Everard, 13 March 2021 Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

The Met was also criticised for its handling of a vigil held for Everard, which resulted in clashes and arrests.

June 2021 – The Met is described as “institutionally corrupt” and Dick is personally censured for obstruction by an independent inquiry set up to review the murder of the private detective Daniel Morgan in 1987.

The findings trigger calls from his brother, Alastair, for Dick to consider her position.

January 2022 – Dick is criticised for the Met’s initial failure to investigate alleged parties held at Downing Street and other government offices during lockdown. The Met later confirmed it would indeed investigate.



Met Police Chief Cressida Dick outside the BBC, 10 February 2022
Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

February 2022 – It emerges that a Met officer disciplined after an inquiry into misogynistic and racist messages has since been promoted.

Misconduct was proven against the unnamed officer after a watchdog inquiry into messages about hitting and raping women, which were shared by up to 19 officers based mainly at Charing Cross police station.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/10/cressida-dick-timeline-a-commissioner-dogged-by-controversies>

Design

‘I can see into the lives of North Koreans’ – the professor who reads washed-up rubbish

From sweet wrappers to noodle packets, Prof Kang Dong-wan collects litter that floats to South Korea from the repressive North. Can military secrets really be uncovered in their surprisingly sophisticated designs?



Copycat designs ... One of the 1,414 wrappers the professor writes about in his new book, Picking Up North Korean Garbage in the Five West Sea Islands. Photograph: Kang Dong-wan

Matthew Wilcox
Fri 11 Feb 2022 04.48 EST

On a clear day from the beaches of Yeonpyeong, a tiny South Korean island, you can see the coast of [North Korea](#) some 12 km (seven miles) distant.

Glance down, however, and you might see something else. Amid the tangle of seaweed and greying driftwood, the chunks of bleached polystyrene and shreds of fishing net, there may lurk bits of brightly coloured plastic.

To the untrained observer, these scraps – sweet wrappers, cigarette cartons, instant noodle packets, all covered in oversized script, vivid colours and garish cartoon characters – might only confirm the Yellow Sea as one of Earth's most polluted marine environments. To the sharp-eyed, however, encoded in the design of these snippets is valuable information about the society from which they originate: [North Korea](#), virtually a closed shop to the rest of the world.

The first person to appreciate this was Kang Dong-wan, a professor of politics at Dong-A University in Busan, [South Korea](#). Kang has spent the past year collecting 1,414 wrappers from the beaches of some of South Korea's most far-flung outcrops. Until Covid, he had studied the North from across the demilitarised zone, catching its changing slogans with powerful lenses. When access to his vantage point was closed off, Kang relocated.



‘The most surprising thing was how much garbage made it here’ ... Kang Dong-wan at work on Yeonpyeong. Photograph: Kang Dong-wan

The Five West Sea Islands were occupied by the South at the end of the war and now form the de facto maritime border between the two countries. Yeonpyeong, the closest island to the North, was the subject of a tit-for-tat [artillery barrage in 2010](#) that left four dead and led to the evacuation of about 80% of the island's 2,000 residents.

"The most surprising thing," says Kang, speaking from the island where he continues to scour the beaches, "was just how much garbage made it here." The professor has turned the fruits of his foraging into a book, *Picking Up North Korean Garbage in the Five West Sea Islands*, which divides the litter into categories: sweets, baked goods, drinks, dairy products, foodstuffs, seasonings, liquor, cigarettes, medical supplies and sundries. "With this rubbish," he says, "I can see into the lives of North Koreans."

Foremost among the preconceptions shredded by Kang's scraps is the idea that the country is unsophisticated, that what goods there are are basic. "The packaging is surprising in its refinement," he says. Perhaps most surprising, he adds, is the way products from the North mirror those of the South. "In a capitalist economy," he says, "packaging and design are tailored to appeal to consumers." You might expect things to be different in a repressive communist regime, but Kang believes otherwise: "Not even North Korea can completely ignore the desires of its people."

Take the wrapper for Galaxy Candy with Strawberry Cream Inside, made in the Pyongyang Wheat Flour Factory in North Korea. It is covered in bright drawings and colours, with a cat suspiciously reminiscent of Sanrio's Hello Kitty. This more elaborate packaging reflects recent changes, says Kang, as North Korean producers have developed sleeker branding.



Soldier's diet? ... Some of the washed-up trash. Photograph: Kang Dong-wan

This is partially a consequence of reforms that followed Kim Jong-un's accession in 2011, heralding a liberalisation of the economy. Simultaneously, an increase in smuggling has made North Koreans familiar with products from abroad. This more refined packaging is an attempt to compete.

The trash also offers a glimpse into factory conditions, says Kang. Ingredient lists and production dates reveal what North Korea has been able to make itself during the pandemic, and what it is forced to import with its dwindling cash reserves. Packaging, too, will often specify what factory a product was made in. If it's known to be operated by the military, this can indicate what the North's soldiers are eating – as many such snacks are, says Kang, "supplied to the military. In general, the public don't consume them. There is no money."

Even the material itself can hold clues. Newer trash, Kang explains, is often composed of recycled or locally sourced materials, a further indication of the North's economic state. Perhaps their reasons are green, but it's far more likely that recycling is being forced on them by scarce resources.

Nick Bonner, who has [written about North Korean product design](#), also sees the wrappers as a gauge of the North's economic plight. "I would imagine over the next few months, as the sanctions bite harder and Covid keeps the border to China closed, there will be less and less garbage for Kang to pick up," he says. "Sad for him but, more worryingly, a reflection of how tough its food and economic situation is."

In the meantime, however, Kang continues his shoreline vigil, adding to his haul with every new tide.

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AstraZeneca

AstraZeneca forecasts higher 2022 sales after record revenues

Drugmaker's total revenues increased by 41% last year with help from \$4bn Covid jab income



AstraZeneca now plans to move away from its not-for-profit vaccine pricing.
Photograph: Morteza Nikoubazl/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Julia Kollewe](#)

Thu 10 Feb 2022 08.30 EST

AstraZeneca forecast higher 2022 sales and lifted its annual dividend for the first time in a decade after record revenues last year, but warned the boost from its Covid-19 products would decline.

The Anglo-Swedish drugmaker said it made almost \$4bn (£2.9bn) last year from the Covid jab it developed with Oxford University. It [moved away](#)

from its not-for-profit pricing in November, when it signed new contracts in Latin America, the Middle East and Asia. The shot, called Vaxzevria, has not yet been approved by the US regulator.

Sir John Bell, the Oxford professor who worked on the jab, this week accused scientists and politicians of damaging the reputation of the vaccine, potentially costing hundreds of thousands of lives. Billed as the vaccine to deliver the world from Covid, it became a political football last year when AstraZeneca faced accusations over its efficacy, supply and side-effects.

Asked on Thursday whether the company could have managed the process better, the chief executive, Pascal Soriot, said he had no regrets. “It’s really hard to regret anything when you have delivered 2.6bn doses of the vaccine and you have saved 1 million lives around the world and of course enabled the economies in many countries to restart.” Together with the Chinese vaccines, the AstraZeneca shot is the most widely used in the world.

The drugmaker’s total revenues increased by 41% to a record \$37.4bn last year, boosted by cancer drugs. In the final quarter, sales rose 62% to \$12bn, a quarterly record. AstraZeneca raised its dividend for the first time in 10 years, paying out \$2.87 per share for 2021, with plans to pay \$2.90 in future years.

Soriot said the company would reach its target of \$40bn sales, outlined in 2014 when it fended off a hostile takeover attempt from Pfizer, in 2022, a year earlier than expected. It is now expecting a high-teens percentage increase in revenues and a mid- to high-twenties percentage increase in core earnings per share.

Despite the jump in sales, the drugmaker made an annual loss before tax of \$265m, compared with a profit of \$3.9bn the year before, after spending more on product launches, research and development, and the acquisition of the rare diseases specialist Alexion. Its research spending rose by 62% to \$9.7bn.

AstraZeneca’s Covid vaccine is far cheaper than those made by its US rivals Pfizer and Moderna. Pfizer raked in almost \$37bn from the jab it developed

with Germany's BioNTech last year, prompting accusations of "pandemic profiteering" from campaigners.

Soriot said the company was still offering affordable and tiered pricing for Vaxzevria to lower-income countries. Sales from the vaccine are expected to decline this year, partially offset by growth in sales from its new Covid-19 drug, Evusheld. Evusheld, an antibody treatment for immunocompromised people who can't be vaccinated received, emergency use authorisation in the US and France in early December.

Since taking the helm almost a decade ago, Soriot has successfully rebuilt AstraZeneca's drugs pipeline. Among its 13 blockbuster medicines – those generating more than \$1bn in a sales a year – several have become multibillion-pound sellers, including the lung cancer drug Tagrisso, the ovarian cancer drug Lynparza and the diabetes and heart drug Farxiga.

He also pulled off the company's largest ever deal, buying Alexion for \$39bn, which completed in mid-July. Analysts say it should underpin future growth, along with recent drugs pipeline successes. Rare diseases medicines contributed \$3.1bn of revenues last year.

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Covid puts substitute teachers in high demand and short supply



New Mexico's governor called on state employees and national guard members to volunteer as substitute teachers. Photograph: Adria Malcolm/Reuters

Schools across the US scramble to fill vacancies created by a teacher shortage and Covid-related absences

Mario Koran

Thu 10 Feb 2022 06.00 EST

Henry Leckenby, 54, recalls a feeling of scarcity when he first started working as a substitute teacher. Each morning, he jumped on the computer first thing to see which assignments were open that day.

Now, he has his pick of jobs he wants to take and schools he wants to work in.

“I’ve gotten the impression that every single day I wake up, I have work if I want it. The other day there were literally at least a couple dozen openings,” he said.

Leckenby, who lives in La Crosse, Wisconsin, has a PhD in physics, but found it difficult to find work after a university job dried up.

“‘Overqualified’ is a word I heard a lot,” he said. But substitute teaching offered a flexible schedule that fit his needs and he’s been doing it ever since.

Substitute teachers like Leckenby suddenly find themselves on the winning end of a supply-and-demand problem facing schools across the country: Too few full-time teachers, and not enough substitute teachers to cover for them.

As the Omicron variant hurtled across the nation, political leaders from the White House to local school boards faced intense pressure to keep open brick-and-mortar schools – and most have.

“Let’s put it in perspective: 95%, as high as 98%, of the schools in America are open, functioning and capable of doing the job,” president [Joe Biden said](#) at a press conference last month. He urged school districts to use funding to keep schools open.

But that reality has left the nation's public schools scrambling to fill holes created by a lack of available teachers to fill vacancies. And it's created a cascade of day-to-day disruptions within school buildings as staff chip in to cover for absent colleagues, leaving some assigned duties aside in the process.

[Research has shown](#) teacher absences have a detrimental impact on student learning, which could compound the learning loss caused by ongoing disruptions in education over the past two years.

States have taken a variety of measures in a desperate rush to solve the problem – from lowering entrance requirements and increasing pay to [more drastic measures](#).

Oklahoma governor Kevin Stitt issued an executive order last month that permits state agencies to allow their workers to work as substitutes while keeping their regular pay. That brought uniformed police officers into schools – to [lead classroom instruction](#).

Meanwhile, New Mexico's governor Michelle Lujan Grisham called on state workers and members of the National Guard to volunteer for classroom duty. By early February, [at least 78 members](#) of New Mexico's National Guard reported for classroom duty.

In Austin, Texas, 400 employees from the school district's central office have chipped in to work as substitute teachers, the district said last month. So did [a county judge](#).

'A double hit'

Beneath the immediate need for substitutes is a shortage of full-time teachers that predates the pandemic. But data indicates that Covid may have hastened some teachers' departures from the field.

In July 2020, in the months that followed Covid's arrival, the seasonally adjusted rate of workers who quit state and local public education jobs reached [1.5% – a 20-year-high](#), according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. By the following summer, however, the quit-rate had fallen to a

record low of 0.3%. And by December, the quit-rate was on par with similar government jobs.

Some who resigned from education jobs may have been lured by higher pay and a better work-life balance [offered in the private sector](#).

But Peggy Wirtz-Olsen, president of the Wisconsin Education Association Council, said others have been driven away by the challenging conditions teachers have long endured.

“It’s been a double hit, with the absences caused by the pandemic plus an alarming number of teachers leaving the profession due to unrealistic workloads, low pay, and a lack of input in school decisions. All of that exacerbates the situation we find ourselves in right now,” said Wirtz-Olsen.

And with remaining teachers out sick for longer periods of time this year, finding enough substitutes has presented an acute challenge.

More than three-quarters of school leaders have struggled to find substitute teachers, according to a nationally representative survey conducted in the early weeks of the school year by EdWeek Research Center. Before the pandemic, schools nationally were able to fill about 80% of teacher absences, while this year it may be closer to 50% or 60%, [EdWeek reported](#).

And in California, the nation’s most populous state, fewer people are applying for permits to become substitute teachers than before Covid arrived.

Between 2019 and 2020, the number of people applying for permits to work as substitute teachers dropped by 25%, according data from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. While applications rebounded in 2021, they were still 87% of pre-pandemic numbers.

In Wisconsin, Wirtz-Olsen said the current challenges underscore the need to improve working conditions both to recruit and retain full-time teachers as well as the high-quality substitutes they depend on. The alternative would mean further disruptions to student learning.

“The constant need to step in and cover for others is putting additional stress on an already stretched system – both on educators and our support professionals in buildings who are increasingly asked to cover,” she said. “And for the student experience, that disruption is causing a lack of consistency from day to day.”



The shortage of teachers is compounding worries about learning loss among students who have had to miss school due to closures or Covid symptoms.

Photograph: Mark Hertzberg/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

In Milwaukee, Wisconsin’s largest school district, full-time elementary school teacher Angela Harris said she doesn’t remember seeing a substitute teacher in her school all year, despite staff being out sick. More often, paraprofessionals or other support staff will step in to cover for absent teachers, she said. She worries about the loss of routine and what it means for students.

“It’s been a revolving door for our students, and I’ve seen the ripple effects across my school,” Harris said.

“There were disparities that already existed, and Covid-19 has just exposed those gaps and made them even worse,” she said.

‘I’ve been deeply alarmed’

Despite the demands and potential risks, many still find in substitute teaching the flexibility that fits their needs. That’s true even for some teachers who are at heightened risk of complications from Covid.

Linda Carter, 70, works as a substitute teacher in Lee County, Florida. Because a paralyzed nerve in her diaphragm left her lung useless, she wears a non-invasive ventilator to help her breathe 18 hours a day. Carter relies on augmented voice technology to deliver instruction, feeding her lesson plans into the software in advance, then letting the electronic voice take the lead in the classroom.

“I just push one of my buttons and it will tell the students what they need to do, provided they stay quiet and follow instructions,” Carter said. “I teach hi-tech.”

Carter, who serves as the treasurer for the National Substitute Teachers Alliance, said she finds the work deeply rewarding and has no plans to leave the classroom anytime soon. But she can’t say the same for all of the substitute teachers she knows, many of whom are retired educators who’ve left the job out of concern about contracting and spreading Covid.

Currently, at least eight states, including Florida, have banned school districts from issuing universal mask mandates.

“A lot of teachers have decided to hang it up because it’s not worth the risk, and I think it’s the same around the country,” Carter said.

In La Crosse, the crunch to find substitute teachers has meant better pay for Leckenby. He’s seen an increase from around \$120 a day when he first started, to around \$140 today.

Still, fear of Covid lingers. Leckenby’s wife works with vulnerable populations. And at 54, he worries about the complications Covid could cause for him.

“I haven’t been scared away. But there have been times I’ve been deeply alarmed,” he said.

“With substitute teaching, there are no benefits. So if I test positive or get sick, that’s at least five days where I’m just out of work. You’re looking at several hundred dollars that could just disappear,” he said.

That’s why, in addition to being vaccinated, boosted and wearing an N95 mask, Leckenby chooses to work only in school districts he knows take masking and mitigation strategies seriously.

“Thankfully, there are some school districts that have mask policies and actually enforce them,” he said. “If there weren’t, it would be a lot more difficult to continue to do this work.”

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Prince Charles

Prince Charles met Queen two days before testing positive for Covid

Clarence House says heir to the throne, who also contracted the virus in 2020, is self-isolating

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Prince Charles has tested positive for Covid for the second time and is self-isolating. Photograph: Max Mumby/Indigo/Getty Images

Tobi Thomas
[@tobithomas_](#)

Thu 10 Feb 2022 08.27 EST

Prince Charles has tested positive for Covid-19 and is self-isolating, Clarence House has announced.

It is the second time the heir to the throne, 73, has contracted the virus. [The first time was in 2020.](#)

The Queen has been confirmed to have been in direct contact with Charles, but the monarch is not displaying any symptoms, a palace source said. They declined to say whether or not the Queen had tested negative.

The 95-year-old is believed to have spent time with Charles on Tuesday when her eldest son was carrying out an investiture on her behalf at her Windsor Castle home. She is understood to be fully vaccinated so will not be self isolating, although she will be advised to take daily lateral flow tests for a week.

A message on the prince's official Twitter feed stated: "This morning the Prince of Wales has tested positive for Covid-19 and is now self-isolating.

"HRH is deeply disappointed not to be able to attend today's events in Winchester and will look to reschedule his visit as soon as possible."

The announcement of the positive test was made just after midday, about 12 minutes before Charles was due to arrive in Winchester to [unveil a statue](#).

It comes days after the Queen marked her platinum jubilee by expressing [her “sincere wish” that the Duchess of Cornwall would be Queen Camilla](#) at Charles's side when he became king.

The Duchess of Cornwall, who has tested negative, revealed during solo engagements on Thursday that Charles, who is self-isolating, is finding the situation "a bit tiresome".

Camilla had accompanied Charles to the British Museum on Wednesday evening where they met scores of people at a reception to celebrate the work of the British Asian Trust.



Prince Charles met the home secretary and chancellor at a reception to celebrate the British Asian Trust. Photograph: Tristan Fewings/AFP/Getty Images

At the reception – where he was in close contact with the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, the home secretary, Priti Patel, and Ian Rush, the former Liverpool footballer – Charles spoke about the “devastating impact” the pandemic has had on south Asia.

Using his pet name for Camilla, which means “darling” or “beloved” in Urdu, he said: “I cannot quite believe it is almost two years to the day that both my mehabooba and myself were able to be with all of you to celebrate the work of the British Asian Trust.”

In March 2020, Charles lost his sense of taste and smell after contracting Covid, but suffered overall from a mild form of the virus. He said he “got away with it quite lightly”. At the time, he spent seven days in self-isolation at his Birkhall home in Scotland before resuming his duties.

His situation is known as a reinfection – when someone tests positive for Covid-19 more than 90 days after a previous positive result – and these represent about 10% of daily cases in England.

Of the 14.8m infection episodes in England since the start of the pandemic, 588,114 (4%) are probably reinfections.

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2022.02.11 - Opinion

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Cressida Dick

Cressida Dick could not solve the Met's problems. She could barely admit they existed

[Sandra Laville](#)



There was precedent for a commissioner determined to root out misbehaviour. Failure to follow it cost her the top job



London mayor Sadiq Khan put Dick on notice that the behaviour of her officers was a return to the bad old days of the 1970s. Photograph: Getty Images

Fri 11 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

When Robert Mark was appointed commissioner of the [Metropolitan police](#) in the 1970s he wryly suggested his ambition was to ensure the service arrested more criminals than it employed.

In the five years of his leadership (1972 to 1977) Mark's success can be measured by the 50 criminal officers he put before a court, and the nearly 500 others who were swept out of the organisation as a result of his ruthless uncovering of the entrenched and institutionalised corruption which had protected them for too long.

Last week the London mayor, Sadiq Khan, put the current commissioner [Cressida Dick](#) on notice that the behaviour of her officers was a return to the bad old days of the 70s, when corruption went hand in hand with sexism and racism as an unchallenged cultural norm within Scotland Yard.

But Dick – appointed the first female commissioner in 2017 and, as our most prominent officer, the symbol for policing nationwide – never had the clarity

of vision and purpose to follow Mark's well documented example of how to effectively cleanse the rot from an organisation.

Perhaps this is because to tackle such systemic problems, you have to admit they exist in the first place, something Dick singularly failed to do. Instead as commissioner, she repeatedly employed the excuse that the horrific behaviour of Metropolitan police officers was [the work of the odd “bad ’un”](#).

She never saw that the unchecked behaviour of multiple bad 'uns amounted to a culture of impunity, or that the repeated themes of violent misogyny, racism, homophobia and abuse of power in the wrongdoing of officers was a sign of a systemic problem.

Dick, who was put on warning by Khan that she had days or weeks to radically alter her stance on the Met's deep-seated problems, was unable to join the dots.

In turbulent times, sound leadership, as Mark displayed, can force through radical change. But where he joined the Met police as an outsider, a senior officer from the Leicestershire constabulary, Dick is Met police through and through.

Known affectionately by some as Cress, she rose to senior roles having been one of the Met rank and file, is steeped in its values and sense of exceptionalism, and ultimately imbued with unerring loyalty to her force.

Scandal after scandal has rocked her organisation, and the public's trust in her officers: the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by serving officer Wayne Couzens; the taking of photos by officers at the murder scene of two sisters; the misogyny and racism exhibited by officers at Charing Cross station, the threats to kill a female colleague made by one of those same officers; [the sharing of disgusting pornography between colleagues on armed protection at Downing Street](#); and the signs of deep-rooted homophobia in the inept investigation into serial killer Stephen Port.

But after each one, Dick has simply apologised or retreated, apparently blind to what became glaringly obvious to others: something at the core of her organisation was dark and wrong.

Take her words when Couzens pleaded guilty to the kidnap, rape and murder of Everard; they were spoken from the perspective of someone whose greatest concern was the reputational damage to policing rather than a duty to protect the public.

“All of us in the Met are sickened, angered and devastated by this man’s truly dreadful crimes. Everyone in policing feels betrayed,” she said.

But for those outside the closed ranks of policing, it was the Met who had done the betraying and the public, in particular women, who were the betrayed.

Speaking after the revelations that two male officers had taken pictures of the scene where sisters Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry lay fatally stabbed, Dick’s apology was so heavily qualified as to be no apology at all.

“If those officers’ actions have added to the family’s unimaginable distress then I apologise,” she said.

The mayor of London was [true to his word](#), when on Thursday he withdrew his support, and she was forced to resign.

Her resignation came after a public statement on Thursday in which she claimed that she led Met “very well”; indeed she believed she had already transformed the force and maintained the trust of the rank and file.

As the search begins for her successor, there are lessons to learn in examining what Dick never did in the face of the repeated impropriety, abuse of power and at times criminal wrongdoing of some of her officers.

She should have publicly admitted there was a problem with the whole culture of the force, clearly identified the standards her officers must adhere to, and then made sure they were enforced ruthlessly and comprehensively, *all the time*.

Sir Paul Stephenson, commissioner from 2009 to 2011, used to say “intrusive supervision” of his officers was required to ensure they upheld standards and avoided corrupt behaviour.

And after the Macpherson report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, Sir Ian Blair, another former commissioner, said Met police officers needed to show real humility and willingness to change if they were to build new credibility with the public.

But that humility and willingness to change never came from Dick, who only recently was spending public money denying there was a systemic problem of prejudice within her organisation

Lawyers for the Met argued successfully in December at the inquest into the four young gay men murdered by Port that the issue of homophobic prejudice should not be considered by the jury. The lawyers said the mistakes were explained by “forgetfulness, indolence, lack of training, stress, overwork or inadequate supervision and management” – not prejudice.

Nothing in the Met’s behaviour, as it was rocked by more and more shocking revelations, suggested Dick ever understood the need for transparent and honest scrutiny of her force in order to tackle its cultural problems.

Instead, Dick’s approach was to play down events and keep things quiet. At gross misconduct disciplinary hearings for two of the Charing Cross officers, the men were given anonymity, even though one of them had been the subject of a criminal conviction for threatening to murder a female colleague. No transparency there.

Mark is remembered because he displayed an uncompromising boldness of thought that put the public first in his cleansing of the Met of the 1970s; he did not resort to sticking-plaster solutions when it was abundantly clear the requirement was major surgery.

These times called for similar decisiveness. But Dick never rose to the task, and, unendingly loyal to her beloved Met, was not willing to face the turbulence and resentments which would have been provoked by taking on the malign culture within it.

Where Dick failed, there is a desperate need now for someone, perhaps an individual with the dispassionate and fearless eye of an outsider, to succeed.

- Sandra Laville, a former Guardian crime correspondent, is now its environment correspondent
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OpinionPolitics

We cannot take democracy for granted – this government’s failings imperil us all

[John Major](#)

Trust in UK politics is at a low ebb, eroded by foolish behaviour. This matters to parliament, and it matters to our country



Prime minister’s questions in the House of Commons, 9 February.
Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK Parliament/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 10 Feb 2022 09.58 EST

Our democracy has always been among the strongest and most settled in the world. It relies on respect for the laws made in parliament, on an independent judiciary, on acceptance of the conventions of public life, and on self-restraint by the powerful.

If any of that delicate balance goes astray – as it has, as it *is* – our democracy is undermined. Our government is culpable, in small but important ways, of failing to honour these conventions.

Where governments fall short, candour is the best means of shoring up support. But that candour must be freely offered – not dragged out under the searchlight of inquiries. If it is not wholehearted and convincing, the loss of public trust can be swift and unforgiving.

We have seen that playing out in recent weeks. Trust in politics is at a low ebb, eroded by foolish behaviour, leaving a sense of unease about how our politics is being conducted.

Too often, ministers have been evasive and the truth has been optional. When they respond to legitimate questions with pre-prepared soundbites, or half-truths, or misdirection, or wild exaggeration, then respect for government and politics dies a little more. Misleading replies to questions invite disillusion. Outright lies breed contempt.

In our democracy, we are able to speak truth to power. But, if democracy is to be respected, power must also speak truth to the people. And yet, in recent years, it has not been doing so.

There has been cynicism about politics from the dawn of time. We are told that politicians are “all the same”, and this untruth conditions electors to condone lies as though they were the accepted currency of public life.

But politicians are not “all the same”. And lies are just not acceptable. To imply otherwise is to cheapen public life, and slander the vast majority of elected politicians, who do not knowingly mislead.

But some do – and their behaviour is corrosive. This tarnishes both politics and the reputation of parliament. It is a dangerous trend. If lies become commonplace, truth ceases to exist. What and whom, then, can we believe? The risk is ... nothing and no one. And where are we then?

Parliament is an echo chamber. Lies can become accepted as fact, which – as the Speaker has pointed out – has consequences for policy and for

reputation. That is why deliberate lies to parliament have been fatal to political careers, and must always be so. If trust in the word of our leaders in parliament is lost, trust in government will be lost too.

At No 10, the prime minister and officials broke lockdown laws.

Brazen excuses were dreamed up. Day after day, the public was asked to believe the unbelievable. Ministers were sent out to defend the indefensible – making themselves look either gullible or foolish.

Collectively, this has made the government look distinctly shifty, which has consequences that go far beyond political unpopularity. The lack of trust in the elected portion of our democracy cannot be brushed aside. Parliament has a duty to correct this.

If it does not, and trust is lost at home, our politics is broken.

If trust in our word is lost overseas, we may no longer be able to work effectively with friends and partners for mutual benefit – or even security. Unfortunately, that trust is being lost, and our reputation overseas has fallen because of our conduct. We are weakening our influence in the world.

We should be wary. Even a casual glance at overseas opinion shows our reputation is being shredded. A nation that loses friends and allies becomes a weaker nation.

And when ministers attack or blame foreign governments to gain populist support at home, we are not taken seriously. Megaphone diplomacy merely increases hostility overseas. International trust may not be easy to regain.

Our way of life is built around the maintenance of law. It was unprecedented when this government broke the law by proroguing parliament, to avoid debates on Brexit that might not have gone as they wished.

I had promised, in a BBC interview, that if the government attempted to muzzle parliament I would challenge their action in court. So I did, though not as swiftly as the civil rights campaigner Gina Miller. Both our challenges

were upheld unanimously by the supreme court, which ruled that the government's actions were unlawful.

The prime minister said he “disagreed” with the court, and the then leader of the house accused the supreme court judges of “[a constitutional coup](#)”. The government accepted the verdict, but in bad faith. It did not apologise – nor did it mend its ways.

It went on to introduce legislation giving the government the power to break international law, albeit – as one minister conceded – “[in a limited but specific way](#)”. Fortunately, the issue fell away, but it was a proposal that should never have been put forward.

It cut overseas aid – which parliament had set at 0.7% of GDP – without the prior approval of parliament (although this was obtained retrospectively).

And this is the government that fought a referendum to “protect the sovereignty of parliament” and the sanctity of domestic law.

All of this is against the backdrop of the prime minister being investigated for several apparent breaches of the ministerial code. He chose to ignore critical reports on his ministers; rejected advice from his independent adviser on ministerial standards, who resigned; and attempted but failed to [overturn](#) a unanimous standards select committee report that condemned the behaviour of a parliamentary colleague and friend.

It may be possible to find excuses for each of these lapses – and others – but all of them, taken together, tell a different tale.

There have also been attempted assaults on civil rights, not all of them successful. The government briefed, but rowed back from, a serious attack on [judicial review](#): but the intent was there and may return. It proposed legislation to allow the police to “stop and search” anyone at a protest meeting “without any cause for suspicion”.

It attempted to legislate to allow the police to impose conditions on protest marches [likely to be “noisy”](#). These are not the only examples. If the power

of the state grows and the protections of the law diminish, the liberties of the individual fall.

The mother of parliaments should not permit this.

We British are a kindly people. When appeals are made for those in distress – at home or abroad – the good heart of our nation responds with compassion and generosity. But increasingly across the western world, populist pressure leads governments to be less generous to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

Here in the UK, the government wishes to remove British citizenship from dual nationals, without any notice or right of appeal. It proposes serious action against criminal gangs that traffic migrants – and rightly so. But it also proposes to criminalise the migrants themselves.

We should search our souls before doing this.

Can it really be a crime to be frightened, homeless, desperate, destitute, fleeing from persecution or war or famine or hardship – and to cross half the world on foot and dangerous waters in an unsafe boat in the hope of finding a better life?

Of course, if the numbers are too large, this creates an appalling problem for local communities. But surely, to seek sanctuary from an unbearable life cannot – morally – be treated as a crime.

Yet the government's borders bill proposes to punish asylum seekers who take an unsanctioned route with a jail sentence of up to four years. These proposals are not natural justice, and are decidedly un-British. I hope the government will reconsider.

The style of the government creates its own problems. It looks for enemies where there are none. Moreover, it then chooses the wrong enemies. Most recently, it has been waging campaigns against the civil service and the BBC. In neither case is this wise or justified – or even in the government's own interests.

The civil service is the support structure to government: treating it as a hostile “blob” that seeks to undermine the government is both foolish and wrong. As for the BBC, it is a crucial part of our overseas “soft power”, and a policy of undermining it and starving it of funds is self-defeating for UK interests.

Ministers should remember that both these institutions are more trusted than the government itself. They should focus their attention on reforms to improve public life.

It is time to refocus on how our politics is funded. The system needs cleansing. It must never be the plaything of the rich or of pressure groups, yet no one wants our politics fully funded by the state. Certainly, I don’t.

Legislation should limit funding by individuals, by companies, by trades unions, to sums that no one can reasonably claim would entitle the donor to favours, rewards or undesirable access. Donors must not be seen to sway policy through an open chequebook.

For many years, travelling the world, I have been received as the lucky representative of the most stable democracy of them all. It was a position of influence built up over centuries – envied, praised and copied.

Trust matters. It matters to our parliament. It matters to our country. It matters for the long-term protection and wellbeing of democracy.

- John Major was the prime minister of Britain from 1990 to 1997. This is an edited version of a speech, “In democracy we trust?”, given at the Institute for Government on 10 February 2022

OpinionBig Brother

Where do millennials like me go now for TV authenticity? Big Brother

[Lauren O'Neill](#)

Compared to the commercialism and staginess of current reality shows, the daddy of them all retains an unfiltered charm



‘Big Brother was a funhouse mirror held up to daily life.’ Contestant Kate Lawler with Davina McCall. Photograph: Tony Kyriacou/Rex/Shutterstock

Fri 11 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

The third season of Netflix’s abstinence-in-bikinis reality show, [Too Hot to Handle](#), launched on the platform in late January with a surprising twist. At the beginning of the first episode, the show’s narrator, Desiree Burch, explained to viewers that one day after wrapping up the filming of season two last year, an entirely new cast was introduced to the show’s villa in the Turks and Caicos Islands. As with the second season’s brigade of

contestants, season three's group were not informed that they would be appearing on Too Hot to Handle, whose agonising reputation precedes it. Instead, the programme-makers told their band of singles that this was a sexy show called Pleasure Island, complete with a fake host and its own in-show lingo.

The participants in Too Hot to Handle's third season had no idea this trick had also been used on their predecessors. They seemed dejected, if still slightly knowing, when they were told. But it's not surprising that the show's producers were keen to pull the rug out from under them in pursuit of "authenticity". Reality TV is now self-consciously commercial, with contestants increasingly seeing its shows as a fast track to brand partnerships and sponsorship deals in a TV-to-Instagram-influencer pipeline. Contestants take part with the intention of growing their social media followings and signing lucrative promotional deals when they leave. Over the years, even the format and production values of reality TV have become predictably staged: we get scene transitions with establishing shots, musical interludes and stock character tropes that become even more pronounced during the edit.

Many reality TV fans are old enough to remember that things were not always this way. Recently, I've noticed internet users sharing grainy, boisterous clips from the UK's original reality juggernaut, Big Brother (during lockdown, three "superfans" even launched a podcast devoted to analysing each episode). Despite the scandal this show courted during its 18-year run and the fact its early contestants were forced to contend with a savage, pre-Leveson tabloid culture, clips from the series now seem like a raw counterpoint to current reality TV. The first series, which launched on Channel 4 in 2000, was billed as a "social experiment". Contestants included a bricklayer from Liverpool and an Irish ex-nun. To begin with, there was no expectation that contestants would do anything but come as they were, to a house where their every action would be filmed for two months. People arrived from all walks of life, and top-percentile hotness was not necessarily a prerequisite for selection.

Of course, Big Brother was not without controversies: it was accused of shamefully showcasing public prejudice, exploiting vulnerable contestants and stigmatising welfare issues. In 2020, season six contestant Makosi

Musambasi told [Grazia](#) magazine that she believed she had been treated differently to other contestants by the audience because of her skin colour. And the press reaction to the show was cruel: the late [Jade Goody](#), during her appearance on Big Brother season three in 2002, was branded a “pig” on the pages of the Sun.

While Big Brother exposed often ugly truths about the UK, it is the show’s bizarre but simple format and often dishevelled contestants that are remembered with a peculiar fondness by millennials like me. Big Brother and its long-running celebrity iteration were remarkably unpolished. Many shows, such as Strictly and The Masked Singer now consist of heavily formatted celebrity competitions that couldn’t be further from the deeply real magic of a Welsh teenager [making up a song](#) about “cooking an egg for the very first time” to a rapt audience of millions.

It was six years, last month, since one of the greatest British TV moments in recent history: when Celebrity Big Brother season 17 contestant Tiffany “New York” Pollard mistakenly believed her fellow housemate [David Gest](#) was dead. (Gest, in a tragic coincidence, actually died only a couple of months after leaving the Big Brother house.) Even though this happened in 2016 (only a year after Love Island, as we now know it, began), the video footage of the moment – which is poorly lit, and features the housemates looking as unkempt as you’d expect of people who have not left home for over a week – feels worlds away from the glossy, preened appearance of Too Hot to Handle.

Reality TV is partly an oxymoron – the nature of editing something into a piece of entertainment has always meant removing at least some of its likeness to real life. It’s important to note that this creation of distance between viewers and contestants can also be a useful corrective to the strong, unfair and deeply personal attacks that many fans, now armed with social media accounts, frequently aim at reality TV recruits. But as the genre has evolved, the “reality” aspect has become more jumbled. Where Big Brother might have been a funhouse mirror held up to daily life, our current formats feel more like a phone camera with Instagram filters. So it’s no surprise that those of us who can recall the first decade of Big Brother are finding enjoyment in revisiting its pure “please do not swear” chaos.

- Lauren O'Neill is a culture writer for Vice UK
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Guardian Opinion cartoon

Boris Johnson

Ben Jennings on Boris Johnson, the Met and partygate – cartoon

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2022.02.11 - Around the world

- [Hungary Viktor Orbán invites Trump to visit to boost re-election campaign](#)
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- [Tense talks Liz Truss warns Russia of sanctions during visit](#)
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- [Ambassador Bridge US urges Canada to end trucker border blockade](#)

Hungary

Viktor Orbán invites Trump to Hungary to boost re-election campaign

Thinktank linked to government has extended an invitation to the former US president



Trump welcoming Hungarian PM Viktor Orban to the White House in May 2019. Photograph: Manuel Balce Ceneta/AP

Flora Garamvolgyi and [Shaun Walker](#)

Fri 11 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

Hungary's far-right prime minister [Viktor Orbán](#) is hoping Donald Trump will travel to Budapest in the coming weeks to boost his reelection campaign.

A thinktank linked to the Orbán government, the Centre for Fundamental Rights, has issued an invitation to Trump, a government source told The

Guardian.

The invitation comes as Orbán moves into campaigning mode ahead of a closely fought election due on 3 April, when his Fidesz party [will face a united opposition coalition](#), in what is seen as the biggest challenge to his rule since he became prime minister 12 years ago.

“People in Fidesz would really like Trump to visit Budapest in March,” said the source, who added that Trump has not yet replied to the invite. If it happens, the visit would be Trump’s first known trip outside the US since he lost the elections in 2020.

Orbán was an early Trump supporter, endorsing him as early as summer 2016, and he also publicly backed him in the 2020 vote. The pair spoke by telephone in January, and Trump returned the favour, publicly endorsing Orbán for the April election. An in-person visit by the former US president would be seen as a major campaign boost.

“These visits have a huge influence in the Hungarian conservative community, because they see [Trump] as an icon, as someone who spent his presidency in a strong headwind,” said a source close to Fidesz.

One former Republican staffer said Trump is known to fear contracting Covid while travelling abroad and may prefer not to travel.

Timeline

Key Trump administration firings and defections

Show

30 January 2017

Sally Yates – fired

Trump fired Sally Yates, the acting attorney general, after she refused to enforce the Muslim-focused immigration ban.

13 February 2017

Michael Flynn – fired

Trump fired national security adviser Michael Flynn after he apparently misled vice president Mike Pence over conversations he'd had with Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak.

10 March 2017

Preet Bharara – fired

Trump fired [Preet Bharara](#), US attorney for New York's Southern District, who had refused to comply with an order to resign.

30 March 2017

Katie Walsh – resigned

Katie Walsh, deputy chief of staff and a Reince Priebus ally, [quit](#). She later said she decided to make the move after the initial failure of a Trump-backed health care bill in the House.

9 May 2017

James Comey – fired

Most notoriously, Trump fired FBI director [James Comey](#). Initially, Trump cited Comey's handling of the Hillary Clinton email investigation as the reason behind his decision. Later, Trump [admitted](#) "this Russia thing with Trump and Russia" (ie the investigation into collusion to swing the election between the president's camp and Moscow) had been on his mind.

6 July 2017

Walter Shaub Jr. – resigned

Walter Shaub Jr., office of government ethics director, resigned over concerns that Trump's conflicts of interest put the US at risk of being seen as a "[kleptocracy](#)".

21 July 2017

Sean Spicer – resigned

White House press secretary [Sean Spicer](#) resigned after Anthony Scaramucci was brought in as communications director.

28 July 2017

Reince Priebus – forced out

Trump forced out [Reince Priebus](#) as the White House chief of staff and replaced him with homeland security secretary, Gen John Kelly.

31 July 2017

Anthony Scaramucci – fired

White House communications director [Anthony Scaramucci](#) was fired after just ten days, reportedly at the request of new White House chief of staff John Kelly and after a foul-mouthed tirade to a New Yorker journalist.

18 August 2017

Steve Bannon – removed

[Steve Bannon](#), White House chief strategist, was removed from his position, leaving a major void in the administration.

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Liz Harrington, chief spokesperson for Trump, did not respond to a request for comment. Asked to comment on various aspects of the invite, Orbán's spokesman Zoltán Kovács responded with one word: "Nope."

It is likely that Trump has been invited to the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), due to be held from 25-26 March in Budapest. It will be the first time a European country hosts the flagship conservative event.

Miklos Szanthó, the director of the Center for Fundamental Rights, told the Hungarian news agency MTI that a number of US senators would attend the conference, as well as Santiago Abascal, the leader of Spain's Vox party and Jair Bolsonaro's son Eduardo.

Fidesz is hoping that Trump will join Orbán as the event's keynote speaker, the Hungarian government source said.

“According to our plans a number of high profile Americans will attend CPAC [Hungary](#), including politicians, as well as prominent thinkers and opinion leaders on the right. We are certain that any fresh information regarding guests and speakers will reach you in due course of time,” said Szanthó.

01:43

Donald Trump hints at run for president in 2024 – video

The thinktank’s mission statement says it acts as a “counter against today’s overgrown human rights fundamentalism and political correctness”. It is known for echoing the government’s communications and creating propaganda videos. According to research by the investigative Hungarian news outlet, Átlátszó, almost all of their budget is provided by grants financed from public funds.

Trump and Orbán met during a [2019 White House visit](#), when Trump said the two men were similar: “You’re respected all over Europe. Probably a bit like me, a little bit controversial, but that’s OK”.

David Cornstein, a long-time friend who Trump appointed ambassador to Hungary, said Trump admired Orbán for his strongman image and his control of the Hungarian political scene: “He would love to have the situation that Viktor Orbán has,” Cornstein said in 2019.

After Trump left office, Orbán’s relations with Washington soured, and Hungary was the only EU nation not invited to Joe Biden’s recent Democracy Summit. Relations with the Trump camp have remained strong.

In September, former vice-president Mike Pence spoke to a conference on conservative social values hosted by Orbán. Former attorney general Jeff Sessions was also a recent visitor.

Fox News host Tucker Carlson also spent time in Hungary earlier this year, broadcasting several shows from Budapest and [making a “documentary”](#) that painted Hungary as a conservative paradise, under constant attack by the Hungarian-born billionaire, George Soros.

It was Carlson's second trip to Hungary in less than a year. Last August he travelled to Budapest to interview Orbán. A few weeks after the Hungarian PM's appearance on Fox, Trump sent him a letter of congratulations: "Great job on Tucker, proud of you!"

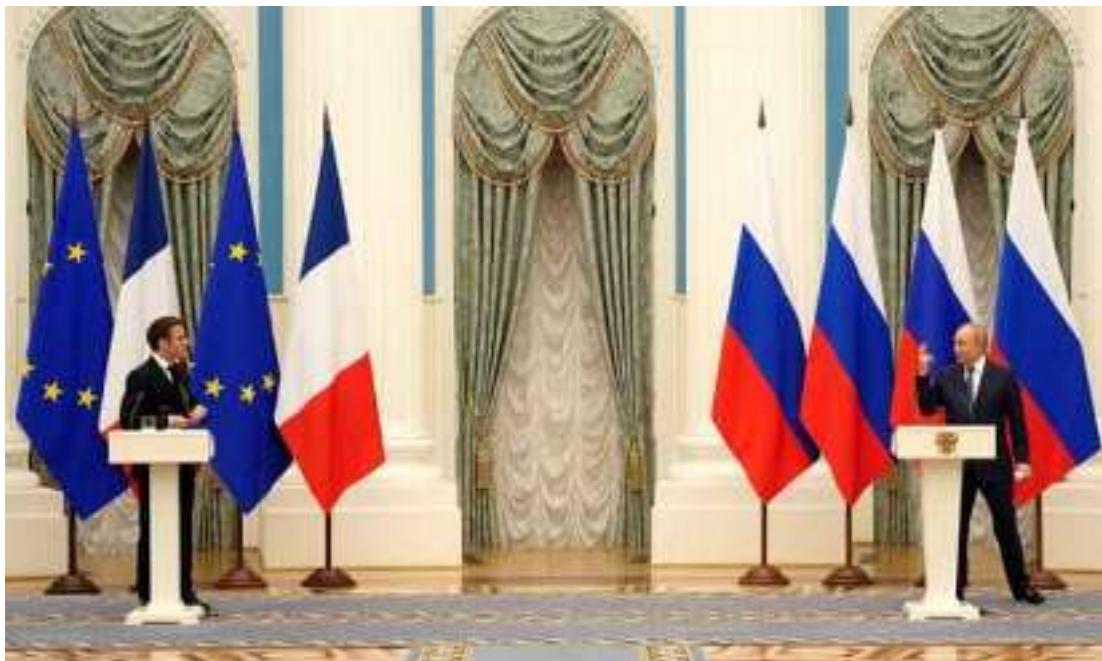
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Emmanuel Macron

Macron was kept away from Putin in Kremlin for ‘refusing Russian Covid test’

‘We could not accept that they get their hands on the president’s DNA’ a member of Macron’s entourage said



Observers were struck by the distances between the two presidents when Macron visited Putin on Monday. Photograph: Reuters

Reuters in Paris

Thu 10 Feb 2022 16.16 EST

Emmanuel Macron refused a Kremlin request that he take a Russian Covid-19 test when he arrived to see Vladimir Putin this week, and was therefore kept at a distance from the Russian leader, two sources in Macron’s entourage told Reuters.

Observers were struck by [images of Macron and Putin sitting at opposite ends of 4-metre-long \(13 ft\) table](#) to discuss the Ukraine crisis on Monday, with some diplomats and others suggesting Putin might have wanted to send a diplomatic message.

But the two sources, who have knowledge of the French president's health protocol, told Reuters Macron had been given a choice: either he accepted a PCR test done by the Russian authorities and was allowed to get close to Putin, or he refused and had to abide by more stringent social distancing.

"We knew very well that meant no handshake and that long table. But we could not accept that they get their hands on the president's DNA," one of the sources told Reuters, referring to security concerns if the French leader was tested by Russian doctors.

A Kremlin spokesperson did not immediately respond to a message from Reuters seeking comment.

The second source in Macron's entourage confirmed Macron declined to take a Russian PCR test. The source said Macron instead took a French PCR test before departure and an antigen test done by his own doctor once in Russia.

"The Russians told us Putin needed to be kept in [a strict health bubble](#)," the second source said.

On Thursday, three days after Macron and Putin had their socially distanced meeting, the Russian leader received Kazakh president Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. The two men shook hands, and sat close to each other, divided only by a small coffee table.

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Ukraine

Liz Truss warns Russia of sanctions during tense Ukraine talks

Foreign secretary issues warning as Sergei Lavrov describes UK's contribution to talks as 'just slogans'

02:15

UK and Russian foreign secretaries' icy press conference – video

[Andrew Roth in Moscow](#)

Thu 10 Feb 2022 11.23 EST

Russia's top diplomat has described talks with the British foreign secretary, [Liz Truss](#), as like a conversation of "the mute with the deaf", as Truss personally warned Moscow of tough sanctions in the event of an attack on Ukraine.

During an icy press conference in Moscow that exposed the gulf between the two sides over [Ukraine](#), Sergei Lavrov, a veteran of 18 years as foreign minister, said they had found little common ground and that the talks contained "nothing secret, no trust. Just slogans shouted from the tribunes."

His counterpart Truss, who became foreign secretary in September, stuck closely to her prepared remarks while fielding questions from reporters, repeating warnings that a war would be "disastrous for the Russian and Ukrainian people and for European security".

Lavrov said Truss had not varied her tone throughout their two-hour meeting, and had ignored his explanations while repeating statements and demands that Britain had made before.

"I'm honestly disappointed that our conversation turned out like the mute with the deaf. We appear to be listening but we're not hearing anything. Our

detailed explanations fell on unprepared ground,” Lavrov said.

“It’s like when they say that Russia is waiting for the ground to freeze so that tanks can easily enter Ukraine,” he added. “It seems that our British colleagues were on similar ground today, off of which bounced all the facts we presented them.”



Sergei Lavrov and Liz Truss in talks. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Truss challenged Lavrov directly over his assertion that Russia is not threatening anyone with its buildup of troops and weaponry near Ukraine’s borders. “I can’t see any other reason for having 100,000 troops stationed on the border, apart from to threaten Ukraine. And if Russia is serious about diplomacy, they need to remove those troops and desist from the threats,” she said.

Away from the cameras, Truss allegedly confused the Russian regions of Voronezh and Rostov with Ukrainian territory when Lavrov asked her whether she recognised Russia’s sovereignty over them. She repeatedly told Lavrov that the UK would never recognise Moscow’s claim, until the British ambassador was forced to step in to correct her, the Russian business daily *Kommersant* reported.

Truss partly confirmed the account in an interview with Russian press: “It seemed to me that Minister Lavrov was talking about a part of Ukraine. I have clearly indicated that these regions [Rostov and Voronezh] are part of sovereign Russia,” she said, according to the British embassy in Moscow.

The episode follows a previous taunt by Russia last week when the foreign secretary was taken to task over her comment that “we are supplying and offering extra support to our Baltic allies across the Black Sea”. The Baltic Sea and the Black Sea – where Ukraine sits on the coast – are on opposite sides of Europe.

The remark led Russia’s foreign ministry spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, to observe: “Ms Truss, your knowledge of history is nothing compared to your knowledge of geography. If anyone needs saving from anything, it’s the world, from the stupidity and ignorance of British politicians.” The Foreign Office said that Truss’s remarks had been misinterpreted.

[The British sanctions package remained under government review](#) on Thursday, somewhat undermining Truss’s threat as she led a British diplomatic effort to head off a potential Russian offensive in Ukraine.

France’s Emmanuel Macron [travelled to Moscow this week on a similar mission](#) to try to dissuade Vladimir Putin from launching an attack.

Truss’s trip is part of a blitz of British diplomacy in Russia. The defence secretary, Ben Wallace, is scheduled to travel to Moscow for consultations with the Russian defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, on Friday. Other European leaders and officials are also shuttling between Moscow and Kyiv. The German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, is expected in Moscow next week.

Expectations for the meetings are limited as Russia has put forward maximalist demands to Nato to remove its troops from member states and to pledge never to accept Ukraine into the alliance. At the same time, Russia [has begun joint military exercises in Belarus](#), continued moving troops on its territory closer to the Ukrainian border, and announced new naval drills in the Black Sea.

In his remarks, Lavrov said British-Russian relations had reached their “lowest point in years” and warned Russia would not be cowed by western threats. He also attacked some western countries for pulling non-essential diplomats from Ukraine, publicly suggesting that Russia could follow suit if it decides the west is preparing a provocation.

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[Canada](#)

Paranoia and alarmism: Canada truckers' 'intelligence reports' hint at mindset

Documents compiled by protest organisers give a glimpse into a conspiracy theory-drenched outlook



A protester bangs gas cans together while yelling 'Freedom' in Ottawa on Thursday. Photograph: Alex Kent/REX/Shutterstock

[Justin Ling](#) in Toronto

Thu 10 Feb 2022 19.54 EST

Leaders of the [Ottawa "Freedom Convoy" protest](#) have warned fellow protesters that the risk of violence is growing, amid speculation the police may move to disperse the nearly two-week occupation of Canada's capital.

Daily “intelligence reports” compiled by protest leaders and seen by the Guardian – as well as public comments by the organisers – have grown increasingly alarmist in recent days.

While the reports include misinformation, and should not be taken as credible intelligence, they nevertheless offer an insight on the occupiers’ conspiratorial mindset.

Thursday’s report warns that “the Office of the Prime Minister (PMO) has directed that Freedom Convoy 2022 be dispersed by not [sic] later than [sic] Saturday, 12 February 2022.”

In [Canada](#), politicians cannot direct police operations, but the increasing paranoia of the protesters present a worrying change in tone.

The reports are prepared by Tom Quiggin, a private security consultant [who has previously been accused of spreading misinformation](#), particularly by overplaying the threat of terrorism posed by Canada’s Muslim community.

Roughly 1,000 people have blockaded downtown Ottawa since late January, demanding an end to all Covid vaccine mandates. Some are calling for Justin Trudeau to step down as prime minister or be removed from office.

They say their occupation will continue until their demands are met, and other protesters have since [blocked the international Ambassador Bridge between Detroit and Windsor](#), Ontario, and two smaller border crossings.

It is not clear how widely these reports are shared, but they accurately reflect the public talking points of the lead organizers.

Police near the Ambassador Bridge have begun receiving additional manpower, Drew Dilkens, mayor of Windsor, told CNN on Thursday, and the city was seeking an injunction from Ontario superior court to have the protesters removed.

“[If] the protesters don’t leave, there will have to be a path forward. If that means physically removing them, that means physically removing them, and we’re prepared to do that,” Dilkens said.

However he later added he was striving to resolve the issue peacefully and ensure nobody was hurt. “It may be gratifying for someone to see the forced removal of the demonstrators, [but] such action may inflame the situation and certainly cause more folks to come here and add to the protest, and we don’t want to risk additional conflict,” Dilkens said.

General Motors Co and Chrysler-parent Stellantis said on Thursday they had to cancel or reduce shifts because of parts shortages, adding to earlier cuts announced by Ford and Toyota. Toyota said it was suspending production until Saturday at plants in Ontario and Kentucky.

The protesters’ reports portray the city’s police chief, Peter Sloly, as an antagonist, saying that he “has played a role in creating a political space where violence can occur”.

Earlier this week Tom Marazzo, a protest leader who is described as a “police liaison”, said that “the statements and actions by the Chief of Police have deliberately set the conditions for potential violence against the peaceful protesters.”

The protesters insist that they are entirely peaceful, but they have resisted attempts to clear them from downtown and stop them resupplying with diesel. Local residents complain that life in the city has been made intolerable by the occupiers’ blaring truck horns and nightly fireworks.

“Our city is under siege,” said Councillor Diane Deans, who described the protests as a “nationwide insurrection”.



A supporter takes a break as he uses cellphone in downtown Ottawa on Thursday. Photograph: Andre Pichette/EPA

Ottawa police say they have made 23 arrests since the occupation began, which includes resistant arrest and breach of probation – another 85 criminal investigations are ongoing.

Efforts to clear the occupiers have been complicated by their extensive physical infrastructure – including wooden shelters and hundreds of trucks – and the presence of children in about 100 vehicles, police say.

Officers have also warned that some protesters are believed to have firearms. “We’ve been worried about how tooled up these guys are,” said a source who has been part of the city’s emergency response.

The protest leaders’ reports and public comments make it clear that the occupiers will resist police attempts to move them.

In a video posted online, one of the organizers told protesters to lock themselves in their trucks if the police move in. “Guys, lock that door. Crawl into that bunk. But before you do that, grab that horn switch and don’t let go let that fucking horn go, no matter what time it is, and let it roll as long as

possible until they're busting your fucking windows down," said Chris Barber.

In one report, Quiggin claims that "police forces are increasingly uneasy with their role" echoing a view among protesters that – unlike the upper echelons of the Ottawa police and Royal Canadian Mounted Police – frontline officers are sympathetic to their cause.

In contrast, the report accuses Sloley and other senior officers of being aligned with "corporatist power structures".

That mentality may embolden the protesters to stand their ground.

"There has been a pervasive narrative in this movement that any violence is not the fault of the protesters, but instead instigated by 'Antifa' ... or orchestrated by the deep state," said Stephanie Carvin, a Carleton University professor and former intelligence analyst. "In my view, this is entirely consistent with that narrative."

Quiggin's reports also reveal the intensely conspiratorial nature of the occupation.

Protesters have made constant allusions to a conspiracy theory which holds that the [World Economic Forum](#) is seeking to use the Covid pandemic to stage a "Great Reset", which would purportedly create a "[Marxian-inspired totalitarian system](#)". Many proponents of this conspiracy theory blame the Forum for creating Covid-19 itself.

On Thursday, Quiggin's daily intelligence report included a list of Canadian officials who it falsely claimed are members of the World Economic Forum, including Trudeau, several members of his cabinet, two Conservative members of parliament and a host of other government and civil society officials. (Politicians cannot be members of the organisation whose partners are all businesses.)

One MP on the list told the Guardian that in recent days they had received a significant increase and worrying rise in harassment and abuse mentioning the World Economic Forum.

The Ottawa police force and Royal Canadian Mounted Police did not respond to requests for comment.

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US news

US urges Canada to end trucker border blockade as mayor says protesters could be removed by force

Authorities work on alternative travel routes as protest hits auto production and injunction sought to remove Ambassador Bridge demonstrators



The trucker blockade in Ottawa. Canada's government has asked protesters to return home, while police near the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor, Ontario – which borders Detroit – are receiving additional manpower, the mayor says. Photograph: Nick Iwanyshyn/AP

Reuters

Fri 11 Feb 2022 00.11 EST

The US government has urged [Canada](#) to use federal powers to ease the growing economic disruption caused by the blockade of the vital

Ambassador Bridge by protesters opposed to coronavirus mandates.

The closure of North America's busiest international land border crossing, a vital supply route for Detroit's carmakers, has halted some auto output and left officials scrambling to limit economic damage.

Canadian truckers started their protests as a "Freedom Convoy" occupying Ottawa, the capital, to demonstrate opposition to a vaccinate-or-quarantine mandate for cross-border drivers mirrored by the US government.

They began blocking the Ambassador Bridge on Monday and have since shut two smaller border crossings in Alberta and Manitoba provinces.

As many pandemic-weary western countries near the two-year mark on coronavirus restrictions, copycat protests have spread to Australia, New Zealand and France, although the wave of infections caused by the highly infectious Omicron variant has begun to subside in some places.

The US homeland security secretary, Alejandro Mayorkas, and the transportation secretary, Pete Buttigieg, urged their Canadian counterparts "to use federal powers to resolve this situation at our joint border", a White House official said on Thursday.

"US and Canadian border and customs authorities are working with great urgency to ensure the continued flow of goods and services across our international border, leveraging alternative land routes, as well as air and sea options."

The US homeland security adviser, Liz Sherwood Randall, was due to speak with the Canadian deputy minister of national defence, Jody Thomas.

Canadian federal ministers have called the blockade illegal and asked protesters to return home. Police near the Ambassador Bridge had begun receiving additional manpower, said Drew Dilkens, the mayor of Windsor, Ontario, which borders Detroit.

“[If] the protesters don’t leave, there will have to be a path forward,” he told CNN. “If that means physically removing them, that means physically removing them, and we’re prepared to do that.”

Dilkens later said Windsor was seeking an injunction from Ontario superior court to have the protesters removed, adding he was striving to resolve the issue peacefully.

“It may be gratifying for someone to see the forced removal of the demonstrators, [but] such action may inflame the situation and certainly cause more folks to come here and add to the protest, and we don’t want to risk additional conflict,” Dilkens said.

With traffic at times shut in both directions, General Motors and Chrysler’s owner Stellantis said on Thursday they had to cancel or reduce shifts because of parts shortages, tacking on to earlier production cuts announced by Ford and Toyota.

Toyota said it was suspending production through Saturday at its plants in Ontario and Kentucky, affecting manufacturing of the Camry, RAV4 and other popular models.

Ford was looking at flying in some auto parts to a plant in Windsor that produced engines for popular models, a union official said.

The Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, said he was working to end the bridge blockade, which hurt “regular Canadians whether it’s grocery store prices, whether it’s jobs lost or suspended, whether it’s supply chains disrupted”.

An Ontario court on Thursday froze funds donated to anti-vaccine protesters through the app GiveSendGo. The convoy group had raised more than \$8m as of late Thursday afternoon, the Boston-based company said.

Protesters began gathering with their vehicles in Ottawa nearly two weeks ago and have occupied the main downtown street that runs by parliament, the Bank of Canada and the prime minister’s office.

More than two-thirds of the \$511bn in goods traded annually between Canada and the US is transported by road. The Detroit International Bridge Company, which owns the Ambassador Bridge, urged Canada to end the protest by repealing the vaccine mandate or removing the vehicles.

A third option was to do “nothing and hope this ends on its own – an option that will most likely prolong the blockade, further crippling our economy and putting more jobs at risk”, said the company’s chairman, Matt Moroun.

Seeking to show support for the Canadian protesters, some US truckers said they would send two convoys this weekend to a fourth border crossing that connects Buffalo, New York, and Fort Erie, Ontario.

The US was adding staff to its command post at the National Football League’s Super Bowl in Los Angeles in response to reports of a convoy causing disruptions at Sunday’s game, the White House official said.

The Department of Homeland Security was making preparations to ensure that a Freedom Convoy event in Washington DC due in early March “does not disrupt lawful trade and transportation or interfere with federal government and law enforcement operations and emergency services”, the official said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/11/us-urges-canada-to-end-trucker-border-blockade-as-mayor-says-protesters-could-be-removed-by-force>

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Ukraine

Russia and Ukraine crisis moving ‘wrong way’, says UK defence secretary

Huge numbers of refugees may flee Ukraine for eastern Europe if Russian troops invade, says Ben Wallace



Video grab released by the Russian defence ministry shows combat crews of the S-400 air defence system during joint exercises in Belarus. Photograph: Russian defence ministry/AFP/Getty Images

*Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent
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Thu 10 Feb 2022 06.35 EST

Huge numbers of refugees could be forced to flee [Ukraine](#) for other eastern European countries if Russian troops invade, the UK's defence secretary has warned, as he admitted that military tensions were still moving the “wrong way”.

Ben Wallace said it would be a “lose-lose” scenario if Moscow directed its soldiers stationed along Ukraine’s borders with Russia and Belarus to attack.

A trio of warnings was issued by senior UK government figures on Thursday, with Wallace suggesting a sanctions package against Russian leaders was being finalised to apply if there was an incursion into Ukraine, while Boris Johnson headed to Brussels and the foreign secretary, Liz Truss, was in Moscow.

Half of all Russia’s combat troops had so far been deployed to the Ukrainian border, Wallace said, adding that the country was also “planning to start a nuclear strategic exercise soon”.

“Despite the talking, the direction of travel is in the wrong way,” he told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme.

Wallace said UK defence chiefs expected moves from the “Russian playbook” that would give a “pretext for an invasion or some other activity”, such as a false flag operation whereby responsibility for an act is wrongly attributed. Cyber-attacks and further stoking of political division could also be used to fan the flames and increase the chances of war, he added.

Profile

Armed forces of Russia and Ukraine, compared

Show

Russia

Army: 280,000, including 2,840 tanks and 6,920 fighting vehicles; 150 Iskander ballistic missiles; 4,684+ artillery; 1,520 surface-to-air batteries.

Navy (just the Black Sea fleet): 6 submarines; 6 warships; 35 patrol ships.

Air force: 1,160 combat planes, 394 attack helicopters, 714 air defence systems.

Ukraine

Army: 145,000, including 858 tanks and 1,184 fighting vehicles; 90 Tochka ballistic missiles; 1,818 artillery; 75+ surface-to-air batteries.

Navy: 1 warship, 12 patrol and coastal ships.

Air force: 125 combat planes, 35 attack helicopters; 6 medium TB2 drones; 322 air defence systems.

Source: International Institute of Strategic Studies

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Wallace said other eastern European countries such as Poland and Romania would “feel the heat” of an invasion of Ukraine. “I think we can expect very large movements of people as refugees,” he said. “And that in itself can be very destabilising to small and medium-sized states.”

After it was announced that 1,000 British troops would be deployed to Nato countries to provide support in case of a Russian invasion, Wallace said they would be able to help with any “humanitarian crisis”.

01:56

'Most dangerous moment' in Ukraine crisis, says Johnson in meeting with Nato chief – video

“Soldiers are able to deal with that and provide force multiplier to the allies that are on the frontline,” he told BBC Breakfast. “There is a cost, there’s a human cost. Russia will remember as the Soviet Union the human cost of Afghanistan. It will remember the human cost of the likes of the Chechnya wars.

“Just like Britain reflects on the cost of Afghanistan and Iraq and all those conflicts we are involved in.”

After Truss’s plan to put the UK’s “toughest sanctions regime against Russia” on the statute book in time for her trip to Russia fell through,

Wallace insisted they were almost ready to present to parliament.

He said: “Energy supplies is one area to target; financial institutions is another one. And ... individuals. It is important that the people in that regime or in the government feel the cost of their actions as well.”

In her meeting with Russia’s foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, Truss said a war in Ukraine would be “disastrous” and would “have massive consequences and carry severe costs”.

Meanwhile, Johnson is heading overseas as parliament prepares to go into recess. He will meet Nato’s secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, in Brussels, before travelling to Poland for meetings with the prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, and President Andrzej Duda.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/10/russia-ukraine-military-tensions-moving-wrong-way-says-ben-wallace-uk-defence-chief>

Ukraine

Can Ukraine and Russia be persuaded to abide by Minsk accords?

Analysis: As Macron tries to revive 2015 agreement, Ukraine believes it is impossible to fulfil as it could hand power to Russia



The President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, right, meets President Emmanuel Macron in Kyiv, Ukraine. Photograph: Future Publishing/Getty

[Shaun Walker](#) in Kyiv

Wed 9 Feb 2022 13.55 EST

In the often acrimonious back-and-forth between Russia and [Ukraine](#) in recent years, “fulfilling Minsk” has become something of a meaningless mantra: all sides agree to abide by the 2015 Minsk accords in public, but neither has any real intention of implementing the provisions of the agreement.

Yet in his [intensive peacemaking efforts this week](#), the French president, Emmanuel Macron, appears to be pinning his hopes on a renewed attempt to breathe life into the seven-year-old agreement.

“The solution of the Ukraine question can be only political, and the basis of the solution can only be the Minsk agreements,” said Macron in Moscow on Monday.

The next day in Kyiv, Ukraine’s president, [Volodymyr Zelenskiy](#), reaffirmed to Macron what he has been saying for months: Ukraine is committed to fulfilling the Minsk accords, as long as this happens in the way Kyiv interprets them.

Privately, however, Ukrainian officials are more downbeat. “Minsk is impossible to fulfil. It would lead to the destruction of Ukraine as a state if we did,” said one high-ranking government official.

The [Minsk accords were signed in February 2015](#), after a 16-hour overnight negotiating session in the Belarusian capital. Of the four leaders involved: Russia’s Vladimir Putin, Ukraine’s Petro Poroshenko, France’s François Hollande and Germany’s Angela Merkel, only Putin is still in office.

The document called for an immediate ceasefire in the conflict in eastern Ukraine, and did bring major military hostilities to an end, but the conflict has continued to simmer and little progress has been made on any of the political steps.

The agreement calls for the withdrawal of foreign troops and mercenaries, as well as constitutional reform in Ukraine that would provide for decentralisation and elections in the current territories, which are financed and administered by Moscow.

For a long time, the main stumbling block was over sequencing. Kyiv insisted the separatists should first disarm, while Moscow demanded political reform first.

There is little appetite in Ukrainian society for any Minsk-based settlement that could give parliamentary seats to Russia’s proxies, and essentially give

Moscow a say in the running of Ukraine.

There is also the fact that seven years have elapsed since the accords were signed. A de facto line of control now snakes through the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, and since the coronavirus pandemic hit, crossings have fallen dramatically in number.

“The people on the other side have spent eight years being subjected to propaganda about Ukraine, most of them have been given Russian passports. Their leaders are Russian citizens. How are we expected now to integrate them back, and have their representatives sit in Kyiv? It doesn’t make sense,” said the high-ranking official.

Russia has given out more than 700,000 passports to residents of the territories, according to a recent statement by a Russian official.

Critics of the Minsk agreement say Poroshenko signed it in 2015 because a gun was pointed at Ukraine’s head, as Kyiv’s forces faced total military defeat from an enemy that was receiving covert support from the Kremlin.

“From my point of view, the Minsk agreements were born dead,” said Volodymyr Ariev, an MP from Poroshenko’s party. “The conditions were always impossible to implement. We understood it clearly at the time, but we signed it to buy time for Ukraine: to have time to restore our government, our army, intelligence and security system.”

He said many of the points in Minsk were incompatible with the Ukrainian constitution, and that with Russia, Ukraine could not be expected to fulfil its demands.

“Macron cannot compel Ukraine to do it Moscow’s way,” said Ariev.

Asked during his press conference with Macron about Ukraine’s reluctance to implement the Minsk accords, Putin used a phrase that some interpreted as carrying sinister undertones: “Like it or not, you’ll have to tolerate it, my beauty.”

The next day, Zelenskiy responded that Ukraine was indeed “tolerant”, as it put up with so much from Russia. But keen to avoid a Russian invasion, as

well as to remove the looming threat of one which is eroding Ukraine's economy, Zelenskiy is also pushing Minsk as a viable solution, at least in public.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Zelenskiy's chief of staff, said the accords could still provide a viable roadmap if interpreted correctly.

"Within the Minsk framework it is really possible to pass to peace through any difficulties, but the steps and their content can only be those that fully respect the sovereignty of Ukraine," he said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/09/can-ukraine-and-russia-be-persuaded-to-abide-by-minsk-accords>

Ukraine

UK prepares 1,000 troops in case of refugee crisis if Ukraine invaded

Boris Johnson and Keir Starmer to separately visit Nato headquarters amid whirlwind diplomacy in face of Russian threats



British and Estonian soldiers on drill in northeastern Estonia, 100 km (62 miles) from the Russian border. The UK has offered to double its 900 troops in Estonia. Photograph: Alain Jocard/AFP/Getty Images

[Dan Sabbagh](#)

Wed 9 Feb 2022 17.30 EST

Britain has placed 1,000 troops on standby to deploy to eastern Europe if there is a refugee crisis prompted by any Russian invasion of Ukraine, ahead of a trip by [Boris Johnson](#) to Nato headquarters and Poland on Thursday.

UK officials warned there was a risk of “a humanitarian disaster” if Russia were to invade. The US has warned there could be a massive displacement of 1-5 million people, with refugees most likely to enter [Poland](#).

“The UK remains unwavering in our commitment to European security,” the prime minister said on the eve of a trip that will see him visit Nato in Brussels on Thursday morning before heading to Warsaw.

Concerns that any Russian invasion would prompt a significant refugee crisis have been increasingly preoccupying western leaders, as Moscow masses about 135,000 troops on the borders of [Ukraine](#) and in neighbouring Belarus.

Britain agreed to send 100 engineers to Poland to help secure its eastern border in December and, earlier this week, said it would start sending a further 350 Royal Marines as a show of solidarity as up to 30,000 Russian forces conduct joint exercises with Belarus.

The UK has also offered to deploy a Type 45 destroyer, deploy HMS Trent in the eastern Mediterranean, send RAF jets to southern Europe, and double the 900 troops based in Estonia as part of an existing Nato battlegroup.

The offer will be discussed between Johnson and Nato’s secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, as part of wider plans by the military alliance to send more forces into eastern Europe. The US said it would send 3,000 troops into Poland and Romania, while France has said it would be willing to send forces to the latter too.

A few hours later [Keir Starmer](#) will also visit Nato headquarters, the first Labour leader to do so since 2010. Labour said he would send a “firm and united” message to allies – and to the Kremlin – in support of the UK government’s policy on Ukraine.

Starmer is expected to emphasise that Labour was instrumental in the founding of Nato after the second world war – and endorse the increased troop deployment in member states across eastern Europe, intended to provide greater security to countries from the Baltic states to the Balkans.

Johnson will then meet Poland's prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, and president, Andrzej Duda, in Warsaw as part of a wider burst of British diplomatic activity. The UK foreign secretary, Liz Truss, [is due in Moscow](#) on Thursday and will be followed by the defence secretary, Ben Wallace, on Friday.

Johnson has been criticised for being relatively inactive during the crisis, as he battles a domestic crisis over parties at No 10. Meanwhile the French president, Emmanuel Macron, [visited Moscow on Tuesday](#) to negotiate directly with the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, although he failed to achieve a breakthrough.

“As an alliance we must draw lines in the snow and be clear there are principles upon which we will not compromise,” Johnson said. “That includes the security of every Nato ally and the right of every European democracy to aspire to Nato membership.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/09/uk-prepares-1000-troops-in-case-of-refugee-crisis-if-ukraine-invaded>

2022.02.10 - Spotlight

- [The hidden life of a food poverty hero Bruises, backache – and filling 100,000 bellies](#)
- ['Their cameras trained on me' Louis Theroux on his showdowns with US extremists](#)
- [The long read Death of the department store](#)
- [Living in a woman's body My daughter thrums with life, my mother is frail – and I'm balanced between](#)



Michelle Dornelly at the De Beauvoir hub in Hackney, east London.

[A worker in winter](#)

‘My life is not my own. I eat, breathe and sleep this’: the single mother who has fed 100,000 neighbours

Michelle Dornelly at the De Beauvoir hub in Hackney, east London.

In despair at problems in her area, mother-of-four Michelle Dornelly set up a food hub for hungry Londoners – many of them refused by food banks. But the unpaid, full-time work takes a heavy toll

by [Sirin Kale](#). Photographs by [Antonio Olmos](#)

Thu 10 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

When Michelle Dornelly is hoisting heavy crates of food into and out of her van, she thinks about her building. When her shoulders ache at night and she spots new bruises on her legs, she thinks about her building. She thinks

about her building when she contemplates her living room, which is so full of tins that her children long ago stopped using it to watch TV, instead sitting in their bedrooms.

Her building. A place where Dornelly could run the Hackney [Community Food Hub](#), in east London, seven days a week. Where she could store the supplies she keeps in her living room. Where they could run workshops for families and take deliveries from their supermarket partners.

But they do not have a building. Instead, Dornelly and her team of 100 volunteers bounce around three different Hackney community centres, four days a week. On Mondays and Thursdays, the hub is in De Beauvoir Town; every other Tuesday it is in Homerton; and on Wednesdays it is at a different location in Homerton. Since it was launched in April 2020 in response to the pandemic, as part of the charity Children With Voices, the hub has supported more than 100,000 people, despite not having a permanent base.

The building comes up in conversation almost every day at the hub, usually accompanied by sighs, as the volunteers help Dornelly pack up the van. They all worry about how much she takes on. Dornelly is strong, but she can feel her back starting to go. Her ribs are always bruised. Sometimes her fingers seize up into a claw-like shape. She can't afford to pay private rent on a building: the organisation is a self-funded food hub, not a large charity. She emailed a detailed proposal to Hackney council in October, asking for assistance in finding somewhere, but the council has not yet secured her a permanent location. She finds this infuriating, as the council refers people to Dornelly for emergency food.

“There are so many empty buildings in Hackney,” Dornelly says. “Why can’t I get a building?” The council even gave Dornelly a [civic award](#). Which was nice. But it is no building.





- Working at the hub is full-on at the best of times – and particularly hectic around Christmas.

Dornelly became a community activist because she had to do something with all of her despair and frustration. It was consuming her. Her sons were getting attacked in the street. (She is a single parent to a daughter and three

sons; all of her sons have additional needs.) The boys were continually harassed by the police. It all got so much that she had to get cognitive behavioural therapy. “I was the angry black mother,” she says. “Angry at the world.”

She lives in London Fields, Hackney, an area with high rates of poverty and youth violence. According to [a 2021 report](#) from the thinktank Policy Exchange, Hackney has one of the highest rates of knife crime in London. Also, 12.1% of residents have [no qualifications](#), compared with a London-wide average of 6.6%, according to the 2018 Office for National Statistics Annual Population Survey. A [2019 study](#) from Loughborough University said 48.1% of children live in poverty, giving Hackney the third-highest level of child poverty of local authorities in the UK.

I’m experiencing the same situation everyone else is experiencing. I am still struggling myself

Michelle Dornelly

So, in 2010, Dornelly founded the charity [Children With Voices](#), which provides after-school and holiday clubs and mentors local children, with the aim of combating obesity, holiday hunger and gang violence. Initially, Dornelly funded it herself, using money from her benefits. She would walk around local shops, asking if they would donate food for the workshops. “I decided to be a proactive parent, because it was either that, or go mad,” she says.

When the pandemic hit in March 2020, Dornelly pivoted to providing food to the “at-risk” families she had been supporting for years. She put out a call on social media for volunteers and more than 250 people responded. Some of them were middle-class professionals who had moved into the area – Hackney has rapidly gentrified in the past decade, causing [house prices to rise](#) to an average of £552,000, compared with a London-wide average of £467,000 – and were horrified by the hidden poverty in their community. “They lived around the corner and had no idea what was happening in London Fields and how bad it was,” says Dornelly. Many of the people the hub supports are on low incomes or benefits.

“The support offered to someone who’s out of work has been falling as a share of earnings [since 1960](#),” says Karl Handscomb, a senior economist at the Resolution Foundation thinktank, which says that the value of the main rate of unemployment benefit that a single person today can expect to receive is only 13% of average earnings.

“What this means is that the level of support being offered is only just above what is considered the destitution line, meaning the bare minimum needed to get by,” says Handscomb. “But people may also be struggling to pay back debts or universal credit advances. That can take them below the destitution line and leave people struggling to decide whether to pay their bills or have food.”





- Dornelly relies on a team of 100 volunteers, including (*top, from left*) Ziggy Noonan, Ruth George, Tasha Paul and (*bottom right*) Brian Parker.

Research from the Family Resources Survey [found that](#) 43% of people on universal credit are food insecure, meaning that they struggle to reliably put

food on the table. According to the Food Foundation, [9% of all UK households are food insecure](#). It is estimated that 2.3 million children live in households that have experienced food insecurity in the past six months. Food bank usage has exploded in the past decade. In 2012-13, the Trussell Trust, the national food bank charity, supplied emergency food parcels to [350,000 people](#); in 2020, [this figure was 2.5 million](#).

Dornelly doesn't have many good things to say about professional food banks. She is always keen to stress that she runs a food hub, not a food bank, meaning that she doesn't require people to have referrals when accessing support: anyone can walk up. "We have loads of clients coming to us with horror stories about food banks," she says. "For some, you have to get a referral, and you can only go there a maximum of three times, and they only give you tins."

Dornelly and her team of volunteers collect surplus food from local supermarkets, almost all of which would otherwise go to waste. "We say smell it, sniff it, taste it," she says. "No one's come back to us in two years to say that anyone got sick or died."

People are asking me: do I heat the home or fill the children's bellies and we go cold?

Dornelly's family eat the same food as her clients: she receives universal credit. She could not afford to work and pay for childcare – plus, one of her sons is often in and out of hospital, due to his medical condition. She receives no salary for her community work, only occasional expenses towards her fuel costs. She says: "I'm experiencing the same situation everyone else is experiencing. I am still struggling myself."

She is by no means clear of her own financial worries – she is in arrears on her rent – although she doesn't like to talk about it, because, relative to the community she serves, she says she is doing OK. And she is worried for them. The government's furlough scheme ended in September. The temporary universal credit uplift of £20 a week was revoked the month after, which has been devastating for Britain's poorest households.

Handscomb says: “When the chancellor announced the uplift, he said it was to mitigate the temporary costs of the pandemic. But I would argue those costs haven’t gone away. Rising energy and fuel prices are a result of the pandemic.

“We know that people on low incomes spend the biggest share of their income on heating and fuel bills.” He says existing government initiatives are inadequate. “The cold weather payment and warm home discount scheme are likely to provide only a few hundred pounds of support.”

When the energy price cap goes [up by 54%](#) in April, the 22m households on default or variable rate tariffs will see their energy bills rise by £693 a year on average. The new price cap will put more than 25% of households into fuel poverty, [according to the Resolution Foundation](#), meaning that they spend more than 10% of their income on energy bills after paying for housing costs. [Research from the Food Foundation](#) found that 55% of households with children fear that not being able to afford their energy or food bills will directly affect their children’s health and wellbeing.



- A rare moment of peace.

“I know people who have five or six children at home,” Dornelly says. “Furlough has finished and their benefits have gone down. Gas prices have gone up. They have to heat the house because they have children. They’re asking me: do I heat the home or fill the children’s bellies and we go cold?”

Yet, says Dr Rebecca O’Connell, an expert in the sociology of food and families at University College London (UCL), there are even worse predicaments. “It’s a cliche, isn’t it?” she says (UCL). “Having to choose between heating and eating. But some people aren’t even in that situation. They have neither heating, nor anything to eat.”

It is the first week of November. Dornelly is at the De Beauvoir hub on a Monday morning. It is a cramped room, full of crates of food. On two trestle tables, volunteers sort out donations of meat, ready meals and packaged salads. Dornelly is beavering away in a corner of the room, allocating half the donations to be packed up and taken to the Tuesday hub in Homerton.

Tuesday. Lizzie, a regular, arrives at the hub. She is in her 80s and walks there every week, even though volunteers would be happy to deliver her food and it takes her an hour each way. Walking helps her arthritis, she insists. Lizzie’s family do not know she comes to the food hub: she is too proud to tell them. Were it not for the hub, Lizzie wouldn’t be able to afford fresh fruit and vegetables.

Food is how we live and participate in society. Being excluded is very painful

Dr Rebecca O’Connell

“A common strategy for people on very low incomes is to buy food that is filling, rather than nutritious,” says O’Connell. Public Health England publishes an Eatwell Guide, which outlines the optimal diet to meet basic nutritional standards. [According to the Food Foundation](#), 27% of households would need to spend more than a quarter of their disposable income after housing costs to meet these dietary requirements. Many simply do not have the money to do so.

Lizzie also picks up food for one of her neighbours, a man in his 80s who lives across the road from her. She used to split her food parcel with him, until Dornelly got wind of it and instructed her volunteers to make up a second parcel. Dornelly has a soft spot for Lizzie. She always stops to chat to her, no matter how busy she is. But although Dornelly doesn't let the clients see her exhaustion, everything is starting to get on top of her. It is just relentless.

"It's starting to wear me out," Dornelly says. One client has travelled all the way from Romford, Essex, with their child: they were rejected by their local food bank because they used it too often. Today, a volunteer is in tears because a client has confided in her that she has been going to bed hungry to feed her daughter.

"Parental sacrifice comes up a lot in our research," says O'Connell. "Most commonly, it is mothers who are heading up lone parent households and have had cuts to their benefits. They go without food so the children have enough. We also see older children sacrifice their food intake to protect their siblings." [Research from the Living Wage Foundation](#) found that 37% of parents working full-time and earning less than what it terms the "real living wage" regularly skip meals for financial reasons.





- This food will be used to feed those in need, but Dornelly has occasionally been forced to refuse donations due to a lack of storage space.

[According to the Office for National Statistics](#), the poorest 10% of households spend just £34.40 a week on food and non-alcoholic drinks. Any unexpected costs – new school uniforms, benefits sanctions – can wipe out a food budget. This is without the increasing cost of food, being driven by Brexit and Covid-related issues in the supply chain. In January, grocery prices [were 2.7%](#) higher than a year ago, while wages remain stagnant for many people.

“You often hear this idea that low-income families need to be taught to budget and cook. But, usually, low-income families have a *really* good idea of the cost of things,” says O’Connell. “When you have less to spend on food, you’re much more sensitive to those price rises.”

The Homerton hub always serves a hot meal on a Wednesday. One regular arrives and eats seven bowls of soup in a row, to Dornelly’s alarm. “He’s starving,” she says. “What’s going on? What’s happening?”

Mid-November. At 7pm on Saturday, Dornelly gets a text message from a mother of three: “Sorry to message you so late, but I’m just wondering if you know of any food hubs that are open.” Dornelly meets her the morning after and hands over a bag of food.

A few days later, Dornelly gets a phone call from Claude, one of her volunteers. He regularly picks up food from a Marks & Spencer store in central London and drives it to the De Beauvoir hub. But he has just been given an £80 parking ticket. This is his third ticket. Dornelly decides that she can’t risk any more and informs M&S that she is no longer able to collect their leftover food. If the hub had a building, they could store items for longer, meaning they wouldn’t have to run about all the time, parking where they shouldn’t and racking up fines.

All week, Dornelly is so frustrated that she keeps breaking down in tears. All she can think about is her building. The volunteers keep asking her about it. “My life is not my own,” she says. “I eat, breathe and sleep this. I’m out in the daytime working on it all day and I’m doing emails at night until 2am. I’m not getting paid for any of it. It’s too much to handle. I just want them to let us have a building.”



- Outside the De Beauvoir hub.

First week of December. Demand is increasing. Dornelly is working 80-hour weeks, even though her volunteers try to minimise her workload by never emailing her out of hours.

A pensioner comes to the Monday morning hub. He tells Dornelly that he is trying to live within his means, but he just can't manage it. The pensioners really get to her. "The elderly fought in the war," she says. "They gave their life for our country. And they're sitting in their chairs with the little they have from their pension, thinking: do I eat or do I heat the house?"

Dornelly doesn't like it. She doesn't like it when she is pressing packets of food upon grateful but ashamed elderly people. She doesn't like it when she drives past homeless people on the streets on her way home. She doesn't like it when she sees expensive blocks of flats popping up all over the borough, developments that will push up rents and drive locals out of the community. She doesn't like any of it. "There is no need for it," Dornelly says. She is standing outside the hub, shivering in the cold. "The way the government is treating people." She almost spits out the words.

I eat, breathe and sleep this. I'm out in the daytime working on it all day and I'm doing emails at night until 2am

"One of the solutions to food poverty is to ensure that wages and benefits are adequate to allow families to buy food that meets their needs for health, but also for social participation," says O'Connell at UCL. "Food is how we live and participate in society. Being excluded from that is very painful." She has carried out research in other inner-London areas with similar demographics to Hackney. Children would talk to her about the experience of never being able to go to Costa for a hot drink and a slice of cake, like their friends, because that might be half of the family food budget. "When children are surrounded by expensive eateries and coffee shops that some of their peers can go to, but they cannot, that is really excluding," she says.

A woman calls Dornelly on Thursday evening, after the Homerton hub closes. Dornelly takes a bag of food and meets her in Dalston. When the woman arrives, she is faint with hunger. She is in her 60s, a pensioner. She

asks if it is OK to give out some leaflets for the food hub to other people who are struggling. Dornelly presses them upon her.

Mid-December. There are issues at the Wednesday hub in Homerton. The building is open to the public and people attending events keep helping themselves to food from the food hub's fridge. Dornelly remonstrates with one of the people who manage the building, but the man is dismissive; he tells her that if someone ate her food, it must have been because they were hungry.

The man pulls out some money and tries to thrust it upon her. Dornelly refuses to take the money, telling him that it is about the principle. She wants people to respect what she is doing. She says that the man throws the money into her fridge instead.

Dornelly goes outside to get away from him. She is hyperventilating. A teenager walking past asks her if she is OK. "I felt so bad," she says. "I felt so low."

She is sick of lugging the crates between community centres, getting bruised and wrecking her back, only for people to help themselves to the food she sets aside for people in need. "I'm just getting tired," she says. "I don't know how much I can continue to go on. Because it's getting a lot."





- Dornelly and her team will deliver to anyone unable to visit the hub.

Christmas week. The man has texted Dornelly to apologise. She plans to avoid that hub this week all the same. She can't face seeing him.

On Monday, one of Dornelly's volunteers, Ziggy Noonan, sends her a voice note. She has just had a phone call from a distressed mother with a daughter of 12, with no money for food. The headteacher of her daughter's school gave her the food hub's number. "Honestly, Michelle, she was sobbing," says Noonan. "I said: 'It's OK, it's going to be all right, we're going to support you here.' I got a bit emotional myself."

At the Tuesday hub, Christmas music plays. Noonan is dressed up as Santa. Dornelly's 22-year-old daughter, Renisha, is wrapping presents on a trestle table in the open air. Every child arriving at the hub today will receive an age-appropriate gift. For some, it may be the only gift they receive. Dornelly is in a Santa dress, accessorised with her signature slash of purple lipstick. She is in frantic form, darting from volunteer to volunteer and coordinating drop-offs from local businesses and well-wishers. She stops to chat to a stressed-out mother whose benefits are about to be sanctioned because she doesn't have the laptop she needs to complete her online learning. "It's horrible," Dornelly sighs.

Barry, one of her regular volunteers, comes in to pick up a parcel for a woman in her 80s. Her husband died recently and she is struggling. "They call me black Jesus," Barry chuckles to the volunteers as he bags up the food.

Some volunteers lived around the corner and had no idea what was happening in London Fields and how bad it was

The council dropped off a carrier bag earlier, containing a few toys and some biscuits. "There's nothing to it," says Dornelly, dismissively. The council has previously supplied the hub with bulk food orders, while Dornelly has received some funding and assistance with querying parking tickets. But relations between the council and the food hub are strained at best. To add insult to injury, last night she got another referral from a council worker, directing her towards someone who needed emergency food.

In response, the mayor of Hackney, Philip Glanville, told the Guardian: "Children With Voices is part of the Hackney Food Network, a partnership of over 60 community organisations in the borough providing food solidarity

to residents through community food hubs, co-ops and food banks, and I am very grateful to all the organisations in our network for the work they continue to do in supporting our residents.

“The council seeks to work closely with all of the community partners in our network, and has specifically supported Children With Voices with bulk food orders and in connecting it with the commercial property team for a suitable vacant property. A number of sites have been discussed, but a suitable property has not been found yet.”

Boxing Day. Dornelly drops off a food parcel to a homeless man in his 50s, whom the hub has been supporting on and off for two years. The council keeps moving him from hostel to hostel. “He was very grateful we hadn’t forgotten about him,” she says.

First week of January. Dornelly gets an exciting email: someone is trying to convert a Clapton church into a community centre and asks if she would like to come and have a look. Dornelly heads down, but the space isn’t big enough for the food hub.

She is about to close up the Thursday hub when a 94-year-old woman comes in, accompanied by a friend. The woman had a fall a few weeks ago and, because she lives on a quiet road, she was left out on the street, in freezing weather, for nearly three hours. Her friend, who looks out for her, heard about the food hub and brought her to it. Dornelly tells the woman her volunteers can drop off food to her front door and keep an eye on her. “I’m still coming to terms with it now,” she says. “Imagine that poor lady being left on the ground for three hours. It’s diabolical. People like that should be monitored.”



- The work is physically demanding, leaving Dornelly with bruises and back pain.

Second week of January. After an unseasonably warm end to the year, a cold snap arrives. At the De Beauvoir hub on Monday, clients are complaining about the cost of gas. [Inflation has reached 5.4%](#), its highest level in 30 years. “This is the steepest rise in the cost of living we’ve experienced since the 1990s,” says Handscomb. “If the government wants to protect the incomes of low- to middle-income households, it has to do something.”

In response to the growing cost-of-living crisis, and the news that the energy price cap is to rise by more than 50% in April, the government last week announced [a one-off energy bill rebate of £200 in October](#), although this amount will have to be repaid in £40 increments over the next five years. Council taxpayers in bands A to D in England will also receive a £150 rebate that will not have to be repaid. The government will also increase the number of homes eligible for the warm homes discount.

Around Dornelly, her team is working conscientiously, bagging up individual portions of fruit and vegetables – someone has donated a

gleaming box of pastel-pink rhubarb – and sorting through packets of meat. Salads and sandwiches are stacked on a trestle table; Dornelly presses her team to have some for lunch. She mothers all of them, constantly checking to see that they have had something to eat, calling everyone “darling” or “sweetheart”, regardless of their age. A volunteer makes Dornelly a cup of tea, but she gets distracted and it goes cold. (This is typical of her; Dornelly always has to reheat her hot drinks in the microwave.)

Demand is intensifying. The team signs up three new clients for deliveries in one day: one young person who is vulnerable, two pensioners who live alone. But despite this increase in need, Dornelly is having to turn away food. M&S emails to offer another collection, but Dornelly wouldn’t have anywhere to keep it. “Thank you for the opportunity,” she responds, “but until we can get a bigger building I will have to say no thank you this time.” It is painful, having to turn down food.

Come Thursday, Dornelly is meant to be having a day off when she checks her Instagram. “I’m in dire need of help to get through until Wednesday for my two-year-old, partner, and me,” a woman writes. Dornelly invites her down to the Thursday hub, but she doesn’t have any money for the bus fare. “I don’t have any money to my name at all,” the woman writes. A volunteer drives to the woman’s house and drops off some food.

Later the same day, another client messages Noonan. She forwards it to the hub’s WhatsApp group. “I tested positive for Covid and I have nothing, even my bread is green,” the client writes. “Is there anything you can help with by getting some food bits here? If not, no worries, thanks for the help always.” Another volunteer, another drop-off.

Mid-January. More issues at the Homerton hub. Dornelly has been allocated a fridge, but it is overflowing with food – her volunteers have to tape it shut. There is a second fridge, but she says she has been told that she is not allowed to use it. Now, when Dornelly goes in there, she feels there is a horrible atmosphere. She feels as if she is being monitored by the people who manage the building. She says they find excuses to come into the hub and hover, watching her team.

Dornelly has been feeling unwell all week. The stress of the situation causes her to break down in tears. “This is making me sick,” she says, choking back sobs. “I’m getting weak and emotional about it. It’s not making me better. It’s just getting really awkward and complicated. I don’t know what they want from me. I’m bringing in food to serve their community. If I bring in less food, less people will get fed.”

Late January. Late Monday evening, she is at home when one of her volunteers knocks on her door and unexpectedly unloads a crate of M&S food. Dornelly takes it, even though she doesn’t have anywhere to store it, because the hub isn’t open tomorrow. She drops most of it off at a local homeless hostel and makes up a bag to take to Lizzie.

When she gets there, Lizzie is upset. She has been looking after a neighbour, a man in his 80s, who lives alone. He just got out of hospital. Lizzie always brings him food from the hub. When she got there earlier, she found him sitting in the dark. There was no gas or electricity. It was cold. He didn’t have a bed. Lizzie contacted the council and someone went around and switched his gas and electricity back on, but he is still in dire need.

Tomorrow, Dornelly will arrange for a food parcel to be dropped off at his house. She will try to find him a bed, a mattress and a warm quilt. She will make sure that her volunteers go around there regularly, to provide him food. She will check on him herself. “I don’t like to see how he’s going to be living in that house on his own when it’s so cold,” says Dornelly.

Sometimes it feels as if everything is disintegrating around her. There is so much need, everywhere she looks, in this city. The institutions that should be helping don’t seem to do anything. What would happen, Dornelly wonders, if she just stopped? Who would look after all these people – and all the other people they don’t even know about yet?

But there is no time to think. There are crates to be stacked and loaded into the back of the van. Drop-offs to be coordinated. Street corners to wait on, to press food into the hands of hungry, desperate people. Pensioners to visit and donations to sift through. Dornelly’s body may be bruised and exhausted, but she plans to keep on going, for as long as she can.

To make a donation to the food hub, visit [gofundme.com](#)

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‘They had their own cameras trained on me’ – Louis Theroux on his showdowns with US extremists



‘He implied he might be making a documentary about me’ ... Louis with far-right livestreamer Baked Alaska in the first episode, Extreme and Online. Photograph: Dan Dewsbury/BBC/Mindhouse Productions

In his new show *Forbidden America*, the presenter meets white nationalists, trigger-happy rappers and other inflammatory figures. Here, he argues that, rather than no-platforming them, we need to hear what they say

[Louis Theroux](#)

Thu 10 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

In 25 years of presenting documentaries, I've made it something of a specialty to go to places and listen to people whose views represent something troubling, even dangerous. The first segment I ever made on TV, for Michael Moore's *TV Nation*, was about millennial cults and involved a trip to western Montana, where I spoke to two neo-Nazis in a trailer. For several hours, they explained how some time in the not-too-distant future there would be global racial conflict, leading to Jesus Christ returning and banishing the different races to separate planets in some cosmic version of old-school southern segregationist policies. Late in the evening, when it had grown dark outside, they made me a cup of tea, which I appreciated. They seemed a little warmer towards me and I asked whether, after the inevitable race war, I might be able to make occasional visits to the black people's planets, but it was still a non-starter.

In the years since, I've made many more hours of documentaries on a variety of subjects, some of them focused on more innocent kinds of cultural oddity, such as infomercial gurus or swingers' parties; others on more serious social themes of crime and mental health. But there has always been a strand in my work of being curious about the side of life deemed – in that rather woolly pejorative buzzword – "problematic".

On Sunday, I have a new series going out on BBC Two. [Louis Theroux's *Forbidden America*](#) is squarely in the sweet spot of problematic content. White nationalists, trigger-happy rappers and figures in the porn world accused of sexual misconduct – they all make appearances. In one sense, in the context of my output, it is business as usual – my latest stop-off in a journey that started all those years ago with neo-Nazis in Montana. But in another sense, in releasing this series now, I am aware that it is business as *unusual*. Times have changed. The world is different; the pandemic, social media, the killing of George Floyd and the ensuing conversations about

institutional prejudice and Black Lives Matter. In the context of everything that's happened in the last couple of years, the decision to put out a series chockful of troubling individuals giving expression to upsetting and extreme opinions might seem odd.

The term is "platforming": the idea that it is irresponsible to amplify hateful voices and that in doing so one is contributing to their power and their harm. We should instead ignore the toxic and the dangerously misinformed, the argument goes: exclude them from the conversation. At its simplest, this is a view so uncontroversial as to be almost banal. Quite clearly, we don't want card-carrying neo-Nazis hosting daytime quiz formats or giving talks to children at our local schools. There is no obligation for us to hear paedophile apologists or Isis sympathisers on Radio 4's A Point of View. Nor to give air time to flat-earthers or climate crisis deniers on current affairs shows.



Should he be given airtime? ... Theroux and white nationalist Nick Fuentes, who believes women should not have the vote. Photograph: Dan Dewsbury/BBC/Mindhouse Productions

This has been the case for as long as the media have existed: broadcasters have always had an obligation to think about ways in which they reflect opinions that may be misinformed or hateful. Making it even more pressing nowadays is the demonstrable harm caused by the spread of false

information online and the way this has empowered formerly marginal figures such as conspiracy theorists and nativists. The world we were delivered by [Mark Zuckerberg](#), instead of the promised one in which we would connect with friends via Facebook and share pictures of banana bread, has curdled into a more troubling place where trolls, anti-vaxxers, ethnonationalists and conspiracy loons can pipe their nonsense directly on to our laptops and phones.

Dodgy algorithms have weaponised our anger and fear, enticing us into liking and sharing content that is false and divisive. And in a manner reminiscent of the fast-food industry, and its reliance on high-fat, high-sugar content, [we appear powerless to resist](#) the spread of junk information about lizard overlords, [Pizzagate](#), and what Phoebe Cates looks like now and how it will leave you speechless (answer: she looks fine).

In this new landscape, every day seems to bring a new test case of whether some influencer or high-profile person should be deplatformed, or whether tech companies and media outlets are throttling free expression by deciding what we can and can't see and hear. Donald Trump fomented unrest on Twitter and was kicked off. The comedian [Dave Chappelle](#) sparked boycotts and a campaign by trans rights activists for jokes on a comedy special on Netflix. As I write, the papers are reporting a growing groundswell against Spotify for its deal with the US podcast host [Joe Rogan](#). Musical artists Neil Young and Joni Mitchell have taken their music off the streaming platform, saying they don't wish to be part of a service that – in their view – contributes to vaccine misinformation.

They wouldn't be your first choice to fill in for Sue Perkins on Just a Minute but I believe I'm right to interview them

These aren't always easy situations to figure out and each of them needs careful thought. The bigger point, though, is that I do understand how, viewed in this context, my decision to put some potentially dangerous and inflammatory figures on BBC Two primetime might appear flat-out weird and irresponsible. And to be clear, some of the people who feature in the documentaries are several orders of magnitude beyond Rogan and Chappelle on the "cancelometer". Extreme and Online, the first episode of *Forbidden*

America, is about a community of trolls and white nationalists whose mascot and leader, the diminutive streamer and broadcaster Nick Fuentes, tells me at one point it would be better if women didn't have the vote. He says he views homosexuality as "disgusting". He has also made Holocaust-denying remarks in his online broadcasts. He was outside [the Capitol on 6 January](#) and is on record as praising the events of the day, viewing them as a blow for freedom and justice.

Other interviewees in the show are cut from similar cloth. A far-right hipster-influencer who calls himself Beardson Beardly, and has appeared online in images doing what many believe to be Nazi salutes (though he denies this), gets some airtime – before he throws me out of his house for asking him about the salutes. Another person I speak to is a troll and livestreamer who uses the pseudonym Baked Alaska (his real name is Anthime Gionet), who has posted inflammatory racist content online – getting himself kicked off Twitter – and was inside the US Capitol building on 6 January, livestreaming his own act of alleged trespass and soliciting several thousand dollars' worth of donations as he did so. So no – they wouldn't be your first choices to fill in for Sue Perkins and Gyles Brandreth on Just a Minute.

And yet I believe I was right to make a programme about them. There are several reasons why. The most obvious one is the nature of the project. I make immersive documentaries, researching, shooting and editing over the course of months or even years. It is very far from the "here's your mic, have at it" atmosphere of a conventional debate or TV appearance. Over the years I have made programmes in prisons, among confessed murderers and paedophiles, and in maximum security hospitals for paedophiles.

These troubled, sometimes dangerous people are legitimate subjects of journalistic inquiry. You wouldn't have them sitting in as pundits on The Moral Maze but in the right context, with the right approach, speaking to people who have done terrible things can be a totally valid exercise: revealing and ultimately life-affirming, shining a light on aspects of human psychology and society in a way that promotes understanding and cultivates empathy.

You might argue that an inmate or convicted predator is a different case from someone actively promoting a divisive political position. And there's something in that. But – without wishing to sound too much [like Liam Neeson](#) – I have a specific set of skills that means I believe I can be trusted to tell these stories in a responsible way. By being informed, by doing the research, by spending time in the field – for hours or days or weeks even – questioning, challenging and revealing the reality of the people we are reporting on, and doing responsible journalism.



‘It’s harder for people to hide their real views these days’ ... Theroux in a quieter moment from *Forbidden America*. Photograph: Dan Dewsbury/BBC/Mindhouse Productions

“But why do we need to hear from these people?” you may ask. Well, you might not need to. But the reason you might choose to is because of what their existence says about the world we are living in, and because of the very real power they represent. The truth is, in terms of his online following, Nick Fuentes and his ilk already have platforms from which they can and do reach audiences, in bedrooms and living rooms around the world, in the millions. And just as Trump has shown no sign of disappearing – notwithstanding his cancellation from virtually every social media outlet going – the reach of Fuentes and his supporters is not likely to end soon. So the choice we are faced with is whether to be curious about that phenomenon, try to figure out

why it's growing, what it's feeding on, how it can be challenged, or whether to ignore it and hope it goes away.

Incidentally, so far, I've only written about the first episode, Extreme and Online. In other episodes we meet rappers in Florida who appear to enjoy stoking beefs that have cost lives and getting tattoos on their eyelids that say "Fuck you"; and we interview the porn agent Derek Hay, who has been accused by some former models of sexual misconduct but who has denied any wrongdoing.

Part of the job of telling these stories has been working hard to reveal the layers underneath. Over the more than two years we've spent making it, enormous effort has gone into giving the programme the necessary shape and context to ensure that questionable views are interrogated, conveying to viewers the whole story and not just those parts the interview subjects wish to show. One positive side-effect of the new media landscape is that it's harder for people to hide their real views. In having their own platforms, the participants in these worlds have not only acquired new influence, they have also created vast digital catalogues freely available online and filled with candid expressions of their sincere opinions, for all of which they can be held accountable.

The choice we face is to be curious about the phenomenon – or to ignore it and hope it goes away

This brought an enjoyable transparency to the filming and a sometimes edgy and even hostile energy: the sense of it being a showdown between a legacy media emissary and an insurgent force of disrupters. In several meetings with the far right, they had their own cameras trained on me. Baked Alaska implied he might be making a documentary about me. On several occasions, the far-right influencers did broadcasts about me when I wasn't around, making clear their real feelings, including one in which Nick Fuentes described me as "pretentious" (moi!?) and ridiculed what he took to be my view of him as a hatemonger, characterising it as either dishonest or – in his word – "retarded". But the bigger point is that, for all their intricacy and ironical pirouetting around the subject of their real beliefs, their digital

footprints meant I had the advantage of being informed as to who I was really dealing with.

I understand why some may question my decision to bring figures such as Fuentes to the attention of a wider mainstream public. Grappling with these subjects over the past two years hasn't always been easy. We started researching in 2019 and were about to start filming in March 2020 when Covid hit. Now here we are, two years on in a culture whose increasing virtuality and virality shows no sign of ending. But for all the challenges we faced, and the difficulties of facing up to content that is upsetting at times, I'd also like to think the job is important and worthwhile, and that the difficulties involved are, among other things, a testament to the timeliness and weight of the subjects.

They are powerful and troubling programmes. But I'm proud of how they turned out. Just like the new digital landscape the films reflect, their darkness also presented me with new possibilities for reaching people. The old world, with its heirloom newspapers and broadcasters monopolising debate, is gone. Now we face a chorus of maverick voices – some hateful, some benign, all of them disruptive, and no longer confined to trailers in Montana.

- Louis Theroux's *Forbidden America* starts on Sunday 13 February at 9pm on BBC Two and iPlayer.
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The former John Lewis department store at Barker's Pool in Sheffield city centre. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

[The long read](#)

The death of the department store

The former John Lewis department store at Barker's Pool in Sheffield city centre. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

The closure of John Lewis's store in Sheffield after almost 60 years was a bitter blow. As debate rages over what to do with the huge empty site, the city is becoming a test case for where Britain's urban centres may be heading

by [John Harris](#)

Thu 10 Feb 2022 01.34 EST

In June last year, the staff of Sheffield's [John Lewis](#) department store began the sad task known as "de-rigging": clearing shelves and boxing up goods to be sent for sale elsewhere. The city-centre store had been shut since the start

of the year, and in March 2021, the John Lewis Partnership had announced that it intended to close the store for good.

Some employees said they were too distraught to take part in all the packing-up. But others volunteered to participate, wanting to bid farewell to their colleagues and the building some of them had worked in for decades. There was a lot of reminiscing, as well as an undercurrent of anger: “tears and laughter in equal measure,” one former employee told me. Some people took away souvenirs, including the store directories that had sat next to escalators and staircases.

In the store’s restaurant, a signwriter had painted: “We no longer have our store but we will always have the memories.” The surrounding wall was soon full of photographs arranged in the shape of a heart, and expressions of gratitude and sadness: “I walked in these doors on my first day, turned round, had been here 23 years”; “For 19 years I’ve been here looking after you and you looked after me – that’s what families do”. T-shirts were handed out, reading: “John Lewis Sheffield: Sept 1963-June 2021”. By September, after three months of work, the store’s five floors were empty, and a story that had run for 58 years apparently reached its end.

When I visited two months later, the building was shuttered and silent. Every ground-floor window was covered by pastel-coloured posters advertising John Lewis’s “virtual events” and click-and-collect services. No one needed any persuasion to talk about the closure. “It’s as bad as a death in the family,” one passerby told me. Then she checked herself. “Well, that’s a bit over the top maybe. But it really upsets me. It’s just always been there.” Other people mentioned the excellent customer service, fondly loved rituals like Christmas shopping and the January sales, and the modest pleasures of visiting an old-fashioned retailer, where “you could see what stuff was, and find out what was what”.

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The closure in Sheffield is part of a story playing out across the world: the extinction of the archetypal department store, and a wider crisis for town and city centres. British Home Stores [closed all 167](#) of its UK branches in 2016;

two years later, House of Fraser, founded in 1849, went [into administration](#). After Covid triggered the temporary closure of most shops and a mass move to online shopping, one of the biggest casualties was Debenhams, the middle-market high-street staple, which [announced](#) that it would close its remaining 118 stores, including in Sheffield, in January 2021. John Lewis announced its [first closures](#) – eight in total, including department stores and a few smaller outlets – in July 2020, and another eight six months later, including Sheffield. In total, since 2016, [according to](#) a study published last summer, 83% of the UK's big department stores have closed.

Because of their size, purpose-built department stores are hard to put to new uses. A few have been successfully reinvented – as arts centres, indoor trampoline parks and education settings. But the rapid spread of vacant stores raises a huge question: if urban centres are not going to be dominated by shopping, what do we want them to be?

In most cases, the fate of empty stores is decided by the commercial property market. But in Sheffield, thanks to a deal struck just before John Lewis closed, the building, which occupies one side of a prized central square, is now owned by the city council, and is at the heart of plans for the city's next wave of regeneration. Sheffield's two newspapers are alive with debate about what should be done with it. A loose community of activists, architects and locals passionate about their city have pitched in.

“In Sheffield, we’re not waiting for a remote landlord to come forward with their ideas. We can shape this,” one of the leading figures in the debate, political economist Tom Hunt, told a meeting of councillors and citizens recently. The point, he insisted, was “to be bold, and show the world what a new city centre can be”.

The old John Lewis building might be transformed, or demolished; it could be sold, or kept for public use. As the debate intensifies, Sheffield is becoming a test case for where our urban centres could be heading, and who gets to decide.

As you walk from Sheffield’s railway station into the city centre, the first thing that hits you are the hoardings, crammed with boosterish slogans

evoking a vibrant future: “There’s a new momentum to our city”; “Remixing the heart of Sheffield”. Behind them lies a series of construction projects, split between the expansion of Hallam University and a regeneration drive called Heart of the City, which promises “spaces to entertain, relax, experience, play, work, gather, shop and drink” (the lowly placing of shopping is no accident). Faced with hard times, the city has seemingly decided that the best course of action is simply to press on with building work.

This is a very Sheffield thing to do. The city’s modern history is bound up with the ruptures it went through 40 or so years ago, when its steel and coal jobs disappeared. Thanks to its Labour city council and the Sheffield HQ of the National Union of Mineworkers, the city and its surrounding area were rebranded as The People’s Republic of South Yorkshire, where the red flag flew from the town hall on May Day, and equality and solidarity were deeply ingrained.

There was another aspect of Sheffield’s postwar experience: a futuristic sensibility embodied by many of its buildings, and the music that began to emerge from the city in the late 1970s, made by such groups as Cabaret Voltaire, Heaven 17 and the Human League. The 1980s was a time of strife and resistance, but it also saw the city associated with glamour and global success – not least in the winter of 1981-82, when the Human League’s timeless single Don’t You Want Me reached No 1 in Britain and the US.



New building projects in Sheffield city centre. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

The John Lewis building seemed to embody all these aspects of Sheffield and its culture. After its conversion into a mutualised company in the 1920s, John Lewis's employees became “partners”, entitled to share its profits. Their workplace combined the monolithic vastness of the industrial age with the forward-looking aesthetics of its cutting-edge architecture. The Sheffield store looked like the acme of what the department store was meant to be: simultaneously aspirational and democratic; a place anyone could come into and share the dream of plenty and endless choice.

Such was a vision rooted in the 19th and 20th centuries – of huge, palatial stores, stocked with everything anyone would want. Department stores sat at the heart of people’s shared experience, and popular visions of the future. They were also a cultural commonplace. In [The Floorwalker](#) (1916), Charlie Chaplin was let loose among munificent displays of goods and that thrilling invention of the previous century, the escalator. The Marx Brothers’ [The Big Store](#) (1941) featured a musical number titled Sing While You Sell, and a chase sequence involving chandeliers and mail chutes. Between 1972 until 1985, the British sitcom *Are You Being Served?* presented the fictional Grace Brothers as a microcosm of a befuddled country, riddled with sexual repression and class distinctions, and hilariously short of business sense.

Before John Lewis bought it, the Sheffield store was called Cole Brothers, a family business launched in 1847 by two drapers who styled themselves as “Silk Mercers, Shawl, Mantle and Carpet Warehousemen, Bonnet Makers and Sewing Machine Agents”. Cole Brothers became a byword for Sheffield, partly because of its location, at the intersection of two city-centre thoroughfares, Fargate and Church Street. Coles Corner, as the site was known locally, was a place where friends and lovers would meet. Long since demolished but marked by a plaque, it is now the site of premises recently vacated by Pret a Manger. But if you want a sense of the memories that once swirled around this small patch of the city, there is a beautiful, self-consciously nostalgic song called Coles Corner, by the Sheffield singer-songwriter Richard Hawley. The cover of his album of the same name featured a painting of Hawley at the old Cole Brothers entrance, awaiting his date with a bunch of flowers. The music was full of swelling strings, and a sense of the glimmer of cities at night-time, the enticing pleasures they offer, and the loneliness of someone yearning for a way into it all:

Cold city lights glowing,
The traffic of life is flowing,
Out over the rivers and on into dark
I'm going downtown where there's music,
I'm going where voices fill the air,
Maybe there's someone waiting for me
With a smile and a flower in her hair



An etching of the original Cole Brothers department store in Sheffield.
Photograph: Mick Flynn/Alamy

Cole Brothers was bought by the Selfridges Provincial Stores Group in 1927, which in turn was acquired by John Lewis in 1940. But despite these changes of ownership, Cole Brothers retained its name, and in 1963 the store relocated to its gleaming new premises.

The new store occupied one side of a city-centre square, Barker's Pool, facing the City Hall – a venue that has hosted everyone from Bob Dylan to Winston Churchill – and Sheffield's cenotaph. It was designed by architects Yorke Rosenberg Mardall, whose founders came from the UK, Slovakia and Finland respectively. The building's white exterior tiles came from Belgium, and its entrances were lined with Spanish granite. Because it was conceived at a time when the automobile was the embodiment of aspiration, it included a multistorey car park with 400 spaces. Inside were 60 departments, spread over five floors. “Gay colour is the keynote throughout”, declared the John Lewis Gazette in September 1963. An eight-page feature included a picture of the huge crowd that had swarmed through the doors on opening day, and detailed descriptions of its interior. “In the restaurant,” it noted, “the carpet can be removed in sections for dancing.”

For the next 40 years, in homage to local tradition, the Cole Brothers name remained on the building. It wasn't until 2002 that the store was rebranded as John Lewis. In the meantime, the story of the city centre and its businesses had entered a new and difficult phase.

In 1990, Sheffield's commercial life was radically reshaped by the opening of a vast out-of-town shopping centre. Meadowhall, on the site of a former steelworks, is so big it has its own railway station. When it opened, Meadowhall offered 180 shops and 12,000 free parking spaces. Within five years, it was attracting many millions of visits per year.

Meadowhall inevitably had serious effects on Sheffield's city centre. One recent architectural history of Sheffield said Meadowhall had "sucked the lifeblood" from the streets at the city's heart. The city centre needed to lure people back. In March 1999, the idea that its future might be built on something other than shopping was tested by the opening of the National Centre for Popular Music. Comprising four huge steel "drums", the £15m Lottery-funded building failed to translate Sheffield's musical heritage into a visitor experience, and the public found it underwhelming. [It closed](#) in June 2000.

Ambitious plans for a city-centre retail development to rival Meadowhall were scuppered by the crash of 2008. Eventually, the council launched a new regeneration project for a chunk of the city centre including Barker's Pool, with less emphasis on shopping and a new focus on housing, offices, eating and drinking, and more. But John Lewis remained central to its vision. There was talk of moving the store, but what mattered was keeping it in Sheffield, as a magnet for "footfall", and a symbol of the city centre's economic vitality.

When accounts of Boris and Carrie Johnson's refurbishment of their Downing Street flat quoted a visitor scoffing at the previous incumbents' "John Lewis nightmare", it located the stores within the subtle gradations and snobberies of the English class system. John Lewis may be sneered at by the more moneyed, but it is still seen by many as solid and accessible, and reassuringly upmarket. These were the qualities the council wanted Sheffield to hang on to.

As Sheffield council was working on its regeneration plans through the 2010s, the man who found himself at the centre of negotiations was Nalin Seneviratne. Born in London and raised in Liverpool, he came to Sheffield 13 years ago, and when we first met in November last year, he was Sheffield city council's head of city-centre development. Well versed in urban planning's technocratic vernacular, Seneviratne is also full of passionate, optimistic ideas about cities and their future. "Everything flows into the city centre," he told me. "All our main roads flow into the city, all the rivers flow into the city and out again, the main railway station is here. Our two universities are in the city centre. So we've got great things to build on."

Seneviratne began dealing with John Lewis in 2013. At that time, the company was offered potential new premises nearby. "They said, 'We don't really like that location – it's too far from Marks & Spencer.' We spent ages discussing where they would like to be," he recalled. "They didn't like any of the plans we produced. We said: 'Well, what do you like?'"



Nalin Seneviratne, former director of city development for Sheffield city council. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

One council insider told me John Lewis proposed relocating within the city centre, in a plan that involved digging a tunnel for a new underground car park and demolishing Victorian buildings. "It was bonkers," they said.

“Completely undeliverable.” At one stage, I was told, John Lewis raised the prospect of moving to Meadowhall.

In 2017, John Lewis told the council the store was going to stay put. But three years later, the pandemic triggered a crisis for the company. “In 2020, they said: ‘Unless you can help us with refurbishment costs, we’re going,’” said Seneviratne.

Desperate to avoid such a major closure in the centre, the council bought John Lewis out of its lease for £3.4m and agreed a new rent based on turnover. The cost to the company of being in the building would increase, but in return, the council agreed to contribute “a considerable amount”, according to Seneviratne, to the cost of the store’s first refurbishment since 1980. Suddenly, all seemed well: John Lewis would stay.

The decision to buy the lease, Seneviratne told me, was based on an acknowledgment that nothing in the city centre was certain. “Understanding that retail was changing, you couldn’t just sit there thinking, ‘Oh, department stores are the future,’” he said. “It was important to get control of the building.” The money would be used to fix up the basics: electrics, lifts and escalators. “So if they [John Lewis] did disappear, the council had a building that was fit for purpose.”

Eight months later, in March 2021, John Lewis made another unexpected announcement. Lockdown had kept the Sheffield store shut since January. The company said that, notwithstanding the obligatory consultation with staff, it now planned to permanently close it. “I almost fell off my chair,” said Seneviratne. “The speed and the timing of the decision, not even a year since doing the new deal – that was a shock. John Lewis had said: ‘We’re going unless you help us.’ So we helped them, and they still decided to go.”

Sheffield’s city council leader is a former miner named Terry Fox. He had been deputy leader when the bad news came in from John Lewis. “It was them that broke up this relationship with the city,” he told me. “Not us.” He went on: “I was absolutely gutted. And furious. On the back of Debenhams closing, it was knee in the stomach time, you know what I mean?”

When I contacted John Lewis and presented the city council's side of the story, a spokesperson declined to give a detailed response. The company said it "had continued discussions for a number of years with the council to explore ways to help us remain in the city" but "it would not be appropriate to discuss these conversations further".

"After serving Sheffield for 80 years it was an incredibly difficult decision to leave," said John Lewis in a prepared statement. "Although financially challenged before the pandemic, we agreed a new lease for the store in the belief that through investment in the shop we could play a key role in the city's regeneration. However, the effects of the pandemic – including three national lockdowns and the acceleration of the switch to online shopping – meant the impact on the store's viability was too great."

After news of the closure got out, an online petition demanding John Lewis reverse its decision quickly amassed 20,000 signatures. People posted messages and photos on the building's windows. "I remember when my mum passed away, I came here to buy candles for her funeral," one note read. "I was so upset and a lovely member of staff found a chair for me, sat me down and went off to find my candles. She was so helpful and patient, she couldn't do enough for me. Yes, I can order online but I will never get that level of service so doubt I will shop with you again."



Messages left by former customers on the doors of the John Lewis store in Sheffield city centre. Photograph: Gary Calton/The Observer

Lana Barker worked at the store for 20 years, starting in the lingerie department, followed by seven years in children's clothing. Last November, using some of her redundancy money, she opened a new lingerie shop called The Woman In Me, just outside the city centre. We had a long conversation, in between her serving customers. One was being treated for breast cancer. In the calm, sympathetic way Barker attended to her, you could see the years she had spent on the John Lewis shopfloor, and the kind of customer service people had so fondly talked about. "I loved working there," Barker said.

After the closure announcement came the staff consultations, and the packing up. "Some people wanted to do it because of their attachment to the building, and I was one of them," Barker told me. "I went through being frustrated, angry, upset, disappointed – the whole thing. And I was worried: what the hell was I going to do? I like to be organised. So for someone to suddenly say, 'At the end of August, I can't tell you what the rest of your life looks like' – that's panicking to someone like me. I'm only 43. It hit hard."

Until January this year, Kate Josephs, the city council's new chief executive, was set to be a key player in the next phase of this story. Raised in Doncaster, 23 miles away, she built a career as a high-ranking civil servant. For a time she worked in Barack Obama's White House. From July to December 2020, she led the government's Covid-19 taskforce, which drafted rules and restrictions, as well as overseeing other areas of policy on the pandemic.

Last month, she got caught up in the "partygate" scandal over allegations of a leaving party in the Cabinet Office. The gathering is being investigated by the Metropolitan police, and Josephs is also the subject of an investigation by the city council. The details remain unclear, but at the time of writing, she was on paid leave.

Around a month before all this broke, I met her in an upmarket cafe facing the old John Lewis building. She seemed full of enthusiasm for her new job, and the work she was involved in on the John Lewis building. "It was

definitely a bold move by the council to appoint me,” she said. “I’m not a local government lifer, but I’ve been very supported. And I’m loving it.”



Kate Josephs, chief executive of Sheffield city council. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

The announcement of the store’s closure, she explained, happened very soon after she arrived in Sheffield, whereupon it was her turn to make a bold move: asking people in the city to come up with radical ideas about what to do with the building. “I felt, I think in common with many people in Sheffield, a sense of personal disappointment,” she told me. “Growing up in the area, Cole Brothers was a place I used to go to. But I guess I pulled my socks up pretty quickly and thought, ‘Well, how are we going to think about this differently?’”

She said she was excited by the ideas that had come in. “We’ve had people suggesting climbing walls, or turning the inside into a kind of independent retail space, or knocking it down and creating a great public square.”

The council’s appeal to the public highlights the unique element of this story. After a department store closes, most local authorities have to wait for a private interest to buy and develop the space. Many stay empty for months, even years. In Sheffield, the future of the former Debenhams, just five

minutes' walk from Barker's Pool, will be decided this way. But the council's control of the John Lewis building opens up an array of possibilities.

The conversation about what should happen has been loud and passionate. Sheffield has two vibrant news outlets, the Star and the Telegraph, which have constantly covered the story. Of late, the latter has been energetically publicising one proposal in particular, for a football centre, building on the fact that the first rules of the game were drawn up in the city. Dreamed up by a consortium that includes a so-far unnamed "global sports brand" and fronted by a Sheffield-based company called Urbana Town Planning, the centre would host "have-a-go football experiences with celebrities, community pitches on the roof, and bars and restaurants on the ground floor opening on to Barker's Pool". Initial sketches also show what the people involved say will be a "residential tower".

Two leading voices in the debate about the building's future are both graduates of Sheffield University: Tom Hunt, deputy director of the university's Political Economy Research Institute, and Adam Park, a local architect. In April 2021, they were given space in the Telegraph to call on the city council to convene "a big public conversation about how to reuse and reimagine the building". To spark people's ideas, they had come up with their own proposal: the John Lewis building reinvented as "Sheffield's Covent Garden". A design by Park showed cafes and bars on the ground floor, with "culture" and "retail" space above, and vertical extensions containing apartments.

When we met, they talked enthusiastically about Eindhoven in the Netherlands, where there are plans to turn an old shopping centre into a "green cultural quarter" with a new music venue and climbable "glass mountain", and La Samaritaine, a revived department store in the middle of Paris, swathed in a new undulating glass shell, and now home to shops, offices, a nursery and 96 social housing units. "It's still a department store downstairs, but they added three new storeys on top," said Hunt. A similar extension could be possible here, he thinks. "Not a massive tower, maybe three storeys. You could do some really interesting stuff to create space for family housing, or for older people."

What did they make of the football centre? “It looks like something out of the 1990s,” said Park. Hunt said: “The problem I’ve got is that it’s a big, single-purpose building – which, if it fails, is suddenly a major issue. You’re putting all your eggs in one basket, like the pop music museum, but on an even bigger scale.”

Both were wary of the kind of residential development – often poky student flats – that they said dominates the city centre. They also rejected the idea of pulling the building down and starting again. “We shouldn’t be demolishing buildings any more,” said Park. “Especially buildings that have a civic presence and a history like this one. But just from a sustainability point of view, the construction industry needs to think beyond demolition as a first option. There’s massive embodied energy in that building. Yes, it’s probably got asbestos in it. But you can take a building back to its concrete frame and build it back again, in quite a radical way.”

Just before Christmas, the John Lewis logos on the building’s exterior were dismantled. The entrance to the car park once again said “Cole Brothers”. At night, some lights stayed on. “There are people in there,” said Seneviratne, “but we don’t know what they’re doing.”

Along with Hunt and Park, the Sheffield Telegraph had organised a discussion about the building’s future at the City Hall. The muted, hesitant mood seemed to be partly down to the newly arrived Omicron variant, but also a sense of uncertainty about how any final decisions about the building would be made.

The most energised contributions came from a couple of the paper’s readers. One insisted she wanted another John Lewis, or something like it: a place “where you can go in look around and choose things – gifts, perfume, makeup”. Another was enthused by the idea of something “experiential”, perhaps a “social issues museum” centred on the struggles of women, people of colour and the LGBT community, or a sport museum. Others suggested a library, a creche and a reimagined shopping arcade. When Hunt spoke, he managed to frame his suggestions in big questions about democracy, participation and the future of the lived environment. “We can show the world what is possible,” he said.

The next day, the city council announced that John Lewis had agreed to pay £5m “to surrender their current lease and obligations”. The money would be put “towards the future redevelopment of the site”. Three consultancy firms had been employed to flesh out the council’s options. All highlighted the challenges in redeveloping the building, not least its extensive asbestos. One paper, by the urban planning agency Fourth Street, recommended knocking it down, opening up the surrounding space to the public, and putting up a new, smaller structure, with potential uses including a “library, archive and storytelling centre”, art gallery, music venue or sports facility, with an opportunity to “stack more private or commercial uses” on top.



Building ongoing near the former John Lewis store in Sheffield. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

The empty store is soon to be covered by a vast “wrap”, at a cost of £100,000, and a five-week public consultation by the city council about the future of the city centre is nearing its end. It sets out three broad options for the John Lewis building. Two involve demolition, then either the creation of a huge new public space, or Fourth Street’s mixed scheme. The third choice is to reuse the existing structure.

Later this year, the plans will become clear, but one person will not be involved: Nalin Seneviratne, who is about to step down as director of city

centre development after 13 tumultuous years. “This is the longest I’ve ever worked for an organisation,” he told me. “Someone else needs to do the next chapter.”

As we walked around the city on my first visit, Seneviratne had talked about resisting private interests buying up public space, and the importance to cities of people’s memories. Street layouts ought to be left alone, he said, and the history of buildings has to be considered. The key to the future of the John Lewis building, he told me, lay in reflecting people’s longstanding relationship with what went on inside. “Staff and customers knew each other on first-name terms,” he said. “It was where people went for their first school uniform, their first pair of school shoes.”

“The trick will be to generate the same sort of love for whatever happens there next,” he told me. “Is it a space people can go and enjoy? Is it free to use? You could go into John Lewis and wander around, you needn’t have bought anything. People would meet in the restaurant, or go and have a coffee. All those things, to do with meeting people – how can that be recreated?”

What he said highlighted something that is often overlooked: the fact that what many dismiss as mere consumerism can be woven through with much deeper human needs and capacities, to do with interaction, self-expression and the way we mark the stages of our lives.

Like so many other places, as big stores lose their dominance, Sheffield is trying to find new outlets for those aspects of life. Around the corner from the old site of Cole Brothers, the council has bought a former Clinton Cards, and has begun turning it into a facility it calls Event Central, which will also enable outdoor gatherings on the street. Last year, it launched Summer in the Outdoor City, a series of events reckoned to have drawn more than 1.5 million people into the city centre. It may be some token of the thinking at work that, more than any other place I have recently visited, the centre of Sheffield has a striking number of places to simply sit down and do as you please.

The music, lights and voices Richard Hawley sang about may eventually be just as relevant to what happens here as old-fashioned commerce. “People will always want to come together,” Seneviratne insisted. “Mixing and meeting in places like this, being able to exchange ideas – that’s who we are as humans, isn’t it?”

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Living in a woman's bodyFamily

Emma Thompson on living in a woman's body: my daughter thrums with life, my mother is frail – and I'm balanced between

When three generations of my family were together, I realised how, wordlessly, we recalibrate each other



Emma Thompson: 'I am grateful I can still get up a hill.' Photograph: Yui Mok/AFP/Getty Images

[Emma Thompson](#)

Thu 10 Feb 2022 03.57 EST

I found myself, during our strange, second Covid Christmas, sandwiched between my 22-year-old daughter and [my 89-year-old mother](#). This year, more than ever, the umbilical connection between us tugged at me as I,

Janus-in-waiting, observed, monitored and enjoyed the miraculous luxury of three generations together.

My daughter has [tattoos](#). I like them, which surprises me. I understand the urge to mark life's more seismic events upon your body. They sear themselves into our brains after all, so perhaps tattoos are just the outer version of the inner burns.

My mother's body bears witness in more traditional ways – watching her navigate its frailty and bentness is a daily learning, a meditation. She taught me to walk when I was a baby, and now, she teaches me how I will walk when I am old: how to reach for this, bend for that, move around the obstacles like an ancient, patient stream. I try not to help.

Living between these bodies is an odd mixture of joy and grief. My daughter thrums. Her life force changes the atmosphere in the room as soon as she enters. We all receive the electrical charge and, once again, we dance.

I must have done that once.

Or my daughter comes in upset, chaotic, spinning out and sits by my mother and receives a calming nod – no questions, I note – and the chaos subsides.

‘Why is my fanny getting bigger?’ my mother breathes at me one morning as she is washing the forks

Whatever made us think we could live without this? We were stuck on our goals and our aspirations and – God forbid – our dreams. We were too busy to notice how the bodies silently speak to one another, how we breathe each other in, recalibrate and breathe out.

But the meeting of these life forces now feels more essential than ever. We are constantly exchanging ever-altering resonances, and balance occurs. Not perfectly – nothing’s perfect – but, consistently, we change and reset one another’s state. So instead of grieving my mother’s ageing, instead of envying my daughter’s youth, I find I am buoyed up and calmed down by turn.

“Why is my fanny getting bigger?” my mother breathes at me one morning as she is washing the forks. We laugh for quite a long time. Her skin reminds me of my daughter’s when she was a baby: the same almost-not-there softness, lovely to stroke.

It feels like she’s returning to something.



Three generations of women in Emma Thompson’s family Illustration: NGADI SMART / STUDIO PI/The Guardian

When I hold my daughter, I can feel, in deeply recessed parts of my body, her vulnerability. She’s all fire and sparks, but I know it’s there. I try not to help.

She’s brimful of the world, and the image in my mind’s eye is of her walking away towards the sun carrying a rucksack, my mother sitting by the fire, dozing to the crackle, and me, standing in the doorway, held between the two states of departure. One towards action and one into stillness. It’s a rich position to be in, full of nutrients, somehow.

I exist between them. I’m grateful I can still get up a hill and I’m depressed about my thighs.

Emma Thompson is an actor and screenwriter

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[Coronavirus](#)

Covid rules are to be axed in England, but is pandemic's end really in sight?

Analysis: Plans to end isolation rules have been gleefully announced, but questions about infection control remain

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



People walk past the National Covid Memorial Wall in London on Wednesday. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Hannah Devlin Science correspondent
[@hannahdev](https://twitter.com/hannahdev)

Wed 9 Feb 2022 14.34 EST

As the threat of the Omicron wave has receded in [England](#), the government has been quick to move the conversation on to “living with Covid”.

It was inevitable that this would mean the eventual lifting of legal restrictions, including the need to self-isolate. But even given the optimistic tone in recent weeks, Boris Johnson’s [announcement on Wednesday](#) came sooner than many expected.

While he signalled the scrapping of restrictions in England [by 24 February](#) – a month earlier than had originally been planned – he provided no detail.

It is unclear whether any specific scientific advice was provided on the impact of the move – none has been published – and some of the latest evidence published by the government’s Sage advisers gives an idea of potential risks.

An [assessment in mid-January](#) concluded that lifting of plan B measures could result in a return to epidemic growth, “particularly if precautionary behaviour, including testing, decreases as a result of reduced perception of risk”. Since then, case numbers have remained high and on Wednesday figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showed that in England infection levels rose to one in 19 people in the first week of February.

But those figures are not as frightening as they once were.

Vaccines and immunity from infection mean that a large surge of cases no longer translates to tens of thousands of deaths. Nevertheless, the Sage analysis points out that another increase could result in “a sustained period of high levels of hospitalisations [that] would have detrimental consequences for the NHS”, at a time when [waiting lists are at a record high](#).

As we move out of the crisis phase of the pandemic, it is perhaps also time to recalibrate what we expect from public health policy, beyond simply avoiding large numbers of deaths in the immediate term. Restrictions have to be balanced against the real downsides of self-isolating, but policies should also be evidence-based, coherent and consider the impact on those in vulnerable groups.

The latest announcement has left a sense of confusion about how the public will be expected to live out the changes to rules in two weeks' time.

Following the [jubilant tone](#) of the announcement regarding people no longer needing to self-isolate, Downing Street later clarified that “in the same way that someone with flu, we wouldn’t recommend they go to work, we would never recommend anyone goes to work when they have an infectious disease”.

A substantial proportion of Covid infections are asymptomatic, or mild, though. So as England moves to a new phase, so new questions will have to be faced. Most employers would not expect – or tolerate – people staying off work when suffering from mild cold symptoms. Will they feel the same way about Covid?

Will people just need to stay at home as long as they are ill – as with flu? Or will there be a suggested isolation period? And how will the rules apply to NHS staff, who until last week faced being sacked unless they were fully vaccinated? The details are, so far, unclear.

There is also continued concern about how the latest policy will affect those in the clinically vulnerable group, for whom Covid remains a more serious threat because their immune systems do not respond as effectively to vaccines.

Campaign groups and charities representing those with blood cancer, kidney disease and other immunocompromised people say that while the government has celebrated being able to return people’s freedoms, it has failed to set out plans for how vulnerable groups will be able to return to a normal life, or to ensure that all of these people are able to access fourth vaccine doses and antiviral drugs.

The emergence of future variants also remains a possibility, and Sage scientists have repeatedly stressed the need for vigilance. While requirements for individuals to test and isolate may be relaxed, it will be crucial for national surveillance to continue to ensure that there is time to react in the case of new variants.

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Coronavirus

Boris Johnson plans to end England's Covid rules a month early

PM makes announcement in parliament but some warn he risks sending signal that pandemic is 'all over'

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

01:14

PMQs: Boris Johnson to scrap Covid isolation rules and 'party' photo emerges – video

[Peter Walker](#), [Heather Stewart](#), [Ian Sample](#) and [Sally Weale](#)

Wed 9 Feb 2022 15.01 EST

All Covid regulations, including the requirement to isolate after testing positive, are due to be abolished in England in two weeks, [Boris Johnson](#) has announced.

The prime minister moved the plan forward by a month, saying the change "shows that the hard work of the British people is paying off". It sets [England](#) on a different course from many countries that continue to enforce quarantine with penalties and fines even while relaxing other rules.

Some scientists warned that Johnson risked sending a signal that the [pandemic is "all over"](#), while unions said he was "going too far, way too soon" in aiming to end all domestic rules in England from Thursday 24 February. Charities said it could leave clinically vulnerable people exposed.

Timeline

Coronavirus restrictions in England

Show

23 March 2020

Boris Johnson announces the first lockdown in the UK, ordering people to “stay at home”.

26 March 2020

Lockdown measures legally come into force.

16 April 2020

Lockdown is extended for “at least” three weeks.

1 June 2020

Phased reopening of schools begins in England.

15 June 2020

Non-essential shops reopen.

23 June 2020

Johnson announces pubs, restaurants, cinemas and hotels will be able to open with restrictions from 4 July. The 2-metre social distancing rule will be changed to 1-metre.

4 July 2020

The first local lockdown comes into force in Leicester and parts of Leicestershire. Restrictions are eased in England, including the reopening of pubs, restaurants, hairdressers.

18 July 2020

Local authorities gain additional powers to enforce social distancing.

3 August 2020

“Eat out to help out” scheme, offering a 50% discount on meals up to £10 per person, begins.

14 August 2020

Lockdown restrictions eased further including the reopening of indoor theatres, bowling alleys and soft play areas.

14 September 2020

Indoor and outdoor social gatherings with more than six people are banned.

22 September 2020

Johnson announces new restrictions, including a return to working from home and a 10pm curfew for the hospitality sector.

14 October 2020

A new three-tier system of Covid-19 restrictions starts in England.

5 November 2020

Second national lockdown comes into force.

24 November 2020

Johnson announces up to three households will be able to meet up during the Christmas period of 23 to 27 December.

2 December 2020

Second lockdown ends after four weeks and England returns to a stricter tier 3 system of restrictions.

19 December 2020

The prime minister announces tougher restrictions for London and the south-east of England, with a new tier 4 – “stay at home” – alert level.

21 December 2020

Tier 4 restrictions come into force in London and south-east England.

26 December 2020

Six million more people in the east and south-east of England enter tier 4.

6 January 2021

England enters a third national lockdown.

15 February 2022

Hotel quarantine for travellers arriving from 33 high-risk countries begins.

8 March 2021

Primary and secondary schools reopen in England.

Two people are allowed to meet in recreation spaces.

29 March 2021

Outdoor gatherings of either six people or two households will be allowed including in private gardens.

Outdoor sports facilities reopen.

“Stay at home” order ends but people encouraged to stay local.

12 April 2021

Non-essential retail, hairdressers and public buildings reopen.

Outdoor venues including pubs and gyms also reopen.

Self-contained holiday accommodation opens.

17 May 2021

Limit of 30 people allowed to mix outdoors.

“Rule of six” or two households allowed for indoor social gatherings.

Indoor venues reopen including pubs, restaurants and cinemas.

Up to 10,000 spectators can attend the very largest outdoor-seated venues like football stadiums.

14 June 2021

Restrictions on weddings and funerals abolished.

19 July 2021

Most legal limits on social contact removed in England and the final closed sectors of the economy reopen including nightclubs.

14 September 2021

The prime minister unveils England’s winter plan for Covid – “plan B” – to be used if the NHS comes under “unsustainable pressure”. It includes measures such as face masks.

29 November 2021

Travel red list reintroduced, with UK arrivals required to pay for and self-isolate in a pre-booked, government-approved hotel for 10 days.

8 December 2021

Johnson initiates plan B measures after the spread of the Omicron variant.

10 December 2021

Face masks become compulsory in most public indoor venues under plan B.

15 December 2021

The government announces all 11 countries will be removed from the UK's travel red list.

NHS Covid pass becomes mandatory in settings such as nightclubs.

27 January 2022

England's plan B measures end, with mandatory face coverings in public places and Covid passports dropped.

Johnson says the government will drop its advice for people to work from home.

Passengers must continue to wear masks on London's buses, trains and trams.

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Downing Street will set out guidance but confirmed people would be advised to avoid going to work if they tested positive for Covid – though without the current legal obligation and possible fines. Currently, those who have the virus can leave their homes after [negative rapid test results on days five and six](#) of the isolation period.

In a sign that the prime minister still faces pressure from inside his party, lockdown-sceptic Conservatives demanded he go further, calling for a guarantee of no future restrictions and changes to public health laws to generate “competitive” scientific advice in future pandemics.

Downing Street had signalled last month that it planned to drop all remaining legal constraints when the relevant regulations expire on 24 March. But in a surprise announcement to the Commons on Wednesday, Johnson hastened the timetable.

The plan was to “present our strategy for living with Covid” on 21 February, Johnson said, bringing cheers from many of his MPs just before prime minister’s questions.

If “the current encouraging trends in the data continue”, Johnson added, he would confirm the end of all domestic regulations, with the change formally beginning later that week. Some travel restrictions, such as passenger locator forms and quarantine for unvaccinated people, are likely to continue.

“Obviously in the same way [as for] someone with flu, we wouldn’t recommend they go to work, we would never recommend anyone goes to work when they have an infectious disease,” Johnson’s spokesperson said. Free Covid testing will continue for now, though it is expected to be scrapped at some point.

It remains unclear if the £500 grant available for people on low incomes who have to self-isolate will still be available, with unions calling for proper sick pay and a guarantee that staff who test positive will not be forced to work. The rule change should not be “a green light for bosses to cut corners”, said Frances O’Grady, the TUC general secretary.

Christina McAnea, the head of Unison, which represents many education and health staff, said the move appeared premature given “rife” infections in schools and UK-wide positive tests still close to 70,000 a day.

“Everybody wants to get back to normal but Covid risks haven’t disappeared,” she said. “This is going too far, way too soon.”

Teaching unions also expressed concern, with the Association of School and College Leaders saying the announcement had come “without any prior communication or discussion”.

[Stephen Reicher](#), a professor of social psychology at St Andrews University and a member of the Sage subcommittee advising on behavioural science, said there was a risk Johnson’s move could affect ongoing Covid efforts such as the booster vaccination programme.

“Taking away the obligation to self-isolate is the final and most powerful way of saying ‘it’s all over’ and that infections don’t matter,” he said. “We know that perceptions of risk are critical to adherence and that people won’t do things if they believe there is no need to do them, however much they are urged.”

Making self-isolation a matter of choice would “inevitably” mean this would happen much more often among people who could either work from home or afford to take time off, Reicher added.

Health chiefs said that while the end of compulsory self-isolation would ease NHS staff shortages, it could bring other pressures. “Covid-19 has not gone away,” said Chris Hopson, the chief executive of NHS Providers, which represents NHS trusts in England, noting that infection levels remained high and there remained risks from variants and long Covid.

There was particular worry among groups representing clinically vulnerable or immunosuppressed groups, with the disability charity Scope saying some disabled people “have felt increasingly like they have been left to fend for themselves”.

Gemma Peters, the chief executive of Blood Cancer UK, said the end of isolation rules would create “anxiety and anger” for those with suppressed immune systems. “Ministers need to ensure the public know that there are 500,000 people in the UK for whom the vaccine is less effective and therefore are not as ‘free’ as everyone else.”

Johnson’s announcement was clearly intended to buoy his MPs a day before the Commons breaks for recess, as he faces new revelations about a Downing Street social event in December 2020, [now being reviewed](#) by police.

At prime minister’s questions, Johnson repeatedly talked up his decision to move rapidly away from tight Covid rules in England, both last summer and after indications this winter that the Omicron variant was less severe, [saying he had](#) got “the big calls” right.

He nonetheless still faces pressure from his MPs. Steve Baker, the deputy chair of the [Covid Recovery Group](#) of Tory backbenchers, said he welcomed the move but called for changes to public health laws to bring “better modelling [and] competitive, multidisciplinary expert advice”, to make future lockdowns less likely.

David Frost, Johnson’s recently departed Brexit minister and an increasingly influential voice on the right of the Conservatives, called for Johnson to “also make clear we will not go down the road of coercive lockdowns ever again”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/09/boris-johnson-says-he-plans-to-lift-all-englands-covid-rules-a-month-early>.

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Hong Kong

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam apologises for long Covid testing queues as new restrictions bite

Apology comes as city enforces new measures including closure of hairdressers and addition of malls to vaccine pass system



Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam has apologised for long Covid testing queues as the city battles a record high number of cases. Photograph: Kin Cheung/AP

Reuters

Wed 9 Feb 2022 20.35 EST

Hong Kong's leader, Carrie Lam, has said she is "deeply sorry and anxious" about the lengthy wait for residents to get tested or enter isolation facilities after a record number of new coronavirus cases left authorities scrambling.

Hong Kong's daily Covid-19 infections nearly doubled to a record 1,161 cases on Wednesday as the global financial hub battles a rapid surge that could pose the biggest test yet of its "dynamic zero" policy.

Writing on her official Facebook page on Wednesday night, Lam said that the government was working hard to enhance capacity and that the fast-spreading infections, hitting places like elderly care homes, were the last thing she wanted to see.

"I firmly believe that all people treasure our frontline medical staff, look forward to resuming their normal daily lives, and want to help Hong Kong ride out the pandemic," she said.

Hong Kong has reported close to 4,000 infections over the past two weeks, up from just two in December, taking its tally to more than 17,000 since the outbreak began in 2020, with 215 deaths, although the figures are lower than other major cities in the world.

Authorities have responded with the toughest measures since the start of the pandemic, which are taking an increasing social and economic toll on the city's 7.5 million residents.

From Thursday Hongkongers will be subject to intense new social restrictions including limits of two people gathering in public, or two households in private. There were some exemptions for carers and tradespeople, but the city was warned that authorities have strong contact tracing mechanism, and would be watching.

The government also added religious premises, shopping malls, department stores, supermarkets, markets and barbers or hair salons to the forthcoming compulsory vaccine pass system, and doubled the financial penalties for non-compliance with compulsory testing orders.

Hair salons and religious venues will be shut for at least two weeks. Photos on social media showed queues out the door of one barber.

Hong Kong has stuck to the [strategy employed by mainland China](#) to suppress all coronavirus outbreaks as soon as possible to eliminate the virus.

Most of the 20,000 residents of Discovery Bay, an area that is home to many expatriates, were ordered to test for Covid-19 after the government said it detected coronavirus in sewage samples. The number of people required to test will likely be much larger, however, because the order extends to anyone who visited the area for more than two hours between 26 January and 8 February.

Large crowds thronged to testing centres across the city, with some residents complaining that they were more likely to get infected while queueing.

Typically, thousands of residents are mandated daily to test if they have been to an area where infections are detected.

Lam said the city was not able to try to live with the virus, as most of the rest of the world is doing, because more than 50% of elderly people have not been vaccinated.

About 80% of the city's residents have had at least one vaccine shot but many elderly people have been hesitant.

Two elderly patients in their 70s died from coronavirus, authorities said on Wednesday.

This article was amended on 11 February 2022 to give the resident population figure for Discovery Bay, replacing an earlier reference to “200,000 residents and visitors”.

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New Zealand

New Zealand police clash with anti-vaccine protesters at parliament, over 120 arrested

Police say it could take days to break up a Covid-linked protest inspired by ‘siege of Ottawa’ on parliament grounds in Wellington

00:51

Anti-vaccine protesters clash with police outside New Zealand parliament – video

[Eva Corlett](#) in Wellington and [Tess McClure](#) in Auckland

Wed 9 Feb 2022 23.19 EST

New Zealand police began evacuating anti-vaccine protesters from parliament grounds on the third day of their demonstration, with more than 120 arrested after clashes.

Police brought in around 150 extra officers from around the country on Thursday to try to clear the protesters from parliament grounds, where they had pitched tents and parked cars, blocking traffic.

The protesters, inspired by the “siege of Ottawa” where truckers paralysed the city and caused a state of emergency, led a convoy of several hundred vehicles to parliament on Tuesday. A number stayed overnight, pitching tents on the lawns.

Tensions boiled over, as the wall of more than 100 police officers advanced their line a few metres every half hour, ripping out tents as they went.



The anti-Covid mandate protest on parliament grounds in Wellington.
Photograph: Eva Corlett/The Guardian

The police picked people off one-by-one at the front of the line, prompting scuffles to break out, and sparking shouts from the crowd of “shame on you, shame on you!” towards the officers.

A drum beat persistently and occasionally the group of a few hundred protesters erupted into songs in Māori and English, including New Zealand’s national anthem. A man egged on the crowd through a loudspeaker: “thank you for standing up for New Zealand!” he shouted.

Away from the frontline, the atmosphere was less volatile, with protesters sitting in deck-chairs, or filming on their phones.

By Thursday afternoon, the police had arrested 120 people and used pepper spray on some members of the crowd, but made little headway in moving the protesters off parliament’s grounds. Two police staff were injured and some protesters suffered minor injuries.



Police pack up a tent at parliament grounds in Wellington. Photograph: Marty Melville/AFP/Getty Images

The police expect the protest will continue over some days, requiring a rolling door of officers to be brought in from other parts of the country, said Wellington district commander superintendent Corrie Parnell.

Speaking to media in a location away from the protest, Parnell said the occupation, with its erected tents, was “unprecedented” on the grounds. “We continue to try and really encourage those persons present here to peacefully desist ... That has not come to fruition,” he said.

There had been good lines of communication with some of the organisers, but Parnell said that had “eroded to a point where [the police are] beyond engaging, educating, encouraging”.

He said protestors had been putting their children on the frontline of the protest, which presented a significant risk for those children and was “less than ideal” for officers trying to move people on.

Over the coming days, the police will continue to slowly apply pressure on the crowd.



A woman is arrested and carried away as protesters refuse to leave parliament grounds in Wellington. Photograph: Marty Melville/AFP/Getty Images

Earlier in the day Parnell said: “While police acknowledges people’s right to protest, this needs to be conducted in a way that does not unfairly impact on the wider public.”

Most New Zealanders have supported the vaccine: 94% of those aged 12 and over are vaccinated with two doses.

New Zealand has vaccine mandates that cover many workers in jobs designated “high contact” – including in healthcare, teaching, and the police. There are also vaccine requirements for other businesses including hospitality, gyms and hairdressers while the country is at a “red” or “orange” alert level. It is currently at red. The government estimates the mandates affect about 40% of the workforce.



Away from the frontline, the atmosphere was less volatile. Photograph: Eva Corlett/The Guardian

This week's protest was purportedly to denounce those mandates – but its members are voicing [a sprawling mixture of concerns](#), including about vaccine safety, a “plandemic”, concerns over gene therapy manipulation, accusations of media corruption, and requests to save a Northland oil refinery from closure.

Over the past year, New Zealand's anti-vaccine and anti-mandate protest movement has been increasingly home to conspiracy theories, threats and violent rhetoric, particularly against reporters, the prime minister, and other members of parliament. Calls for “citizens' arrests”, “Nuremberg”-style trials, and for the execution of reporters and politicians have become commonplace in the movement's social media pages and chat apps. At the current protest, some demonstrators decorated their vans with nooses, and scrawled “hang them high” on the parliament paving stones.

The threat of that rhetoric exploding into violence was [acknowledged by parliament and the country's counter-terror services](#) in November last year. Parliamentary services boosted security after a [spate of threats or harassment of MPs](#). In January, prime minister Jacinda Ardern's van [was forced off the](#)

road and on to a curb after being pursued by anti-vaccine protesters yelling abuse.

Ardern said on Thursday that it was time for protesters to move on.

“I’m reminded that relative to the people that are at parliament now, on the very day that they’re there, tens of thousands of people went out and got vaccinated. It [the protest] is not reflective of where the rest of New Zealand is at right now. All of us want to actually move on.”

She said the eviction of protesters was a police matter. “Every New Zealander has the right to protest – but when it tips into affecting business, people’s ability to move, and the ability of kids to go to school or emergency services to move around then obviously the police need to manage that,” she said.

Parnell asked the public to avoid the area if possible, and said there would be traffic delays.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/10/new-zealand-police-clash-with-anti-vaccine-protesters-during-eviction-operation>

2022.02.10 - Opinion

- Johnson's Savile slur isn't the first rightwing conspiracy to go mainstream
- Like most men, I now only wear ties at funerals. So why do I have 60 of them?
- Covid vaccines deserve our trust – but big pharma doesn't
- Unions don't call the shots any more – but we'd all be better off if they did

Opinion
The far right

Johnson's Savile slur isn't the first rightwing conspiracy to go mainstream

[Joe Mulhall](#)

From 'activist lawyers' to 'no go zones', extremist ideas have become a part of our political discourse



Anti-migrant protesters demonstrate in Dover, 5 September 2020.
Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Thu 10 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

When [Boris Johnson](#) wrongly accused Keir Starmer of having failed to prosecute Jimmy Savile, many people reacted with a slight sense of bemusement. However, for those of us who research and monitor the far right, it was instantly recognisable. It wasn't surprising that these comments were soon followed by the Labour leader being heckled by an angry mob repeating the conspiracy theory.

Despite having been around [since 2018](#), the disinformation about Starmer had recirculated in January this year, with major far-right figures such as Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (AKA Tommy Robinson) sharing it with his 155,000 subscribers on the secure messaging service Telegram. The post whipped Lennon's supporters into conniptions, with one simply posting the image of a noose in response.

There has been an increasing creep of far-right rhetoric and conspiracy theories into mainstream politics and it is important to understand how this occurs. It is unlikely that Johnson was scrolling through Tommy Robinson's Telegram channel and came across the Savile slander. Rather, conspiracy theories and talking points circulate within far-right spaces, and the ones that gain the largest traction are spread incrementally via mainstream hosts such as rightwing commentators, until they are picked up by people who often have no idea where they originate.

The best recent example of this has been some of Priti Patel's rhetoric around cross-Channel migration. In early 2020, the organisation I work for, Hope not Hate, began to closely monitor a small group of far-right activists who spent their days on the beaches and at lookout points around the port of Dover. Their videos, which occasionally showed them chasing and harassing migrants on the beaches and at their accommodation, quickly spread across far-right social media platforms and whipped anti-immigrant activists into a peak of anger.

The daily drip of anti-migrant content into far-right online spaces forced the issue of cross-Channel migration up the agenda within the movement. Started by solo far-right activists – so-called “migrant hunters” – the issue was soon adopted by more formal far-right organisations such as Britain First which began to enthusiastically campaign around the issue.

Nigel Farage then joined in and began to discuss it on his LBC radio show. This was the moment the specific rhetoric around cross-Channel migration by boats escaped the confines of the far right and entered the mainstream once again, having dropped down the news agenda. Dehumanising talk about “floods” of migrants and alarmism about an “invasion” were once again amplified and subsequently picked up widely by rightwing traditional

media outlets. The result was dangerous, with Patel, the home secretary, then echoing the language of the far right when she spoke of “[activist lawyers](#)” who she said were frustrating the removal of migrants.

Sadly, some far-right conspiracy theories gain such traction that they become widely believed, most notably the “Muslim no- go zones” conspiracy theory. Hope not Hate [polling](#), carried out by YouGov, found that 58% of Tory party members say it is true that there are “no-go zones” in Britain where sharia law dominates and non-Muslims cannot enter. Here we see an unsubstantiated belief, pushed by the far right and subsequently widely believed.

Too often people think of the far right as a tumour on the body politic, something to be cut off an otherwise healthy host. In reality, it is better understood as a gangrenous limb that, if left untreated, poisons the rest of the body. Words have power. The cordon sanitaire that kept the far right “beyond the pale” is crumbling and the results are extremely dangerous.

- Joe Mulhall is director of research at the anti-fascism organisation Hope not Hate. He is the author of numerous books on postwar fascism including Drums in the Distance: Journeys into the Global Far Right
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OpinionMen's fashion

Like most men, I now only wear ties at funerals. So why do I have 60 of them?

[Adrian Chiles](#)



I used to wear them at work, then only when I was presenting football. But would it be a betrayal of my Croatian heritage to give them away?



A pain in the neck ... can a man have too many ties? Photograph: moodboard/Getty Images/Image Source

Thu 10 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

“I think,” said my friend Dai, “there should be a tie amnesty.” In the course of a clearout, he was dismayed to find he had 30 ties in his collection, a count not much greater than the number of years since he’d last had cause to wear one.

I remember my dad telling me, donkey’s years ago, that you knew were getting old when you bought yourself a black tie for funerals, instead of borrowing one from your old man. I passed that milestone a while ago. You know you’re really cracking on when you have 60 ties, but the black one is the only one you have any use for.

I thought I only had half as many, but I found more in a bag at the back of the wardrobe, waiting to be taken somewhere. But where? Who would want them? Charity shops must be sick of the sight of them. What is going to become of them all? The average length of a tie is, I read, 58 inches or just short of 1.5 metres. My collection alone, laid end to end, would stretch for 90 metres. Let’s say there are 30 million males in the UK – including all the

tie-wearing schoolboys – and they have, on average, five ties each: that comes to well over 200,000km of ties. A use must be found for them.

One reason that I have so many is that, being of Croatian heritage, I have always felt the need to boast about my country's gift to the world. Natty neckties are first thought to have been sported by Croatian mercenaries serving for the French during the thirty years' war of the 17th century. I love the idea of big Croatian brutes larging it around Paris in their small, traditional, knotted neckerchiefs, arousing the interest of Parisian fashionistas. "*Très chic!*" they must have cried. The Croats call themselves Hrváti; the French call them Croates. Conflate the two and you get cravat. *C'est bon!* Soon, Louis XIV was wearing one, and that was that. So I can't possibly ditch my many Croatian ties. That would surely be treasonable and I've not long had my passport.

As for the others in my collection, my television presenting career came at the end of the era in which tie-wearing was compulsory. I started out on a programme called Working Lunch on BBC Two in 1994, where the editor took the radical decision that we shouldn't wear jackets. Traditionalists in the main newsroom were sniffy. Some took to calling the programme Naked Lunch rather than Working Lunch. Miseries. Heaven forfend if we'd also chosen to dispense with ties. Tellingly, this was never considered; there's radical and then there's radical.

I have many ties from this era, none of which could be worn today without causing consternation. They are loud, they're wide, they're garish. They will never come back into fashion, if they ever were. Very few of the programmes I went on to present required me to wear a tie. The exception, oddly, was football. For some reason, televised football clung on to the tie longer than any part of the business, other than straight news bulletins. For a long while, absurdly, the only time I ever wore a tie was at football matches. And funerals, obviously. Now, it's just the latter.

Powerful forces seem determined to stop the rot. In January 2020, GQ declared: "[It's official – everyone is wearing ties again.](#)" But then the pandemic happened and just about the only tie-wearers left in the land were Chris Whitty, Patrick Vallance and whichever government bod stood at the lectern between them. GQ hasn't given up yet, though. Just last September,

it asserted: “[Men’s ties are bold, brash, and better than ever.](#)” Like Croatian mercenaries, the tie-lovers fight on.

Adrian Chiles is a broadcaster, writer and Guardian columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/feb/10/like-most-men-i-now-only-wear-ties-at-funerals-so-why-do-i-have-60-of-them>

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[Opinion](#)[Pharmaceuticals industry](#)

Covid vaccines deserve our trust – but big pharma doesn't

[Laura Spinney](#)

The pandemic has saved the reputation of some pharmaceutical giants whose track records should not be whitewashed



'The Covid pandemic has, in some senses, been big pharma's redemption. But the question of trust isn't going away.' A protest for pharmaceutical companies to suspend Covid vaccine patents, London. Photograph: David Cliff/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Wed 9 Feb 2022 07.29 EST

Last week, a commission set up by Stanford University and the Lancet found that the devastating opioid crisis in North America [could happen again](#), and not just there. The unethical practices that Patrick Radden Keefe documented in his prize-winning 2021 book, [Empire of Pain](#), were not

restricted to one company, Purdue Pharma, and the part of the Sackler family that owned it. They were and remain normal behaviour in the pharmaceutical industry and in the agencies that are supposed to regulate it.

The Covid pandemic has, in some senses, been big pharma's redemption. The vaccines that were developed at record speed, albeit on the back of decades of painstaking, publicly funded research, have been portrayed as a miracle of public-private cooperation. But this report reminds us that the question of trust isn't going away – and it won't until we do something about it.

At a Lancet webinar last week, the addiction expert at Stanford, Keith Humphreys, who led the commission, noted that if you measure the opioid crisis in terms of years of life lost, rather than absolute numbers of deaths, the fallout in the US and Canada has been on a par with that of Covid. Measure it by deaths relative to the populations of those countries, and it's worse than the HIV/Aids epidemic at its North American peak. This "epidemic" was caused not by a virus, but by human greed. And it's not over.

Because those who became addicted to prescription painkillers often progressed to heroin and then fentanyl, the crisis is still growing despite tighter controls on prescription. The commission's modelling suggests that without major policy changes, the US alone could lose another million lives before this decade is out. That's not to mention the damage that addiction does even when it doesn't end in death.

What's more, the crisis is spreading as companies cast their marketing nets wider – notably, to low- and middle-income countries where appropriate pain relief and palliative care are often in short supply. Rich countries aren't immune either. GP prescriptions for opioids more than doubled in the UK between 1998 and 2018, prompting some to claim that the country was seeing its own opioid epidemic.

Humphreys laid the blame at the door of the opioid manufacturers, of which Purdue was only one. But he also described the culture that enabled them, pointing to "dramatic failures in regulation, in law, by healthcare systems

and by individual physicians that failed to stop them". And most of those weaknesses, he said, have not been fixed.

They include a "revolving door" between industry and the agencies that regulate them; drug companies' relative freedoms in countries to aggressively market their products; the existence of fake grassroots or "astroturf" groups that claim to represent patients' interests but are actually in companies' pay; and the industry's well-funded lobbying of elected officials.

Although the regulatory environments are different in Europe and the US, we know from at least 20 years of whistleblowing and investigative journalism that the problems the commission identified exist across the industry. In 2012, for example, [GlaxoSmithKline was fined \\$3bn](#) for promoting the inappropriate prescription of antidepressants to children. And last year, the French drugmaker Laboratoires Servier and the French medicines agency were [fined for their part](#) in the scandal over Mediator, a diabetes treatment that has been linked to hundreds of deaths.

These cases will be familiar to those who follow drug industry shenanigans. What is interesting is the timing of the Stanford-Lancet report. It was released while we're still living through a pandemic that has revealed unexpectedly high levels of mistrust in science. People who are vaccine hesitant often point to what they perceive to be the pharmaceutical industry's untrustworthiness. Yet mainstream opinion absolves the industry of any responsibility for that. For the vaccine-compliant, the only bogeymen in this story – besides a handful of cynical anti-vaxxers – are the social media platforms that peddle disinformation.

A week ago, for instance, the international non-profit NGO, the Center for Countering Digital Hate, wrote, "The simple fact is that the anti-vaxx movement – and its myriad offshoots – have gained public attention and traction for [one main reason](#): because big tech profits from their content and their followers, and so refuses to take them down."

Let me be clear: the Covid vaccines deserve our trust. More than [10bn doses](#) have been administered to date, and they have turned out to be [safer and](#)

more effective than anyone dreamed possible. They are our best way out of this pandemic, and the more people who take them, the more lives will be saved. It is also worth pointing out that, even if Covid has created some vaccine billionaires, vaccine development is not generally lucrative. Until Covid, big pharma was deserting the field because the profit margins were so slight – with the result that we still lack vaccines for some major killers, including HIV.

But even if the industry pulled off a coup this time, in collaboration with academia, it needs to get its house in order or we risk seeing even higher levels of vaccine hesitancy in the next pandemic. After all, many people put their trust in opioids, and that didn't work out so well. Some companies developing Covid vaccines, such as AstraZeneca, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson, have been censured for bad practices in the past. Is it really surprising that surveys show it is the least trusted industry?

It is true social media has done us a disservice and our social contract was fraying before Covid came along. But it's also true that, if anti-vaxxers and their enablers are ready to stop at nothing in pursuit of fat profits, they have an excellent role model in big pharma. If governments, industry and physicians acknowledge this needs to change, at long last, then this crisis won't have gone to waste.

- Laura Spinney is a science journalist and the author of Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How it Changed the World
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[Opinion](#)[Trade unions](#)

Unions don't call the shots any more – but we'd all be better off if they did

[Larry Elliott](#)



Britain is not 'going back to the 1970s'. Organised labour is far too cowed for that, and collective bargaining all but gone



Scuffles outside Saltley fuel depot in Birmingham, where miners had gathered to try to prevent lorries collecting coke. Photograph: Trevor Roberts/Daily Mail/Re

Thu 10 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

For those versed in trade union folklore, the [battle of Saltley Gate](#) holds a special place. In 1972, workers from Birmingham factories downed tools to support striking miners, blockading a gasworks in the city where there was a huge stockpile of coking coal. Orchestrated by a young Arthur Scargill, the blockade successfully prevented lorries from collecting the coal.

The action was pivotal in winning the strike for the miners, so it comes as no surprise that today, on the 50th anniversary of Saltley Gate, the Midlands branch of the TUC is holding a celebratory event. Scargill will be one of the speakers.

There is much talk about how Britain is returning to the 1970s, but the detour down memory lane provided by the events in Birmingham in February 1972 shows how fatuous are the comparisons. To be sure, there is some upward pressure on pay as businesses reopen after lockdown, but the idea that Britain is locked into a wage-price spiral is for the birds. Fundamental changes to the economy that have taken place over the past

half century mean [prices are going to rise](#) faster than wages this year, further eroding living standards.

The factories workers surged out of to support Scargill's call for solidarity have largely gone – since replaced by offices, call centres and warehouses. Mass pickets were outlawed as part of a concerted drive by the Conservative governments of the 1980s to weaken organised labour. The number of workers covered by collective bargaining agreements has plummeted, and in the private sector only [one in seven workers](#) belong to a trade union. Four million of the 6.6m trade union members work in the public sector, while those in the lowest-paid, highly casualised sectors, who would benefit most from the support of a trade union, are least likely to be members of one.

Just how far the pendulum has swung in the past half century was illustrated in the letter by the general secretary of the GMB union, Gary Smith, to Andrew Bailey, inviting the governor of the Bank of England [to try his hand](#) as a care worker for a day to see how people coped on low pay. Bailey has taken some deserved flak for suggesting it would help the Bank of England regain control of inflation were workers – faced with rocketing energy bills and rising taxes – to moderate their wage claims this year

The alacrity with which 10 Downing Street [slapped down](#) Bailey for his comments was also illustrative. The balance of power in the workplace has shifted too far in favour of employers – and even the Conservatives can sense there is a problem, not least for their own political survival. One thing that has not changed from the 1970s is that making people worse off has a political cost for the government.

In theory, weakening the power of unions was supposed to liberate management to bring in new ways of working that would boost efficiency. Forcing workers to accept less generous pay awards would leave more money to spare for investment in new kit and better training. Everybody would be better off.

In practice, investment has remained weak. Rather than spend money on improving skills that are lamentably poor by international standards, employers have paid themselves more and boosted the value of their assets through share buyback schemes. The 2010s were [a lost decade](#) of

historically weak productivity growth and flatlining living standards. Rachel Reeves, the shadow chancellor, was quite right when she said the Conservatives had become the party of high taxation because they were the [party of low growth](#). The current model simply isn't working.

There are lessons to be learned from the US, where Joe Biden knows the economic model is not working well enough for ordinary Americans either. Claiming to be the most pro-labour president ever, Biden has tried to make it [easier for unions](#) to organise, a move that is showing signs of paying off. Buffalo, in New York state, recently became the first city in the US to have [unionised branches](#) of Starbucks, a firm that is certainly no friend of organised labour.

Biden has also listened to demands from unions to boost manufacturing through a “buy American” procurement policy. More generally, the White House’s strategy has been to keep the economy running as hot as possible, despite concerns from the Federal Reserve, the US central bank, about inflation. Strong growth has pulled down the unemployment rate, resulting in labour shortages.

There have been some positive signs in the UK. The TUC was heavily involved in the design of the furlough scheme at the start of the pandemic. The “[national living wage](#)” will go up by 6.6% in April, to £9.50 an hour, shielding those on the lowest incomes from the worst of the cost-of-living crisis. Firms are struggling to fill vacancies, forcing them to offer better pay and conditions.

All that said, a piece of the jigsaw is missing, and that is unions. They have a far bigger role to play in prising Britain out of its low-skill, low-pay, low-investment rut. Levelling up is a worthy ambition, but if it is to be anything more than a slogan it needs to begin in the workplace. In recent years, the balance of power between workers and bosses has been a case of levelling down. There’s no question that the UK has plenty of economic woes, but they can’t be blamed on organised labour. One of the problems is that unions are too weak, rather than too strong.

- Larry Elliott is the Guardian’s economics editor

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[India](#)

India's biggest state begins voting in key test of Narendra Modi popularity

If BJP holds Uttar Pradesh it would bolster ruling party's claim for third victory in 2024 parliamentary polls



Voters queue to cast their ballot at a polling station in Muradnagar during the first phase of Uttar Pradesh state assembly elections. Photograph: Prakash Singh/AFP/Getty

Reuters in New Delhi and Vrindavan

Thu 10 Feb 2022 03.47 EST

India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, has begun voting in the first of a series of local elections that will be a test of the popularity of the prime minister, [Narendra Modi](#), and his ruling party.

With a population almost as big as that of Brazil, keeping power in the bellwether state would bolster the Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) in its claim for a third successive victory at nationwide parliamentary polls due by 2024.

In Vrindavan, a Hindu holy city about 100 miles (160km) south of India's capital, New Delhi, saffron-clad monks bundled up against the winter cold waited in line with other local people to cast their votes.

"If people want to have a good government, they have to come out to vote," said Acharya Udit Narayan Diwedi, 41, who said he voted for the BJP.

Defeat in Uttar Pradesh, or in any of the other three states it holds that also stage elections this month, would add to pressure on the Hindu nationalist party amid criticism of high unemployment and its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"If the BJP loses, especially in UP, that will be a big setback," said Rahul Verma, a fellow at the New Delhi-based thinktank Centre for Policy Research. "But you can call this a semi-final. The game in 2024 will be very, very different."

For the main opposition Congress party, led by the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, the calculation appears bleaker. Of the five states where voting begins this month, it holds only Punjab in the north-west.

"Congress desperately needs to win states, even if it is smaller states, just to get back in the habit of winning. Otherwise they are in trouble," said Verma.

Failure to do so would lead to more questions about the leadership of [Rahul Gandhi](#), whose father, grandmother and great-grandfather have all served as prime ministers but who has struggled to dent Modi's high ratings.

During campaigning, the BJP has appealed to large Hindu majorities in the northern states of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Both states are home to important holy sites, some of which are disputed by Hindus and minority Muslims.

Opinion polls suggest the BJP will win the vote in both states, despite some opposition parties seeking to mirror its Hindu-first agenda and appeal to its

support base.

“We have seen all political parties playing within the same field of the BJP,” said Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, the author of a biography of Modi. “That is one of their biggest successes.”

Congress and activists have criticised the approach, saying it risks stoking communal tensions that have flared up into deadly violence in the past.

Yogi Adityanath, a hardline Hindu monk who is seeking re-election as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, praised his own record on fighting crime and said that law and order took precedence over religion. “My government dealt with the issues of corruption,” he told reporters on Monday.

“Law and order has improved markedly and police action during my rule was taken against gangsters and mafia groups without discriminating on the basis of their caste or religion.”

Uttar Pradesh, home to about 200 million people, votes in seven phases ending on 7 March, while most other states begin polling in the coming days. Counting in the five states begins on 10 March, with the results expected soon after.

The BJP faces a challenge from Congress in the north-eastern state of Manipur, while in the western state of Goa, the Aam Aadmi party (AAP) is trying to expand its reach beyond its traditional base of New Delhi.

The fifth state, Punjab, looks like a close contest between the ruling Congress, AAP and several regional parties.

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Unilever

Unilever expects more price rises for shoppers on back of higher costs

Marmite and Dove maker forecasts cost inflation of £3bn for coming year and rules out more big deals

- [Business live: Unilever signals more price rises](#)



Unilever has ruled out pursuing any more big deals after a failed £50bn offer for GSK's consumer healthcare division. Photograph: Jakub Porzycki/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Mark Sweeney](#)

[@marksweney](#)

Thu 10 Feb 2022 09.57 EST

Unilever has signalled further price rises are ahead for shoppers as the company behind brands from Marmite to Dove forecast its own input costs would rise by as much as €3.5bn (£3bn) this year.

The FTSE 100 consumer goods company said that after significant supply chain cost inflation last year it expected a further increase in the price of raw materials, freight and packaging in 2022, which was ultimately likely to result in consumers paying more for its products in supermarkets and other retail outlets.

“The major challenge of 2021 has been the dramatic rise of input costs,” said Alan Jope, the Unilever chief executive. “We responded with pricing actions. In 2022 we will manage a significant input cost inflation cycle.”

Also known for brands such as Hellmann’s mayonnaise and Ben & Jerry’s ice-cream, the company expects “very high” cost inflation of €2bn in the first half of this year although it said that may moderate to €1.5bn in the second half.

“There is currently a wide range for this that reflects market uncertainty on the outlook for commodity, freight and packaging costs,” the company said.

Jope described the surge in costs this year as “unprecedented”, an ominous sign for shoppers. “We are managing the inflationary shock 2022 brings,” he said. “The biggest challenge is navigating the unprecedented input cost inflation.”

Unilever also ruled out pursuing any more big deals after the failed £50bn offer for GSK’s consumer healthcare division, as it beat expectations in the fourth quarter with sales revenue growth boosted by price rises.

The embattled consumer products company, which is facing increasing pressure from shareholders to restructure, including potentially splitting its businesses or shaking up its board, also announced a €3bn (£2.5bn) share buyback scheme.

“We have engaged extensively with our shareholders in recent weeks and received a strong message that the evolution of our portfolio needs to be

measured,” said Jope. “We therefore do not intend to pursue major acquisitions in the foreseeable future.”

However, Jope said the company would continue to seek smaller, “bolt-on” acquisitions to build its luxury beauty, health and wellbeing sectors.

The company, which has already announced a structural overhaul to give five business divisions more control, reported a 4.9% rise in underlying sales growth in the fourth quarter – well ahead of the 3.8% City consensus. Full-year sales grew by 4.5% to €52.4bn, the fastest underlying growth in nine years, with 2.9 percentage points of that attributable to price increases, and 1.6 percentage points to growing sales.

“The acceleration of Unilever’s operating performance continues,” said Jope.

Earlier this week, a top 10 shareholder, the asset manager Flossbach von Storch, said Unilever should seriously consider splitting the company, which operates three divisions for beauty, food and household products.

Jope ruled out selling its nutrition and ice-cream businesses after speculation about a potential deal. “Both are great businesses,” he said. “They have some of the strongest brands that can thrive within Unilever. I see a bright future ahead for both the nutrition and ice-cream businesses inside Unilever.”

The leading Unilever shareholder Terry Smith, the founder of Fundsmith, has described the failed attempt to takeover the GSK business as a [“near death experience”](#) and said management should focus on improving the core operation – or step down.

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Last month, Unilever announced plans to [cut 1,500 management jobs globally](#) – a move Jope said would result in the loss of a “handful of jobs in most countries” – as the company tried to respond to calls for an improvement in operating performance.

“We have a lot more we can do with the portfolio we have,” said Jope. “I am impatient to see that starting to come through. There was a moment in time we felt, still feel, a transaction around GSK could have created value. However, our shareholders, while supporting the general strategic direction, felt it was too much at the wrong time.”

Last month, it emerged the US activist investor Nelson Peltz had built a stake in the company, although he has not as yet said publicly what changes he is pushing for.

The share price fell as much as 3% in early trading as analysts focused on a forecast that its operating margin would be down between 1.4% and 2.4% to between 16% and 17%. Last year the company abandoned its operating margin target of 20%.

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[Rights and freedom](#)[Venezuela](#)

Venezuelans despair at smears, stigmatization and arbitrary arrests



Venezuelan security forces investigate after an assassination attempt against President Nicolás Maduro in August 2018. Supposed links to the incident have been used as a pretext for arbitrary arrest. Photograph: Miguel Gutiérrez/EPA

Amnesty International decries ‘systematic policy of repression’ as Maduro clamps down on enemies real and imagined

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Thu 10 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

Juan Carlos Marrufo Capozzi, an electrician and former soldier from Valencia, [Venezuela](#), and his wife María Auxiliadora Delgado Tabosky, were at home when agents from the South American country’s military intelligence unit barged in.

Soldiers with rifles sifted through their paperwork and hard drives, before taking the couple away, leaving Marrufo’s distraught teenage daughter from a previous marriage behind. That was in March 2019, and they haven’t tasted freedom since.

“They are completely innocent, they don’t even have any political affiliation,” said one of their family members on condition of anonymity for

fear of reprisals. “Now they are trapped in an underground jail cell, and we don’t know when they will be free.”

The couple were released in October and dropped off on a highway, only to be recaptured on the way home, and accused of terrorism and treason, amid a host of other offenses. News of their arrest appeared in the media, as often happens when people are detained on spurious charges in Venezuela.

A report released on Thursday by Amnesty International found that politically motivated arrests were often preceded by stigmatization and smear campaigns launched by pro-government media in Venezuela.

“Our research shows that there are instances where there is an extremely high correlation between public stigmatization and politically motivated arbitrary arrests,” said Erika Guevara-Rosas, [Americas](#) director at Amnesty International, in a statement.

“This correlation is a new indicator of a systematic policy of repression and points to the crime against humanity of persecution, which must be investigated by the international justice system.”

For Marrufo and Delgado – who respectively also hold Italian and Spanish citizenship – the media attention was only part of the ordeal.

“Their detention makes no sense, and they are in a very bad way psychologically,” said the family member, who has been in contact with the couple. “Juan Carlos is having suicidal thoughts because he’s been falsely accused of the worst crimes that there are. He needs help.”

Hundreds of other people remain detained without trial in Venezuela, a country mired in social, political and economic ruin, and run by the authoritarian and isolated government of Nicolás Maduro.

Venezuela boasts the world’s largest proven oil reserves, but runaway hyperinflation has rendered the local currency practically worthless, leading to the tacit dollarization of a so-called socialist country. Shortages in food, medicines and fuel are a daily reality.

The UN working group on arbitrary detentions said in January that the couple's detention was part of a "systemic practice of depriving people of their liberty without respect for the rights enshrined by international law", and that such a practice "could constitute crimes against humanity".

Delgado's brother, Osman Delgado Tabosky, was accused of financing an assault on the Fort Paramacay military base in August 2017, which was raided by soldiers loyal to the opposition for weapons. The Miami-based businessman was later accused of plotting a [brazen assassination attempt](#) on Maduro with explosive-laden drones in 2018 and labelled a terrorist by the government.



President Nicolás Maduro speaks earlier this month. Photograph: Javier Campos/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Lawyers working on the couple's case say their ordeal is the result of petty retribution from the regime.

"It's clear that there's no guilt there, it's just vengeance against María's brother," said Alfredo Romero, a lawyer with Foro Penal, a Venezuelan rights watchdog that is working on the couple's case. "They are political prisoners, and of the 240 political prisoners currently in Venezuela, 91 have been detained for more than three years without even a trial."

In the face of growing discontent, the Maduro government has clamped down on enemies perceived and real, as he continues to resist a challenge to his legitimacy from the US-backed opposition leader Juan Guaidó.

Mass protests in 2017 were met with brutal repression, with thousands of demonstrators injured and hundreds arrested. Arbitrary detentions and cases of torture abound, leading the international criminal court to announce an investigation into the government for possible crimes against humanity in November last year.

“We can only hope that the investigation follows through to the end,” said Melania Leal Rosales, whose sister, Emirlendris Benítez Rosales, has been jailed since August 2018, also accused, without evidence, of being part of the plot to assassinate Maduro. “My sister is innocent and she can’t take much more.”

Benítez, who was three weeks pregnant when arrested, lost her unborn child while jailed. She has also been beaten and tortured behind bars, according to the UN’s working group on arbitrary detention. She now struggles to walk and uses a wheelchair.

“The papers said they found drugs in her car and some parts of the drones that were supposedly used to kill Maduro, and that she was trying to flee the country, but that’s all a lie,” her sister said. “They were looking for blame where there is none.”

Meanwhile, the Maduro government’s tightening vice on society is causing some to lose faith in the ability of international mechanisms, such as the ICC investigation, to bring about justice.

“People have been and gone before and the regime is still in power,” the family member of Marrufo and Delgado said. “It’s hard to keep the faith when reports get written but nothing ever changes.”

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Cryptocurrencies

‘Sexy horror comedy’: Bitcoin laundering suspect is also ‘raunchy rapper’ Razzle Khan

Heather Morgan, arrested on suspicion of laundering cryptocurrency worth billions, has a second life as performer with ‘more pizzazz than Genghis Khan’



A composite image showing the Bitcoin logo next to a screenshot from one of Heather Morgan’s rap videos. Photograph: Olivier Douliery/AFP/Getty Images

[Martin Farrer](#) and agencies

Thu 10 Feb 2022 00.29 EST

A woman accused of laundering billions of dollars in stolen cryptocurrency alongside her husband may end up becoming better known for her

excruciating music career as a self-styled “raunchy rapper” called Razzlekhan.

Heather Morgan was arrested along with her husband, Ilya Lichtenstein, in Manhattan [on Tuesday](#) over their alleged involvement in laundering bitcoin stolen in a 2016 hack of the virtual currency exchange Bitfinex. They are not accused of involvement in the hack itself but face charges of conspiring to commit money laundering as well as to defraud the United States.

However, the charges risk being overshadowed by Morgan’s portrayal of an apparently lavish lifestyle online as a “badass money maker” and performer. The 31-year-old has published an extensive catalogue of rap videos, DIY techniques and other lifestyle issues on social media platforms including Instagram and TikTok, calling herself the “Turkish Martha Stewart” or the “[Waffle Queen of Korea](#)”.

On her website, Morgan calls herself Razzlekhan or the “Versace Bedouin ... the raunchy rapper with more pizzazz than Genghis Khan”.

“I’m a real risk taker/pirate riding the flood/I’m a badass money maker,” she raps in one video in which she refers to herself as the “Crocodile of Wall Street”.

“Come real far but don’t know where I’m headed/Blindly following rules is for fools,” she says, gyrating on Wall Street wearing sunglasses, a leopard print scarf, and shiny gold jacket.

Morgan, 31, was arrested along with her husband, Ilya Lichtenstein, 34, in Manhattan [on Tuesday](#).

The pair is accused of conspiring to launder 119,754 bitcoin stolen after a hacker broke into Bitfinex and initiated more than 2,000 unauthorised transactions. Justice department officials said the transactions at the time were valued at \$71m in bitcoin, but [with the rise in the currency’s value](#), it is now valued at over \$4.5bn.

Prosecutors claim the pair tried to launder money via a network of currency exchanges or claimed that the money represented payments to Morgan's startup, the department said. Prosecutors said on Tuesday the illegal proceeds were spent on things ranging from gold and non-fungible tokens to "absolutely mundane things such as purchasing a Walmart gift card for \$500".

At a bail hearing on Friday, a defence attorney called the charges "thin" and overblown. "I don't think you'll find that billions of dollars have been laundered," he said.

However, thanks to their ubiquitous social media presence, details about Morgan, from California, and Lichtenstein, a dual US-Russian national from Illinois also known as "Dutch", have emerged since their arrest.

"Her art often resembles something in between an acid trip and a delightful nightmare," Morgan wrote about herself on her website, Razzlekhan.com. "Definitely not for the faint of heart or easily offended."

"Razz likes to push the limits of what people are comfortable with," she said. "Her style has often been described as 'sexy horror comedy'."

The social media posts tout a lavish lifestyle. One video shows a glimpse of an upscale Manhattan apartment with a clear view of the sky and other buildings. In a Facebook post from October, Morgan hinted at wanting to buy a painting from Sotheby's auction house.

When not making rap videos or posting pictures of her artwork or a Bengal cat on Facebook, Morgan was a contributor to the financial publications Forbes and Inc.

A June 2020 article she wrote for Forbes was titled: "Experts share tips to protect your business from cybercriminals."

More discreet online, Lichtenstein described himself on LinkedIn as a "technology entrepreneur, coder and investor" and the founder of several tech companies.

In a Facebook post, he recalled how he proposed to Morgan – “my best friend and the woman of my dreams!” It involved what Lichtenstein called a “weird, creative multi-channel marketing campaign” that saw posters of Razzle Khan plastered across New York City and her face on a Times Square billboard.

In one YouTube video, Morgan said: “I’ve also been totally broke and homeless multiple times … Money comes and goes. Sometimes you have it, sometimes you don’t.

“It’s really nice when you have it but nothing in this life is certain,” she said. “Right now I’m basically living my ideal life.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/feb/10/sexy-horror-comedy-bitcoin-laundering-suspect-is-also-raunchy-rapper-razzlekh>

Republicans

‘Gazpacho police’: Nazi gaffe lands Republican congresswoman in the soup

Marjorie Taylor Greene appears to confuse Hitler’s secret police with popular Spanish cold tomato soup



Marjorie Taylor Greene accused Nancy Pelosi of some sort of consommé-based reign of terror. Photograph: Evelyn Hockstein/Reuters

Guardian staff

Wed 9 Feb 2022 18.52 EST

The extremist Republican congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene triggered a wave of viral jokes on Wednesday [after ranting](#) about the “gazpacho police” patrolling the Capitol building in Washington DC.

Greene was apparently mixing up the famously cold Spanish soup gazpacho with the Gestapo – the brutal Nazi-era secret police in Germany.

The Georgia congresswoman has [made numerous bigoted statements](#) and her spreading of Covid misinformation has seen her ousted from Twitter. She [made the most recent comments](#) in an interview on Real America with Dan Ball, produced by the rightwing One America News Network television channel.

“Not only do we have the DC jail which is the DC gulag, but now we have Nancy Pelosi’s gazpacho police spying on members of Congress, spying on the legislative work that we do, spying on our staff and spying on American citizens,” she said, referring to the Democratic speaker of the House.

Just to clear things up, [@RepMTG](#)

Gazpacho: a vegetable-based Spanish cold soup

Gestapo: Nazi Germany's secret police pic.twitter.com/T9q76r706G

— The Republican Accountability Project (@AccountableGOP)
[February 9, 2022](#)

Greene did not explain why she thought Pelosi would form a police force inspired by gazpacho soup, nor why it would then carry out such extensive surveillance at the heart of American democracy.

Predictably, Greene’s apparent gaffe prompted a wave of internet hilarity and jokes.

“Gazpacho is a cold tomato soup. Gestapo is the Nazi police force. Neither of these things are right,” [tweeted political journalist](#) Jake Sherman.

“How dare MTG blame Gazpacho, when we all know that Vichyssoise Violence is the real culprit,” quipped [podcast host](#) Emily Brandwin.

Sarakshi Rai, a senior journalist at the Hill, [added](#): “I was wondering why everybody in DC was tweeting about gazpacho and now I’m just craving some for dinner.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/09/marjorie-taylor-greene-gazpacho-police>

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Ukraine

Biden and Putin to speak as US warns Russia could attack Ukraine ‘any day’

The two leaders will speak on Saturday after warnings from Washington that a Russian invasion of Ukraine could be imminent



Ukrainian Armed Forces hold a drill in eastern Ukraine earlier this month amid escalation on the Ukraine-Russia border. Photograph: Sergey Kozlov/EPA

[Julian Borger](#) in Washington and [Dan Sabbagh](#) in London with agencies
Sat 12 Feb 2022 01.27 EST

US president Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin will speak on Saturday as Western nations warned that a war in [Ukraine](#) could ignite at any moment.

The US warned on Friday of the “very distinct possibility” of a Russian invasion of [Ukraine](#) in the next few days and told all remaining Americans to leave the country in the next 48 hours.

On Saturday, Biden will speak with Putin by phone. Putin requested the telephone call between the leaders to take place on Monday, a White House official said, but Biden wanted to conduct it sooner as Washington detailed increasingly vivid accounts of a possible attack on Ukraine.

Ahead of the discussion, Australia and New Zealand became the latest countries to urge their citizens to leave Ukraine as soon as possible, joining Britain, Japan, Latvia, Norway and the Netherlands. Israel said it was evacuating relatives of embassy staff.

The US is also set to evacuate its embassy in Kyiv. The Associated Press reported the state department will announce early Saturday that all American staff at the Kyiv embassy will be required to leave the country ahead of a feared Russian invasion.

The department had earlier ordered families of US embassy staffers in Kyiv to leave, but left it to the discretion of nonessential personnel if they wanted to depart.

Diplomatic sources said that the US president had told allied leaders in a call that the Russian leader had taken a decision to go ahead with an invasion, but Jake Sullivan, the national security adviser, said: “We have not seen anything come to us that says a final decision has been taken, [that] the go order has been given.”

“I will say that the way that he has built up his forces and put them in place, along with the other indicators that we have collected through intelligence, makes it clear to us that there is a very distinct possibility that [Russia](#) will choose to act militarily, and there is reason to believe that that could happen on a reasonably swift timeframe,” Sullivan said.

“Now, we can’t pinpoint the day at this point, and we can’t pinpoint the hour but what we can say is that there is a credible prospect that a Russian

military action would take place, even before the end of the Olympics.” The Winter Olympics in China close on 20 February.

“We continue to see signs of Russian escalation, including new forces arriving at the Ukrainian border,” Sullivan told reporters. “We are in the window when an invasion could begin at any time.”

US secretary of state Antony Blinken described the situation as at a “pivotal moment” and said he would speak to Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov on Saturday.

“If Russia is genuinely interested in resolving this crisis of its own making through diplomacy and dialogue, we’re prepared to do that,” he said.

“But it must take place in the context of de-escalation. So far, we’ve only seen escalation from Moscow,” he said.

“This is a pivotal moment. We’re prepared for whatever should happen,” he said.

Biden has told other [Nato](#) and EU leaders that the US believes Putin has decided to carry out an invasion of Ukraine, which could happen in the next few days, according to diplomatic sources.

Biden’s call to allies followed a situation room meeting at the White House to discuss the latest intelligence on the Russian military buildup, and on Putin’s thinking.

“Practical things will start to happen on the ground as a result of this decision, but that doesn’t mean that Putin couldn’t still row back,” a European diplomat said, insisting it was not too late to deter the Russian leader. “There are further decision points along the line.”

Sullivan said US citizens still in Ukraine should leave in the next two days.

“If you stay you are assuming risk with no guarantee that there will be any other opportunity to leave, and there is no prospect of a US military evacuation in the event of a Russian invasion,” Sullivan said.

“If a Russian attack on Ukraine proceeds, it is likely to begin with aerial bombing and missile attacks that could obviously kill civilians without regard to their nationality. A subsequent ground invasion would involve the onslaught of a massive force with virtually no notice. Communications to arrange a departure could be severed and commercial transit halted.”

Russia wants guarantees from the West, including a promise of no missile deployments near its borders, no [Nato](#) membership for Ukraine, and a scaling back of the alliance’s military infrastructure.



A Ukrainian soldier trains during military drills close to Kharkiv, Ukraine.
Photograph: Andrew Marienko/AP

The West describes Russia’s main demands as “non-starters” but is willing to talk about arms control and confidence-building steps.

Late on Friday the Russian foreign ministry accused Western countries of spreading false information with help from the media, in order to distract attention from their own aggressive actions.

The White House said Biden was calling transatlantic leaders “to discuss our shared concerns about Russia’s continued buildup of military forces around Ukraine, and continued coordination on both diplomacy and deterrence”.

A European diplomat said that the US had asked for the urgent call with Nato allies and the heads of the EU council and commission, to share the new intelligence.

Western intelligence agencies believe that the most likely goal of a Russian offensive would be to surround Kyiv and force regime change. [A number of invasion scenarios are considered possible](#), but there is a prevailing belief that any military intervention could see a lightning attack, aimed at encircling Kyiv, with the intention of forcing the collapse of President Zelenskiy's government, and trying to install a pro-Russian regime without urban warfare.

They also believe that the signal for such an invasion would be a false-flag attack, possibly including allegations of Ukrainian use of chemical weapons, that would be used as a pretext for Russian intervention.

Within minutes of Biden's call, the UK Foreign Office urged British citizens in Ukraine "to leave now via commercial means while they remain available".

The Russian embassy in Kiev said it was considering telling non-essential staff to leave, according to [Tass news agency](#). Other embassies stepped up evacuations on Friday.

According to [Walla News](#), Israel ordered family members of diplomatic staff out of the country, and the [Kyiv Post](#) reported that the US had called for American members of the Ukraine monitoring mission run by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe to leave the country by Tuesday.

Vice-Admiral Nils Andreas Stensønes, the [head of the Norwegian intelligence service](#), said Russia now had 150,000 troops massed around Ukraine, and said the decision on whether to attack rested with Vladimir Putin.

"Now it is first and foremost up to President Putin if he chooses to do so," Stensønes said. "It is difficult to say whether it is probable or not probable, because it is solely up to the Russian president to make that decision."

He added that Russians “have all they need to carry everything out, from a minor invasion in the east to minor attacks here and there in Ukraine, or a complete invasion, with, possibly, an occupation of all or parts of Ukraine”.

Western intelligence agencies largely agree that Putin has now put in place enough troops to attempt an invasion, a sentiment reflected in [warnings in the last 24 hours from Biden](#) and the UK prime minister, Boris Johnson.

He emphasised on Thursday that any invasion would amount to a massive miscalculation by Putin because Ukraine would “fight and they will resist very strongly”.

The raised alert follows the failure of several diplomatic initiatives to lead to a breakthrough. Reports suggested that much of Emmanuel Macron’s more than five hours of talks with Putin in Moscow on Monday, was taken up by lengthy historical lectures from the Russian leader, with very little substance on current events.

Accounts from German officials on “Normandy format” talks in Berlin between Russian, Ukrainian, German and French officials had been difficult and offered no prospects of defusing tensions.

The German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, is due to visit Moscow to see Putin on Tuesday, but his spokesman said he was taking no new diplomatic initiatives with him.

The head of the foreign affairs committee in the Bundestag, Michael Roth, a former minister, said on Twitter: “Russia has effectively annexed Belarus militarily. What are being called “exercises” is really the encirclement of Ukraine, and a concrete threat to Poland and the Baltic States. The situation remains dangerous.”

The Associated Press and Reuters contributed to this report

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Ukraine

UK troops sent to help train Ukrainian army to leave country

Armed forces minister says personnel will withdraw after fears of ‘no-notice attack’ from Russia



Ukrainian servicemen take part in military drills in Kharkiv, Ukraine, on 10 February. Photograph: Vyacheslav Madiyevskyy/Reuters

[Dan Sabbagh](#) and [Clea Skopeliti](#)

Sat 12 Feb 2022 06.38 EST

British troops helping with training in [Ukraine](#) will leave the country this weekend, the armed forces minister James Heappey said as he warned that Russia could launch an attack “at no notice”.

Heappey said the small number of UK personnel sent to train Ukrainian troops on anti-tank missiles would be withdrawn, alongside about 100

helping with wider troop training as part of Operation Orbital.

Britain, in common with all other Nato allies, has said it would not fight against any Russian attack, a point repeated by the minister in a BBC interview. Ukraine is not a member of Nato, although in 2008 it was given a promise that it would one day be able to join.

“There will be no British troops in Ukraine if there is to be a conflict there,” Heappey said. “They will be leaving over the course of the weekend.”

The military evacuation follows a string of warnings, led by the US but supported by the UK, that Russia had assembled a force capable of invading Ukraine. Jake Sullivan, the US national security adviser, said on Friday night: “We are in the window when an invasion could begin at any time.”

Western intelligence fear the most likely scenario, in the event of a conflict, is that Russian forces would mount a lightning attack aimed at encircling Kyiv, a city of more than 3 million people, and trying to force a change of regime. As a first step, Moscow’s forces would aim to rapidly degrade Ukraine’s military in a lightning attack.

Russia was now in a position to attack “very, very quickly”, Heappey said, though he hoped no invasion would take place. He told BBC Breakfast: “We are now confident that the artillery systems, the missile systems and the combat air are all in place that would allow Russia to launch – at no notice – an attack on Ukraine.”

The military withdrawal follows a Foreign Office warning on Friday to British nationals, telling them to leave Ukraine immediately while commercial flights are still available and the land border with Poland remains open.

The US told all remaining Americans on Friday to leave the country in the next 48 hours, with other countries following suit with similar warnings. Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Germany, Latvia, Norway and the Netherlands are among those issuing similar advice. Israel said it was evacuating relatives of embassy staff

There are no plans for an emergency airlift by western air forces from Kyiv, unlike in Afghanistan last summer, the minister said. Unlike then, “the Royal Air Force will not be in a position to go in and to fly people out”, Heappey added.

But US and UK forces are building up in Poland to help provide support to the eastern European country and help out if there is a mass movement of refugees in the event of an invasion. On Friday, the US said it would send 3,000 further troops to Poland, on top of 1,700 it had already agreed to send out.

Britain said earlier this week [it would send 350 troops to Poland](#), in addition to the 250 it already has in the country, and has placed a further 1,000 on standby for deployment to help with any refugee movements. The US has estimated that anywhere between 1 million and 5 million people could be displaced.

Russia has repeatedly denied it has any plans to invade and its defence minister criticised Britain on Friday for delivering anti-tank weapons to Ukraine and helping with military training.

Defence minister Sergei Shoigu, in a meeting with his UK counterpart, Ben Wallace, also accused the UK of sending special forces to the country. “I would like to see the reason why the United Kingdom is sending special forces to Ukraine and until when [they] will be there,” Shoigu said.

On Saturday, the US president, Joe Biden, will speak with Vladimir Putin by phone in an attempt to resolve the crisis.

Amid calls for Britons to leave the country as quickly as possible, the former British ambassador to the US Lord Kim Darroch described the challenge remaining embassy staff would have to undertake to help Britons leave the country, saying it would “overwhelm the embassy’s resources”.

He added: “With lots of foreign nationals trying to get out, there will be chaos, there may need to be extra flights laid on so this will occupy everyone’s time for 24 hours a day for the next few days and you won’t get everyone out – some people will choose to stay,” he said.

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Ukraine

Cooperation between UK and Russia ‘close to zero’, Wallace told by Kremlin

Defence secretary says Moscow has given assurances it is not planning invasion as he warns of consequences



Ben Wallace at talks in Moscow on Friday. Photograph: Russian Defence Ministry Press Service/EPA

[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow, [Dan Sabbagh](#), and [Shaun Walker](#) in Kyiv

Fri 11 Feb 2022 13.36 EST

Russia’s defence minister has described levels of cooperation with Britain as “close to zero” and in danger of going into “negative” territory as he received the UK defence secretary, [Ben Wallace](#), in Moscow for talks meant to de-escalate tensions with the west.

Sergei Shoigu began his meeting with Wallace by attacking the UK's deliveries of lethal arms and military trainers to [Ukraine](#), which Wallace claims would only be useful for defence in case of a potential invasion.

"I would like to see the reason why the United Kingdom is sending special forces to Ukraine and until when [they] will be there," Shoigu said.

The talks on Friday marked a second round of British-Russian diplomacy following the foreign secretary [Liz Truss' meeting with her Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov](#), who complained that the talks resembled a discussion of the "mute with the deaf".

By contrast, Wallace sought to emphasise the professional nature of Friday's meeting with Shoigu, where he warned [Russia](#) about the "tragic" consequences of an offensive in Ukraine and said he had received Moscow's assurances that it was not planning to launch an invasion.

"Shoigu is a professional and very experienced minister," Wallace said following the "frank and constructive" talks. "When they say they aren't going to invade Ukraine we take it seriously but look at the actions that accompany it."

Wallace said he had not seen signs yet of a de-escalation by the Kremlin, pointing to [Russia's deployment](#) of more than half of its offensive military forces near the border and saying the country is in position to launch a large offensive into Ukraine if it decides to.

But he also said he sought to "address some of the issues raised in Russia's draft treaty", a document published by its foreign ministry that includes demands that Nato remove its infrastructure from eastern [Europe](#) and publicly pledge not to admit Ukraine into the military alliance.

"We can try and move on to where we can resolve our issues together through diplomacy, through other actions, and through confidence-building measures," he said he told Shoigu during meeting. Asked to evaluate the level of relations following the meeting, Wallace said they were "above zero".

Wallace also defended British deliveries of arms, including antitank missiles to Ukraine, saying they were useful only for defensive purposes and that British military trainers would return to the UK “pretty soon”.

Wallace and Shoigu were pictured shaking hands under a portrait of allied military leaders following the taking of the Reichstag in 1945. The two men also exchanged gifts. Wallace received a plaque from an Arctic convoy ship and Shoigu a ceremonial sword.

Western intelligence agencies increasingly believe that Vladimir Putin has now put in place enough troops to attempt an invasion, a sentiment reflected in warnings in the last 24 hours from both Joe Biden and Boris Johnson. Nevertheless, they continue to believe no final decision by the Russian leader has been made.

A number of invasion scenarios are considered possible, but there is a prevailing belief that any military intervention ordered by Putin would be designed to achieve regime change in Kyiv. That could see a lightning attack, aimed at encircling the capital, with the intention of forcing the collapse of [Volodymyr Zelenskiy's](#) government, and trying to install a pro-Russian regime without urban warfare.

Johnson emphasised on Thursday that any invasion would amount to a massive miscalculation by Putin because Ukraine would “fight and they will resist very strongly”. Any belief in the Kremlin that a Russian intervention would be welcome by anything other than a tiny minority was mistaken, British ministers said.

On Thursday, representatives of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany met in Berlin, to try to hash out a roadmap towards implementing the Minsk accords, signed in 2015 to bring an end to the active phase of conflict.

The French president, Emmanuel Macron, has made [resurrecting the Minsk deal](#) the key plank of his diplomatic attempts to avoid Russian military action and he pushed the idea during his visits to Moscow and Kyiv earlier this week.

While Zelenskiy has publicly backed the accord, in private Ukrainian officials say fulfilling it would be politically impossible given public opinion in Ukraine, and would give Moscow a permanent say in the country's politics.

After nine hours of talks, the sides broke up close to midnight having failed to sign any kind of joint document, merely agreeing to keep dialogue going.

Russia's representative at the talks, Dmitry Kozak, said the "key disagreement" was that Kyiv refused to open direct negotiations with representatives of the breakaway territories. Ukraine believes that doing so would legitimise what are in effect Russian puppet regimes. Kozak accused Kyiv of sabotaging the talks.

"A negative result is still a result, we now have full clarity about what the statements of different politicians about adhering to the Minsk agreements mean," Kozak said on Friday.

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Russia-Ukraine crisis: where are Putin's troops and what are his options?

A visual guide to recent troop deployments as tensions soar

by [Andrew Roth](#), [Dan Sabbagh](#), [David Blood](#) and [Niels de Hoog](#)

Fri 11 Feb 2022 14.50 EST

Why are there tensions?

[American officials have warned](#) of the “very distinct possibility” of a Russian invasion of Ukraine in the next few days, after Russia [forward-deployed](#) hundreds of tanks, self-propelled artillery and even short-range ballistic missiles from as far away as Siberia to within striking range.

Moscow’s rhetoric has also grown more belligerent. Vladimir Putin has demanded legal guarantees that Ukraine will never join Nato or host its

[missile strike systems](#), concessions he is unlikely to receive. [A flurry of diplomatic activity](#) has done little to ease tensions.

Putin is also short on time. His troops cannot remain out of garrison indefinitely. By late winter he will probably have to launch an attack or draw down his forces, in what would look like a retreat. In the meantime [the UK](#), US and others have told their citizens to leave.

[Map showing Russian troop deployments near Ukraine](#)

What do we know about the deployments?

As of 6 February, 74-76 battalion tactical groups, the smallest operational unit in Moscow's army, were estimated by military intelligence group Rochan Consulting to be in place near the borders of [Ukraine](#) in both Russia and latterly Belarus.

Many of the heavy weapons stationed near Ukraine arrived in spring 2021, when [Russia](#) put an estimated 110,000 troops with tanks and other heavy weaponry near the border. Some, but not all, of Russia's troops to base in May after Putin secured a summit with Joe Biden.

Russian troops have been arriving from the east for several weeks. On 11 February, the head of the Norwegian intelligence service said they numbered 150,000. There are also separatist forces in the breakaway areas of Donetsk and Luhansk. Their numbers are estimated at 32,000, some of whom are likely to be unacknowledged Russian forces.

This assessment shows some of the main deployments as of late 2021:

[Scenarios map](#)

In early February, there was some evidence that forces previously massed several hundred miles from the border were moving closer to Ukraine. There were signs that the seven BTGs stations in Yelnya, near Smolensk, [were moving on to near Klintsy](#), about 100km from the border.

Over the new year Russia began to move tanks, artillery, air-defence systems and fighter jets to Belarus for joint “Allied Resolve” exercises [that started on 10 February](#) and are due to run until 20 February. That deployment is continuing to grow and is currently estimated at about 17 BTGs or possibly higher.



Deployments at Zyabrovka airfield in Gomel, Belarus, 25 kms from the border with Ukraine, on 10 February. Photograph: AP

Nato has warned that Russian forces in Belarus could reach 30,000, including Speznaz special operations forces, SU-35 fighter jets, S-400 air defence systems and Iskander missiles, which can carry nuclear weapons, and have a range of 500km.



A troop housing area and military vehicles in Rechitsa, Belarus on 9 February. Photograph: Maxar Technologies/Reuters

One of the largest forces to remain near Ukraine since May 2021 comes from the 41st Combined Arms Army, which is headquartered in Novosibirsk almost 2,000 miles away. Stationed at the Pogonovo training area south of Voronezh since spring, some of the 41st CAA forces have moved to Yelnya, a town in the Smolensk region closer to Belarus.

Satellite pics

The equipment includes motorised infantry, main battle tanks, rocket artillery and Iskander short-range ballistic missiles comprising an estimated six or seven BTGs, [according to an estimate](#) by the independent defence analyst Konrad Muzyka.

Satellite images taken from above Pogonovo depict the arrival of more equipment between November 2021 and January 2022.

Satellite pics

Satellite pics

Other recent movements show motor rifle brigades from the 49th Combined Arms Army moving towards Crimea. Artillery and air-defence assets from the 58th Combined Arms Army have also been spotted in satellite photographs taken from above Novoozerne in western Crimea. The US estimates 10,000 troops moved into Crimea [in late January and early February.](#)

[Satellite images, Crimea](#)

There are also units permanently deployed near Ukraine from the 8th and 20th Combined Arms Armies.

What form could a Russian attack take?

Western intelligence agencies believe that the most likely goal of a Russian offensive would be to surround Kyiv and force regime change, and that [as of 11 February Putin had put in place enough troops](#) to attempt an invasion.

This runs counter to the [thinking in Ukraine as of late January](#) that a focused attack in the east was the most likely scenario. On 21 January Ukrainian military intelligence said that since the beginning of the month Moscow [had supplied separatists](#) in eastern Ukraine with additional tanks, self-propelled artillery, mortars and more than 7,000 tons of fuel.

A map released by Ukrainian military intelligence [in November](#) showed a worst-case scenario: Russian forces crossing the Ukrainian border from the east and attacking from annexed Crimea, as well as launching an amphibious assault on Odessa with support from Russian soldiers in Transnistria and troops sent in from Belarus.

[Ukraine scenario map](#)

The US, the UK and some independent western experts [highlight the importance of Belarus](#). The country, now closely aligned to Moscow, is considered the simplest invasion route to Ukraine's capital Kyiv as it would allow Russian forces to cross the large Dniepr river in friendly territory and attack Kyiv from the west.

The potential economic consequences of any new fighting would be enormous as the US and its allies are promising “significant and severe” economic and technological sanctions in the event of an attack, while Russia could cut off gas supplies to [Europe](#).

Russia could still seek concessions from the west in negotiations while maintaining its troops along the border for a credible threat of escalation. Putin has said he believes high tensions are useful for Russia. Nevertheless, analysts say that without a clear diplomatic victory, any drawdown could look like a defeat.

When might an attack happen?

February has long been seen as the most likely month for a potential offensive. Russian soldiers are [participating in military exercises in Belarus](#) which are due to finish on 20 February and Vladimir Putin [has returned from a trip to Beijing for the Winter Olympics opening ceremony](#).

[Military comparison graphic](#)

How did we get here?

In 2014 [Putin sent troops to annex Crimea](#), a mainly Russian-speaking region of Ukraine. Russia also incited a separatist uprising in Ukraine’s south-east, clandestinely sending soldiers and weapons to provoke a conflict that grew into a full-blown war.

A [2015 peace deal](#) established a line of demarcation and called on both sides to make concessions. Since then low-level fighting has continued along the front, and both sides have accused the other of violating the agreement, which observers say is close to collapse.

[historical troop movements](#)

Russia no longer wants to maintain the status quo and is looking for another way to assert control over Ukraine.

What is the role of Nord Stream 2?

The completion of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany via the Baltic Sea gives both sides an economic weapon.

The pipeline would allow Russia to send gas to Europe without going through Ukraine, meaning Moscow could pile pressure on Kyiv without the risk that Kyiv would cut the gas supply route in retaliation. Ukraine has lobbied furiously against the project, saying it undermines its national security.

[Planned Nord Stream 2 pipeline locator](#)

However, the pipeline, which has become a pet project of Putin's, has not yet come online, and western governments have indicated that in the case of invasion, that may never happen.

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2022.02.12 - Spotlight

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- Blind date ‘She told me she’d had a negative lateral flow test. Is that today’s version of making a pass?’
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What has growing up watching porn done to my brain – and my sex life?



‘Kids need to be told porn is a fantasy projection, like storylines on Made in Chelsea.’ Photograph: Serena Brown/The Guardian. Illustration: Justin Metz. Model: Zoe Rhode

As a young woman, I've been surrounded by porn my whole life. It's shaped the way I see myself, in and out of the bedroom

Annie Lord

Sat 12 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

I was young the first time I watched porn. I didn't have hips or enjoy eating olives. My parents still paid my phone bill and I'd never kissed anyone, despite the story I used to tell about some guy I met on my family holiday to Spain. I was on the school playing fields at lunchtime and a boy from my form came over and put his Sony Ericsson slider phone right in my face. On the screen I could see a blurred video of a woman in red suspenders pleasuring herself, letting tense breaths hiss out from behind her teeth. The space between her legs was smooth and hairless, like the skin of an unripe nectarine. She looked like I did, except I was 13 and she must have been older. "I bet you do this, don't you?" the boy said, his eyes hidden beneath floppy hair.

At the time I didn't think much about the video, except it was a bit gross that she was doing that alone. There was no way I would have believed it affected me or that seeing more images like that eventually would. But porn was already shaping how I, and the men I would later share relationships with, viewed my body. It was implementing a code of behaviour we would draw and learn from. It was telling us what sex was when the only way we were educated about it in school was via condoms on bananas and photos of untreated gonorrhoea.

Back in the mid 00s, gaining access to porn was still quite difficult for teenagers. Not many of us had phones that could connect to the internet, so watching it meant waiting until your parents were out or asleep, when you could sit in front of the desktop computer. I still managed it. I needed to, because everyone who should have been telling me about sex was too embarrassed to. And I wasn't going to learn on the job: I'd overheard too many horror stories about toothy blowjobs.

I wanted to learn to be like those malleable, impressive bodies. I remember being stressed about what happened between missionary, eagle and doggy

because so many videos cut out when people changed positions. I wanted to watch those hidden gaps. Was it clumsy and awkward, like getting out of a car in a short dress? Do you say with your voice where you want the other person to go? Or should the voice only be used to say things such as “Don’t stop!” and “Harder!”? Many say the best people to have sex with are those with a sense of humour, who smile when you fanny fart or nearly fall off the bed. Except I didn’t see any of that when I watched porn. It looked seamless, like a choreographed dance. The only clumsy part was the bad acting at the beginning when the masseur would ask his client to lie down on the table.

While the men I saw on screen did lots of different things to the women they slept with – slapping, choking, pulling, gagging – it always had the same effect. She would arch her back and moan louder. We didn’t read this as unrealistic or uninspiring because it fitted in with the world we were already learning to live with. We laughed at the guys in school, even when their jokes weren’t funny; spent our lunch breaks watching them play football, knowing that if we attempted to join in it would look as if we were trying too hard. People act as if porn has created a world in which women’s desires are placed in service of men’s, when really it is an expression of that world. When it came to having sex, my friends and I knew to pretend to like it when guys started using that aggressive gun finger motion between our legs or mistook a thigh crease for a clitoris. That seemed to be women’s role in sex, as in life: liking stuff. We were trying to make men feel good, but the whole time teaching them they didn’t need to do the same for us.

“I think I’m just one of those people who doesn’t like sex,” a girl friend of mine said at the time, glum but resigned after a disappointing night with her boyfriend.

When I was 15, MindGeek bought Pornhub, making millions of videos available for free each week. In the absence of any other guidelines, my friends and I continued to be influenced by what we saw, trying for something most of us weren’t getting much enjoyment out of. Porn stars were bald from the eyebrows down, and as we viewed them as the prototype, we copied what they did, removing what little hair was already there. I remember sitting on the bathroom tiles aged 17, breathing through my mouth in order to avoid that eggy sulphur smell in Veet hair removal

cream. I moved on to razors when the hairs became coarser, ones that gave shaving rashes so itchy I often had to leave class to furiously dig my nails into the ingrown hairs. It felt more orgasmic than anything a man was doing to me. “But why would you want to look like a child?” Mum asked when she heard about girls my age giving themselves Brazilians. I just thought she didn’t get it, like she didn’t get [Paramore](#) or clothes from American Apparel.



‘Women’s role in sex, as in life, seemed to be trying to make men feel good.’
Photograph: Getty Images. Illustration: Justin Metz

Truthfully, I didn’t give much thought to the performers in these videos and what they might be going through for my entertainment. I know, of course, that for many women it is impossible to enjoy something that is so obviously foregrounded in male pleasure at the expense of the women on screen. At the time, mainstream feminism seemed to associate almost anything sexual with liberation, and any criticisms of porn as puritanical. I was more aware of the arguments people used to patronise porn stars – telling them they couldn’t be enjoying their work even as they said they were – than I was of the porn stars themselves. But in 2015 a number of [reports emerged](#) about abuse on porn sets. I tried watching ethical porn, directed and filmed by women, but it was often behind a paywall. I wasn’t used to paying for porn, so I would stay only until the free trial ran out. From what I did see, a lot of

ethical porn looked the same to me – only instead of naughty nurses on screen, the women were art dealers, and there was a nicer filter on the video.

At university I got a laptop and a door with a lock on it, and then I started watching more porn. I realised that, with more of it in my life, any masturbation unaccompanied by porn made it almost impossible to climax. I used to spend ages dreaming up long, complex scenarios about teachers telling me off or that guy who smoked out of the window of the block of flats opposite. But porn made all that easy: you didn't have to think at all because it was right there in front of you, screaming yes, yes, yes. Even if afterwards it left you with a distaste on your tongue, like when you've eaten loads of crisps. When I tried to masturbate without it, my hand would cramp up and all the images I tried to invent faded out. I couldn't see anything but blankness. So I'd open up my screen again and type in "amateur". I can see how for some people it can begin to eclipse their whole sex life. The dopamine rush from it hits you like a kick in the teeth.

I thought if you weren't into hardcore stuff – hair pulling, spanking – you must be boring in bed. So I pretended to like them

I spoke a lot about porn with my peers; especially my male friends. I knew that one liked glossy videos featuring women with big fake breasts, because he wanted the escapism that came from watching someone he probably would never sleep with in real life. I often dropped porn into conversation, because I was desperate to be a "cool girl" in their eyes. Someone who drinks beer and plays video games. And cool girls definitely watched porn. Only later would I find out that some of these men were questioning their own relationship with porn; that they wanted to cut down on it.

A friend of mine told me that her ex-boyfriend used to watch porn on his phone four times a day, mostly in the toilet cubicle of his office building. Once, over coffee, she described to me what sex with him was like. "He could only come in one really specific position," she said and then tried to demonstrate it to me: he would stand up and she'd be upside down on her head with her ankles either side of his head. "Often he'd shush me because he needed to concentrate on what he was doing." My friend claimed she

didn't really mind – she just accepted she'd be uncomfortable. We'd all learned to prioritise male pleasure.

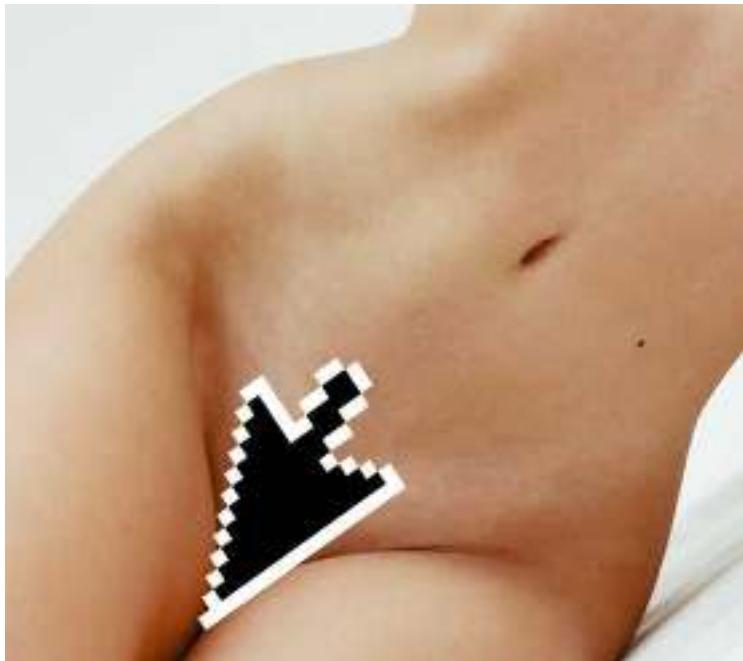
I'm 26 now and porn is everywhere. [Fifteen million UK adults](#) said they watched porn during the pandemic. And while it kills off some people's imaginations, it inflames others, encouraging people to become more experimental in their sex lives. Lots of my friends watch it with their partners to help them think of new positions; some have discovered their queerness through it, or kinks they had no idea about. You see this in how many guys nowadays are willing to try rimming. Initially seen as quite a taboo sexual practice, it became popularised through porn. Then rappers began referencing it in their lyrics (most notably Megan Thee Stallion's "If he ate my ass he's a bottom feeder" and Jhené Aiko's "Gotta eat the booty like groceries" in Omarion's Post to Be). Finally, it manifested in memes. It is so common now that when I was watching football with eight guy mates, they all said they do it essentially every time they have sex.

I asked the only other girl at the table what she thought. "It's quite nice having men do something ... " She paused for a moment because she couldn't find the right word. "Something like *that* for our pleasure."

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Porn does this a lot. It takes something previously considered niche and shows it again and again in a mainstream context until it becomes normalised. Before, if you wanted to see rough sex, you had to search deep into the corners of the internet to find it. After Pornhub and other websites like it put BDSM right next to "blowjobs" and "lesbian" and all the other categories, this made it much easier to find. By the end of university, between this, Fifty Shades of Grey and my own insecurities, I had internalised the idea that if you weren't into hardcore stuff, you were boring in bed. A guy pulled my hair and all I could think about was whether any of it had fallen out. Someone left bruises on my bum from spanking and I dug my nails into my fist like I do when I'm getting a tattoo or a piercing and I want to distract myself from the pain. And throughout both of those

experiences, I stayed true to the lesson I had learned all those years ago when I first watched porn: I pretended to like it.



‘I was desperate to be a “cool girl”. And cool girls definitely watched porn.’
Photograph: Serena Brown/The Guardian. Illustration: Justin Metz. Model: Zoe Rhode

This pretence was present in a lot of other aspects of my life. I nodded along when men told me about albums I had already listened to, acted impressed by films I thought were boring. It’s hard to see what came first: whether I pretended to like things in life because I’d learned to do so in bed, or whether learning to do it in bed meant I did so more in life. All I know is that my entire personality was built around wanting to please.

Some of my friends had worse interactions, where things veered into the nonconsensual. “He put his hand round my neck,” began a friend; she had been at a festival and gone back to a guy’s tent. “It was light at first, so I was all right with it, but he was doing it so hard I started to panic. When he stopped, I felt light-headed.”

My friend is far from alone in this. In 2019, a [BBC survey](#) found that more than a third of UK women under 40 have experienced “unwanted slapping, choking, gagging or spitting” during consensual sex. A lot of people would

blame this on porn, including the [Centre for Women's Justice](#), which said: "This is likely to be due to the widespread availability, normalisation and use of extreme pornography."

I disagree. Violence against women has a lot more to do with a society that emboldens men to position their desires above women. Though I do think there's something to say about the way porn blurs many of the nuances of sex, especially when it comes to rough sex. In kink communities, a heavy emphasis is placed on consent: safe words and no-goes. Most porn videos show these practices – choking, restraining, spanking – without showing scenes of consent, which is necessary in order to ensure they're safe and enjoyable for those participating. That's fine if it's a fantasy but not when you've never been taught to interpret it as such.

My friends and I grew up with porn, but we still had a couple of years of development without it. Old phones using 3G took ages to load sites, and there were far fewer videos to choose from. But teenagers now can access it whenever they want to. In 2019, research commissioned by the [British Board of Film Classification](#) [pdf] saw more than half of 11- to 13-year-olds admitting to watching porn, rising to 66% of 14- to 15-year-olds. Sex education hasn't changed much since I was growing up, and in a world that has become even more digital, teenagers are at real risk of receiving entirely wrong messaging about porn and sex. More and more they seem to think that porn is sex and sex is porn, and that is confirmed every time they open up their phone and watch it without anyone in school or at home telling them any different. I'm not against porn, but kids need to be told that it's a fantasy projection, like made-up storylines on Made in Chelsea, or a show home.

Sex is a bit like a packet of Revels: just because they're all in the same packet doesn't mean you'll like them all

I hope that future generations demand more from their sex life; that they come of age with an enhanced sense of what is real and what is fake. In 2020 the government updated official guidance on relationships and sex education, for the first time in 20 years. Now compulsory from primary school, sex education must cover consent, abortion and domestic abuse.

There's also a large portion of guidance on the evolving digital cultures of sex and relationships, including sexting and porn. It shouldn't be too hard to improve, given the last government guidance came before Instagram or iPhones.

Disappointingly, though perhaps predictably, there's no mention of pleasure. There is also concern over the flexibility of the new guidance. Schools are not being handed a curriculum but are being asked to develop their own based on the government guidelines, which are far from comprehensive. Topics to be covered are listed without any information about when or how they should be taught, meaning reluctant schools could get away with teaching one or two classes before heading back to the textbook. And given the opposition to schools teaching sex education in detail – one sex educator in the US was bombarded by the press for offering “masturbation videos for first-graders” after showing a cartoon in which two characters used anatomically correct names for their genitals – it's likely this will be the path most taken.

A teacher couldn't have got there in time to shield my eyes from what I saw on that phone when I was 13, but they could have explained to me what to think when I did see stuff like that. Such as: porn isn't real, all bodies look different, very often you have to show people how to touch you, and there's a lot of trial and error involved. Yes, it can look clumsy when you change positions, but no one remembers those bits anyway. How few orgasms come that easy. That sex is a bit like a packet of Revels, where you might love the chocolate counters but hate the coffee-flavoured ones, and just because they're all in the same packet doesn't mean you'll like them all. In the same way that you might like getting tied up by your hands but hate another form of bondage. Not to judge a penis by its size because sometimes it can have some imperceptible bend in it that leaves you screaming. How sometimes sex is lazy and slow and much hotter for it. That there are times when you don't think you're going to orgasm and then suddenly you're twitching on the bed like roadkill. Then I would have enjoyed porn from an arm's-length distance rather than trying to bring it into my bed and act it out, like a ventriloquist's dummy.

I still watch porn, but I don't see it as a manual on how I should behave. I see it as a way of getting out of my head after a long day, something to make me excited about sex again when things have stagnated with a partner. I've become more confident and, as a result, men's approval seems less pivotal, making it easier to say what I want, both during sex and outside it. Male pleasure is not the only focus. What I want is, too. Plus, I have other ways to learn. I'm not afraid of embarrassing myself in front of my girl friends any more, so I ask lots of questions about sex.

"Do you guys still shave everything off?" I asked one of my girl friends the other day.

"No, I stopped that a while ago," she said. "I want to look more womanly now."

Recently, I've been thinking about growing my pubic hair out, but I don't even know what colour those short, dark spikes would smooth out into. I'm naturally strawberry blond, so maybe it would be ginger? Or mousy brown? I asked another friend who trims and waxes hers into a bikini line and she sent me a reference picture. And I thought about how strange it is that I'm so far away from my body that I don't even know what the natural state of it might look like. But I'll find my way back.

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[Blind date](#)[Dating](#)

Blind date: ‘She told me she’d had a negative lateral flow test. Is that today’s version of making a pass?’



Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian

Lottie, 35, teacher, meets Tim, 33, doctor

Sat 12 Feb 2022 01.00 EST



Lottie on Tim

What were you hoping for?

A good meal, some posh vino and to meet someone interesting.

First impressions?

He looked very smart and had a friendly smile and kind eyes.

What did you talk about?

What “maxillofacial” means. Music festivals. How social media is life-sapping. What Guildford’s really like. The frustrations and joys of working in the NHS. Climate change.

Any awkward moments?

I made a bad joke about Colgate Max toothpaste that I then had to explain. Tim very kindly laughed.

Good table manners?

Absolutely. He poured the wine and talked me through how to eat oysters.

Best thing about Tim?

Good company, interesting and easy to talk to.

Would you introduce him to your friends?

Sure, he's a lovely guy.

Q&A**Want to be in Blind date?**

Show

Blind date is Saturday's dating column: every week, two strangers are paired up for dinner and drinks, and then spill the beans to us, answering a set of questions. This runs, with a photograph we take of each dater before the date, in Saturday magazine (in the UK) and online at theguardian.com every Saturday. It's been running since 2009 – you can [read all about how we put it together here](#).

What questions will I be asked?

We ask about age, location, occupation, hobbies, interests and the type of person you are looking to meet. If you do not think these questions cover everything you would like to know, tell us what's on your mind.

Can I choose who I match with?

No, it's a blind date! But we do ask you a bit about your interests, preferences, etc – the more you tell us, the better the match is likely to be.

Can I pick the photograph?

No, but don't worry: we'll choose the nicest ones.

What personal details will appear?

Your first name, job and age.

How should I answer?

Honestly but respectfully. Be mindful of how it will read to your date, and that Blind date reaches a large audience, in print and online.

Will I see the other person's answers?

No. We may edit yours and theirs for a range of reasons, including length, and we may ask you for more details.

Will you find me The One?

We'll try! Marriage! Babies!

Can I do it in my home town?

Only if it's in the UK. Many of our applicants live in London, but we would love to hear from people living elsewhere.

How to apply

Email blind.date@theguardian.com

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Describe Tim in three words

Genuine, caring, a good listener.

What do you think he made of you?

Slow eater, but hopefully a fun dinner partner.

Did you go on somewhere?

No, we made good use of the cocktail bar at the restaurant.

And ... did you kiss?

No.

If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?

Maybe one less glass of wine – the hangover was real.

Marks out of 10?

8. I had a very lovely time, with great food and drink.

Would you meet again?

I'd be open to the idea.



Lottie and Tim on their date.



Tim on Lottie

What were you hoping for?

Good food, good company and not to embarrass myself.

First impressions?

Sharp as a tack.

What did you talk about?

Our work. Travelling experiences. Her past career as a steel band musician. And cats.

Any awkward moments?

I think I tried to mansplain what a negroni was, and got it wrong.

Good table manners?

Absolutely. We both handled our oysters like grownups.

Best thing about Lottie?

She is a really good communicator.

Would you introduce her to your friends?

Yes, of course.

Sign up to our Inside Saturday newsletter for an exclusive behind the scenes look at the making of the magazine's biggest features, as well as a curated list of our weekly highlights.

Describe Lottie in three words

Confident, fashionable, grounded.

What do you think she made of you?

Apart from charming and handsome? Probably that I was quite awkward.

Did you go on somewhere?

No, but we did make the most of their lovely cocktail menu.

And ... did you kiss?

No, although she did tell me she had a negative lateral flow test. Is that today's version of making a pass?

If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?

We managed to solve all the problems in the NHS over dinner, but I got too

pissed and have unfortunately forgotten our solution.

Marks out of 10?

I would say 8 but her superb fringe makes it a 9.

Would you meet again?

I'm not sure we had a spark.

Lottie and Tim ate at [28-50](#), London SW3. Fancy a blind date? Email blind.date@theguardian.com

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[Women's shoes](#)

Happy feet: how fancy slippers took over the world



Fancy footwear for the great indoors. Photograph: David Newby/The Guardian

Uggs, faux-shearling slides and ‘sluffers’... slippers have had a fashion makeover. Here’s how to get haute and comfy



[Jess Cartner-Morley](#)

[@JessC_M](#)

Sat 12 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

Cicero, Leonardo da Vinci and Shakespeare all thought that eyes were the windows to the soul, but with due respect to the big dogs, I beg to differ. It is shoes which tell you everything. Hype trainers worn with a bland suit; teetering heels worn in defiance of practicality; scuffed ballet pumps; haute hiking boots or polished brogues – shoes hold the clues to what you do all day and how you get there, to whether you really want to be at the party and who you are going home with.



From left: sheepskin moccasins, £48, The Small Home; shearling slip-ons, £117, The Sleeper at net-a-porter.com; two-stripes sheepskin slippers, £80, Mou. Photograph: David Newby/The Guardian

If you are wearing secondhand New Balance 550 sneakers sourced from Depop then I know, and I mean *know*, that you take your flat white with plant-based milk (pea, having moved on from oat) and are considering a star-sign tattoo. No offence to these creatives, but you can't tell that from gazing into a pair of blue eyes.

But the shoe currently worn both by anyone who is anyone and by everyone who is everyone else isn't a "shoe" at all. Right now, it is all about slippers. In two decades of writing about every fashion trend you can imagine, I doubt I've ever written about slippers, but this most humble of footwear has finally left the fireside and entered the zeitgeist.



Two-stripes sheepskin slippers, £80, Mou. Photograph: David Newby/The Guardian

For reference, see Jennifer Lopez at LAX dressed in the modern jet-set uniform of oversized oatmeal loungewear and designer sunglasses teamed not with Nikes or Ugg boots, but with [Gucci's furry slippers](#). Or Kendall Jenner's new year weekend selfies, in North Face Thermoball indoor-outdoor puffer slipper boots (also known as sluffers).

Net-a-Porter is leaning into the trend with [Balenciaga's creamy recycled faux-shearling logo-ed backless mules](#) for £550, while [Pangaia's Jersey Sliders](#) (£70), in a mix of recycled and organic cotton mix, come in a very non-pipe-and-slippers shade of flamingo pink. Urban Outfitters, retail's spiritual home-from-home for Gen Z, has [Ugg's cult Fluff Yeah](#) oversized chubby fur slippers (£60) in panther print or tie-dye. Let's not forget either that Uggs were the shoe of choice for the late, great fashion visionary Andre Leon Talley, inside and out.

At first glance, this looks like a world which has forsaken fashion for good. Karl Lagerfeld, who thought that sweatpants were a sign of having given up on life, must be turning in his grave at how lockdown's home comforts have left us with zero tolerance for clothing that isn't soft and squishy. Once upon a time, supermodels wouldn't get out of bed for less than £10,000; these

days, Kendall and co insist on being swaddled in cashmere, shearling or down-filled nylon at all times. Zoom having broken the fourth wall that once separated our public-facing selves from what we wore at home, we are comfortable being seen in any old thing – as long as it's comfortable.



Thermoball mules, £45, The North Face. Photograph: David Newby/The Guardian

But lean in a little closer, and you see that these slippers are not anti-fashion, but nu-fashion. All the major shoe trends of the past decade have been filtered into footwear you can wear when your outfit is accessorised by the telly remote rather than an evening bag. Furry shoes? They've been around since Phoebe Philo put fluff-lined pool sliders on the Celine catwalk in 2014, darling. Backless silhouettes? Some of us started wearing them in 2015 when Alessandro Michele did backless loafers in his first Gucci collection. JW Anderson's cult padded crossover slides, a long-time front-row favourite, gave us the cartoonish proportions now found in flouncy high-street slippers. And what are North Face Thermoballs, if not puffer jackets for your feet? Wear your slippers with pride. Right now, they are as fashion forward as feet can get.

Styling: Make-up: Delilah Blakeney using Charlotte Tilbury. Hair: Shukeel Murtaza at Only Agency using Bumble & Bumble. Styling assistant: Peter

Bevan. Models: Kimberley and Trese-San at Mrs Robinson, and Aishwarya at Body London.

Clothing: Top picture, on tiled floor, from left: marble dress, £229, whistles.com, sheepskin moccasins, £48, thesmallhome.co.uk; slip dress from a selection, rag-bone.com, two-stripes sheepskin slippers, £80, mou-online.com; animal spot skirt, £115, kitristudio.com, shearling slip-ons, £117, The Sleeper at net-a-porter.com

Sofa picture, from left: shirt, £85, withnothingunderneath.com, jumper, £125; jigsaw-online.com, jeans, £40, weekday.com, sheepskin moccasins, £48, thesmallhome.co.uk; skirt, £279, and top, £179, uk.sandro-paris.com; necklace, £90, mejuri.com, shearling slip-ons, £117, The Sleeper at net-a-porter.com; jumper, £165, and track pants, £165, ksubi.uk, blazer, £220, from a selection at samsoe.com, socks, £19, redwinglondon.com; scrunchy, £10, stinegoya.com, two-stripes sheepskin slippers, £80, mou-online.com

Stair picture: top, £75, baumundpferdgarten.com, slip dress from a selection at rag-bone.com, scrunchy, £15, itsrooper.co.uk, socks, £19.50, falke.com, Thermoball tent mules, £45, [the north face.co.uk](http://thenorthface.co.uk); animal spot skirt, £115, kitristudio.com, cardigan set, £228, thereformation.com; necklace, £180, monicavinader.com; earrings, £85, missoma.com, socks, £7.99 set of two, sockshop.co.uk, beatnik slides, £90, reebok.co.uk

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[Sali Hughes on beauty](#)[Makeup](#)

How to make the most of your freckles – or fake them



The most densely freckled are packed, the less makeup you'll need to wear.
Photograph: master1305/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Perfect foundation for those who are naturally blessed, plus the best faux freckle products and techniques



Sali Hughes

@salihughes

Sat 12 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

There's not much that I miss about my youth, but if I could permanently restore my lost smattering of nose freckles, I would.

Few things are as attractive as a constellation of pigment clusters imprinted across the face, and the more densely they're packed, the less makeup you'll need to wear (a girlfriend of mine is covered completely in freckles and it's as though she wakes up each morning in a perfect face of foundation).

That said, women with freckles will simultaneously have other skin concerns and may crave coverage, but I'd urge them not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. A thick foundation will send freckles grey and dull. Better to unify the surrounding skin tone with a clean, more transparent base like [Chanel's Les Beiges Water Fresh Tint](#) (£50) or, for a little more coverage, [MAC Cosmetics Face & Body Foundation](#) (£32 for a bottle four times the size of most). Then use a full coverage concealer to camouflage any spots or dark circles.

The uniformly dotted pencil method unfailingly looks too St Trinian's fancy dress

Those bereft of their former freckles, or those who've never known the joy at all, can fake them if they've the inclination. There are now several faux freckle pens on the market, [Freck](#) (£17) being the original and most famous, but for something so novelty, I'd suggest [Lottie London Freckle Tint](#), for a less risky £6.95. Whichever you choose, the most natural application method is to get as many freckles from each brush-to-pot dip as possible – this mimics the naturally varied shade density of real melanin dots – some lighter or smaller, some darker or bigger.

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When the dotted-on freckles are semi-dry, tap your finger on to them, and then again on to the unmarked surrounding skin, effectively copy and pasting your freckles across the nose and cheeks. This haphazard, blurry approach gives an authentically scattered freckle pattern, as opposed to the uniformly dotted brow pencil method that unfailingly looks too St Trinian's fancy dress.

It's a fun, pretty look to try once in a while, though its wash-off nature makes it a faff for anything approaching daily wear. That said, do not make like a TikToker and use longer lasting henna, unless you've got your technique down and are absolutely sure it's natural henna sold specifically for skin, not hair. Never, ever use "black henna" (PPD dye that can trigger a reaction and kickstart lifelong allergies), and remember any errors will take days to fade.

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2022.02.12 - Coronavirus

- Covid live Johnson sent police party questionnaire; anti-vaccine mandate protests hit Australia and NZ
- US Regulators put brakes on Covid vaccine for children under five
- Spain Vaccine requirement for UK teenagers to be dropped
- France 'Freedom convoys' head towards police checkpoints

[Coronavirus live](#)

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Covid: Johnson sent police party questionnaire; anti-vaccine mandate protests hit Australia and New Zealand

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Coronavirus

US regulators put brakes on Covid vaccine for children under five

FDA postpones key meeting, saying it needs to wait for data to show how well third Pfizer dose works for young children



The FDA said it hoped parents would understand the decision to delay was part of the agency's careful review and high scientific standards.
Photograph: Nam Y Huh/AP

Associated Press
Fri 11 Feb 2022 15.19 EST

US regulators on Friday put the brakes on their push to speed Pfizer's Covid vaccine to children under five, creating major uncertainty about how soon the shots could become available.

The Food and Drug Administration had urged Pfizer and its partner BioNTech to apply for authorization of extra-low doses of its vaccine for the youngest children before studies were even finished – citing the toll the Omicron variant has taken on children.

Next week, FDA advisers were supposed to publicly debate if youngsters should start getting two shots before it is clear if they would actually need a third.

But Friday, the FDA reversed course and said it had become clear it needed to wait for data on how well that third shot works for this age group. Pfizer said in a statement that it expected the data by early April.

FDA's vaccine chief Dr Peter Marks said he hoped parents would understand that the decision to delay was part of the agency's careful review and high scientific standards.

“We take our responsibility for reviewing these vaccines very seriously because we're parents as well,” Marks told reporters during a teleconference.

Pfizer's early data showed two of the extra-low doses were safe for children under five and strong enough to give good protection to babies as young as six months. But once children reached the pre-school age – the two- to four-year-olds – two doses did not rev up enough immunity.

And a study of a third dose is not finished yet – meaning the FDA was considering whether to authorize two shots for now with potentially a third cleared later, something highly unusual.

On Friday, the FDA did not say exactly what new data Pfizer was providing, except that it involved the critical issue of a third dose.

“We believe additional information regarding evaluation of a third dose should be considered as part of our decision-making,” the agency said in a statement.

The nation's 18 million children under five are the only age group not yet eligible for vaccination.

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Spain holidays

Spain to drop Covid vaccine requirement for UK teenagers

Border requirements loosened for non-EU 12 to 17-year-olds in time for UK half-term holidays



Mother and daughter enjoying view of the Ebro river in Catalonia.
Photograph: Aleksandrs Tihonovs/Alamy

[Nazia Parveen](#)

[@NParveenG](#)

Fri 11 Feb 2022 10.26 EST

Spain has announced it will loosen its border requirements, with children over 12 from non-EU countries no longer needing to be fully vaccinated.

The Spanish government announced that it is relaxing its travel rules from Monday, which will be a boost for British holidaymakers planning to head

abroad in February half-term.

Children aged 12 to 17 will now be able to visit by showing a negative PCR test taken within 72 hours of arrival in Spain, as an alternative to presenting a Covid certificate with proof of having been fully vaccinated.

Reyes Maroto, Spain's minister for trade, industry and tourism, said: "As one of the world's favourite tourism destinations, we are committed to making travel to Spain a safe and easy experience for our visitors, especially for families travelling with children."

All other UK travellers, excluding children under 12, will still need to present a Covid certificate showing proof of being fully vaccinated at least 14 days prior to arrival in Spain. If more than 270 days have passed since the last dose was administered, proof of a booster jab is also required.

Prior to travelling to Spain, all passengers must also present a QR code which is obtained from filling in the Health Control Form (FCS in Spanish) available via Spain Travel Health (SpTH).

Tourism bodies welcomed the move, with a spokesperson for ABTA, the British Travel Association, saying the changes to the rules will mean more families will be able to enjoy a break in one of the UK's most popular overseas holiday destinations.

"This, along with the UK also relaxing its travel requirements, means it is getting easier for people to set off on their long-awaited holidays abroad.

"With two-thirds of families saying their holidays are more important to them now than before the pandemic, the latest changes should give more people confidence to book their much-missed foreign holiday," the spokesperson added.

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[France](#)

French ‘freedom convoys’ head towards Paris police checkpoints

Inspired by Canadian truckers, motorists are protesting against Covid restrictions and Emmanuel Macron

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01:17

French ‘freedom convoys’ head towards Paris to protest against Covid rules – video

Reuters in Paris

Fri 11 Feb 2022 06.56 EST

France will deploy thousands of police in and around Paris on Friday and over the weekend and set up checkpoints at toll stations on major roads leading into the capital to keep “freedom convoy” motorists out, the city’s police force said.

Despite [an order not to enter Paris](#), motorists protesting against Covid-19 restrictions are converging on the French capital from cities across France, inspired by the horn-blaring demonstrations [taking place in Canada](#).

The French “freedom convoy” protests, however, show signs of uniting a disparate group against the president, Emmanuel Macron, two months from April’s presidential election, with remnants of the 2018-2019 anti-government [gilets jaunes movement](#) and some far-right politicians rallying behind the motorists.



A protester in Nice carrying French and Canadian flags. Photograph: Eric Gaillard/Reuters

“We’ve been going around in circles for three years. We saw the Canadians and said to ourselves: ‘It’s awesome, what they’re doing.’ In eight days, boom, something was sparked,” said Jean-Marie Azais, heading to [Paris](#) from the south-west.

The motorists’ protest follows waves of demonstrations over [France’s vaccine pass rules](#) – which require people to show proof of inoculation against Covid to enter bars, restaurants, cinemas and other public spaces.

Whereas in Canada the protests have united truckers [angered by a vaccine mandate](#) for crossing borders, in France it is people angry over Covid restrictions who are taking to their vehicles.

In Toulouse, a convoy of vans, motorhomes and cars departed from a parking lot on Thursday, waved off by a crowd wearing the high-visibility vests that defined the gilets jaunes demonstrations.

The different convoys are expected to arrive outside Paris later on Friday. Their numbers are unclear. In the central city of Le Mans, one meeting point was deserted on Friday.

The police deployment will include rapid-response officers on motorcycles and heavy lifting equipment to dismantle any makeshift roadblocks put up by the protesters.

Some supporters of the “freedom convoys” said the protesters should not be deterred by the police order to remain outside Paris city limits.

“The authorities cannot block everyone,” said one woman cheering on the motorists in Toulouse. “The convoys must force it, they must still try to enter.”

The gilets jaunes revolt shook Macron’s presidency over several months and revealed a deep-seated anger felt outside big cities at the high cost of living and an urban elite perceived as disconnected from the daily hardships of ordinary people.

With spiralling energy prices and a strong economic rebound driving inflation higher, households are again feeling a squeeze on budgets, prompting the government to take piecemeal measures to curb voter frustration.

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2022.02.12 - Opinion

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- [How can Jacob Rees-Mogg find ‘Brexit opportunities’? They don’t exist](#)
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[**Opinion**](#)[**Climate crisis**](#)

Here's how to demolish the most common excuses for climate crisis apathy

[Elizabeth Cripps](#)

Every one of us now has a duty to do something, if not for ourselves then for the survival of future generations



Flooded streets in Dhaka, Bangladesh in October 2021. Photograph: Sumit Ahmed/Eyepix Group/REX/Shutterstock

Sat 12 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

Climate change is terrifying, so why don't we do more to stop it? Read any headline on the climate crisis, and it seems unbelievable that we're not all chaining ourselves to the headquarters of oil and gas companies, or at least

hammering on MPs' office doors. But we're not. "Of course, I care about climate change," we say. "But ... "

Then they come out, the reasons for apathy. We've all heard them. We've probably all said some of them. But do they really excuse us?

Let's look at some of them, starting with: "It's so far in the future."

It's not. This is already happening: in wildfires, storms and floods in Europe, Australia, the US and the UK, and in decades of devastation in the global south. The victims of climate change include future generations, but they also include the [11-year-old in Bangladesh](#) whose friend drowned, the [New Orleans family](#) who lost everything in Hurricane Katrina and the girl [forced into child marriage](#) because her parents can no longer feed her.

Even if this were "just" about future generations, they matter too. Because they are our children and grandchildren, and because they are people. Take the least controversial moral rule you're likely to find: don't seriously harm other people. Suppose, says the philosopher [Henry Shue](#), you plant a landmine on a busy path. That's wrong if it will explode tomorrow. It's still wrong if it won't go off for another 150 years. Climate change is that landmine – and a whole lot more of them.

"It's too expensive!"

This is the so-called economic argument against mitigating climate change: that it's cheaper to adjust to a hotter planet. Even if this were factually unassailable ([spoiler alert: it's not](#)), it would be morally flawed. It relies on what philosophers call utilitarianism – the view that we should maximise overall welfare (often, in practice, overall money) even if some people suffer desperately along the way. That's in direct contradiction to the most basic intuition of commonsense morality. It disregards human rights.

Even if we swallowed this pill, it takes another questionable assumption to make the anti-mitigation sums add up. These economic arguments, says the philosopher [Simon Caney](#), assume that future people's pain, even their deaths, count for less in the cost-benefit calculations if these are further in

the future. That isn't standard economic discounting; it's discounting the lives of our descendants.

"It's the government's problem."

Climate change is a catastrophic failure by governments. But we are voters, and governments act on our behalf. Many of us are drivers, flyers, meat-eaters. Morally speaking, we can share responsibility for harms we are part of or those we fail to prevent between us. I'm not saying you (or I) should feel guilty about this unfolding global disaster, but we should feel ashamed. We should act.

"I'm already vegan and don't fly."

This one is the flipside to "it's all the government's fault": putting it all on individuals. That's inefficient, unfair, and doesn't work anyway. Going car-free is harder without a good public transport system; leaving mitigation to individuals means putting all the burden on those who happen to make the effort. And individual carbon-cutting, although important, isn't enough. It won't avert this catastrophe without governments on board or fossil fuel giants being held accountable. Faced with institutional failure, we shouldn't feel powerless, but we *should* all be climate activists, using our own actions to bring about change from above.

"Lying in front of lorries isn't my thing."

So don't do that! But perhaps look past the optics that make you uncomfortable and ask yourself why anyone would feel desperate enough to glue themselves to a road. It's not because they enjoy it. Then ask what it is that you will do. Write to your MP? Wave banners outside parliament? Demand that your bank or pension fund divest from fossil fuels? Donate to climate justice NGOs? Progress takes a combination of tactics, from lobbying politicians to civil disobedience. Do what you're good at, as part of a bigger picture.

"I won't make a difference."

But we could. And that should matter to each of us. Philosophers explain this in various ways. Sure, some say, it probably won't change the world if you turn up to a protest or ditch your car. But you might be a trigger, making the protest big enough for politicians to listen, saving untold lives. In any case, you would have helped – by being part of the group who made a difference. And what's the alternative? Sitting on the sidelines, while others right this collective wrong? That's not fair on them.

“I've got enough to do already!”

I get this. I really do. But climate justice isn't some esoteric goal. It's about living in a way that doesn't kill people: doesn't drown them, burn their homes or give them malaria. So how much money or time or emotional effort should each of us put in for this basic collective morality? I don't have a final answer because the ethical debate is continuing. But I have an answer that will do for now, for those living comfortably in rich countries. However much we should do to avert this tragedy, it's more than most of us do now.

- Elizabeth Cripps is a writer and moral philosopher at the University of Edinburgh, and author of [What Climate Justice Means and Why We Should Care](#)
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[Opinion](#)[Brexit](#)

How can Jacob Rees-Mogg find ‘Brexit opportunities’? They don’t exist

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



It is increasingly clear that Brexit is doing enormous damage to Britain’s economy. And for what, exactly?



Jacob Rees-Mogg, the new Brexit opportunities minister, pictured in Downing Street this week. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Fri 11 Feb 2022 11.57 EST

Jacob Rees-Mogg reminds me of a kipper. A very specific kipper, resting on a plastic pillow of ice, which intruded into the public consciousness back in 2019, when Boris Johnson [held it aloft](#), proclaiming it as an example of the absurd, pettifogging rules imposed by Brussels on the yeoman traders of Britain. Naturally, Johnson's claims fell apart on inspection. There was no European directive mandating a cushion of ice for the sleeping fish. On the contrary, the ice pillow was demanded by a British rule, drawn up by British officials. Nothing to do with the EU.

The episode came back to me when Rees-Mogg, newly appointed minister for Brexit opportunities and government efficiency, [appealed to readers of the Sun](#) to write in and tell him “of ANY petty old EU regulation that should be abolished”. That’s because Johnson’s kipper illustrated not only his serial dishonesty on matters European – [already well-documented](#) – but also a gap in the Brexiters’ arsenal. That gap was fairly well concealed in the 2016 referendum campaign, but Rees-Mogg’s plea in the Sun, like Johnson’s kipper, has exposed it.

Here's how it can be identified. Take the Brexiters at their word – that leaving was about more than ending European immigration – and ask them to name some other reform that Britain badly needed but which proved unachievable so long as we remained in the EU: a specific change that only Brexit could unlock. The committed leaver will struggle and sputter, before either mentioning blue passports or else retreating into abstract nouns: "freedom" or "sovereignty". Press them for a concrete, real-world benefit of Brexit, one that survives scrutiny, and they wilt. They either end up making something up, as Johnson did, or else phoning a friend – like Rees-Mogg's call-out to Sun readers.

Perhaps we're being unfair. After all, Johnson is always telling us that Britain's swift authorisation of Covid vaccines was possible only because we were outside the EU. Except that, too, is false. The vaccine decisions were taken during the transition period, when the UK was still bound by EU rules. [There was no need to leave to make that happen.](#)

Surely there must be something. Or is "Brexit opportunities" an oxymoron, on a par with "Ebola upsides"? The trade expert Sam Lowe gamely offers that, "Consumers could benefit from the UK embracing a position as a regulatory freeloader in the [medical devices space](#): but this is not without its risks." Wonder why they never put that on the side of a bus.

If the worst we could say of Brexit was that it hasn't delivered any of its promised gains, maybe we could let it pass. But Brexit is inflicting grave losses, starting with [deep economic pain](#), even if that pain has been well camouflaged by Covid and by the omertà imposed by a Labour leadership that would rather talk about almost anything else.

The evidence of the hurt is in abundant supply. On Wednesday, [the public accounts committee reported](#) on the "clear increase in costs, paperwork and border delays" that Brexit has imposed on UK businesses. The next day it was the turn of the Office for National Statistics, whose [business survey](#) found that more than half of the UK's importers and exporters now cite additional paperwork and higher transportation costs as problems, with those two issues their biggest headaches by a wide margin. The phone-in programmes hum with British entrepreneurs, plenty of them leave voters,

now driven to despair, forced to spend precious, exhausting hours filling in forms they never used to have to fill in and paying costs they never used to have to pay.

Ignore the talk of the greatest growth since the second world war: that's just a function of the economy having [collapsed so badly in 2020](#). Note instead the Bank of England's forecast of 1.25% growth in 2023, falling to just 1% in 2024. David Smith, economics editor of the Sunday Times and no remoaner fanatic, puts that down partly to Covid but partly to the "[adverse fiscal consequences of leaving the EU](#)", which left the country "with a budget hole that has had to be filled with higher taxes. We now have a high-tax economy strangled by red tape and hampered by trade restrictions."

The people who led us off this cliff continue to pretend that none of this is happening. In a [facepalm moment](#) in the Commons this week, the pro-Brexit MP for Dover, Natalie Elphicke, complained about the "miles of traffic jams" besetting her constituency. Those are because of the laborious checks and delays that now confront lorries coming into the port, but Elphicke insisted the jams were "not because of Brexit but because of Brussels bureaucracy". Like many Brexeters, she is outraged that when you leave the EU, the EU treats you as if you've left the EU.

Wherever you look, it's the same picture. For all the [fur-hat photo-ops](#) in Moscow, Britain is no more than a bit player in the current crisis over Ukraine. Before Brexit, the UK was one of the three decisive members in an economic bloc that stood between the US and China as the most powerful in the world. Outside the EU, and having broken our commitment on overseas aid and forsaken the soft power that came with it, the UK is [struggling to stay relevant](#).

Meanwhile, the delicate constitutional machinery that kept Northern Ireland at peace has been smashed. At the same time, those other parts of the UK that once relied on EU cash now face a government that has broken its manifesto promise to plug the gap previously filled by Brussels funds. That deprives Wales, which voted to leave the EU, of [close to £1bn](#) over the next three years.

This is what Rees-Mogg should be reading in his mailbag. That Brexit has inflicted great losses on this country; that the supposed offsets for those losses don't offset them at all; and that there are next to no "opportunities" worthy of the name. Brexit is a rank failure. I understand why our politics cannot yet say as much, that a decent interval has to pass between 2016 and that moment. But that moment will come eventually – and when it does, it threatens to arrive with a mighty fury.

Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionUkraine

Keir Starmer's cynical embrace of Nato is a sad sight indeed

[Lindsey German](#)

The Labour leader has directed his ire at anti-war campaigners, even though he knows we've been proved right again and again

- Lindsey German is convenor of the Stop the War coalition



‘A war in Ukraine would be devastating.’ US troops line up to meet the Nato secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, at the military airbase of Mihail Kogalniceanu, Romania, 11 February 2022. Photograph: Robert Ghement/EPA

Fri 11 Feb 2022 11.27 EST

What has happened to [Keir Starmer](#), the seasoned anti-war protester?

The Labour leader and I both marched on the [Stop the War demonstration](#) against the Iraq war in 2003. I remember reading with interest his [Guardian article](#) “Sorry, Mr Blair, but [UN resolution] 1441 does not authorise force”, questioning the legality of that war. Only two years ago, when he wanted to appear to be on the left of Labour as he sought election, I was happy to [see him promise](#) to bring forward a Prevention of Military Intervention Act.

Starmer’s [recent outburst](#) about the Stop the War coalition – he claimed that we were effectively on the side of Vladimir Putin for opposing the march towards war over Ukraine – seems to be a critique of his former self. Does he now think he was not a “benign voice for peace” but “at best naive; at worst actively giving succour to authoritarian leaders”? Partly it is sad because he in all likelihood believed what he said then but has now joined the ranks of those politicians who will say anything, no matter how flatly it contradicts their previous statements, if it serves their current ambitions.

However, everything we and Starmer thought at the time has been proved correct by events, and every criticism he makes of the anti-war movement now has been made before – and revealed as false.

We were told more than 20 years ago that opposition to war in Afghanistan was the same as supporting the Taliban; then that we were aiding Saddam Hussein when we demonstrated against war with Iraq in 2003. When we opposed the [Nato bombing of Libya](#) in 2011, we were accused of backing Muammar Gaddafi.

It was a lie then, and it is now. We opposed those wars because we believed they would worsen the situation – increase not decrease terrorism, cause greater instability, and leave millions suffering from the consequences. On all those questions we have been proved decisively correct. Our opposition to [war in Ukraine](#) is not based on any support for Putin – he has his own record of militarism and war – but because we recognise that such a war would be devastating and that a peaceful resolution can be found.

The argument that we oppose war because we support the governments of those countries suggests that there can be no good reason for people to oppose war other than being beholden to another power. This is an insult to

all those campaigning for peace, including in [Russia](#), where no doubt pro-war elements claim their opponents are supporting Nato or the US.

In order to justify his argument, Starmer has to argue that [Nato](#) is purely defensive. “There is no equivalence between a defensive alliance that has never provoked conflict and those who would inflict the appalling cost of war on to others,” he writes.

Tell that to the people of Afghanistan and Libya, who have suffered so much as a result of the Nato wars. Stating that the organisation is a defensive alliance does not make it true. It has moved a very long way geographically from the North Atlantic, which was its original remit. Its origins were in the cold war; its role since the end of that war, in 1989, has been expansionist and interventionist, and it is now playing an active role in manoeuvres and arms provision in eastern Europe. It is increasingly looking towards the [Indo-Pacific](#) as another theatre of conflict.

This military organisation is also putting huge pressure on member states to increase their spending on “defence”. Nato demands at least [2% of GDP](#) from each country, which encourages further militarism and conflict. Meanwhile, in Britain millions of people are facing a serious cost of living crisis, an NHS in permanent emergency mode and record levels of inequality.

The Boris Johnson government – whose foreign minister [does not appear to know](#) which provinces are in Russia and which in Ukraine – has been the most belligerent in its talk about war with Russia. No doubt this is a tactic to deflect from the prime minister’s own domestic crisis, but it could also lead to an extremely dangerous situation for people in Britain, as well as in Ukraine and Russia.

Starmer should be opposing this government, not trying to bang the drum for war even harder. His invocation of the Attlee government in his defence ignores the foreign policy record of that government, which supported wars in Korea and Malaya and introduced the nuclear bomb with “a [bloody Union Jack](#) on top of it”, in the words of Starmer’s hero, Ernest Bevin. Starmer sees Nato and the NHS as twinned achievements of Attlee’s government, but a much closer and more meaningful comparison with the creation of the

health service is the founding of the United Nations in 1945, rather than the cold war military creation he celebrates.

Stop the War has been proved right over the previous wars, while those who mistakenly supported them seem to have learned no lessons from the terrible consequences of their errors. War over [Ukraine](#), involving nuclear powers, could have much more damaging consequences. Diplomacy could lead to a way out, we believe, as even the French and German governments are trying to establish, in contrast to Starmer.

We have become all too familiar with Labour politicians promoting wars. Stop the War will continue its campaigning against this threat and the British government's connivance in it – with Labour acquiescence. Our message is simple: don't get fooled again.

- Lindsey German is convenor of the Stop the War coalition
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[**Guardian Opinion cartoon**](#)

[**Cressida Dick**](#)

Martin Rowson on the resignation of Cressida Dick as Met chief – cartoon

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Culture wars rage as depopulated Spanish region goes to polls



Pablo Casado, leader of the People's party, visits a cattle farm in Navas del Marqués, Castilla y León Photograph: Europa Press/Getty Images

Ruling party may need help from rightwing Vox to hold on to power after snap election in Castilla y León

[Sam Jones](#) in Las Navas del Marqués

[@swajones](#)

Sat 12 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

People in the Spanish region of Castilla y León vote on Sunday in a snap election that represents a massive gamble for the ruling conservative People's party (PP). It could see a breakthrough by a new political platform campaigning on behalf of depopulated and underdeveloped parts of [Spain](#).

The [vote was called in December](#) after the regional president, the PP's Alfonso Fernández Mañueco, kicked his partners in the centre-right Citizens party out of the coalition government, claiming that he could no longer rely on their loyalty.

It follows a turbulent few weeks in Spanish politics that have included a row over the country's meat industry and rightwing fury after the socialist-led central government managed to get its [flagship labour reforms approved by parliament](#) thanks to a PP MP accidentally voting against his party.

Buoyed by its performance in national polls – and by [its strong result in the Madrid region last May](#) – the PP had hoped to use the Castilla y León poll to win a majority there and to score an emphatic victory before a looming election in Andalucía and next year's general election.

But its momentum appears to be waning. [Recent polls](#) suggest that the party, led by Pablo Casado, [will have to rely on the support of the far-right Vox party](#) if it wants to remain in office. The socialists are predicted to finish not far behind the PP, with Vox in third place and Citizens – already a party in its death throes across Spain – coming a distant fourth.



Javier Ortega Smith, secretary general of the Vox party. Photograph: Europa Press/Getty Images

While the PP has already relied on Vox to govern in regions such as Madrid and Andalucía, relations between the two parties have been strained since October 2020, when Casado rounded on the far-right grouping, accusing it of practising a politics based on “fear, anger, resentment and revenge”.

Since then, however, Casado has dragged his party rightwards and enthusiastically sought out culture wars and wedge issues.

Both the PP and Vox have seized on comments that the consumer affairs minister, Alberto Garzón, made in an interview with the Guardian last December.

Although the minister had renewed his calls for Spaniards to reduce their meat consumption for the sake of their health and the planet – and contrasted meat from traditional farming with meat from intensive megafarms – his words were twisted and presented as an attack on Spain’s meat industry.

Standing in front of a field of cows on a traditional farm near the small town of Las Navas del Marqués in the Ávila province of Castilla y León last month, Casado said the government was “insulting livestock farmers,

insulting the Mediterranean diet and threatening Spain's international image".

He also said that megafarms were subject to strict legislation and that, as he saw it, "they don't cause pollution". Asked why some PP councils had campaigned to stop the construction of new megafarms, Casado said those were political decisions.

In recent days, Casado has also accused the Spanish government of attacking the country's cheeses, beets, and of spending "a million euros on tourism for other races".

Last week, he suggested that the socialist prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, presided over a "Dracula coalition", but went on to mix his metaphors by claiming that everyone Sánchez bit "turns into a zombie, like him".



Isabel Díaz Ayuso and Pablo Casado. Photograph: Oscar Gonzalez/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

With the PP's fortunes in the traditionally conservative region suddenly in doubt, the party drafted in Isabel Díaz Ayuso, who is widely seen as a possible rival to Casado because of her electoral clout and ability to appeal to Vox voters.

It did not take her long to stake her conservative credentials. Responding to questions about the sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests in Spain, Ayuso said, “[All institutions make mistakes](#)”, adding that few people wanted to talk about the church’s cultural legacy in Spain or about “the charity, solidarity, values and comfort it offered”.

Pablo Simón, a political scientist at Madrid’s Carlos III University, said things in Castilla y León were not going according to plan for Casado and his party.

“The problem is that when they called the elections, they thought they’d do so well that they’d be able to govern alone, like in Madrid,” he said. “But all the polls point at things getting worse for them than they’d thought.”

Anything the PP do now, added Simón, will come at a cost: “They’ll either have to depend on Vox, with all that depending on a more radical parliamentary partner implies, or they could even lose the government. Either scenario is worse for the PP than how things were, or how they wanted them to be.”

Simón also noted that the so-called [España vaciada, or hollowed-out Spain platform](#), could play a role in the shape of the new regional parliament as “there are nine provinces that are very different with local phenomena”. Voters sick of 35 years of PP rule could decide to give their votes to these grassroots groups on Sunday.



A photograph from an exhibition on rural depopulation in Spain.
Photograph: Miguel Riopa/AFP/Getty

The people of Las Navas del Marqués, however, are not holding their breath for an imminent improvement in their daily lives.

Javier, who owns a bar in the town, said locals were more worried about depopulation and basic services than the meat row. “It’s about all kinds of infrastructure, from telecoms and internet to roads,” he said. “There’s also a shortage of doctors.”

Given that most of the meat in the area was raised on traditional farms, he added, few people would take issue with Garzón’s words.

Miguel, who was born in a house on the main square in Las Navas del Marqués 74 years ago, didn’t hesitate when asked what the most pressing electoral issue was.

“Jobs, jobs and jobs,” he said. “People go where the work is and that’s how towns die. A lot of people here have always felt left behind and abandoned by the authorities. Castilla y León needs to be thought about a bit more. It’s not just about Catalonia and the Basque country and Andalucía.”

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Ghislaine Maxwell

Ghislaine Maxwell lawyers cannot keep retrial arguments under seal, judge rules

Lawyers want new trial after juror Scotty David gave interviews in which he said he had been sexually abused as a child



Judge Alison Nathan wrote on Friday that she was denying the motion to keep all documents under seal. Photograph: Jane Rosenberg/Reuters

[Victoria Bekiempis](#)

Fri 11 Feb 2022 18.05 EST

[Ghislaine Maxwell's](#) lawyers cannot keep sealed their detailed legal arguments about a juror in her trial who might not have disclosed childhood sex abuse during jury selection, a judicial decision issued Friday said.

Judge Alison Nathan wrote: “[The] defendant’s motion to temporarily seal, in their entirety, all documents related to the motion for a new trial, is denied.”

This ruling stems from Maxwell’s filing of detailed arguments for a new trial, relating to this juror, under seal.

Maxwell was found guilty on 29 December of sex trafficking and associated counts for facilitating Jeffrey Epstein’s sexual abuse of girls, some as young as 14. Epstein, a financier and convicted sex offender, was apprehended in July 2019 for sex trafficking minor teens. Epstein killed himself approximately one month later in a New York City jail while awaiting trial.

The arguments on sealing documents stem from controversy about Juror 50, who has been identified as Scotty David. After Maxwell’s trial, David gave interviews where he claimed to have been sexually abused as a child.

Maxwell’s lawyers claimed that filing their defense documents publicly, before Nathan makes a decision about a hearing or retrial, “will provide a roadmap of the defense’s examination of Juror 50 and will allow him to plan out and tailor his responses, or even potentially spoliate evidence, to paint himself and his conduct in the best light possible”.

David publicly said that he told other panelists about this sexual abuse during deliberations, allowing them to understand circumstances from a victim’s perspective.

David’s statements about alleged abuse spurred questions because potential jurors filed out questionnaires as part of the selection process. These questionnaires inquired about sexual abuse.

David reportedly said that he did not remember a question on abuse but said he had answered every question truthfully. In the wake of David’s statements, prosecutors asked Nathan to investigate his comments. Maxwell’s lawyers promptly asked for a hearing and new trial.

In issuing her decision about sealing, Nathan said: “The court is unpersuaded by the defendant’s concern that media interest in the motion

warrants temporary sealing of the documents in their entirety.”

Nathan said that both sides must propose “narrowly tailored” redactions. It is unclear when these redacted documents will be made public.

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Mississippi

Black FedEx driver shot at by white men draws parallels to Ahmaud Arbery case

D'Monterrio Gibson was delivering packages in Mississippi when he was allegedly attacked by Brandon and Gregory Case



D'Monterrio Gibson, 24, was shot at by a white father and son as he was delivering for FedEx in Brookhaven, Mississippi, on 24 January. Photograph: Rogelio V Solis/AP

[Maya Yang](#)

Sat 12 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

A Black FedEx driver who was allegedly shot at by a white father and son in Mississippi while delivering packages said he “can definitely see the similarities” between his case and that of [Ahmaud Arbery](#), a 25-year-old

Black man who was murdered in 2020 by three white men while jogging in Georgia.

“Because Ahmaud Arbery didn’t survive to speak up for himself, so I want to take that upon myself to do that for me and him as well,” said D’Monterrio Gibson, 24, in an [interview with CNN](#) on Friday.

The father and son, Brandon and Gregory Case, [were reportedly](#) arrested and charged this week over the incident. According to Gibson, he was delivering packages on an evening route in Brookhaven, Mississippi, on 24 January when the two men allegedly chased him in a truck for several minutes and fired at least five shots towards his van.

“They came out of nowhere,” he said at a news conference on Thursday. “Even if [the van] was unmarked, civilians still can’t take the law into their own hands … I’m thinking this is a racism thing,” he added.

According to the Washington Post, Gregory Case was driving the pickup truck and attempted to cut Gibson off as he was trying to leave. Gibson then swerved around the truck to get out of the neighborhood.

Gibson described the alleged attack in an interview [with the Mississippi Free press](#). “I drive down about two or three houses,” Gibson said. “There’s another guy [Brandon Case] standing in the middle of the street pointing a gun at my windows and signaling me to stop with his hands, as well as mouthing the word, ‘Stop.’ I shake my head no, I hide behind the steering wheel, and I swerve around him as well. As I swerve around him, he starts firing shots into my vehicle.”

He added that when he called the police to report the shootings, a dispatcher interrupted him and asked if he had been on Junior Trail, the street where he was delivering the packages.

“I said, ‘Yes.’ He was like, ‘Well I just got a call of a suspicious person at this address,’ ” Gibson [recalled](#) at Thursday’s press briefing. He replied to the dispatcher and said: “Sir, I’m not a suspicious person. I work for FedEx. I was just doing my job.”

The Cases were arrested on 1 February, over a week after the incident. According to court records reviewed by the Washington Post, Brandon Case, 35, was charged with feloniously attempting to cause bodily harm with a firearm and a deadly weapon. His 58-year-old father, Gregory Case, was charged with unlawfully and feloniously conspiring to commit aggravated assault. The father and son were released from jail the next day on bail.

Despite the charges, Gibson and his lawyers argue that the local police are not taking the case seriously and are calling for a [federal hate crimes investigation](#).

“Some semblance of justice was served, but we’re disappointed since we think the charges should be attempted murder because that’s what it was,” said Carlos E Moore, one of Gibson’s lawyers.

Gibson said he was initially reluctant to speak out about the incident until he was reminded of Arbery’s murder – which also involved a white father and son - and similar incidents over the years in which Black people were killed while simply going about their lives.

“I thought about all the people who ain’t here to speak [for themselves],” Gibson told reporters. “I’m just looking at everything way different now ... You can just die doing your job.”

The Cases and their attorneys have yet to comment publicly on the situation.

In a statement to the Associated Press, FedEx condemned the incident, saying, “FedEx takes situations of this nature very seriously, and we are shocked by this criminal act against our team member. ... The safety of our team members is our top priority, and we remain focused on his wellbeing. We will continue to support Mr Gibson as we cooperate with investigating authorities.”

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Yoga, nature walks: Salesforce opens luxe ‘ranch’ to help remote workers connect



Salesforce said employees can use the property from next month for onboarding, skill and talent development. Photograph: Sundry Photography/Alamy

In an internal survey, employees asked company to find ‘ways to connect’ which the 75-acre Trailblazer ranch will provide plenty of

[Maya Yang](#)

Fri 11 Feb 2022 20.34 EST

Salesforce employees will soon be able to hold meetings in California’s redwood forests after the company announced plans to open its own luxury ranch to help staff “connect” after two years of remote working.

The 75-acre property known as Trailblazer Ranch is located near Santa Cruz, California, and boasts an outdoor amphitheater, a communal kitchen, fitness and learning centers and conference rooms. The property also features sleeping pods and suites equipped with fireplaces and employees will be able to partake in guided nature walks, yoga sessions, garden tours, group cooking classes, art journaling and meditation.

The company says Salesforce workers will be able to visit the property from next month for onboarding, training, skills building and talent development.

“Since the pandemic began, we’ve onboarded tens of thousands of employees remotely. Those employees have never met their manager or teams in person. And many of our existing employees haven’t seen their colleagues face-to-face in two years,” the company said in a statement on Thursday. Salesforce said that, according to an internal survey, the number one thing employees asked for was “finding ways to connect”.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought a temporary hiatus to Silicon Valley’s famously over the top office spaces as thousands of tech workers went remote. And while the pandemic fueled speculation that this could spell the end for Silicon Valley, the recent reopening of office spaces appears to prove otherwise.

Some companies are starting to coax people back and companies, including Google and Facebook, are taking out leases on even more offices. Last year, Silicon Valley witnessed a building boom that led to the most office construction in six years. In December, Meta rented 719,000 sq ft at a

campus in Sunnyvale in what was the [largest private-sector office lease](#) of 2021.

“Silicon Valley remains the global center of innovation and its importance will continue to grow even as other innovation hubs emerge,” [said](#) Tishman Speyer, a veteran developer who bought the campus seven months before Facebook’s purchase.

Other new construction [projects](#) that were completed in 2021 include a 657,000 sq ft Yahoo office campus in San Jose, as well as a 611,000 sq ft Google office campus nearby.

Salesforce’s new ranch reaffirms the company’s – and Silicon Valley’s – continued belief in the importance of working in person. “Trailblazer Ranch is an exciting new gathering place where employees can forge trusted relationships with their colleagues, learn from one another, get inspired, grow in their career, get trained on the company, and give back to the community in a fun and safe environment,” the company said.

Salesforce said the ranch is an “opportunity to disconnect from technology and connect with each other”. The company went on to cite a recent [study](#) by Deloitte that revealed employees are working three more hours a day compared with before the pandemic. Moreover, 80% of the study’s respondents listed wellbeing as important or very important to their company’s success.

The ranch is temporarily located at 1440 Multiversity in the town of Scotts Valley, as the company solidifies its long-term Trailblazer Ranch site. The ranch space will also be open to local non-profits and the surrounding community, the company said.

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Solomon Islands

US plans to reopen Solomon Islands embassy in push to counter China

Washington will reopen its embassy on the island after 29 years, expanding its Pacific presence amid China's growing influence in the region



Solomon Islands prime minister Manasseh Sogavare. The US says it will open an embassy in the Solomon Islands, laying out in unusually blunt terms a plan to increase its influence in the Pacific nation. Photograph: Mark Schiefelbein/AP

Guardian staff with agencies
Sat 12 Feb 2022 01.48 EST

The United States plans to re-establish an embassy in [Solomon Islands](#), a senior US state department official said, as Washington seeks to beef up its presence in a region where China is rapidly expanding its influence.

Secretary of state Antony Blinken is set to announce the opening of a new embassy on the Pacific island state during a visit to nearby Fiji – 29 years after the United States downgraded its diplomatic presence in Honiara.

The move comes just a few months [after riots in the island](#) chain of 800,000 people in November when protesters tried to storm parliament and then went on a three-day rampage, torching much of the capital Honiara's Chinatown.

The unrest [was sparked by opposition](#) to veteran prime minister Manasseh Sogavare and partly fuelled by poverty, unemployment and inter-island rivalries, but anti-China sentiment also played a role.

The United States closed its embassy in the Solomons Island capital in 1993 and is now represented by a consulate there, with an embassy in the Papua New Guinea capital of Port Moresby.

Blinken flew to Fiji after a meeting in Melbourne of the United States, Japan, India and Australia, at which the so-called Quad pledged to deepen cooperation to ensure an Indo-Pacific region free from “coercion,” a thinly veiled swipe at China’s economic and military expansion.

In a briefing on the flight, a senior US administration official told travelling reporters that “there are very clear indications that (China) want to create military relationships in the Pacific”.

“The most pressing case right now is what’s going on in the Solomon Islands. With Chinese security personnel bucking up an increasingly besieged president in a way that has caused a lot of anxieties across the region,” the official said.

China said in December [it would send police advisers](#) and riot gear to Solomon Islands as foreign peacekeepers began leaving the Pacific nation after being deployed during the deadly protests.

A subplot to November’s unrest was Sogavare’s efforts to forge closer ties with Beijing after abruptly breaking off the island’s longtime ties with Taiwan in 2019.

China balks at any official exchanges between other countries and self-ruled Taiwan, which it sees as its own territory awaiting reunification.

The Solomons government said in December it had accepted Beijing's offer of six "liaison officers" to train its police force and equipment including shields, helmets, batons and other "non-lethal" gear.

In recent years China has stepped up pressure [to isolate Taiwan internationally](#), getting eight nations to switch diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing since 2016.

A diplomat at the US embassy in Port Moresby said the reopening of the mission in the Solomons Islands would build on US efforts to place more diplomatic staff throughout the region.

The aim was to "further engage with our Pacific neighbours, connect US programs and resources with needs on the ground, and build people-to-people ties," the diplomat said.

The US government had provided vaccines and other help to Solomon Islands in combating the Covid-19 pandemic, the diplomat said.

The US Congress and the White House will need to approve the embassy proposal.

The Associated Press, Reuters and Agence-France Press contributed to this report

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/12/us-plans-to-reopen-solomon-islands-embassy-in-push-to-counter-china>

Headlines monday 7 february 2022

- [NHS Sajid Javid denies row with Treasury behind backlog plan delay](#)
- [Live Javid says ‘active discussion’ taking place between government and NHS over backlog](#)
- [NHS England Waiting times for cancer referral and treatment at record high](#)
- [Paramedics More than half of NHS crews suffering from burnout, study finds](#)

NHS

Sajid Javid denies row with Treasury behind NHS backlog plan delay

Health secretary blames impact of Omicron for delay, which health leaders say could exacerbate England's waiting list crisis

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Sajid Javid (above) denied he was at loggerheads with the chancellor, Rishi Sunak. Photograph: James Manning/PA

Peter Walker Political correspondent
[@peterwalker99](#)

Mon 7 Feb 2022 04.06 EST

Sajid Javid has denied that a plan to clear the huge NHS backlog in England has been delayed because of wrangling with the Treasury over funding, as health bodies warned any further wait could exacerbate the scale of waiting lists for treatment.

The health secretary, who had been scheduled to announce the plan on Monday, insisted it had simply been held up by chaos caused by the [Omicron variant](#) of Covid, and that it would come imminently.

Saffron Cordery, the deputy chief executive of [NHS](#) Providers, which represents NHS trusts in England, said the plan should be published as quickly as possible to help the health service tackle the 6 million-strong backlog, which is set to rise further.

“There has been no argument, there has been a very active discussion within both the NHS and my department to collectively agree on an elective recovery plan,” Javid told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme. “We’ve got a plan. It is being finalised right now. It will be published very soon.”

Cordery told the same programme: “We need to see this plan as quickly as possible because trust leaders are really keen to plough on and make their way through these very long waiting lists which have built up during the pandemic, and indeed pre-existed the pandemic.

“What we’re waiting for is a set of priorities and measures and procedures that will be put in place to support trusts, to enable them to boost their activity levels, so it will be measures to free up clinician times, it will be measures to support trusts to work more effectively together.”

[NHS backlog graphic](#)

Matthew Taylor, the chief executive of the NHS Confederation, [has warned](#) health funding plans could face gridlock due to opposition from the Treasury, which might view the spending as “wasted on a dying administration”.

But in another interview Javid denied he was at loggerheads with the chancellor, Rishi Sunak. Javid told Sky News: “What I would say about the

Treasury is that I couldn't wish for a better partner when it comes to the challenges that I have.

"I don't recognise that at all. Having been chancellor, having a close relationship with the Treasury, for any department, is crucial. And right now, for health and care, I'm just really pleased we've got that really good working relationship."

The plan was delayed "because we had a roadblock with Omicron", Javid said, adding: "I had planned to publish the plan in December. We were almost there, we were agreeing it finally with the NHS and across government, but because of Omicron we've rightly changed our focus, especially to boosters and to focus on that."

The row comes as the numbers of cancer patients facing delays in seeing a specialist for the first time and starting their treatment have hit record highs in England.

Half a million people in England with suspected cancer will have to wait longer than the supposed two-week maximum to see an oncologist this year, an analysis for the House of Commons library reveals.

The number of patients confirmed to have the disease who are unable to start treatment such as surgery or chemotherapy within the 31 or 62 days that hospitals try to guarantee is expected to exceed 75,000 for the first time.

Javid told Today it was inevitable waiting lists "will rise above 6 million over the coming months" as patients returned following the pandemic, before starting to fall.

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NHS

NHS England waiting times for cancer referral and treatment at record high

House of Commons research shows 500,000 suspected patients will wait over two weeks to see oncologist



The analysis found that between April and November 2021 more than 90,000 women who may have breast cancer did not see a specialist within two weeks of GP referral. Photograph: Dmytro Zinkevych/Alamy

[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor

Sun 6 Feb 2022 16.16 EST

The numbers of cancer patients facing delays in seeing a specialist for the first time and starting their treatment have hit record highs in England, amid fears that overstretched **NHS** services can no longer provide prompt care.

The disclosure comes as a new row over how quickly hospitals can clear the record 6 million-strong NHS backlog has forced ministers to delay publication of the long-awaited plan to tackle it.

Half a million people in England with suspected cancer will have to wait longer than the supposed two-week maximum to see an oncologist this year, an analysis for the House of Commons library reveals.

The number of patients confirmed to have the disease who are unable to start treatment such as surgery or chemotherapy within the 31 or 62 days that hospitals try to guarantee is expected to exceed 75,000 for the first time.

Experts, who claim significant shortages in the NHS cancer workforce are to blame, fear delays in getting diagnosed and starting care could reduce a patient's chances of survival. [Cancer](#) charities highlighted the "unimaginable distress and anxiety" they induce in patients.

"Cancer care is in crisis," the shadow health secretary, Wes Streeting, said. "As this new analysis shows, terrifyingly large numbers of people are waiting longer than they should to receive vital cancer care and treatment with the insecurity of not knowing."

Streeting, who was treated for kidney cancer last year, asked the Commons library to analyse the NHS's performance against the array of targets introduced 11 years ago that in theory guarantee patients speedy care.

The analysis found that between April and November last year 290,428 people with possible symptoms of cancer did not get to see a specialist within 14 days of being urgently referred by a GP. After seven months of the year that is already far higher than the previous highest number breaches of the target, the 235,549 recorded last year.

They include 91,896 people who may have breast cancer, 76,307 with suspected skin cancer and 47,936 who GPs believe may be suffering from lower gastro-intestinal cancer.

The total figure equates to 41,490 people a month. If that trend continues, as many as 497,877 people who have a lump, unexplained bleeding or other

potential sign of the disease will have missed out on a first appointment by the time 2021-22 ends at the end of next month. If confirmed, it will represent an almost 11-fold rise on the 45,291 such cases seen a decade ago.

“These figures show the huge challenge the NHS faces in clearing the cancer backlog. This is a time of real worry and anxiety for people waiting for a cancer diagnosis, with any delay creating the risk of a worse prognosis”, said Minesh Patel, the head of policy at Macmillan Cancer Support.

The analysis also shows that the proportion of women who GPs fear may have breast cancer who see an oncologist within two weeks has fallen to just 72.7% – the lowest since records began.

Delyth Morgan, the chief executive of Breast Cancer Now, said: “It’s highly alarming that increasing numbers of women with potential breast cancer symptoms are waiting over two weeks to be seen by a specialist.

“Ensuring that women with breast cancer get a prompt diagnosis and start treatment as quickly as possible gives them the best chance of survival.”

She urged ministers to “put an end to agonising delays for women” and boost the NHS breast cancer workforce “which was already overstretched and chronically under-resourced prior to the pandemic”. Some hospitals are so short of specialist cancer nurses that they have had to limit the amount of chemotherapy they provide.

Commons researchers also found that 12,498 people diagnosed with cancer during the first seven months of 2021-22 were unable to undergo their “first definitive treatment” within 31 days of doctors deciding to treat them. That is another record high compared with the 13,907 such cases recorded in 2020-21 and could mean that by the end of March about 21,425 people will have waited longer than a month this year. Ten years ago the same figure was 4,005.

Even larger numbers of cancer patients are not having their “first definitive treatment” 62 days after an urgent GP referral. Between April and November in all 32,647 people missed out on undergoing surgery,

chemotherapy or radiotherapy within that timescale, which is another key NHS cancer target. Again, if the 4,664 people a month denied that chance is repeated until the end of next month, then a total of 55,966 people across the whole of 2021-22 will have been affected.

The Department of [Health](#) and Social Care (DHSC) was expected to publish the “elective recovery plan” detailing measures to tackle the 6-million backlog, on Monday. That, however, has been delayed for a second time by a fresh bout of wrangling between NHS England and the government over how demanding the targets imposed on hospitals should be.

The disagreement centres on the deadline by which NHS trusts will have to have treated all those who have been waiting either one year or two years for care, usually an operation. “Conversations about the targets have become protracted and difficult. The Treasury wants a certain scale of ambition, they want tougher targets than NHS England thinks is feasible”, said an NHS source.

Another NHS source said: “There will be an aim to end 104-week waiters by the end of March. And nobody will wait more than a year for treatment by March 2025, but the government are trying to bring that forward to March 2024, and that is still being negotiated.”

The Commons library’s research shows that the number of patients not getting cancer care on time has been rising relentlessly every year since Labour first created the targets in 2009.

“The Conservatives blame the pandemic”, said Streeting. “But the state of cancer care has been worsening every year since 2010, and the NHS had record long waiting lists and 100,000 staff shortages before Covid hit. It’s a bit rich for the Tories to now declare a ‘war on cancer’ when they spent the last 12 years disarming the NHS through mismanagement and underfunding.”

In a statement the DHSC blamed the unprecedented delays on the pandemic. It said: “Cancer diagnosis and treatment remains a top priority. The pandemic has put enormous pressures on the NHS, causing waiting lists to

grow, but now most cancer services are back to or above pre-pandemic levels.

“Our record investment in the NHS includes an extra £2bn this year and £8bn over the next three years to cut waiting times, including through delivering an extra 9 million checks, scans and operations, making sure more patients get the treatment they need sooner.

“Last week the health and social care secretary declared a national war on cancer, with the launch of a call for evidence to inform a new 10-year plan to improve cancer care, speed up diagnosis and invest in innovative new treatments.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/feb/06/nhs-england-waiting-times-for-cancer-referral-and-treatment-at-record-high>

NHS

More than half of NHS paramedics suffering from burnout, study finds

Heavy workload, record 999 calls and inadequate breaks are storing up mental health problems for ambulance crews



A survey of nearly 400 crew members at a north of England ambulance service has revealed high levels of stress and anxiety. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor

Sun 6 Feb 2022 13.57 EST

Over half of paramedics are suffering from burnout caused by “overwhelming” workloads, record numbers of 999 calls and the public misusing the ambulance service, [a study has found](#).

Frontline crew members also blame lack of meal breaks, delays in reaching seriously ill patients and their shift often not ending when it should for their high levels of stress and anxiety.

The working lives of ambulance staff are so difficult that nine out of 10 display symptoms of “depersonalisation”, characterised by “cynicism, detachment and reduced levels of empathy” when dealing with patients who need urgent medical treatment.

The widespread poor mental welfare of paramedics is a problem for the [NHS](#) because it is leading to some quitting, thus exacerbating its shortage of ambulance personnel, the authors said.

The findings, published in the Journal of Paramedic Practice, have prompted concern that the demands on crews, alongside the injury, violence and death they encounter, are storing up serious mental health problems for them, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

The research is based on responses from 382 crew members who work for an unnamed NHS regional ambulance service in the north of England.

“Ambulance staff are passionate about their role. However, burnout is a significant and very real issue that decreases staff efficacy and reduces quality of patient care,” the study said. It was undertaken by Rachel Beldon, who works for the Yorkshire ambulance service, and Joanne Garside, a professor and school strategic director of Huddersfield university’s health and wellbeing academy.

“Participants wanted better resources and staffing levels. The current workload appeared to be overwhelming and negatively affected their mental health and work-life balance.”

Many ambulance crew also have negative feelings about their bosses, do not feel valued, and “some felt they were thought of as ‘dots on a screen’ rather than people”, the paper said.

The findings come as 999 calls hit record levels and concern is rising about unprecedented numbers of [patients being kept waiting in ambulances](#) outside

hospitals because A&E staff are too busy to admit them. Two major reports last year said delayed handovers were a factor in thousands of patient deaths a year.

One paramedic, who recently described ambulance crews' working lives in an [article in the Guardian](#), said the findings captured the realities of responding to 999 calls. "Workload is massive. You could have just dealt with a very complicated job and need a few minutes to gather your thoughts, but that time is never allowed as the control centre is constantly harassing you.

"Burnout affects the quality of care patients receive because staff are exhausted generally and only get a 30-minute break during an eight-hour shift, so become grumpy and make poor decisions, and that is reflected in poor patient care."

Sara Gorton, head of health at the union Unison, said: "Excessive hours without proper breaks, shifts overrunning, and queueing for hours outside hospitals has become commonplace for many ambulance staff. Some are regularly reduced to tears by the overwhelming pressures.

"The government's failure to fund services properly has left them with too few staff and emergency vehicles.

"Demand is so extreme that paramedics have no time to offload about their many challenging experiences. Long-term exposure to this level of stress could lead to serious mental illness. Staff shouldn't be left to suffer emotional damage just for doing their jobs."

A spokesperson for the Department of [Health](#) and Social Care said: "We recognise the pressure this pandemic has put on all NHS staff.

"To help relieve these pressures, NHS England and Improvement has given ambulance trusts an extra £55m to boost staff numbers for winter, providing over 700 additional staff in control rooms and on the frontline, alongside £1.75m to support the wellbeing of frontline ambulance staff."

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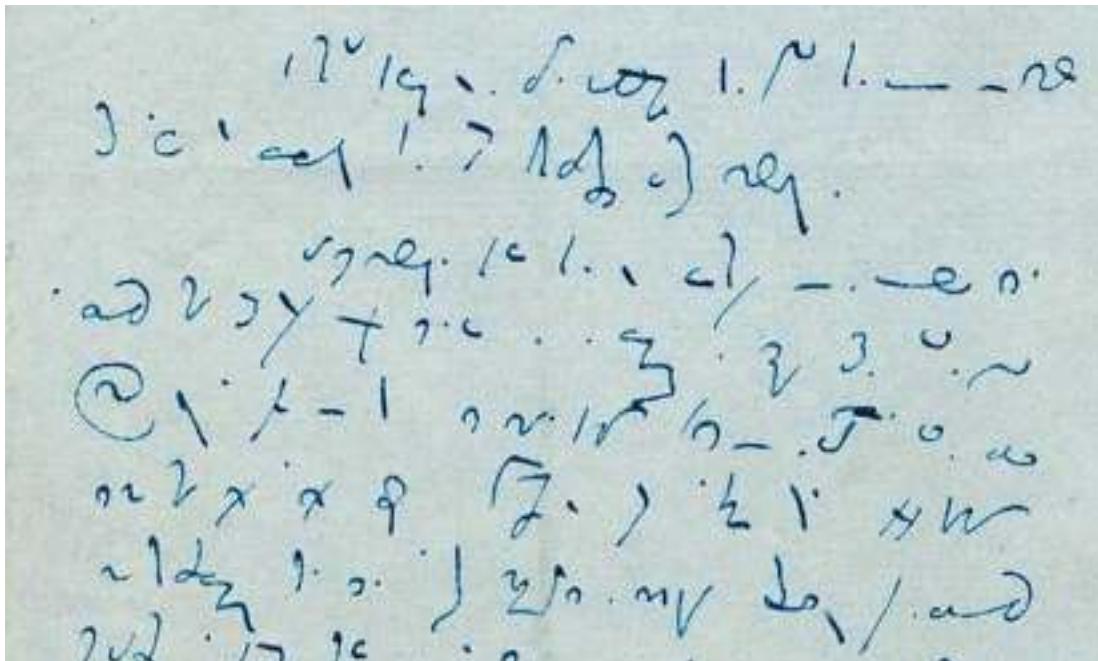
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Forget Wordle! Can you crack the Dickens Code? An IT worker from California just did



‘The devil’s handwriting’ ... part of the Tavistock letter, written in a shorthand dating from the 1700s that Dickens modified. Photograph: Alamy

The writer's archaic shorthand has baffled experts for over a century. So they launched a deciphering competition for fans – with stunning results that cast new light on his love life and financial peril

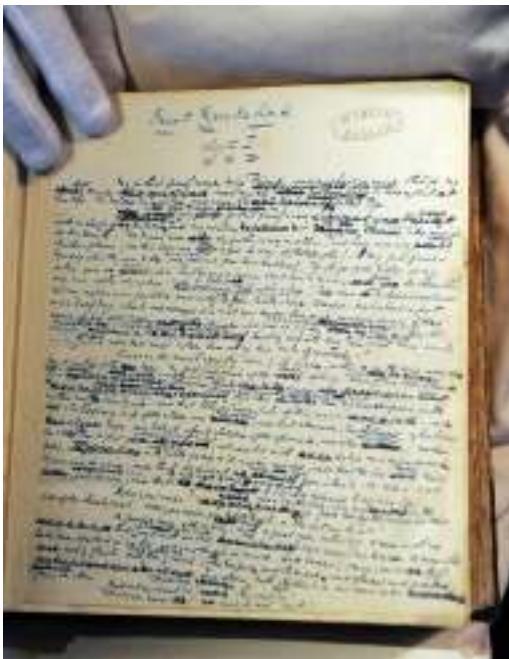
[Simon Usborne](#)

Mon 7 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

Despite all the precision he brought to bear on his intricate plots, [Charles Dickens](#) was a notoriously messy writer. His manuscripts are full of inky splodges, with barely legible alterations crammed in between scrawled, sloping lines. Worse still was his love of a type of shorthand dating from the 1700s. To this, he added his own chaotic modifications to create what he called “the devil’s handwriting”.

Fond of puzzles and codes, the great Victorian writer used these time-saving hieroglyphics to make notes and copies of his letters and documents, reams of which he burned. Academics are still toiling to decipher 10 shorthand manuscripts that survived. Forget Wordle. This is the Dickens Code. And for a long time, it had seemed uncrackable.

Last year, the stumped experts behind what is known as the Dickens Code project made a cry for help. They put out a call for amateur sleuths to enter a competition, the task being to transcribe one of these baffling documents: a mystery letter that has been kept for more than a century in a New York library. It is scrawled in blue ink on paper bearing the letterhead of Tavistock House, the London home where Dickens wrote Bleak House.



Splodgy mess ... the manuscript of Great Expectations. Photograph: Tony Kyriacou/Shutterstock

When the competition opened last October with a £300 prize, the note was downloaded 1,000 times in three days. Participants were invited to use guides to brachygraphy, the now obsolete shorthand system that Dickens had adapted. In the semi-autobiographical David Copperfield, brachygraphy is described as a “savage stenographic mystery”.

Competitors also had access to a notebook in which Dickens explained, with characteristic ambiguity, some of his own symbols. He used “@” for “about” and an angular kind of “t” to mean “extraordinary”. In the end, only 16 people, from all over the world, were able to submit solutions. None managed the entire thing.

When Dickens sat down to compose the Tavistock letter, he would have been amused to consider that, almost 165 years later, it would be pulled to pieces, endlessly analysed and ultimately deciphered by, among others, a 20-year-old student from Ohio called Ken Cox. “I thought it was mind-boggling that there was something he’d written that nobody had read yet,” says Cox, a fan of puzzles, Dickens and even shorthand, who studies cognitive science at the University of Virginia.

So what does the Tavistock letter say? Sadly, it is not notes for – or even part of – a long-lost short story, although there is hope that the other documents may include fiction. What it does reveal is a suitably convoluted tale of a canny businessman who has reached a fraught juncture in his love life and literary career, and is now leaning on his connections and the courts for help.

“The decoders really have helped to cast light on this troubled period in Dickens’s life,” says Dr Claire Wood, lecturer in Victorian literature at the University of Leicester. Wood leads the decoding project with Hugo Bowles, professor of English at the University of Foggia in Italy. After a lengthy process of piecing the entries together and cross-checking with other sources, the pair have a transcript that is 70% complete.



In full ... the letter that was set as a competition. Photograph: Alamy

“I feel obliged,” the letter begins, “though very reluctantly, to appeal to you in person.” Three newly translated phrases were vital in understanding what comes next. One sleuth deduced that “HW” referred to Household Words, a periodical Dickens edited and co-owned with the publisher Bradbury and Evans. Another linked the symbol for “round” to All the Year Round, a new journal Dickens founded in 1859 and owned himself after falling out with Bradbury and Evans.

In another breakthrough, one solver translated two scribbles as “Ascension Day”, a Christian feast that falls 40 days after Easter. This fascinated Wood and Bowles because Ascension Day in 1859 coincided with a period in which we know Dickens was attempting to incorporate Household Words into All the Year Round. Did the letter have something to do with this transition?

These clues shed light on another letter, written in longhand fortunately, that is kept at the same New York library. It’s an apology to Dickens from the manager of the Times about a row that had erupted when Dickens asked the newspaper to print an advert alerting his existing – and potential new – readers to All the Year Round. It mentions another letter, one Dickens had written to John Thadeus Delane, editor of the Times. Until now, this letter was assumed lost. But we now know it was the Tavistock scrawl. So what did it say?

It’s important first to understand where Dickens was in 1859. It was a tricky year for the writer, then 47, despite the fame he had earned with Bleak House and David Copperfield. A year earlier, his marriage had fallen apart amid salacious rumours of an affair with an actress. Dickens published a furious statement in Household Words, describing the rumours as “most grossly false, most monstrous, and most cruel-involving”. When he asked Bradbury and Evans to print the statement in Punch, which it also published, the company refused. Their relationship fell apart and the publisher declined an offer from Dickens to buy its share of Household Words.



'He's usually scathing about judges' ... Dickens, in a recently coloured photo. Photograph: Charles Dickens Museum/Oliver Clyde/Rex/Shutterstock

The fallout prompted Dickens to plan his own journal. But it was a risky move because, while successful, he was in financial trouble. He had a divorce, a rumoured mistress, and 10 children to pay for. "He was," Bowles says, "a celebrity on the ropes." Household Words, which Dickens launched in 1850, was a vital source of income and a shop window for his work. It had taken off in 1854 with the serialisation of his novel *Hard Times*.

Dickens was desperate to hold on to his readers but Bradbury and Evans had other ideas. They wanted to keep Household Words alive without him – and sued to prevent him from giving the impression the magazine was closing. However, a judge ruled in Dickens's favour: yes, he could announce the switch, as long as he said Household Words was being "discontinued by him" and not the publisher.

A triumphant Dickens used this phrase in the advert intended for the *Times*, but a clerk rejected it. Unaware of the legal ruling, the clerk felt the advert gave the false impression that Household Words was indeed being shut down. "A cancelled advert in the *Times* came as a nasty surprise to Dickens," Bowles says, "and needed to be rectified."

After getting Cs in literature, I never dreamed anything I did would be of interest to Dickens scholars

Shane Baggs, IT worker

The Tavistock letter is, we now know, the writer's desperate bid to rescue the situation by appealing to the editor, an acquaintance. Dickens refers to the advert "announcing that, after Ascension Day, Household Words will be discontinued by me ... [It] was refused and sent back with a message that this particular was untrue and unfair." He mentions the judge's ruling approvingly, saying he can see no "sense or reason" for the rejection.

The Times swiftly apologised and reinstated the advert. Dickens had won. All the Year Round, which he launched with the first instalment of A Tale of Two Cities, was a sensation. A year later, it serialised Great Expectations. Meanwhile, Bradbury and Evans failed to save Household Words. When they auctioned its title, Dickens snapped it up at a fraction of the price he had originally offered, churlishly adding the line "With Which Is Incorporated Household Words" to the cover of All the Year Round.

The academics have been stunned to learn about Dickens's ruthless business dealings – and amused by his legal double standards. "I mean, he's usually scathing about judges," Bowles says. "And here he is quoting the judge, naming him in the letter, and saying what a great guy he is for supporting him." Yet Wood senses vulnerability too. "Dickens is riding high," she says, "but also feeling these personal and professional pressures and trying to keep all the plates spinning."



‘Savage stenographic mystery’ ... Dev Patel in the recent David Copperfield film; the novel references Dickens’s shorthand system. Photograph: Landmark Media/Alamy

The £300 prize was won by Shane Baggs, a Californian IT worker and code enthusiast, who solved the most symbols. “After getting mostly C grades in literature,” he says, “I never dreamed anything I’d ever do would be of interest to Dickens scholars.”

Cox, who as a child wrote coded letters to friends after being inspired by a book about Britain’s wartime codebreaker Alan Turing, contributed solutions including the words “untrue and unfair”. He says: “When I turned it in, I thought I was on the right track. But then I thought they might get a ton of letters and be like, ‘Well, most of these are fine – but this dude’s just looks like the plot of Legally Blonde.’”

The Dickens Code project, which is funded by the government’s Arts and Humanities Research Council, will run for another year. Wood and Bowles want to grow their band of sleuths to help transcribe more documents, some much messier than the Tavistock letter. One series of notes is headed Anecdote, in longhand. “Now,” says Bowles, excitement building in his voice, “I think that could be Dickens telling a story we’ve never heard.”

More details about the Dickens Code project [here](#).

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Interview

‘I’ve had letters from klansmen’: Jennifer Beals on Flashdance, The L Word and fighting to get diverse stories told

[Zoe Williams](#)



Jennifer Beals ... ‘Let me put my hand on the hilt, I will show you the sword is mine.’ Photograph: Jill Greenberg

The actor, who broke through in 1983 playing a welder who dreamed of being a dancer, reflects on a life of activism, why gen Z give her hope and joining the Star Wars universe



[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Mon 7 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

Jennifer Beals is talking to me by Zoom from ... “Do I have to say?” she asks. Not really, I tell her. “I can tell you there’s a blizzard outside and it’s really beautiful.” Her reticence, which lasts about 30 seconds, is because she is in New York, filming a yet to be announced new season of *Law & Order*. You could imagine her taking a friend’s secret to the grave; she is very cagey about where she lives, tending to call herself “nomadic” and describing her home as “the middle of nowhere” (in reality, somewhere near Los Angeles). Commercial discretion, though? Not so much.

It is creepy to go on about how young actors still look, as though that were a goal in itself, but Beals, 58, is so unchanged – since she first played Bette in [The L Word](#) in 2004; since Devil in a Blue Dress in 1995 – that my brain thinks it is making a mistake. She definitely, positively starred in *Flashdance*

in 1983, her breakthrough role after a tiny part in *My Bodyguard* three years earlier, yet that can't be right – it was 40 years ago! It is like walking past someone you think you knew at school, then realising that it can't be them because this person is 21.

She grew up in Chicago, her Irish American mother a primary school teacher, her African American father a shop owner who died when she was nine. Beals was bookish, not a stage school kid, and it is not obvious how she landed the role of the welder turned dancer Alex in *Flashdance* when she was 18. She was still at Yale, studying American literature, and had to defer for a term. It wasn't part of a grand plan, put it that way.

"I didn't even feel like I wanted control or impact," she says, "I wanted joy, full stop. It was completely pleasure principle: 'This is fun. I enjoy this. And I can feel myself expanding – it's really exciting and totally terrifying.'" *Flashdance* was massively successful. It is an interesting film to watch now, partly because it is brilliant, but also because the intensity of the objectification is so 80s. Possibly because she had not one but four body doubles, and maybe because she went straight back to college afterwards, Beals never seemed to be defined or boxed in by her sex-symbol entry point.



Beals in *Flashdance*. Photograph: Cinetext Bildarchiv/Paramount/Allstar

Now, she has entered a franchise with a fractionally longer Hollywood pedigree than her own, as Garsa Fwip in *The Book of Boba Fett*, a spin-off of [The Mandalorian](#) – itself, of course, a spin-off of *Star Wars*. It takes a while to get your ear in to her natural register, which is playful, very literary and full of bathos. “It’s so exciting to be part of the lineage,” she says of Boba Fett. “It feels like a calling, like there’s some reason that the universe has decided that you’re going to enter into these stories.”

Later, talking about the roles she has longed for, she says: “Sometimes, I can taste a part in my mouth. I know that part is mine. It’s like a sword-in-the-stone scenario. This is mine. I’m coming to claim it. That’s all I’m asking. Let me put my hand on the hilt and I will show you this sword is mine.” Half of her is deadly serious, half is definitely joking. You can hear her academic hinterland not so much in her references – everyone has heard of King Arthur – but in her insistent ambiguities and cool irony.

On the one hand, she is hard-boiled about Boba Fett. “It’s a business thing: studios and networks are trying to find something that is a sure-fire hit, so they’re appealing to nostalgia.” From an audience perspective, “obviously, during the pandemic, there’s a desire for comfort”. She wouldn’t say it was all Covid-driven, though: “When have studios ever been interested in taking a risk?” But there is nothing hard-boiled about her attachment to [Star Wars](#), which she describes in a self-mocking cascade. “I remember seeing *Star Wars*; I was 14. They were talking about the Force and I thought: yes. This is what I’ve been looking for.” The films chimed with her amorphous spiritual fervour. She has said if she wasn’t an actor, she would be a Buddhist nun. It is a joke, but *is it?*

“I was never that kid practising an acceptance speech in the mirror, holding an award. I was the kid who wanted to know, who was God? What is God? That was my obsession. I mailed away for [catechism](#) lessons from an advertisement in the back of the *Silver Surfer* comic, but that wasn’t what I meant. Then I started collecting Bibles. Then I moved on to tarot cards. My mom was just horrified. Cut to two years from now – I’ll have started a religion based on *Star Wars*. ”

Beals’ trademark may be ludic ambiguity, but on politics she is deadly serious. Boba Fett slots into a career-long determination to foster diversity,

in terms of who is telling the stories and which stories get told. “I look to tell underrepresented stories, and sci-fi is such a wonderful way to explore those ideas – to explore those on the outside, redefining their power, finding their path and perhaps even lighting a way for others.”

Just before the pandemic, Beals reprised a different role – not perhaps the one for which she is most famous, but the one with the most committed fandom: Bette, the alpha art dealer in *The L Word*, light years away from Beals’ serene real-life personality. “If I just played who I was, I would play somebody who lived in a cave most of the time. I’m not sure how many roles like that there are.”



As Bette in *The L Word: Generation Q*. Photograph: Hilary Bronwyn Gayle>Showtime

The show was first aired in 2004. I suppose the elevator pitch would have been “Friends except they are lesbians”. That proposition alone, nearly 20 years ago, was radical. Beals remembers: “When we were about to shoot the pilot, I was in a restaurant with my husband [the Canadian businessman Ken Dixon]. I leaned over to kiss him and it dawned on me at that time: if two women had been kissing, it would have been seismic in its effect on people.”

It turned out to be impossible to break those conventions on sexuality without breaking a whole host of conventions on race, class, parenthood and society. The L Word is technically sitcommy, warm, human and funny, but, stripped of the cliches of the format, it became something much more searching and original. It returned in 2019 as [The L Word: Generation Q](#), bringing in transgender and non-binary characters, the writing recognisably subtle and fearless, the arcs and dilemmas novel.

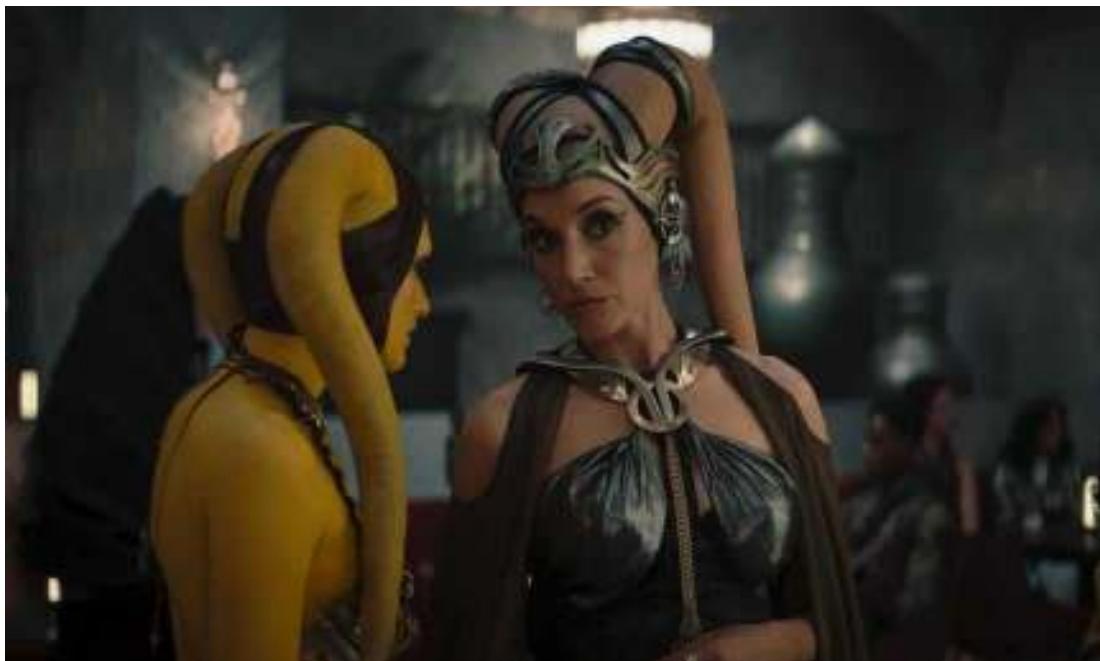
“We took the three characters from the original iteration and tried to usher in the newer stories of this new generation. It’s so fascinating – an entire generation said: ‘Your words are not commensurate with our experience. Therefore, we will change the words.’ Whereas, in the past, people would have just tried to squeeze themselves into those words. In my generation, you were this, or you were that, and there was nothing in between. As many Rocky Horror Picture Shows as you saw, as many different people as I met, I was still in this very binary mindset. This generation blew that to smithereens and it’s really exciting.”

She hesitates, as if weighing up whether to say something a bit schmaltzy, then goes for it: “I really think they’re the hope for the planet.”

That show was also the first time Beals “came into contact with so many extraordinary activists who were thinking politically. That started to shift my perception, and I understood how important it was to become involved, to move the needle a little bit.” She is now involved with a range of charities and campaigning organisations, from GLSEN – which fights harassment of LGBTQ+ students – to more general movement-building against Donald Trump.

The L Word’s original showrunner was Ilene Chaiken, who is known for being ahead of her time (she executive-produced The Handmaid’s Tale, having fought to make it for years). The L Word was as groundbreaking on race as it was in its approach to sexuality – it featured thorny, challenging conversations between the biracial Bette and her white partner, Tina (played by Laurel Holloman), about whose sperm to use for their prospective child and what that meant for identity. This was, bear in mind, a time when entire dramedies could be set in New York with barely a black character. In terms of representation, it feels as though TV and film have changed a lot.

“When I was a young girl, I didn’t see myself represented,” Beals says. But there is a rather chilling detail from *Devil in a Blue Dress*, the neo-noir film that also starred Denzel Washington, in which Beals played Daphne Monet, who was biracial but passed for white. It is a trope she returned to 20 years later for *The Last Tycoon*, a series based on the F Scott Fitzgerald novel, in which she played Margo Taft, a movie star, again passing for white.



As Garsa Fwip, right, in *The Book of Boba Fett*. Photograph: Lucasfilm/Disney

Monet was one of Beals’ sword-in-the-stone parts, but originally the studio felt that – since she had been *Flashdance*-famous for 10 years – too many people already knew she was biracial and it would signpost the twist. I suggest that this was discrimination – or attempted discrimination – that surely couldn’t happen today, or if it did, they sure as hell wouldn’t admit to it. “Who knows?” she says. “I don’t know. I’m in the forest most of the time. How do I know what the world is? I can tell you what the trees look like.” Be cautious with this, I think is her implication: things haven’t moved on as far as it might seem. At times, whether as an honorary gay icon, a successful biracial actor or a campaigner, she has been a lightning rod for bigots.

“I’ve had my letters from klansmen, believe me,” she says. “I could always navigate it. I don’t know if that’s just because I was conditioned to navigate

it. But I always could. It just made me determined to work even more.” There is something else driving her, a belief in the importance of storytelling so deep that it blurs or even erases the line between her self and her work. “Every single thing is narrative. Our understanding of things is a narrative. It’s the narrative of who’s in power. It’s the narrative of the person in the bodega down the street. What is the story that I’m telling myself? Am I telling myself the story that my teachers told me that I was? Am I telling myself the story that my parents told me that I was? How do I come to the narrative that serves my highest good?”

Aside from being in Law & Order, Beals is producing a number of projects, only one of them nearly ready to be talked about. It is a film that circuitously began with an idea about social media that she and another producer, Tom Jacobson, commissioned two YA novelists to write as a book, which “did very well and got a bunch of prizes”. She is poised, always, between the drive to create more, different, better stories, narratives that meet the demands of the age, and her Buddhist/wood-nymph desire to “stay in the cave and enjoy the forest. But it has some meaning, me working. So I might as well.”

The Book of Boba Fett is streaming now on Disney+

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Wearable technology

Garmin Fenix 7 review: next-gen boss of adventure smartwatches

Top-of-the-line sports watch goes anywhere and tracks anything, with longer battery life, better GPS, stamina and a touchscreen



Available in a range of sizes, materials and with or without solar charging, the Fenix 7 is the new top-dog of super smartwatches. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

[Samuel Gibbs](#) Consumer technology editor

Mon 7 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

Garmin's latest top-of-the-line Fenix 7 track-it-all adventure smartwatch introduces a number of new features, better GPS, longer battery life and improved tech – as well as a touchscreen to go with its buttons.

Starting at £599 (\$699.99/A\$1,049), it can hit £1,000 or more if you pick the largest, most fancy version. But the new luxury device does give us a preview on what the firm's cheaper sports watches may feature later in the year.

The Fenix 7 comes in a range of sizes, weights, materials and with an optional solar-charging system, all of which have full mapping.

The new model looks like a refinement rather than a revolution away from previous Fenix designs. The 7S is the smallest, sleekest version with a 42mm case and 1.2in screen, although it is still obviously a sports watch. The standard 7 and supersized 7X are larger, chunkier beasts but are still light and comfortable to wear.



The watch has a charging port on the back and special quick-release straps but is compatible with standard third-party bands, too. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The new touchscreen makes the Fenix feel slicker and more modern. You can tap and hold on widgets on the watch face to jump straight to things such as a graph of your heart rate, battery power settings or notifications, or swipe through menus, screens and maps. For daily smartwatch functions it works very well.

But touchscreens are unreliable during activities, don't work well in the wet nor with gloves. Garmin has kept its excellent five-button control system and disables touch when you start most activities, to prevent accidental pauses of runs or similar.

Because of the smart way Garmin has integrated the touch system with buttons, everything can be controlled via either method or both at the same time. It is genuinely great

The [transflective colour LCD screen](#) looks the same as its predecessor – clear and easy to read in direct sunlight, with a backlight for the night. But the power-efficient technology doesn't look as slick as OLED screens.



The Fenix 7 sapphire solar, as pictured, has a 47mm-wide case with 22mm straps and stands 14.5mm tall – just fitting on my 50mm-wide wrist.
Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Specifications

- **Screen:** 1.2, 1.3 or 1.4in transflective MIP LCD
- **Case size:** 42, 47 or 51mm

- **Case thickness:** 14.1 to 14.9mm
- **Band size:** standard 20, 22 or 26mm quick release
- **Weight:** 42 to 68g body only
- **Storage:** 16 or 32GB
- **Water resistance:** 100 metres (10ATM)
- **Sensors:** GNSS (GPS, Glonass, Galileo, BeiDuo, QZSS), compass, thermometer, heart rate, pulse Ox
- **Connectivity:** Bluetooth, ANT+, wifi

Long battery life



The [Garmin Connect app](#) controls settings, syncs and displays the mountains of data and insights the watch collects, and enables ‘smart’ features such as message notifications and music control on your phone. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The watch can be used independently of a smartphone, unlike rivals, paired via Bluetooth to an Android or iPhone, or synced with a Mac or Windows

PC using the Garmin Express app and included USB cable. But the watch has wifi to sync data straight to your Garmin account, download new apps, system and map updates, too.

The Fenix 7 lasts for a very long time between charges. Connected to my phone for smart notifications, with full activity and health-tracking features active, including blood oxygen monitoring during sleep and three hours of running, the watch lasted over 15 days and nights. It should last up to 40 hours of running with GNSS or longer with some power-saving features turned on – long enough for practically any activity.

Note the smaller 7S has shorter battery life or the larger 7X lasts longer, while solar models can add up to four days extra smartwatch use or eight hours of running, too, roughly [double the Fenix 6 Pro solar](#). It takes more than 2.5 hours to fully charge the Fenix 7 via USB, hitting 50% in an hour.

Health, fitness and tracking



Each activity tracks more data than most need and can be customised, including changing the information that is displayed on screen during the activity and what is recorded. Pictured are the main post-run statistics. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The Fenix 7 can track practically every activity under the sun, with well over 60 activities preloaded and more available from the [Connect IQ store](#). They cover all the sport and adventure bases, including walking, hiking and running in its various forms, most things concerning a bike, swimming and various water sports, triathlons and other multisport events, skiing, climbing, strength and gym work. And even some ball sports.

It has two meaningful improvements to Garmin's best-in-class running tracking. The improved GNSS consistently gets a satellite lock faster outdoors and indoors, and produces much more accurate live pace estimations compared with its predecessor.

The new real-time "stamina" measurement for running and bike-based activities is a live estimate of how much energy your body has left as a percentage, based on your fitness, sleep, activity, recovery and other factors the watch tracks during your day.



The watch shows two metrics as overlapping bars: your total 'potential' energy at your usual pace (black) and your 'current' stamina (orange), which is how much energy you have left for harder than usual work, such as a burst of speed or a steep hill. Photograph: Garmin

Your potential energy goes down steadily as you run, while your current stamina shrinks faster when putting in more effort and recovers when taking it easier. If the bar hits zero it doesn't mean you're immediately going to shut down but it is likely you won't have the energy for top performance.

Combined, they allow you to better pace yourself, such as if you've started off too fast in a race or haven't pushed it hard enough in training. It gives you instant information of how much you have left after each interval or whether you've got the energy for a proper sprint finish. Afterwards, you can see a chart of your stamina against distance, pace or the other metrics the watch records.



The comprehensive health tracking mirrors the watch's predecessor, the Fenix 6, including 'heath snapshots', all-day heart rate, stress, steps, calories, sleep and Garmin's excellent '[body battery](#)' system for interpreting it all but lacks ECG. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Observations

- The Fenix 7X has a light that acts as a torch or as a running light at night, flashing red as your arm swings back and white as it goes forward, making you more visible to cars.

- The sapphire solar models have an additional “multiband GPS” feature, which increases tracking accuracy around tall buildings or vegetation by locking on to the newer “L5” [frequency band of GPS](#) as well as the usual “L1” band.
- The watch has Garmin Pay for contactless payments but few banks are [supported in the UK](#).



The touchscreen makes navigating the highly detailed worldwide maps a lot easier and faster than previous button-only systems, which could be very tedious. A new and useful ‘up ahead’ feature shows how far and the direction to the next self-prescribed waypoint on walks or hikes.
Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Sustainability

The Fenix 7 is [generally repairable](#). The battery is rated to last at least a few years of frequent charge cycles [while maintaining at least 80% capacity](#). In lasting more than 15 days between charges, in theory, the battery would not need to be replaced for as long as 20 years. The watch does not contain any recycled materials. Garmin guarantees at least two years of security updates from release, but typically supports its devices far longer.

Garmin offers trade-in schemes for some lines and [complies with WEEE](#) and other local electronics recycling laws.

Price

The Garmin Fenix 7 comes in a variety of sizes and models, starting at [£599.99 \(\\$699.99/A\\$1,049\)](#) for the standard 42 or 47mm models.

Solar models cost from [£689 \(\\$799.99/A\\$1,199\)](#) and the top sapphire solar models cost from [£779.99 \(\\$899.99/A\\$1,499\)](#).

Verdict

The Fenix 7 is a powerhouse of a do-it-all, go-anywhere, track-anything adventure watch, that is very much the best in the market.

It is an excellent follow-up to the [Fenix 6 line](#) that introduces meaningful upgrades, many of which are expected to flow down into Garmin's numerous lines of less expensive, more focused products over the next year.

The longer 15-day-plus battery life, faster performance, better GPS, a touchscreen and stamina metrics are great additions to the comprehensive tracking Garmin is known for. Most people will only use about 5% of what the watch is capable of but that 5% will be different for each person and each occasion.

The Fenix 7 is an expensive, statement purchase. If you just run or cycle it will be overkill but if you have the cash, do lots of activities or just like the idea of being able to parachute into the middle of nowhere and still find your way home, this is the watch for you.

Pros: tracks everything under the sun, very long battery life, optional solar charging, cross-platform phone notifications, Garmin Pay, full offline mapping, offline Spotify, Bluetooth, wifi, 100m water resistance, real buttons, accurate GPS/GNSS, choice of materials.

Cons: expensive, big, limited Garmin Pay bank support, limited smartwatch features compared with Apple Watch/Galaxy Watch, no

voice control, screen basic compared to OLED.

Other reviews

- [Garmin Fenix 6 Pro Solar review: the solar-powered super watch](#)
- [Garmin Forerunner 245 Music review: a runner's best friend](#)
- [Venu 2 review: can Garmin make a good smartwatch?](#)
- [Samsung Galaxy Watch 4 review: Google smartwatch raises bar](#)
- [Apple Watch Series 7 review: bigger screen, faster charging, still the best](#)

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Greta Riaukaite at the Barbican launderette. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

[The Guardian picture essay](#)

How the UK's dutiful launderette is fading under Covid and energy prices

Greta Riaukaite at the Barbican launderette. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

A much-loved community space and an essential service, their days now seem numbered

by [Georgina Quach](#)

Mon 7 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

The first thing Rajiv Shrikul does when he opens up his launderette in south [Edinburgh](#) each morning is pray. He says the 7am routine, which he started as a young boy in India, helps him cope with the kaleidoscope of

personalities that pass through his shop. “Some people are angry, some are generous – you need to have a very stable mind. Meditation calms you down, especially in these hard times.”



- Photograph: Murdo MacLeod

After opening in 1977, Braidburn launderette became a social hub, drawing in households that lacked the space or funds for their own machines. But Braidburn’s future is uncertain, like so many launderettes. These longtime staples of urban living have been hit hard in the pandemic and they, and their customers, are struggling with the cost of living crisis.

When [Scotland](#) went into lockdown, Shrikul’s revenue tumbled by 80% – and customers are only now trickling back in. “Suddenly, nobody was coming through the doors. I only stayed open because my elderly customers needed me to pick up and wash their clothes.”



- Rajiv Shrikul loading a tumble dryer. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod



- Customer and regular visitor Arthur Mafonko with his dog Milo. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod

Normally, during the Edinburgh festival fringe, tourists would pile into Braidburn to do their washing, but the last two summers have been quiet. The absence of students – another of his biggest client groups – also dented his cashflow.

Danial Kochak, who helps his dad Masoud Kochak run the Barbican launderette in London, says their loyal group of regulars cushioned the financial impact of Covid. The launderette's mouthwash green palette harkens back to the early 1970s, when it opened. While locals have been using its services for decades, Kochak's earnings now pale in comparison with the value of the land the launderette sits on – property prices in the Barbican district have [risen by 60%](#) in the last 10 years, according to Land Registry data.

[The Barbican Launderette](#)

[The Barbican Launderette](#)

Launderettes' margins are further thinning as energy prices soar across the country. Kochak recently upped his tumble dryer fees by 20% to £1 for eight minutes. "Gas has jumped from 5p to 17p/kWh in six months. Owners will have to either weather it, put their prices up, or shut up shop," says Bruce Herring, chair of the National Association of the Launderette Industry (NALI). But with many owners reluctant to pass the price rise on, businesses are being pushed to the brink.



- Masoud Kochak. Photograph: Sarah Lee

In the last five years, the number of UK laundry facilities has fallen by more than a third to 2,000, according to the NALI. Developers remaking urban neighbourhoods for students and young professionals are building homes equipped with washing machines, leaving local launderettes without clientele. “We’re a throwaway society, so some people would rather buy a new duvet than have it professionally cleaned,” says Kate Yeats, a Braidburn customer.

Because most tumble dryers in launderettes are gas-heated, the [government’s plan](#) to phase out gas power by 2035 is also stoking fears, Herring says. “Converting the machines to use electricity isn’t really an option as it is so difficult – and the running costs would be three times more than gas.”



- The [Barbican](#) launderette. Photograph: Sarah Lee

The soaring energy bills come as prices rise faster than at any time in the past three decades. Braidburn customer Fraser Howie, 25, who runs a taxi business in Edinburgh, says he is close to breaking point, with spiralling fuel and insurance costs hampering his already slow recovery. “I’m worried about how businesses will survive if something changes or another Covid variant crops up. Taxi drivers have received hardly any government help, meaning some of us previously making £70,000 a year have had to live off a £3,000 grant. How are we meant to afford everything that we had?”



- Greta Riaukaite. Photograph: Sarah Lee

Greta Riaukaite, a 25-year-old carer for elderly residents on the Barbican estate, recently moved further out from London's centre to Brent, for cheaper rent. She now pays £830 a month for a studio flat, but may need to move again as the high cost of living, combined with stagnant wages, pushes the capital out of reach. "I do love London, but it's so financially straining. Everything has gone up – travel and food bills especially," she says. Another Barbican launderette regular, who only identifies himself as Raymond, says his pension barely covers the £1,733 monthly rent for his one-bed flat on the estate.

The Barbican Launderette

A sad consequence of coronavirus has been its muffling of launderette gossip. Waiting customers would cover all kinds of topics, from dream holidays to their daughter's wedding dress. "People used to chit-chat for hours, but I have had to ban them from staying because they cannot be socially distant in my small shop," says Shrikul.

Arthur Mafonko, a guesthouse owner, has used Braidburn for decades. Since working together in restaurants 30 years ago, he and Shrikul have been inseparable friends. “He has always been there for me,” says Mafonko. He opened a restaurant in early 2020 but due to Covid, the business never got off the ground. Pandemic restrictions also hit Mafonko’s new business, which suffered cancellations in December after the Scottish government [advised families to reduce social mixing](#). “We have just been keeping the business afloat, waiting for the good times to return,” he says.





- Scenes from the Braidburn launderette. Photographs: Murdo MacLeod

As the squeeze on households continues, the launderette – and its multicultural, multigenerational kind of fellow feeling – offer a balm. “I really enjoy my job, getting to have coffee and a wee chat. My oldest customers have become family,” says Shrikul, who took over the Braidburn

five years ago. As a single parent, he found the role suited him much better than his long hours working as a waiter. Whenever he hears of deaths among his regulars, he always tries to attend their funeral. “Doing my home visits to pick up or drop off laundry means I often get to have a final chat with my customers, who have become part of my life. Even after they’ve died, their photos are still in my shop.”



- Raymond at the Barbican launderette. Photograph: Sarah Lee

Since the sudden death last year of Raymond’s wife of 50 years, Hazel, his routine of meeting neighbours at the launderette every Thursday goes a little way towards healing his private anguish. “I’m very fortunate to have such a strong community at the Barbican,” says Raymond, 96. “People here check up on me.” The retired civil servant joined the parachute regiment during the second world war at 16 years old. He lied about his age to get in, he says. Though he survived 18 missions in Germany, France and Palestine “without a scratch”, all of his friends died in combat. As he approaches his 100th birthday, Raymond hopes the Queen, who is a day older than him, will be the one to send the telegram.



- Photograph: Sarah Lee

As more and more launderettes close, the disappearances of these communal spaces that bring generations of people together are not just individual tragedies, but a loss to society that affects us all.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/feb/07/how-the-uks-dutiful-laundrette-is-fading-under-covid-and-energy-prices>

2022.02.07 - Coronavirus

- [AstraZeneca Doubts cast over jab ‘probably killed thousands’](#)
- [Live Covid: Canadian capital declares state of emergency over protests; Vietnam reopens schools after year-long closure](#)
- [Keir Starmer Labour leader cleared of breaking lockdown rules over office beer](#)
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Vaccines and immunisation

Harm to AstraZeneca jab's reputation ‘probably killed thousands’

Scientist who worked on jab criticises ‘bad behaviour’ by scientists and politicians who damaged reputation of Covid vaccine

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When the AstraZeneca jab was rolled out in the UK government advisers recommended under-40 should be offered an alternative due to a link to rare blood clots. Photograph: Robin Utrecht/Rex/Shutterstock

[Caroline Davies](#)

Mon 7 Feb 2022 07.35 EST

Scientists and politicians “probably killed hundreds of thousands of people” by damaging the reputation of the [AstraZeneca](#) vaccine, according to an Oxford scientist who worked on the jab.

Prof John Bell said: “They have damaged the reputation of the vaccine in a way that echoes around the rest of the world.”

“I think bad behaviour from scientists and from politicians has probably killed hundreds of thousands of people – and that they cannot be proud of that,” [he told a BBC Two documentary](#).

When the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab was rolled out in the UK government advisers recommended under-40s should be offered an alternative due to a link to very rare blood clots.

Fears over the links to blood clots also led other countries, including Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, the Republic of Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Bulgaria, Iceland and Thailand, to pause their use of the vaccine.

The AstraZeneca vaccine has also not played a significant role in the booster programme. The BBC reported it accounted for only 48,000 of the more than 37m booster doses given in the UK.

The AZ vaccine was celebrated as a UK success story and billed as “Britain’s gift to the world” when it was developed.

It was designed to be cheap, and developers had the ambition that it should be available at low cost. Unlike the mRNA vaccines, it could be transported at low cost and stored at fridge temperature. Nearly half of the adult population in the UK received two doses of the vaccine.

The AZ vaccine’s approval in the UK coincided with Britain’s separation from the EU.

“I don’t think it made relations with Europe any easier that it was promoted as the British vaccine,” Bell told the documentary, *AstraZeneca: A Vaccine for the World*, to be broadcast on the BBC on Tuesday at 9pm.

Before European regulators made their decision, Germany decided it should not be given to those over 65, and France's [president, Emmanuel Macron, called the vaccine "quasi-ineffective"](#) in people over 65.

The [European Medicines Agency approved the jab for all adults of all ages](#). Both France and Germany later reversed their positions, the documentary says, but the reputation of the vaccine had been damaged.

There were also major rows about distribution. The vaccine was being manufactured in both the UK and the EU, but because the UK had been guaranteed priority in a deal signed before the rest of Europe, the company was [unable to send vaccines](#) from British plants to supplement EU stock.

The overall risk of blood clots is very low – estimated at one in 65,000 overall – but slightly higher in younger adults. When European regulators declared that the vaccine's benefits outweighed its risks, most lifted their suspension – but put age restrictions on the vaccine, the BBC said.

When it came to deciding on booster doses in the UK, the clots issue and the simplicity of the Pfizer or Moderna mRNA jabs not being age-restricted, sealed the AZ vaccine's fate.

It is registered as a booster vaccine in the UK, but it proved simpler to give the majority of people Pfizer or Moderna – even though this was a more expensive option. Since then, evidence has shown that mixing different types of vaccine may offer better protection, according to the documentary.

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Covid news: Anti-vax mob targets UK opposition leader; Sweden eases travel curbs – as it happened

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Keir Starmer

Keir Starmer cleared of breaking lockdown rules over office beer

Durham police confirm they will take no further action against Labour leader over April 2021 incident

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Keir Starmer has previously said: ‘We didn’t break any rules, we were working in the office and we stopped for a takeaway.’ Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

PA Media

Mon 7 Feb 2022 02.34 EST

Keir Starmer has been cleared of an allegation he broke lockdown rules after he was filmed drinking a beer in an office.

The [Labour](#) leader was in the City of Durham MP's office, working in the run-up to the Hartlepool byelection in April 2021.

He has previously insisted he did nothing wrong, despite comparisons by his opponents to the “partygate” allegations at 10 Downing Street.

Durham police have confirmed they did not believe any offence was committed.

A spokes person for the force said: “Durham constabulary has reviewed video footage recorded in Durham on April 30 2021.

“We do not believe an offence has been established in relation to the legislation and guidance in place at that time and will therefore take no further action in relation to this matter.”

Starmer has previously told LBC Radio: “The restrictions allowed people to work when they needed to. We were running an election campaign, we were in a constituency office.”

He said no restaurants or pubs were open and the hotel in which he and colleagues were staying did not serve food, so “if you didn’t get a takeaway then our team wasn’t eating that evening”.

Asked if he was prepared to apologise, Starmer said: “We didn’t break any rules, we were working in the office and we stopped for a takeaway.”

He added: “We did nothing wrong.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/feb/07/keir-starmer-cleared-of-breaking-lockdown-rules-over-office-beer>

Australia news

Australia to reopen international border on 21 February

Scott Morrison announces all fully vaccinated visa holders will be able to enter, two years after Covid border closure

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The border announcement has provoked mixed emotions for those in Australia who have been separated from family or missed funerals in recent months. Photograph: Dan Peled/AAP

[Christopher Knaus](#)

[@knausc](#)

Mon 7 Feb 2022 02.35 EST

Australia will open its border for fully vaccinated tourists and all visa holders, a decision branded “bittersweet” by those who have missed funerals in recent weeks due to ongoing restrictions.

Scott Morrison on Monday announced the nation would open to all fully vaccinated visa holders, including tourists, on 21 February, almost two years after borders were first closed.

The borders have been progressively opening since November, but some groups including bridging visa holders, some immediate family members and tourists were yet to be allowed exemption-free travel.

The announcement on Monday provoked mixed emotions among those who have remained trapped by ongoing restrictions in recent months, including for Gold Coast resident Amy Jade Newsome, who is on a bridging visa while she waits a decision on a skilled worker visa.

Newsome was denied a compassionate exemption to attend her aunt's funeral in the UK last month, meaning she would have been trapped abroad if she had left Australia.

“It’s bittersweet and almost like the timing, it just couldn’t be any worse, I guess,” Newsome told *Guardian Australia*.

“I’m happy to be able to go home, but it’s been just over a month and now I can go? It’s a huge amount of emotions. Anger, happiness, frustration – I’m happy for everyone else and myself, I suppose, that we can go home.”

Bridging visa holders were the last temporary visa category subject to a closed border, forcing them to apply for travel exemptions. Freedom of information data showed about 70% of bridging visa holders' exemption applications were being rejected.

Latest: Australia will reopen its borders to fully vaccinated tourists from February 21, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announces — ending some of the world's strictest and longest pandemic travel bans.

— Alex Macheras (@AlexInAir) [February 7, 2022](#)

Get vaccinated. Get your booster. You not only won't die but you can visit Australia.

— Stephen McDonell (@StephenMcDonell) [February 7, 2022](#)

In one case reported by Guardian Australia, the federal government [rejected six compassionate exemption applications](#) made by Sydney woman Ash Fadian, a bridging visa holder wanting to travel to her brother-in-law's funeral in the UK.

"I'm beyond devastated. I'm just gutted to be treated like this," she said late last month.

Exemptions [from aged care workers](#) on bridging visas trapped overseas were also rejected, denying the industry staff at a time of acute shortages.

The decision to open the border has also been welcomed by Australian residents who have been unable to reunite with immediate family.

The government had pledged to allow immediate family to reunite prior to Christmas, but [the changes introduced last year did not define adult](#) sons and daughters of Australian residents as "immediate family". That meant people like [Stewart Hayter, an Adelaide-based grandfather](#), was unable to see his daughter and two grandchildren, who both live with autism.

Hayter's frustration was compounded by Morrison's public plea for working backpackers and students to ["come on down" last month](#). He described those comments as a "slap in the face" to those struggling to deal with prolonged separation from their families.

Hayter welcomed Morrison's announcement on Monday as "great news", which will enable him to be reunited with his family after more than two years.

In making the announcement, which [had been expected](#), Morrison emphasised the need for travellers to be fully vaccinated and referenced the Novak Djokovic scandal, saying "events earlier in the year should have sent

a very clear message to everyone around the world” that Australia requires visitors to be fully vaccinated.

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The tourism industry was quick to welcome the news.

Tourism & Transport Forum chief executive, Margy Osmond, said the sector was “thrilled” but that there was still detail to be worked through.

“There will be some issues around the technicalities of this. There’s work to be done. It’s not as simple as just turning on the tap,” she said.

The [Business](#) Council of Australia said the reopening put Australia in a position to “supercharge our economic recovery”.

“This move brings to an end fortress Australia,” said chief executive, Jennifer Westacott. “This is the light at the end of the tunnel that small business, tourism operators and the events industry was desperate to see.”

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2022.02.07 - Opinion

- [This government has been built on a fantasy. Restoring reality will cost the Tories dear](#)
- [Caught in the rental trap, we're trying to turn our flat into a co-op. Here's what we've learned](#)
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OpinionConservatives

This government has been built on a fantasy. Restoring reality will cost the Tories dear

[Nesrine Malik](#)

Boris Johnson's lies have damaged democracy - but it's the entire Conservative ecosystem that has let him get away with it



'Boris Johnson and party impunity, both so diligently promoted, mean it is nearly impossible to reverse course without blowing up the entire operation.'

Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Mon 7 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

There is a literary and cinematic device that usually signals the protagonist has entered a world that may look normal but is in fact slightly off. A clock might start moving backwards; a ball might be thrown in the air and keep

rising, disappearing into the sky. The main character in [Christopher Nolan's Inception](#), for example, moves between reality and complex dream worlds. When he can no longer tell the difference between the two, he uses a small silver spinning top as a reality check. If it loses momentum and stops spinning, he is awake. If it continues to spin, he is asleep, lost in an uncontrollable nightmare.

Since news of No 10's parties started being leaked to the press, many of us have become that anxious man, desperately waiting for the spinning top to slow down and topple over: for [Boris Johnson to resign](#); for his party to finally boot him out; for some sign that we are not living in a world where the rules no longer apply. Every time speculation about the 54 letters required to trigger a no-confidence vote has intensified, or a senior Tory has broken cover and condemned Johnson, or a report has confirmed partying during lockdown and "failures of leadership", the spinning top has slowed, as it has seemed certain that not another day could pass with Johnson still in office.

But it's been weeks now. To be precise, it's been more than *two months* since the first news broke of Johnson attending a party. Since then, there have been reports of the prime minister crying and broken, apologising to people in the halls of Downing Street like a drunk punter in a nightclub toilet after a bad breakup. Anonymous sources and their eager handlers brought us such final pronouncements as "it's over", "the letters will be in by 5pm", describing Johnson as "downcast and defeated". All this may not have necessarily implied a swift departure, but what it certainly didn't suggest was that, only days later, this same man would be [accusing the opposition leader](#) of failing to prosecute Jimmy Savile and implying the Labour frontbench took drugs.

The likelihood is that all these events amount to a slow bleed, rather than an immediate fall. Johnson's renewed fight (if the reports that he was flagging are to be believed) is the frantic flailing of a man on the ropes. But it's a hell of a slow bleed. Something always seems to stem it. A fortunately timed defection of one Tory MP to Labour snatched the no-confidence letters back. A Metropolitan police investigation, also well timed, filed down the teeth of [Sue Gray's report](#). A belligerent Vladimir Putin appeared to threaten (again,

what timing!) an invasion of Ukraine. Yet there are only so many excuses one can make before one realises it's not a series of last-minute lifesavers that have prevented Johnson's departure; it's the ecosystem that allows him to remain.

In this ecosystem, the norms that once tied action to consequence have been severed. For years now, the Conservative party has honed a political programme in which lying – and the styling-out of lies – is central to how the party runs business. From the false claims MPs made about the [windfalls that Brexit would deliver](#) to the NHS, to denying the reality of national PPE shortages, the guiding principle among Tory MPs has been to lie first and avoid questions later. If truly cornered, they switch to a strategy of attacking and undermining – judges, the media, [human rights lawyers](#), the EU, the civil service, Tory party members themselves who don't toe the line.

Johnson's appointment as party leader was a victory for a 2016 vintage of politics that combined aggression and relentless dissimulation. And it has worked. With Johnson as its battering ram, the government has managed to make it through the [highest Covid death toll in Europe](#), several corruption scandals and a barely scrutinised Brexit deal. To achieve this sort of licence, all the chips were put on one man with one style of leadership. But what happens when that style, that man, [becomes the liability](#)?

Well, you look for alternatives and you muster some moral courage to do the right thing. But Johnson and party impunity, both so diligently promoted over the past few years, mean it is nearly impossible to reverse course without blowing up the entire operation. And so what should have been a straightforward and swift matter of political principle that ended in Johnson's resignation has become something else entirely. Kremlinology and political calculations fill the moral void as MPs and advisers try to figure out the cost to their own careers.

It's no coincidence that the two most high-profile [MPs to criticise Johnson](#) – the failed Brexit secretary David Davis and the former prime minister Theresa May, whose Home Office was responsible for the Windrush scandal – have already cashed in their chips and absconded with their own legacies intact. In the meantime, Johnson gets what he wants, which is to live another

day, then another, and another, as the rest mull over the question: how to restore gravity without bringing the entire party crashing down in the process? Who, apart from Johnson, can cheerfully bluster through the disasters of Brexit and pandemic mismanagement, and lie with such effortless conviction? If your product is a con, you need a conman.

This is why it is taking so long. This is why rejoicing in the latest harms to Johnson's reputation feels more like a nervous, drawn-out affair than a relief. In theory, yes, there is a limit to what any politician can get away with in a democratic society. In theory, yes, what goes up must come down. But in practice, when an entire government has been built on fantasy and false promises, restoring the codes of reality is costly. It must be done slowly and carefully, as the party and modern conservatism steer away from Johnson and Brexit populism. But towards what? While they figure that out, Johnson remains, even as a dead man walking, and the silver top continues to spin.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionHousing

Caught in the rental trap, we're trying to turn our flat into a co-op. Here's what we've learned

[Ruby Lott-Lavigna](#)

This kind of homeownership is a sustainable solution to the housing crisis – but it's not easy in today's property market



Stockholm: in Sweden, nearly a quarter of homes are cooperatives.
Photograph: IBL/REX/Shutterstock

Mon 7 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

My home, like many people's, is a place of solace and comfort. It's somewhere I've worked through the end of a long-term relationship, hosted parties, waged an ongoing war with a squirrel in my garden and housed my extensive condiment collection. Despite my emotional ties to this place, I do

not own it. Like the other [13 million](#) people in the UK who rent from private landlords, that puts me in a permanently precarious situation. I am at the behest of a landlord, who can evict me for no reason, at any time.

In this state of uncertainty, you can be reminded of your powerlessness at any moment. That moment came for me and my housemates towards the end of last year, when we found out that our landlords were considering selling. So what did three young professionals with no rich benefactors but an unusually large understanding of housing policy do? We decided to try to turn our house into a cooperative.

The housing cooperative movement has become a striking alternative to a profit-driven housing market. In simple terms, turning a house into a co-op brings a property under collective ownership, where members can come and go and ensure that a house remains under not-for-profit ownership in perpetuity. Once the cost of the property has been paid off, rents in the co-op can drop to the minimal levels needed to fund repairs and other minor costs, forming a home that can be rented affordably and well below market rate. It's also sustainable – any surplus rent saved can be used to get other housing co-ops off the ground.

The modern cooperative movement has origins in 19th-century England and France, with one of the first housing cooperatives appearing in [Spotland Road, Rochdale, in 1861](#). Cooperatives are still found across the world today (in Sweden, [23% of homes are cooperatives](#)). Here in the UK, however, the sector is far smaller and the movement has slowed over the past 50 years. There have been some [notable exceptions](#), and cooperatives have received some political support from the [Green party](#). But in the UK, there are mere 685 housing co-operatives in total. The low figures are partly due to the immense rise in property prices since the 1980s, coupled with a lack of government support and a cultural obsession with private homeownership.

Advice on the process of creating a co-op is often outdated. There are some archaic guides, usually written in the early millennium around the birth of the internet. A 2003 guide [by Radical Routes](#) recommends, endearingly, fundraising “to cover telephone, postage and stationery” costs. The lack of

recent guidance on how to create your own co-op points to a struggling movement.

However, it is far from impossible. If you already have a property in mind, the first step is building a business plan – which in its most basic form is a spreadsheet that works out the projected cost of the project (though at a final stage this becomes slightly more complex). This business plan would include the cost of paying back a mortgage, paying other costs such as ground rent (if it's a leasehold), bills and housing insurance.

Ethical lenders such as [Triodos Bank](#) will lend you 70% of the cost of the property against your normal rent, rather than your collective incomes, so you're probably going to have to find the money for the other 30% yourself. That's another row in the spreadsheet. At the end, you divide this number by the number of tenants, and you create an estimated monthly rent. You'll need to get the landlords to agree to sell at an affordable price – potentially slightly below market rate (you are saving them estate agent fees, guaranteeing a chain-free sale and making them feel morally righteous, after all). After that, you incorporate the cooperative with a name, and register it for a small fee with the help of cooperative organisations such as Catalyst Collective. With all the above, you must then apply for a mortgage, find that 30% or fundraise for it, create co-op rules, and finally, buy the house. Ta-da: you have a co-op.

In many ways, it's a perfect solution to the housing crisis. By increasing the cooperative housing stock, co-ops create more affordable rooms and reduce the number of private tenancies that [statistically are of a poorer standard](#), subject to unregulated rent hikes and no-fault evictions. They also ensure the house remains something for people to live in rather than an asset (a concept that has bemused many friends of mine). In sentimental terms, tenants suddenly regain control over the space. In London, where rent can make up [38% of renters' incomes](#) (or more if you're young), it's one of the few prospects for stable, affordable living.

Of course, building a cooperative is not easy in today's housing market. Historically, fundraising 30% of a property's value was achievable. Indeed, many co-ops began as squats. Today, when house prices in the capital are

448% higher than in 1971, it's crippling. By our calculations, we may have to find at least £100,000 upfront in order to turn our home into a cooperative, on top of the monthly costs to pay off the mortgage and other associated costs. That would bring up our monthly rent by hundreds of pounds, making the prospect unviable.

Right now, turning our house into a co-op seems like an unrealistic prospect. Our landlords are receptive to the idea but of course would like to realise the best price for their property. The motivation to find some small way to evade the crippling housing crisis in this country is overwhelming, and between the Trello cards and Excel spreadsheets, I'm trying not to give up hope on our housing co-op just yet.

Ruby Lott-Lavigna is a senior staff writer at Vice UK

This article was amended on 7 February 2022. Prospective co-operatives would likely have to fund 30% of a property's value if mortgaging with an ethical lender, not 20% as an earlier version stated several times.

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Opinion[Boris Johnson](#)

Britain's Covid story is about sacrifice and selflessness. Boris Johnson can't tell it

[John Harris](#)



The prime minister's crumbling authority has created a vacuum, and the right is already filling it with dangerous narratives



Illustration: Matt Kenyon for the Guardian.

Sun 6 Feb 2022 07.23 EST

In June 2021, the American magazine the Atlantic ran a [long and admiring profile](#) of Boris Johnson. “To him,” wrote the author, “the point of politics – and life – is not to squabble over facts; it’s to offer people a story they can believe in.” Johnson himself made the same point, in rather more elegant language: “People live by narrative. Human beings are creatures of the imagination.”

Back then, those words were intended to capture Johnson’s talent for an unorthodox kind of political communication, and explain his success. But in early 2022 they sound more like an encapsulation of the reasons for his inevitable demise. The simple tale of the people who made the rules arrogantly breaking them is now immeasurably more powerful than any of the narratives he offers in his defence. To say that people tell stories, moreover, is often to associate them with lies, and so it has proved. Johnson’s evasions and untruths now extend into the distance; what he repeatedly – [and desperately](#) – said about Keir Starmer and Jimmy Savile is only the latest example.

There is one more sense in which his talent for storytelling has deserted him. “Partygate” has cost him [credibility and popularity](#), but it has also had another result that has been overlooked. Johnson’s apparently awful hypocrisy means he can no longer talk about a story all of us have lived through, and which has still not been satisfactorily told: that of the pandemic, the awful suffering and sacrifices it entailed, and what that experience says about us collectively and individually.

That is a very strange position for a prime minister to be in. Imagine if next week there was a national Covid memorial service at St Paul’s Cathedral or Westminster Abbey. The Queen would attend and give a reading; past premiers would solemnly take their seats alongside doctors, nurses and other NHS workers. If Johnson was still in office, it would be unusual if he did not speak. But given his indelible association with rule-breaking and recklessness, could he do it? Perhaps his brass neck would lead him to carry on as if nothing had happened, but the moment would be so awkward that it would threaten to render the whole occasion ludicrous.

Whatever the weekend’s chatter about a new Downing Street operation and a “[return to Tory values](#)”, all he seems to have left is mindless boosterism and a set of props. He puts on hard hats and makes [endless claims](#) about the UK’s economic strengths, but they sound increasingly crass; all those habitual boasts about the rollout of vaccines – symbolised by his seemingly daily visits to hospitals – suggest he’s claiming credit for other people’s efforts. He cannot weave a tale about the privations of the pandemic giving way to the benefits of Brexit or the glories of “levelling up”, because both are being [revealed as fantasies](#).

Not surprisingly, the current public mood feels almost numb: when all plan B restrictions in England were lifted on 27 January, it was telling that rather than hype about another “freedom day”, there was an overwhelming sense of everything remaining tense and uncertain – a feeling that the spiralling cost of living and evidence of a [national mental health crisis](#) are only making things worse.

Johnson [has promised](#) a “UK commission on Covid commemoration” and a “fitting and permanent” official national Covid memorial, but hardly any details have materialised. Meanwhile, answering the need for a story about

what we have all experienced, people and places are beginning to collectively mark the pandemic – both the lives that were lost and the shared spirit that got us through it. Commemorative spaces and [artworks](#) are being unveiled all over the country. In London there is the [national Covid memorial wall](#), whose spontaneous origins make it feel all the more authentic and human. The Welsh government is planting two [commemorative woodlands](#). Scotland has a government-funded project called [Remembering Together](#), intended to create occasions and spaces for remembrance, and honour how the country's communities “continue to come together during the most difficult times”.

As Johnson flounders, other politicians have come up with their own versions of that basic narrative – as happened last week, when [Starmer responded](#) to Sue Gray’s “update”. He spoke about people who followed the rules and restrictions now being consumed by “rage, by grief and even by guilt”, and the need for them to “feel pride in themselves and their country, because by abiding by those rules they have saved the lives of people they will probably never meet”.

But on the political right, the narrative vacuum Johnson has left is being filled by stories that feel toxic and dangerous. In some Tory circles, any idea of a dutiful public making sacrifices for the common good is at risk of being replaced by something very different: the belief that lockdowns and restrictions were simply a failed experiment, and what motivated people to follow what the Conservative backbencher Steve Baker [recently called](#) “minute restrictions on their freedom” was not a willing spirit of collective sacrifice, but a state that had decided “to bully, to shame and to terrify them”. On the wilder fringes of the internet, similar ideas are expressed by the irate keyboard warriors who insist that those of us who supported Covid rules were dupes and “bedwetters”.

Johnson’s endless disgrace will only fuel those stories. We already know that around £14bn of public money was wasted on fraudulent [Covid loan claims](#) and [unused personal protective equipment](#). The apparently imminent public inquiry into Britain’s experience of the pandemic will doubtless unearth more evidence of such misrule and incompetence. As people’s fury about Downing Street parties festers, these things may yet be the perfect raw material for a grimly familiar tale that would perfectly suit [Nigel Farage](#) and

his ilk: the idea that the pandemic really boiled down to yet another betrayal of the people by a rotten elite, and that most of the restrictions and rules were never really necessary in the first place. Its effects could go well beyond politics, into people's basic wellbeing: if this story catches on, it may only deepen the sense of torment and confusion that has already pushed many people over the psychological edge.

These are the dangers that the nodding-dog Tory supporters of a failed prime minister need to wake up to. People really do live by narratives, and in times of collective crisis those who rule us need to give us at least some sense of where we have been, where we might be going, and what everything means. Johnson's serial stupidities mean he is simply unable to do that: if the great storyteller has no stories, his own tale has surely reached its end.

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist
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US television

The Cosby Show was a groundbreaking show that will forever be tainted

[Andrew Lawrence](#)

A new docuseries on the allegations against Bill Cosby reminds us of the impact his sitcom had and how watching it will never be the same again



Phylicia Rashad and Bill Cosby in The Cosby Show
Photograph: Nbc-Tv/Kobal/Shutterstock

Mon 7 Feb 2022 02.11 EST

The Cosby Show was more than just a hit sitcom. It was a sitcom for the whole family, achingly so. Cliff Huxtable wasn't just a put-upon father of five or a deadpan granddad or an exasperated guardian. He was a sought-after obstetrician who brought even more kids into the show's fictional world. The scenes of him in his office, consulting with expectant families, allaying the anxieties of pregnant moms, make an important point: for all of

Dr Huxtable's hopelessness at home, he was actually really good at his job, grounding his character while making the adults in the audience feel seen, too.

We Need to Talk About Cosby, the buzzy Showtime documentary series that debuted at the end of January, ahead of Black History Month, views these scenes more skeptically, through the eyes of actor and artist Lili Bernard. In one Cosby Show episode she plays an expectant mother in an office consultation with the good doctor. On its face her scene seems sweet, perfectly innocent. But Bernard describes her on-set experience as emotionally distressful, painting Cosby as a tyrant who bullied her into delivering her lines just so. Her story speaks to a familiar on-set imbalance, the big shot who clashes with the small fry. But the more chilling reveal is that America's Dad also allegedly drugged and raped her at the Trump Taj Mahal casino in Atlantic City, in 1990, according to her 2021 lawsuit.

Herein lies the difficulty of cancelling Cosby for those of us who still consider his work to be worthwhile. It's one thing to cancel his live performances and pending TV projects; those directly enrich him. It's another to stop listening to his albums –especially the early stuff, where Cosby shows an R Kelly-like tendency to tell on himself in his Spanish Fly material. But before more than 60 women accused Cosby of sexual assault, The Cosby Show was a television institution in the prime of its I Love Lucy syndication phase. Which is to say you couldn't channel surf without landing on the episode where Theo pierces his ear or Rudy gets sick or Cliff gives birth to a hero sandwich. Netflix's acquisition of the series in the late-aughts was not only the start of a strategy of gaining subscribers by gobbling up classic TV, but also echoed the show's transformational impact in the 80s.

In my interview with [We Need to Talk About Cosby's director, W Kamau Bell](#), he concedes that part of the show's genius was offering up five different Huxtable children for the kids at home to connect with. Rudy, the baby daughter in the Huxtable brood, was the character who hooked me, who had me setting alarms for 7pm on Thursday nights. And for as inspirational as the show's seamless fusion of jazz and Black art and Black love and Black prosperity were, my main takeaway was Dr. Huxtable got to work from home. That was #goals.

Later years brought an appreciation for The Cosby Show as team effort, the product of years of collaboration between actors and writers and costumers and the like. Those syndication deals were great for Cosby, sure. But they also sustained workers who might've had difficulty moving on after the show, especially the Black collaborators. But as the allegations against Cosby snowballed, it was only a matter of time before the show was ripped from the air and from streaming, never to be easily conjured again and affecting more than just the guy whose name was in the title. When Geoffrey Owens, the actor who played Huxtable son-in-law Elvin, was [outed as a Trader Joe's employee in 2018](#), it spoke to the profundity of a Cosby problem that appears to have no bottom.

We Need to Talk About Cosby visits with Cosby Show contributors across the call sheet, from the overworked writers who were too removed to notice anything fishy to the stage manager who negotiated the line of models outside Cosby's dressing room. While the docuseries steers clear of rendering judgment on folks who were just trying to keep their jobs, it does look harshly on Cliff Huxtable's character wrinkles that once seemed innocuous – his aphrodisiac barbecue sauce, his job as a doctor who saw women in his basement office. It assumes a room full of writers didn't have a hand in developing those ideas, or that New York isn't littered with brownstone doctors offices. Besides, all TV shows turn cringey as our sensibilities evolve. A faithful reboot of the Honeymooners, with Ralph Kramden constantly threatening his wife with physical abuse, would never fly today.

The Cosby Show is so much more complicated. In the same way you can draw a line from Will and Grace to the legalization of gay marriage, you can trace a path from the Huxtable brownstone to the Obama White House; you'd be well challenged to tell the history of Black progress in America and on television without a glancing mention of the Huxtables. You could say The Cosby Show is the product of the man's better angels. But it also ruined the careers and lives of some of the women who did and didn't appear on the show. It's a sad story, no doubt, but not unique to Hollywood productions. The key difference here is we know the score. And now that The Cosby Show is dead and buried along with America's Dad, the kid in me can't help but wonder if we will ever truly reckon with all that was lost.

- We Need to Talk About Cosby airs on Showtime on Sundays with a UK date to be announced
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Ottawa declares state of emergency as Canada trucker protest gridlocks city

Police chief decries ‘siege’ after thousands of protesters join rallies against Covid restrictions

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00:50

Trucker Covid protest paralyses Canadian capital – video

[Peter Beaumont](#) and agencies

Mon 7 Feb 2022 08.13 EST

The mayor of Ottawa has declared a state of emergency in the Canadian capital after a week-long protest by truck drivers over Covid-19 restrictions that has gridlocked its city centre and sparked allegations of interference in domestic affairs by groups from the US.

The “freedom truck convoy” began as a movement against a national vaccine requirement for truckers crossing the border from the US but has turned into a rallying point against public health measures in [Canada](#).

The Ottawa mayor, Jim Watson, vowed to get “the city back” from protesters, and said the emergency declaration highlighted the need for support from other jurisdictions and levels of government. The protesters were behaving “insensitively” by continuously “blaring horns and sirens, [setting off] fireworks and turning it into a party”, he said. “Clearly, we are outnumbered and we are losing this battle. This has to be reversed.”

The state of emergency gives the city additional powers around procurement and how it delivers services, which could help it purchase equipment required by frontline workers and first responders.



A shed that was being used as a soup kitchen is hauled away as truckers and their supporters continue to protest against the Covid vaccine mandates in Ottawa. Photograph: Patrick Doyle/Reuters

The protests have drawn in US groups opposing Covid-19 restrictions and prominent Republican figures including Florida's governor, Ron DeSantis, seen as a potential presidential contender in 2024, and Donald Trump, who called the prime minister, Justin Trudeau, a “far-left lunatic” who Had “destroyed Canada with insane Covid mandates”.

On Sunday, Bruce Heyman, a US ambassador under President Barack Obama, said this interference had to end.

“Canada-US relations used to be mainly about solving technical issues,’ he tweeted. “Today Canada is unfortunately experiencing radical US politicians involving themselves in Canadian domestic issues. Trump and his followers are a threat not just to the US but to all democracies.

“Under no circumstances should any group in the USA fund disruptive activities in Canada. Period. Full stop.”

Police in Ottawa [announced](#) that anyone attempting to bring support to the blockade, including gas, could be arrested. “Overnight, demonstrators exhibited extremely disruptive and unlawful behaviour, which presented risks to public safety and unacceptable distress for Ottawa residents,” according to a news release on the Ottawa police website.

The growing crackdown in Ottawa came as protests spread to other cities over the weekend, including Toronto, Edmonton, Halifax, and Vancouver.

Thousands of protesters descended on the capital again on the weekend, joining a hundred who remained since last weekend. Residents of Ottawa are furious at the nonstop blaring of horns, traffic disruption and harassment and fear no end is in sight after the police chief called it a “siege” that he could not manage.



A protester sits on top of a campervan outside Parliament Hill in Ottawa.
Photograph: Patrick Doyle/Reuters

The Ontario premier, Doug Ford, described the scenes as unacceptable and like “an occupation”.

A GoFundMe campaign supporting the convoy was shut down by the site on Friday. [GoFundMe said it would refund](#) or redirect to charities the vast

majority of the millions raised by demonstrators. DeSantis and other Republicans said they would investigate the site.

In further signs of how the convoy has been seized upon by the US right, the Texas attorney general, Ken Paxton, tweeted: “Patriotic Texans donated to Canadian truckers’ worthy cause”, and the Texas senator, Ted Cruz, said on Fox News “government doesn’t have the right to force you to comply to their arbitrary mandates”.

Gerald Butts, a former senior adviser to Justin Trudeau, tweeted in response to the comments from south of the border: “For some senior American politicians, patriotism means renting a mob to put a G7 capital under siege.”

In Canada’s largest city, Toronto, police controlled and later ended a much smaller protest by setting up roadblocks and preventing any trucks or cars from getting near the provincial legislature. Police also moved in to clear a key intersection in the city.



Demonstrators protesting against Covid vaccine mandates and restrictions in downtown Toronto on 5 February. Photograph: Anatoliy Cherkasov/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Many Canadians have been outraged by the crude behaviour of the demonstrators. Some protesters set fireworks off on the grounds of the

National War Memorial late on Friday. A number carried signs and flags with swastikas last weekend and likened vaccine mandates to fascism.

Protesters have said they will not leave until all mandates and Covid-19 restrictions are removed. They are also calling for the removal of Trudeau's government, though it is responsible for few of the measures, most of which were put in place by provincial governments.

Associated Press contributed to this report

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[Germany](#)

Wit and wisdom of Germany's anti-noise philosopher revealed to new readers

Theodor Lessing's newly collected early writings shine light on writer who later prophesied climate change



Theodor Lessing ‘would write an essay about Kantian ethics one day, a column about the psychology of stage kisses the next’. Photograph: Theodor Lessing estate, Hannover city archive

[Philip Oltermann](#) in Berlin

[@philipoltermann](#)

Mon 7 Feb 2022 00.00 EST

In a nation of great thinkers who preferred the clean air of ivory towers over the hubbub of the streets, Theodor Lessing stood out for digging his

knuckles into the dust.

The great brawler of early 20th-century German philosophy picked fights with those he dismissed as “self-hating” fellow Jewish intellectuals, challenged the towering man-of-letters Thomas Mann to a duel, and skewered the sacred cows of the Nazis, who brutally murdered him shortly after seizing power in 1933.

After falling into obscurity for almost a century, a newly published annotated edition of his early writings introduces a new generation to Lessing’s witty and often waspish mind, including the target of his most obsessive gripe: urban din.

As founder of Germany’s first anti-noise society, the Jewish-German philosopher and avowed socialist campaigned against organ grinders, coachmen cracking their whips and housewives beating their carpets, expounding his pet hate in a monthly pamphlet called “Der Anti-Rüpel” (“The Anti-Lout”).

The noise of the city, Lessing wrote with characteristic acidity, was “the revenge of those working with their hands on those head-workers who laid down their laws”: a kind of aural narcotic that dulled the mind like alcohol or drugs and prevented urban dwellers from sharp enlightened thinking.



Lessing, Germany's visionary grumbler, has been largely neglected by academia since his death.

Published on the eve of Lessing's 150th birthday on Tuesday , with an afterword by editor Rainer Marwedel, the two-volume, 1,920-page anthology Culture and Nerves also reminds readers that the Hanover-born malcontent was not just the “noise philosopher” his critics liked to mock, but a sharp mind who managed to see through the fog of history with a clarity few of his contemporaries could match.

“Lessing wrote philosophically about a wide range of issues,” said Marwedel, who has spent the last 40 years of his life researching Lessing’s biography and annotated edition of his work. “He’d write an essay about Kantian ethics one day, a column about the psychology of stage kisses the next: he was quite French in that way, and not your typical German ivory-tower philosopher”.

Two threads run through Lessing’s diverse reflections: a deep philosophical pessimism inherited from his idol Arthur Schopenhauer, and a satirical style reminiscent of Heinrich Heine, in keeping with a Jewish-German literary tradition radically curtailed by the second world war.

“For Lessing, insight was attained through suffering, and knowledge was pain”, Marwedel told the Guardian. Such a combative outlook on life could make him a prickly intellectual sparring partner: his book on the “Jewish self-hatred” of his contemporaries allowed that term to gain widespread currency.

In 1910, he wrote a satirical screed that mocked the Jewish literary critic Samuel Lublinski using common antisemitic tropes, which in turn led novelist Thomas Mann to denounce Lessing as an “impertinent midget” in an essay of his own.

Lessing responded with a telegram in which he asked, perhaps more in jest than in earnest, whether Mann would follow up his words with an armed duel, but the author of Buddenbrooks and The Magic Mountain declined the offer.

Something is changing on our globe. There will be a change in the climate that will change many people's ways of living

Theodor Lessing, 1930

Lessing's prickliness could also make him immune to the delusions about German cultural superiority expounded by other thinkers of his age, however.

"I have grown sceptical of the beauty and greatness of the German mind," Lessing says in an essay on English drama, written at a time of growing resentment between the two nations, and reprinted in *Culture and Nerves*. "In England it is different. The average person there is more eccentric and unique than we are."

Europe's supposedly enlightened cultural tradition, he would go on to write, had done little to protect the continent's biodiversity: like a "cruel, merciless machine", it had driven bears, wolves, moose and other species to extinction.

In another essay, also written in 1930, the trained medic warned of the consequences of rainforest destruction and climate change: "Something is changing on our globe," Lessing wrote. "There will be a change in the climate that will change many people's ways of living, their professions and their work."

In the ultimate tour de force of his mocking eloquence and piercing foresight, Lessing portrayed the German president Paul von Hindenburg as a puppet of the ascendant National Socialist movement.

Hindenburg, he wrote in an article for German-language *Prager Abendblatt* newspaper in 1925, was "a representative symbol, a question mark, a zero. You could say: better a zero than a Nero. Unfortunately history shows that behind a zero there will always be hiding a future Nero."

The article was as prophetic as it was scandalous: "For German anti-democrats, Hindenburg was effectively a placeholder for the kaiser, so to poke even gentle fun at him amounted to *lèse-majesté*," said Marwedel.

The scandal led to boycotts of Lessing's lectures, his dismissal from teaching at Hanover's Technical University, and eventually his death in exile: on 30 August 1933, a team of three Nazi-supporting assassins from the Sudetenland shot the philosopher through the window of his study in Marienbad, making him the first known victim of the Nazi regime in the Czech Republic.

"If anything could be more shocking than the murder of Prof Lessing at Marienbad, it is the indecent joy with which the German press receives the news," the Manchester Guardian commented on Lessing's death at the time.

"The misguided roughs who shot him were the tools of something bigger than themselves – the Nazi creed which glorifies the murder of political opponents."

Lessing's spikes and bristles mean Germany's visionary grumbler has been largely neglected by academia since his death. An open letter published shortly after the assassination, calling for donations to set up an institute in Lessing's name and produce a complete edition of his writings, was signed by luminaries including Albert Einstein and Bertrand Russell but failed to collect sufficient funds.

Marwedel said he had funded the research for the latest volumes largely out of his own pocket. He is currently seeking funding to complete an edition of Lessing's entire works, amounting to at least nine volumes and 3,600 pages.

This article was amended on 7 February 2022 to correct a misnaming of Marienbad as Marienburg. Also, the main picture is from the Theodor Lessing estate, not Rainer Marwedel.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/07/theodor-lessing-germany-anti-noise-philosopher-book>

Joe Rogan

Spotify CEO condemns Joe Rogan over use of N-word but won't 'silence' him

Daniel Ek says he will not remove US podcaster from the platform and it was Rogan's decision to remove a number of past episodes



Spotify chief executive Daniel Ek (pictured) says he ‘strongly’ condemns racial slurs made by podcaster Joe Rogan but cautioned that cancelling voices is a slippery slope. Photograph: Janerik Henriksson/AP

Reuters

Mon 7 Feb 2022 01.59 EST

Spotify's chief executive officer [Daniel Ek](#) says he “strongly” condemns racial slurs and other comments made by popular US podcaster Joe Rogan, but will not be removing him from the platform.

Ek's comments, sent in a letter to staff seen by Reuters, come on the heels of Rogan issuing an apology for the second time in a week, [the latest for using racial slurs](#) after a montage video surfaced showing him repeatedly using the N-word.

Ek said it was Rogan's decision to remove a number of past episodes from The [Joe Rogan](#) Experience podcast, following discussions with the music streaming platform and his own reflections on some of the content in the show, including the usage of racially insensitive language.

"While I strongly condemn what Joe has said ... I want to make one point very clear – I do not believe that silencing Joe is the answer," Ek said.

Ek reiterated his stand on Spotify's content moderation policies and said that he believes the company should have clear boundaries around the content being published. The company should take actions when they are crossed, but he cautioned that cancelling voices is a slippery slope.

The company will also commit US\$100m for the licensing, development and marketing of music and audio content from historically marginalised groups in a bid to elevate creators from a diversity of backgrounds, according to the letter, which was confirmed by a Spotify spokesperson.

In his apology, Rogan had said the montage showed him using the epithet in conversations on shows over the last 12 years, and included examples of him discussing its use by Black and white comedians and others.

03:02

Joe Rogan offers 'sincere and humble apologies' for using N-word on his podcast – video

A mixed martial arts commentator and a prominent vaccine sceptic, Rogan has courted controversy with his views on Covid vaccines, the pandemic and government mandates to control the spread of the virus.

Prominent singer-songwriters [including Neil Young and Joni Mitchell](#) said they were removing their music from Spotify in protest at coronavirus

misinformation broadcast on the platform.

The backlash against Covid misinformation on the streaming service wiped more than \$2bn off its market value last week.

[Spotify has said it would add a “content advisory”](#) to any episode with discussion of Covid-19.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2022/feb/07/spotify-ceo-condemns-joe-rogan-over-use-of-n-word-but-wont-silence-him>

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[Peng Shuai](#)

Peng Shuai says Weibo post sparked ‘enormous misunderstanding’

Tennis player gave interview to L'Équipe on sidelines of Beijing Olympics, accompanied by Chinese official



China's Peng Shuai has spoken to the French daily L'Équipe in Beijing.
Photograph: Edgar Su/Reuters

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Mon 7 Feb 2022 10.54 EST

The Chinese tennis player [Peng Shuai](#) has given her first interview to an independent media organisation since she alleged on Weibo that a senior Chinese official had coerced her into sex, saying it was an “enormous misunderstanding”.

The interview with the French sports daily L'Équipe came as the International Olympic Committee said it was not up to them or anyone else “to judge, in one way or another, her position”.

Peng also announced in the interview that she was retiring from tennis.

Peng disappeared briefly from public life after the Weibo post in November, sparking a major international campaign calling for confirmation from the Chinese authorities that she was safe and well.

Speaking to L'Équipe in Beijing, Peng said her original statement had been misunderstood. She said she had never accused the former vice-premier [Zhang Gaoli](#) of sexual assault and denied she had disappeared from public view afterwards.

She was accompanied to the interview by the Chinese Olympic Committee's chief of staff, who also acted as translator, the report said. L'Équipe was also required to submit questions in advance and publish her comments verbatim in question-and-answer form, as preconditions for the interview.

Peng thanked everyone for caring about her wellbeing, but also questioned why it had been “exaggerated”.

“I didn't think there would be such concern and I would like to know: why such concern?” she said.

Peng said there had been a “enormous misunderstanding” [over her post](#), which she confirmed she deleted herself a little under 30 minutes after publishing it. “I erased it,” she said, adding: “Why? Because I wanted to.” She did not give further details.

Peng's latest statement – an apparent attempt to ease international concerns over her wellbeing – generated further suspicion. Teng Biao, a US-based Chinese human rights lawyer, [said on Twitter](#): “The simple truth is, #Pengshuai is forced to say what the Chinese authorities want her to say.”

The Women's [Tennis](#) Association also admitted its concerns over Peng have not been alleviated.

“It’s always good to see Peng Shuai, whether in an interview or attending the Olympic Games. However, her recent in-person interview does not alleviate any of our concerns about her initial post from 2 November.

“To reiterate our view, Peng took a bold step in publicly coming forth with the accusation that she was sexually assaulted by a senior Chinese government leader. As we would do with any of our players globally, we have called for a formal investigation into the allegations by the appropriate authorities and an opportunity for the WTA to meet with Peng – privately – to discuss her situation. We continue to hold firm on our position and our thoughts remain with Peng Shuai.”

Peng had posted an essay to Weibo in early November, describing an on-again-off-again consensual affair with the then 75-year-old, and an incident in which he allegedly pressured her into having sex after inviting her to his house to play tennis with him and his wife.

Amid what she described as “complicated feelings”, they allegedly rekindled the affair, until an argument and his failure to meet her shortly before the post.

In the L’Équipe interview, Peng reiterated comments she gave [to a Singaporean state-controlled outlet in December](#), saying she never accused Zhang or anyone else of sexually assaulting her.

“I hope that we no longer distort the meaning of this post. And I also hope that we don’t add more hype on this,” she said. “I never said anyone sexually assaulted me.”

In her post, Peng had described Zhang pressing her into having sex and her not agreeing, before relenting.

“After dinner I still did not want to, and you said you hated me! You also said that in these seven years, you never forgot me and that you would be good for me etc etc,” she wrote, according to a [translation](#) by What’s On Weibo.

“I was afraid and panicked and carrying the emotions of seven years ago, I agreed ... yes, we had sex.”

The post went viral despite its quick removal from Weibo. With efforts to contact Peng proving fruitless, and the topic completely censored inside [China](#), the head of the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA) Steve Simon went public with his concern for her welfare, and global tennis stars began advocating under the hashtag #WhereIsPengShuai.

Even as the Peng saga has been widely reported by world’s media for a number of months, it remains off limits to people inside China. Mentions of Peng and the incident could not be found on Weibo, the country’s dominant social media platform.

Late in November, almost three weeks after Peng’s post, China’s external English-language state media began disputing the global concerns, publishing a translation of an [email said to be from Peng to Simon](#) – and which Peng later said she did write – and videos of several apparently choreographed public appearances.

In the interview with L’Équipe, Peng also said she “never disappeared” and she didn’t know why such concern spread.

“It’s just that a lot of people, like my friends, including from the IOC, messaged me, and it was quite impossible to reply to so many messages,” she said, adding that she had responded to emails from friends and the WTA but she had difficulty accessing the organisation’s online communications system.

The IOC spokesperson Mark Adams on Monday said it was doing “everything we can to ensure she is happy”.

“I don’t think it’s up to us to be able to judge in one way, just as it’s not for you to judge, in one way or another, her position,” he said.

Despite multiple attempts by the WTA, only the IOC has been able to meet with Peng.

Questions have previously been raised about the IOC's handling of the matter, with the organisation accused of too readily accepting Chinese government assurances as to Peng's welfare ahead of the [Winter Olympics](#).

The IOC also [announced](#) on Monday its president, Thomas Bach, had met with Peng face to face on Saturday, alongside the former chair of the Athletes' Commission and the IOC member Kirsty Coventry.

"During the dinner, the three spoke about their common experience as athletes at the Olympic Games, and Peng Shuai spoke of her disappointment at not being able to qualify for the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020," a statement said. It added that Peng had accepted an invitation to meet again in Europe and to stay in contact with Coventry.

The statement did not mention the allegations or Bach's recent comments that [he would support her](#) if she wanted an investigation into Zhang.

In her interview, Peng urged against combining sport and politics, a key message of Beijing during the Olympics as it faces widespread scrutiny and criticism over its human rights records, with diplomatic boycotts and social media campaigns for commercial or viewing boycotts.

"My sentimental problems, my private life, should not be involved in sports and politics," she said. "Sport must not be politicised because when it is, most of the time that amounts to turning one's back on the Olympic spirit, and it goes against the will of the world of sport and of the athletes."

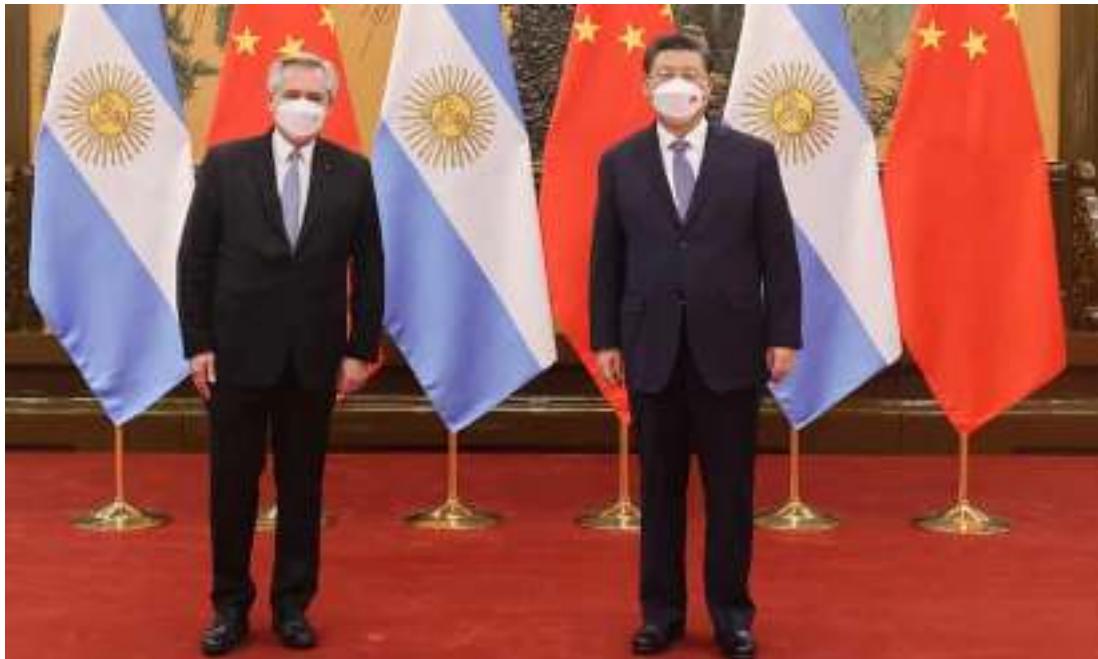
Additional reporting by Vincent Ni

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Falkland Islands

Truss says Falklands part of ‘British family’ after China backs Argentina

Accord signed by Alberto Fernández and Xi Jinping at Winter Olympics also supports Chinese claim to Taiwan



Argentina’s Alberto Fernández and China’s Xi Jinping met at the Beijing Winter Olympics, where Argentina signed up to China’s Belt and Road infrastructure initiative. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

PA Media

Sun 6 Feb 2022 19.07 EST

Liz Truss has defended the Falklands as “part of the British family” after China backed Argentina’s claim over the South American islands.

The [foreign secretary tweeted that “China must respect the Falklands’ sovereignty”](#) after the Argentinian president, Alberto Fernández, met China’s President Xi on the fringes of the Beijing Winter Olympics.

According to a statement on the website of the Chinese embassy in the UK, the two leaders spoke of their “deep friendship” and Argentina signed up to [China’s Belt and Road infrastructure initiative](#), a state-backed campaign for global influence.

But they also signed an agreement in which China reasserted its support for Argentina’s claim to the Falklands, while Fernández backed Xi’s one-China policy, which claims Taiwan as its own.

The statement said Argentina should be able to “fully exercise its sovereignty over the Malvinas (Falklands) Islands issue”.

But Truss said: “We completely reject any questions over sovereignty of the Falklands. The Falklands are part of the British family and we will defend their right to self-determination. [China](#) must respect the Falklands’ sovereignty.”

Chen Weihua, a journalist for China Daily, an English-language newspaper owned by the Chinese Communist party, replied: “But it’s OK for UK to challenge China’s sovereignty in the South China Sea by sending navy vessels? At least China has not sent its navy near the Malvinas, or what you call the Falklands.”

[Xi has also met Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, in recent days.](#) The two leaders pushed back against US pressure and declared their opposition to any expansion of Nato – a key issue in the current tensions on the Ukrainian border.

In a joint statement, they criticised “interference in the internal affairs” of other states and, in a thinly veiled reference to the west, said: “Some forces representing a minority on the world stage continue to advocate unilateral approaches to resolving international problems and resort to military policy.”

China has increasingly shown support for [Moscow in its dispute with Ukraine](#), which is threatening to escalate into armed conflict.

The Conservative MP and chair of the Commons defence select committee, Tobias Ellwood, has warned of the coming together of China and Russia.

After the leaders' meeting, he tweeted: "Putin is not in China to discuss the bobsleigh, but to further align Russia away from the west to the east. This is the axis of power that will dominate our era.

"Any sanctions we impose will only assist Putin with his aim. This is the bigger picture we are missing."

On Sunday, Ellwood added: "With China now onside, the Russian invasion into Ukraine is imminent. Our window for the west to prevent this is now closing fast."

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Headlines tuesday 8 february 2022

- [Boris Johnson PM will not apologise for Jimmy Savile remark, says minister](#)
- [Live No 10 refuses to accept link between mob hounding Starmer and PM's Savile smear – UK politics](#)
- [No 10 Guto Harri reportedly lobbied No 10 chief of staff to stop Huawei ban](#)
- [Carrie Johnson Senior Tory and Labour figures speak out over media focus](#)

[UK news](#)

Pressure mounts on Johnson to apologise for Jimmy Savile remark

Speaker and senior cabinet minister urge PM draw line under matter after protesters shout abuse at Keir Starmer



Officers use a police vehicle to escort Keir Starmer to safety after the Labour leader was surrounded by protesters on Monday. Photograph: Conor Noon/PA

[Jessica Elgot](#) and [Heather Stewart](#)

Tue 8 Feb 2022 13.07 EST

Boris Johnson is under growing pressure to apologise for remarks falsely linking Keir Starmer to the failure to prosecute Jimmy Savile after a senior cabinet minister and the Commons Speaker urged him to draw a line under the matter.

No 10 made clear the prime minister would not apologise for the remarks, which provoked renewed anger when protesters shouted abuse at the Labour leader on Monday. Surrounded near parliament, Starmer was branded a “paedophile protector” and one demonstrator carried a noose. He and his Labour colleague David Lammy were bundled into a police car.

Eleven Tory MPs have called for Johnson to retract and apologise for the claims he made in the Commons last week.

Michael Gove, the levelling-up secretary, did not defend the comments when asked about them on Tuesday. “It’s a uniquely sensitive issue and I think the sooner the debate moves on, the better,” he told reporters at Convention of the North in Liverpool.

The Commons Speaker, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, condemned the abuse of Starmer and the shadow home secretary and linked it to the prime minister’s comments last week, which he called “inappropriate”.

01:36

Anti-vax protesters shouting false Savile slurs target Keir Starmer – video

Hoyle told MPs: “Those sorts of comments only inflame opinions and generate disregard for the house and it is not acceptable. Our words have consequences. And we should always be mindful of that fact.”

Johnson’s official spokesperson said the prime minister had already “clarified” his remarks to make clear Starmer was not personally responsible for the Savile case because the comments were “capable of being misconstrued by a tiny minority”.

Asked whether that “tiny minority” included the crowd that surrounded Starmer, he said: “I’m not seeking to link anything. I wouldn’t seek to look into the motivations of individuals.”

Chris Philp, the digital minister, had earlier said the comment that Starmer had failed to prosecute the child sex offender was “not incorrect” but said Johnson had clarified he did not mean Starmer took the decision when he led the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

“The first comments in the house on the previous Monday were capable of being misconstrued and that is why it is important and right that a couple of days later that Boris Johnson ... did clarify that he was not suggesting at any time that Keir Starmer had personal responsibility for the case,” Philp told BBC Breakfast. “But he obviously did have responsibility for the conduct of the CPS.

“I don’t think there is any way you can reasonably suggest that the comments on Keir Starmer’s overall responsibility for the CPS in any way provoked the very unseemly and totally unacceptable harassment we saw last night.”

A No 10 source said the prime minister did not intend to go further than his condemnation of the abuse of Starmer.



Keir Starmer is escorted to a police car after being heckled by protesters.
Photograph: Twitter

Johnson’s initial comments did not suggest Starmer had taken institutional responsibility but said as director of public prosecutions he had “spent more time prosecuting journalists and failing to prosecute Jimmy Savile”.

Tories including the former chief whip Julian Smith and the select committee chairs Simon Hoare and William Wragg suggested Johnson

should apologise. Others who also voiced concern at the consequences of the prime minister's rhetoric included the former cabinet ministers David Davis and Caroline Nokes and the ex-ministers Stephen Hammond and Tobias Ellwood, as well as three MPs elected in 2019, Anthony Mangnall, Aaron Bell and Rob Largan.

The husband of Jo Cox, the Labour MP murdered in 2016 by a far-right extremist, also warned about the consequences of politicians lending credence to far-right conspiracy theories.

Brendan Cox said the prime minister's choice to "inject poison into politics" with his comment had "unintended consequences".

"If it was a one-off, I think we could be more sanguine about it," he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. "I think the people that are directly responsible for what happened yesterday were the people that did it.

"However, it's also true that if you inject poison into politics that has a whole set of unintended consequences that people will react to in different ways and at times that can lead over into intimidation, it can lead over to violence, it can lead over into extremism."

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

[**Politics**](#)

Chris Heaton-Harris is new chief whip and Jacob Rees-Mogg minister for Brexit opportunities – reshuffle as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2022/feb/08/boris-johnson-keir-starmer-protesters-jimmy-savile-smear-covid-uk-politics-news>

Huawei

Guto Harri reportedly lobbied No 10 chief of staff to stop ban on Huawei

Boris Johnson's new press chief believed to have been trying to stop Chinese firm from being dropped from UK's 5G network



Guto Harri understood to have approached senior No 10 official seeking advice on which minister to approach for help with Huawei. Photograph: Vickie Flores/EPA

[Tom Ambrose](#)

Mon 7 Feb 2022 18.30 EST

Boris Johnson's new communications director lobbied a former chief of staff at Downing Street not to ban Chinese technology company Huawei over spying fears, leaked documents suggest.

Guto Harri, who was [appointed No 10's press chief](#) on Monday in the wake of the partygate resignations, reportedly asked Sir Eddie Lister which ministers he could “nudge” for help.

He met Lister, who was then the prime minister’s chief of staff, as well as three top executives from the technology firm Huawei, which has links with the ruling Chinese Communist party, on 2 June 2020, according to [the Sun](#).

The paper said that Harri, representing lobbying firm Hawthorn Advisors, used the 25-minute video call to ask which ministers to approach at a time when the security service was reviewing the risk of allowing the firm into the UK’s core telecommunications network.

He asked Lister if there were “any ministers we should talk to? Perhaps give a nudge in DCMS [Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport] or Treasury?”.

The paper said that, according to minutes taken at the time, the No 10 chief of staff suggested Johnson did not want to ban [Huawei](#) but was “caught” between pressure from the Tory party and the US government.

He said: “This PM is not anti-China and is not Donald Trump,” adding that Johnson “believes in good relationships with [China](#). He is not coming from a negative place in any way.”

He added: “We are caught. We want the technology, we want it rolled out. There’s an American concern and a parliamentary concern. There are a large number of MPs across the political divide who have a problem with China. Some are Atlanticists, some over Covid, some over Hong Kong, some over human rights.”

No 10 defended Harri’s appointment by Johnson on Sunday when his links with Huawei were first reported and said full security checks had been concluded.

However, the former Tory leader Sir [Iain Duncan Smith](#) joined Johnson’s former aide Dominic Cummings in calling for further investigation into Harri’s appointment.

He said: “Given the issue of the threat to national security that Huawei poses, that lay behind why Huawei have been banned from our 5G system, it is important that there is clarity in these matters.

“Will Guto Harri now be subject to full security oversight including past involvements with Huawei?”

A No 10 spokesperson told the Sun: “In full compliance with appropriate guidance, government officials met with a number of interested parties, including Huawei, following the change in US policy.”

Telecoms providers were ultimately told they must stop installing Huawei equipment in the UK’s 5G networks.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/feb/07/guto-harri-reportedly-lobbied-no-10-chief-of-staff-to-stop-ban-on-huawei>

[Carrie Johnson](#)

Senior Tory and Labour figures speak out over media focus on Carrie Johnson

MPs defend PM's wife after criticism of her in extracts from book by Conservative peer Michael Ashcroft



Carrie Johnson and her husband making a virtual call at Chequers in December. Photograph: No 10 Downing Street/Reuters

[Rowena Mason](#) Deputy political editor

Mon 7 Feb 2022 14.56 EST

Senior political figures, from Keir Starmer to Sajid Javid, have criticised negative briefings that suggest [Carrie Johnson](#) is partly to blame for the troubles of her husband's premiership.

MPs came to the defence of the prime minister's wife after the publication of extracts from a new book by the Conservative peer Michael Ashcroft which

suggested her “behaviour is preventing [Boris Johnson] from leading Britain as effectively as the voters deserve”.

In response, a spokesperson for Carrie Johnson issued a statement saying she “plays no role in government” and had been targeted by enemies of the prime minister in a “brutal briefing campaign”.

Boris Johnson’s leadership is hanging by a thread after scandals over No 10 parties – some of which were also attended by Carrie Johnson – and the funding of the No 11 flat refurbishment, which was her [project with the celebrity designer Lulu Lytle](#).

But Javid, who Carrie Johnson worked for in the past as an adviser, described some of the attacks on her as sexist and misogynistic.

“This whole focus on Carrie Johnson in some of these reports, I think it’s very undignified and very unfair,” said the health secretary.

Starmer said people should not be dragged “into the gutter”.

The Labour leader said: “I approach politics on the basis that we should treat people with respect. We can profoundly disagree but we should treat people with respect. And I would take exactly that approach with Carrie Johnson.

“Obviously, respect differences of opinion, but I do not go along with the idea that we should drag everybody into the gutter.”

The shadow work and pensions secretary, Jonathan Ashworth, also waded in, saying: “I don’t think it’s fair or right at all, and I’ll tell you why. I just think as a general rule, a politician’s partner – any politician, any party – should be off limits.

“It’s the politician that has chosen to have a public life … I think this whole focus on [Carrie Johnson](#) in some of these reports, I think it’s very undignified and very unfair.”

Sources have previously told the Guardian that the prime minister’s wife had on occasions tried to have her say on policy issues, particularly on the environment. Former Downing Street insiders said they felt Carrie could

make her husband change his mind, sometimes overnight, on an issue they thought was already agreed.

The prime minister would also tell aides that if he did not take a particular course of action, it would anger his wife. They also reported Johnson receiving scores of messages from her during the working day – and her repeatedly calling his staff, insisting the prime minister be hauled out of meetings to talk to her.

Paul Goodman, the editor of the ConservativeHome website, which is owned by Ashcroft, said on Monday that the idea that the prime minister's wife had partly prevented Johnson from leading effectively was his “impression of the consensus view in Westminster, at least among ministers, MPs and spads”.

However, he also agreed with Carrie Johnson's defenders that the ultimate responsibility lay with the prime minister.

“Whether the charge is true or not, it deflects from the main point. Which is that the prime minister himself, not his spouse, bears responsibility for his decisions,” he wrote.

“It would be unfair to blame others for them, even his politically engaged wife. After all, he chooses who he divorces, marries and has children with.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/07/senior-tory-and-labour-figures-speak-out-over-media-focus-on-carrie-johnson>

2022.02.08 - Spotlight

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[Will Arnett](#)

Interview

‘I cried for an hour’: Arrested Development’s Will Arnett on divorce, fatherhood and friendship

[Hadley Freeman](#)



Will Arnett: ‘I like characters who are really cocky and really dumb. That seems to be a great cocktail for me.’ Photograph: Corey Nickols/Contour by Getty Images

After years of playing insecure braggarts, the actor is taking on a new challenge – as star of the improvised celebrity cop show *Murderville*. He talks about his ‘weird’ period, his split with Amy Poehler, and having a baby in his 50s



[@HadleyFreeman](#)

Tue 8 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

No one is better at playing idiotic egomaniacs than Will Arnett, and I mean that as the highest of compliments. From his malevolent ice skating champion in *Blades of Glory*, to the nefarious TV executive Devon Banks in *30 Rock*, to most famously, Gob (pronounced, biblically, “Job”) Bluth, the inept eldest son on [Arrested Development](#), Arnett has cornered the market on fools who brag about themselves to compensate for how little they have to brag about.

“Like the guy in the \$4,000 suit is holding the elevator for the guy who doesn’t make that in three months. Come on!” [Gob shouts at his employees](#). So it is extremely pleasing that when we connect by video chat, and Arnett

appears on my screen from his home in Los Angeles, that he is sitting in front of a clutch of awards. Like the actor with a shelf of awards is going to talk to the journalist with nothing. Come on!

“Oh man. I just figured out that I probably shouldn’t be sitting here,” Arnett says when I ask about the metalware behind him. “It’s embarrassing because it’s like: ‘Hey man, we can all curate what we have in our background – and you choose to have that!’ I’ve gotten a lot of shit from friends on Zoom calls about it. But honestly, I didn’t put them there, I just moved house …”

As well as moving house, Arnett, 52, had a baby over lockdown, Alexander, known as Denny, with his girlfriend Alessandra Brawn. He also has two older sons with his ex-wife, Amy Poehler. How has having his third baby in his 50s compared with having his first in his 30s? “Well, when you already have kids, you know how long the road is. Like, this morning, just getting my two older boys out of the house and to school took a couple hours and by the time I’m home it’s 8.30 and I’m three hours into the day already and I’m like: ‘Oh my god. I’m in this for A WHILE,’” he says, rubbing his eyes. Arnett looks far better than anyone with a 20-month-old baby has any right to, but his handsome appearance always did undercut his loser persona (or maybe that should be the other way around). So he’s not planning the fourth and fifth babies? He fixes his face into an exaggerated grin with wide-open, terrified eyes. “No. I am absolutely not doing that.”



Arnett (right) with Jason Bateman in Arrested Development in 2005.
Photograph: Rex/20thC.Fox/Everett

The awards are for his work on the [superlative animated Netflix series BoJack Horseman](#), which ran from 2014 to 2020, because as well as being the go-to guy for malevolent doofuses, Arnett is the man to call if you're making an animated film or TV show and you need a deep and scratchy voice that audiences adore. Name a blockbuster animated film of the past 20 years and Arnett was probably involved: Ratatouille, Despicable Me, the Lego films – in which he played a hilariously arrogant Batman. “I think the first thing I did was ... I want to say Ice Age 2? Maybe? But don’t get me wrong, I’m not one of those actors who are like: ‘Actually I’ve done so many, I can’t remember which one it is.’ It’s purely bad memory,” he adds quickly. Liza Minnelli swooned to his baritone on Arrested Development and I ask when he realised he had such a great voice and whether he does anything to take care of it. He laughs at the very thought.

“Never and no. It wasn’t until I moved to New York that people mentioned my voice to me. Maybe in Canada people don’t really compliment each other. Actually, a member of my extended family said to me: ‘People PAY you for that voice?!’”

Unlike his characters, Arnett, who grew up in Toronto, is cursed with a very Canadian sense of self-awareness and self-mockery. “I hope I’m not being too earnest,” he frets at one point. “I just get so worried when I talk about my life.” And yet Arnett has been famous now for decades. He didn’t breakthrough until he was almost 33, when Mitch Hurwitz, the creator of Arrested Development, cast him as Gob after years of false starts. “From the moment I met Mitch, my life changed. I learned so much about the world from him, and I’m a better person because of my friendship with him. You’re not going to get me crying,” he says, tears suddenly welling in his eyes.

Arnett was one of the breakout stars of Arrested Development, going from a complete unknown to being cast in movie comedies such as Blades of Glory, Hot Rod and Semi-Pro, playing characters not a million miles from Gob. “I like characters who are really cocky and really dumb. That always seems to be a really great cocktail for me,” he says.



Flaked. Photograph: Darren Michaels/Netflix

And yet, over the past decade, he seemed to have enough of that cocktail. BoJack Horseman and Flaked, the Netflix series he created, wrote and starred in 2016, about a man struggling to maintain his sobriety, were melancholic rather than farce. “It’s a new phase,” [he told interviewers at the](#)

time. Arnett was always a good actor, having studied at the Lee Strasberg Institute, rather than taking the usual route to comedy through sketch shows. The dramatic background helped his comedy: his idiots are endearing because he balances the silliness with epiphanic moments of bleak self-awareness, most obviously with Gob. As a result, we Arrested fans laughed at Gob, but we also wanted to things to work out for him. Arnett was especially excellent on BoJack Horseman, as the destructive has-been actor who knows how awful he is. Yet he had always been so winning at playing losers, it was hard not to feel that, in jettisoning his signature character, something had been lost.

So it's a joy to see him in his latest Netflix series, Murderville, a US take on BBC Three's Murder in Successville, in which he plays a cop named Terry Seattle – “and no, I've never been there,” Seattle growls. In each episode, Seattle has to solve a murder with a different celebrity trainee – Sharon Stone, Conan O'Brien, Annie Murphy, Ken Jeong, Marshawn Lynch and Kumail Nanjiani all take turns in the role – and the celebrity has no script. Yes, it's the improv celebrity cop show you didn't know you needed in your life. I was a little sceptical when I heard about the concept, and I have seen Arnett in too many short-lived shows. But I ended up bingeing it and, at times, especially with Nanjiani's episode, I cried with laughter. It's shamelessly silly, and watching Arnett try to control the storyline, while also bouncing off the bemused celebrity guest and still maintain his persona as the moronic cop feels like a glimpse of sunshine after a long winter: you can't help but grin. But why isn't Arnett's Arrested co-star – and off-screen best friend – Jason Bateman in the show?

“He was supposed to be! But because of the scheduling of his other Netflix show [Ozark], he couldn't. What happened was a bummer because – well, wait,” he says, correcting himself. “Here's the good news: I actually ended up making the show with a bunch of people I didn't know, which was amazing. Because I'm lazy, I love doing stuff with my friends, but everyone was working. But actually, we ended up getting so many amazing people.”



As Terry Seattle in Murderville. Photograph: Lara Solanki/Netflix

It works to the show's advantage to have Arnett trying to manage people he clearly isn't best buddies with, as it makes proceedings feel less chummy. Stone is an obvious example. "She's so confident and smart, I felt like her assistant," he says, and this comes across very satisfactorily on screen. But the real joy of Murderville is that, after the existential angst of BoJack, it's nice to see Arnett enjoying himself again.

"You know, the last couple years have been so weird for me, and this was just about having fun," he says.

The weird years began in 2012 when Arnett and Poehler announced, after nine years of marriage, that they were separating; they divorced in 2016. They had often worked together and Mindy Kaling, in her bestselling memoir, *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?*, cites their relationship as the ideal, a sentiment echoed by fans. So their split sparked an enormous amount of online commentary. What's it like going through a divorce when the outside world is so invested in you as a couple?

"People talk about you like they know you and they talk about your relationship as if they know what's going on. So imagine how weird that is. It's brutal with any relationship, and we have kids, and without getting into

specifics, you then see stuff online, like, this one journalist wrote: ‘I’m Team Amy.’ I’m like: ‘You’re a grown person. What are you talking about? This is a breakup. This is a family. This isn’t some game.’”

I tell him that my favourite part of [Poehler’s 2014 memoir, Yes Please](#), is her chapter in which she imagines hypothetical books to help people through a divorce. One is called I Want a Divorce! See You Tomorrow! – to help divorced parents with young children “have a knock-down, drag-out fight and still attend a kid’s birthday party together on the same day”. He makes a small smile. “Yeah, you get on with it. It’s been almost 10 years and my kids are so lucky that Amy is their mother and I’m so lucky that we’re such a huge part of each other’s lives, even more so than we were five years ago,” he says.



With Amy Poehler in *Blades of Glory*. Photograph: Snap Stills/REX Shutterstock

At the time of the separation, Arnett was making season four of *Arrested Development*, when Netflix revived the show in 2013 after Fox abruptly ended it in 2006. He was thrilled to be back with the cast, but the shoot was, he says “almost excruciating … Just brutal, brutal, brutal. I was driving to the set one day and I pulled over to the side of the road and cried for an hour.” At least he was working with Hurwitz at the time, who, he says,

helped him to turn his pain into something “hilarious and cathartic” on the show.

That pain directly fed into BoJack Horseman and Flaked. His self-loathing, narcissistic character on the latter was, he says, “an amalgamation of characteristics that I didn’t like about other people and other stuff about me that I didn’t like. Yeah, what a weird thing to do. But it was kind of the only thing I knew how to do. It was a painful couple of years, but I had to go through it, I guess.”

At the time of making Flaked, Arnett, who had been sober for well over a decade, said he was struggling with alcohol again. He winces when I bring that up. “I don’t know. I think we all go through things in our lives, and when we’re in it, we talk very honestly about it. I don’t regret [saying it], but that was six or seven years ago. You know what I mean?”

Arnett then went back to Arrested to make the fifth series. It is by now largely agreed among the fans that the fourth and fifth seasons aren’t a patch on the original three. Did it feel different making them?

“You know, I think there were a lot of things in those seasons that did not work. We weren’t all together, for a start,” he says, referring to the scheduling difficulties that made it impossible to get the actors all together at the same time. “But there were moments when we were together and I was crying with laughter, and it was worth it for that. Maybe it was like a very expensive reunion for all of us.”

Another problem was that Jeffrey Tambor, who plays twins George and Oscar Bluth, had recently been fired from another TV show, Transparent, after allegations, which he denied, of sexual misconduct. It then emerged that while filming Arrested he had yelled at Jessica Walter, who played his onscreen wife, Lucille, and who died last year. An awkward interview with the cast in the New York Times in 2018 about all this did little to help, especially against the background of the #MeToo movement. Tambor has been little seen since. Is Arnett in touch with him?

“Yeah, no comment. It’s just a bummer all round,” he says carefully.

Other shows of Arnett's have also come in for criticism, including BoJack ([for having a white actor voice an Asian character](#)) and 30 Rock (for featuring multiple occurrences of blackface; the show's creator and star, Tina Fey, has apologised and [removed those episodes from streaming platforms](#)). Is it harder to make comedy these days now that people are more socially aware?

“I don’t know. Sure? I guess? There are more ways for people to voice their displeasure these days. But then, when we made Murderville, we had a lot of laughs,” he shrugs.

We go back to talking about the “weird years”, and where he is now, no longer a lost, divorced man, but a happy new father with joyful new comedy. “It is crazy to me how much my whole life has shifted in five years in such a dramatic way. Isn’t that wild?” he says happily. We Arrested fans never confused Arnett with Gob, but, as with Gob, we did always want things to work out for him.

Murderville is on Netflix.

If you’d like to hear this piece narrated, listen to The Guardian’s brand new podcast, [Weekend](#). Subscribe on [Apple](#), [Spotify](#), or wherever you get your podcasts.

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Composite: Getty/Guardian Design

[The long read](#)

Alcoholism and me: ‘I was an addicted doctor, the worst kind of patient’

Composite: Getty/Guardian Design

My drinking and drug use pushed me over the edge into a complete breakdown. Then a stint in rehab made me question how much we really understand about addiction

by [Carl Erik Fisher](#)

Tue 8 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

I’m lying in bed when I hear the commotion. I peer through the doorway of my room, and right outside, the new guy is getting in Ruiz’s face. There’s a phone right outside the door, one of those sturdy metal payphones like one you’d see on a street corner, and Ruiz, a gentle older man with shoulders

stooped by the demoralisation of his nth relapse and hospitalisation, is just trying to talk to his family. But the new guy has been manic and pacing since he arrived a few hours ago, and he won't take no for an answer.

I watch the new guy stalk the other way across the doorway, muttering to himself, menacing even in retreat. Then a warning shout echoes from much too far in the distance, and he appears once again – flying, near horizontal – to tackle Ruiz, dragging him off the phone.

The staff quickly take him down; thankfully, no one is seriously hurt. Shaken, I try to focus on my journal, but my mind races. I'm 29 years old, writing notes in a sloppy felt-tip pen (no ballpoints are allowed), trying to understand how I went from being a newly minted doctor in a psychiatry residency programme at Columbia University in New York to a psychiatric patient at Bellevue, the city's notorious public hospital.

Bellevue is synonymous with the most challenging cases of mental illness, and now I'm locked on the dual-diagnosis ward on the 20th floor, near the top of the building, where they put people who have substance use problems alongside other mental disorders. I've already recognised some of the faculty from when I applied here for residency, and I know from the tour I took as an applicant that the special prison ward, protected by a guardhouse with bulletproof glass and thickly barred gates, is one floor below us.

I need the phone those two men have been fighting over. It's my only way to reach the outside world, that other plane of reality where I was once a psychiatry resident. I'm having trouble accepting that I belong here. Day by day, it seems more likely that what the doctors have been telling me is correct – that, just like the new guy, I too have had a manic episode, in my case induced by weeks of stimulants and alcohol. But I'm still not sure what I should do.

The next day, I meet with the whole treatment team – half a dozen psychiatrists, therapists and counsellors facing me across a massive table in one of those windowless hospital conference rooms. For the first time, I truly let my guard down and recount my whole drinking history. How I grew up with two alcoholic parents and swore to myself I'd never be like them. How, even as I finished medical school at Columbia, I had the creeping

sense that my drinking was out of control. How the blackouts got more and more frequent, but I didn't reach out for help, and I didn't accept the help that friends, colleagues and supervisors had all offered, then implored me to take.

I tell them everything, even about the time I woke up on the floor of the hallway in my building, shirtless, my skin sticking to the tacky linoleum, locked out of my own apartment. It was only by getting up to the roof and climbing down the fire escape that I made it in to work that day at all. I was late again, and so ashamed and scared by what it said about me. It was obvious that something was wrong, but I never told anyone about it, because to do so would be to acknowledge what I had long suspected.

They ask me about my family, and I tell them about my father's four stints in rehab and the bottles of wine my mother secreted around the house. I describe my parents as alcoholics, as I usually do, but I also finally give voice to that dangerous suspicion about myself: "I'm starting to realise that I'm an alcoholic, too," I say, and then break down crying.

Later that weekend, I call my friend Ravi from that payphone, looking down the disorientingly long hallway that stretches the length of the ward. He's helping me with all the logistics, setting up disability insurance, getting my rent paid and generally making it possible for me to go to rehab – a place I don't quite want to go to, but am told that I need.

We talk about how it'll be good for me, and how I've struggled for so long. His voice is strained. It's clear he's worried about me. So I hesitate for a moment – I have the clear sense of telling myself that this is a truly ridiculous question, that I shouldn't ask him this – but then ask him anyway, even as I keep one eye down the hallway for any potential assailants: "Do you really think I can never drink again?"

I'm supposed to be going to some specialised rehab for doctors, but I know nothing about it. I want to go, but not really. I need help, but maybe I can do it on my own, or at least find a better way. Why is this so hard?

Addiction is a terrifying breakdown of reason. People struggling with addiction say they want to stop, but, even with the obliterated nasal

passages, scarred livers, overdoses, court cases, lost jobs and lost families, they are confused, incredulous and, above all, afraid. They are afraid because they cannot seem to change, despite the fact that they so often watch themselves, clear-eyed, do the very things they don't want to do.

Addiction is often explained in terms of a dichotomy of free choice v total compulsion. By claiming that addictive behaviours are simply a kind of choice, people have justified punitive measures for centuries, from putting drunkards in the stocks to imprisoning people for drug possession. If their drug use is a free choice like any other, the argument goes, people should accept responsibility for their behaviour, including punishment. The opposite view, which these days is commonly presented as a compassionate counter-argument by neuroscientists and advocates, is that addictive behaviours are involuntary and uncontrollable compulsions, and thus people with addiction deserve compassion and treatment, rather than punishment.



Photograph: 5m3photos/Getty Images

But this dichotomy between choice and compulsion is unsatisfying. Lived experience contradicts such a stark binary, and many people with addiction feel themselves occupying a confusing middle ground. The thing that is terrifying to most people with addiction is that they watch themselves making a choice even while feeling there is something wrong with the

choosing. It is, in other words, an issue of disordered choice: a problem with choice, choice gone awry.

The ancient Greeks had a word for this experience of acting against your present judgment: *akrasia*, often translated as “weakness of the will”. Akrasia isn’t just doing something that is arguably harmful, like eating too much pie or spending too much money on clothes. Everyone indulges, even though indulgence is rarely the best option according to a cold, utilitarian calculus. Akrasia is doing something even though you truly believe it would be better not to, of recognising in the moment that you are acting against your better judgment.

Aristotle was deeply invested in the idea of akrasia. To him, it was self-evident that people sometimes acted against their better judgment. He saw more nuance in the notion of choice, and he believed there were various ways that internal conflict might interfere with that choice. Surely, he asked, emotions or misguided reason can often get in the way of one’s better judgment?

Plato arrived at a different point of view. He understood the problem of self-control partly as the result of a divided and conflicted self, one he illustrated through the famous metaphor of the chariot: the intellect is the charioteer attempting to wrangle the two horses of positive moral impulses and irrational, passionate drives. The notion is also found widely in classical narrative, such as Medea’s psychological struggle in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, torn between love and duty: “But a strange power attracts me against my will – desire urges one thing, reason another.”

In the study of addiction today, the divided self is a prominent explanation of how choice can be disordered. For example, behavioural economics research describes the psychological feature of “delay discounting”, in which smaller but more immediate rewards are favoured over larger, delayed ones – this process is universal to humankind, but more pronounced in addiction. Immediate rewards are grossly overvalued, causing extreme impulsivity that feels like loss of control.

Nudging these types of choices can be a highly effective component of addiction treatment. The most obvious example originates from the 1980s,

when Stephen Higgins, a psychologist at the University of Vermont, developed a “[contingency management](#)” programme to treat people with cocaine addiction. In addition to counselling, Higgins used a voucher system that gave people small rewards, such as sports equipment and movie passes, for cocaine-negative urine samples, and gave them a bonus for longer stretches of abstinence. This strategy was highly successful. One of the early experiments found that 55% of the voucher subjects were continuously drug-free for 10 weeks, compared with fewer than 15% of subjects receiving the usual treatment. After decades’ more research, contingency management now has strong evidence in its favour, especially for stimulant problems, for which there aren’t good medication treatments.

After my time at Bellevue, I did go to rehab, and in time, I returned to the residency programme at Columbia. For years afterward, I was in supervised treatment. At a moment’s notice, I had to be prepared to run across the medical centre or across town to my “urine monitor”, a woman who would watch me urinate to make sure I didn’t try to pass off someone else’s bodily fluids as my own. My monitored treatment was a form of negative contingency management. I wasn’t totally committed to abstinence at first, but my medical licence was on the line, so I chose not to drink. This powerful contingency is, in large part, why these physician health programmes have extraordinary five-year success rates of 75% or higher, eclipsing the effectiveness of essentially all other addiction treatments.

Yet some people don’t stop, no matter what the cost. There is still that nagging 25% of people who don’t make it to the five-year mark, for example. Some of my friends and colleagues from the physician health programme did relapse, and they were trying their best – none thought in the moment that it would be better to start drinking or using again. Those outcomes are a testament, I think, not to the power of a simplistic compulsion, but to the complexity of the internal forces that lie beneath the stereotype.

As I was researching the subject of addiction, my mother was slowly wasting away from lung cancer. During her illness she told me about how her own father, a Swedish immigrant, fell into a severe depression every winter. He would remember his happy childhood in Stockholm and compare

it with their life in Newark: no hot water, working the night shift at a bottling plant, never seeing his wife, who worked an opposite shift on a different assembly line. Though he tried not to drink, he'd always relapse on alcohol as Christmas approached, and for months my mother, still a young girl, would be sent out into the Newark winters to trudge from bar to bar to find him so he could get a few precious hours of sleep before his next shift. From an early age, she was taught that alcohol was a way to cope with a difficult world.

I don't intend to diagnose my parents or grandparents. It is rarely useful to attempt to arrive at one major "cause" of anyone's addiction – genes, environment, trauma, the trauma of everyday life. But it has helped me immensely to see their addictions at least in part as a function of their unprocessed pain. Like everyone else, they were drinking and smoking for a reason: because those substances did something for them. Sadly, their use simultaneously helped them to cope and made their problems much worse, perpetuating a vicious spiral.

This is the core of the addiction-as-dislocation theory. Beyond soothing the concrete effects of physical dislocation, people use drugs to address an alienation from cultural supports. This kind of alienation is what Émile Durkheim, the founder of modern sociology, called anomie: the social condition of a breakdown of norms and values, resulting in an existential lack of connection to meaning and purpose. This sense of dislocation, some scholars argue, is one of the core drivers of today's [opioid epidemic](#).



Photograph: Everynight Images/Alamy

Epidemics are never caused solely by some inherent power of the drugs themselves. There is often, if not always, social wounding underneath, driving the substance use. In 2014, the Princeton economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton (the latter of whom won a Nobel prize the next year) happened upon an unexpected finding: a significant uptick in the number of suicides among middle-aged white Americans.

Case and Deaton found that death rates from three causes – suicides, drug overdoses, and alcoholic liver disease – were rising rapidly, and the increases were almost all among people without a college degree. In their subsequent analyses, Case and Deaton connected these deaths to a rot at the core of today's societal structure. True, these working-class whites were suffering some concrete losses from the globalising economy, such as worse jobs with lower wages, but beyond that, work had become far less meaningful. People no longer had a real connection to their jobs – they were less likely to belong to a union and less likely to have any stability or structure in their work. Beyond that, there were plenty more reasons for despair. Marriage rates were declining, and religious participation was falling. More people were living alone than at any time in recorded human history.

All these dislocations were fatally exacerbated by the US's stark inequality – the highest income inequality of all the G7 nations – combined with what is objectively the [worst-performing healthcare system](#) in the developed world, with its bloated costs and inefficiencies holding down wages and destroying jobs. Case and Deaton labeled these deaths from suicides, drug overdoses, and alcoholic liver disease “[deaths of despair](#)”. In 2017 alone, there were more than 150,000 deaths of despair in the US, and many of them among people between 20 and 50.

It’s crucial to note that all these white people – my family and myself included – were spared from other, more direct forces of oppression and racism that have driven deaths from addiction [in Black and Brown communities](#) for decades, even centuries. Persistent health inequities by race and social class have long dwarfed the white working-class deaths of despair identified by Case and Deaton. The “deaths of despair” narrative should not enable an exclusive focus on white problems; to do so would draw a false distinction between this epidemic, populated by images of white middle-class users who are portrayed as blameless victims, and the ongoing crisis of substance-related deaths driven by structural issues such as poverty, trauma, concentrated disadvantage and hopelessness. In reality, these crises are deeply intertwined. The point, rather, is that the psychological dislocation driving addiction is powerful enough to reach into all corners of human society, and it is not limited to concrete, material resources.

One of the first patients in my internal medicine rotation during medical school was a rail-thin man with a heroin addiction who had a tumour the size of a melon sticking out of his jaw. He had tried to get a little nodule on his tongue checked out a few months earlier, but the clinic doctors didn’t have a lot of patience for his drug use and “noncompliance”, and he had quickly fallen out of care. Now his family had brought him to the medical centre to die.

It was four years before my breakdown, and I was in the middle of the third year of medical school – the dreaded “clinical year”, when students rotate through different specialties as part of the teams directly caring for patients – and it was wearing on me. That man seemed to embody everything wrong with modern medicine: not our inability to cure the cancer, but how easily

patients could be left by the wayside. The churn of the system was demoralising. We'd patch up acute conditions and dump people back into nursing homes or even on to the streets, with little opportunity for working with the human problems so often at the root of unhealthy behaviour. As the winter rolled on, I got tired of waking up at 4am just to tackle checklists of tasks that didn't seem to be helping anyone.

I started drinking more – much more. I started crying unexpectedly. I met with a bushy-bearded psychoanalyst in a cramped cinder-block office at the medical centre, though at first I hid the extent of my distress behind safe, professional language, claiming I was there because I wanted to develop as a future psychiatrist and learn about myself.

I limped through the year of clinical rotations and took a research fellowship, but even during the comparatively relaxed research year, my drinking got progressively worse. I set countless limits for myself, then immediately violated them. After telling myself I wouldn't drink at a scientific conference in Miami, I passed out against a palm tree and then puked in a cab. I wondered if I was an alcoholic, but I quickly dismissed the possibility.

I had gone to an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting as a med student – we were all required to go as an educational exercise – and it seemed clear that I wasn't like those people, or my parents. My problem, I thought, was more sophisticated, something more complex and existential than a "disease" like alcoholism or a psychiatric disorder like suicidal depression or debilitating OCD. Patients facing those conditions were the ones really suffering; they were the ones who needed treatment. I just needed to grow up.

And yet, as the consequences mounted, I started to believe that I might have a problem. My psychiatrist fired me as a patient because of all the sessions I missed, and I poured a full bottle of gin down the sink and swore to myself that I'd really cut down this time. I didn't realise then, but I do now, that I was doing the same thing I had tried with my parents once I got old enough to recognise just how bad their drinking was: searching the house for hidden bottles and pouring them out in front of them. It worked just as well.

In the end, it was the [mixed amphetamines of Adderall](#) that tipped me over the edge into a complete breakdown. I had accessed the drug easily, because it was an entitlement for a white and privileged user like me. I got it through medical channels, paid for it with medical insurance and, most of the time, used it in a relatively sanctioned way. It is the kind of drug that preserves and supports the existing social order; stimulants get you to work, after all. Not long after it was in my hands, though, I began using Adderall dangerously, and the combination of alcohol, amphetamines and days of sleeplessness combined to put me into a drug-induced manic episode.



Photograph: BSIP/Universal Images Group/Getty Images

At first, it was glorious. I felt the total dissolution of my ego and a lucid clarity, a taste of an imminent and transcendent mystical experience. Then the delusions set in. I understood that I had got wrapped up in a spiritual war of good versus evil. At times I did wonder whether the drugs had caused a psychotic mania, but I could no longer identify reality, as all those thoughts and feelings and fears came rushing in at once. We describe mental illness as if it's an entity, a clearly demarcated state, or at least a state with some sort of checkpoint or transition, but I passed no such gate. I felt like I was straddling the gap between sanity and insanity, or, perhaps better put, inhabiting the quantum uncertainty of both at the same time, multiple states of being flashing through my disordered mind.

A few days later, it was getting harder to deny to myself how bad things had got, but in my mind I still protested. I started whispering the same phrase over and over to myself: “I know what crazy is, and this is not it. I know what crazy is, and this is not it.” For just one precious moment, I saw just how wrong I was, and, realising that I couldn’t do it myself, I screamed out for help. My neighbour called the police.

On my second day in rehab, almost two weeks after I was taken to Bellevue, I was summoned to meet the medical director, Dr Summers, in his office for my intake interview. I had heard that he would probably have the final say over my case, and I had been watching him closely as he stalked the hallways with an impatient, kinetic energy. This I could work with. I had spent my entire career sucking up to older doctors.

As soon as I sat down in his office, he scowled and began to interrogate me. How much had I been drinking, exactly? What else was I using? Was I sure? My hopes withered, but I tried to stay positive and calmly presented my case: young man with binge drinking exacerbated by Adderall and occasionally cocaine, in the context of overwork and burnout. Far from healthy, but now highly motivated. I could really do this as an outpatient. I had learned my lesson and wanted to get better.

I watched his face for any signs of an opening. Instead, after a long pause, he leaned across the table and told me that he’d be testing my hair for drugs.

“Tell me now,” he asked portentously, “what will we find?”

At first, I was confused – I had just told him everything I’d been taking – but then the realisation landed: I wasn’t a colleague or a trainee any more, not to him. I was an addicted doctor, the worst kind of patient, perfectly equipped to massage my story and maintain my denial. In Bellevue I had also been a patient, but treated with respect, even like a colleague. Here, though, I was just a liar, and apparently I had to be broken down and reformed.

During the nine weeks I was in rehab, I saw things in the programme that seemed wrong, if not downright harmful, and which fed my resistance. A sense of fear and surveillance permeated the group I was in, all of us health professionals. A flirtatious surgeon was “therapeutically discharged”

because he wouldn't stop talking to female patients; he was transferred to a long-term care programme in Mississippi that would, we were told, break down the entrenched personality issues standing in the way of his recovery.

In a regular group exercise titled Responsible Concerns, we called out other people for troubling behaviour, such as expressing any doubts about treatment or AA. A family practice physician – older than most of us, and gentle, but quietly, awkwardly obstinate – refused to stop pointing out the elements of AA that he thought were illogical, so he was given a pamphlet titled King Baby, which described how his resistance was just a symptom of his own immaturity. It all felt crazy to me. The targets of their interventions were sweeping – people's very personality and character – and in psychiatry, we would never set out to engineer a fundamental character reconstruction in the space of a few weeks or months.

To this day, I am not entirely sure how to think about that rehab programme. Was it too harsh, or did I need to be challenged? Was all their focus on character and personality rehabilitation overkill? I am convinced that I did need to be coerced, in the sense of being faced with a hard choice. Most people going to addiction treatment are going with some form of coercion – at least informal coercion, from family and friends – and I was there because I had to be, at least if I wanted to practice medicine anytime soon. I am glad that I was coerced in that sense; if I hadn't had the monitoring programme in place, I might not have stuck with treatment and entered recovery, and I could have harmed other people, or died myself. Still, I'd like to believe that whatever deeper rehabilitation I experienced had more to do with connection than confrontation. I didn't really need to be broken down, and the most meaningful and transformative experiences were less about the formal treatment and more about being put in a situation where mutual help could take hold and do its work.

After residency, I devoted a year to training in forensic psychiatry. I spent one day a week at New York State's maximum-security prison for women, and it seemed as though every patient sent to our psychiatric clinic had both a low-level drug offence and trauma history. Many of them jockeyed to get time off their sentences by going to tough-love boot camps, where their heads were shaved and they did push-ups in the snow while staff screamed at them. I couldn't shake their stories. The injustice of how, if not for an

accident of birth, my own story could have been entirely different. The NYPD chose to take me, a white guy living in an upscale Manhattan neighbourhood, to a hospital rather than booking me. If I'd been a person of colour in a different neighbourhood, I could have been imprisoned, like so many of the people who populate our current system of mass incarceration, or even shot and killed.

Disparity in access to medical treatment remains one of the strongest examples we have of the stark racial disparities in the understanding and treatment of addiction. Black and Brown people have long had to fight for treatment. Addiction in communities of colour, perennially a major problem, is too often explained in a stigmatised way that justifies prohibitionist approaches: portrayed as self chosen and irresponsible. On a structural level, addiction is explained away as the intractable effect of poverty or other root causes, treated as inevitable and expected, and thus left to the criminal legal system.

In my psychiatry practice, I see “non-addicted” people struggling with food, work, cheating, power, money or anger all the time. One psychotherapy patient of mine uses compulsive bingeing and purging as a way of managing negative emotions such as fear and shame. Another cannot put down his phone or stop checking his email – despite his clear intentions and plans to do so, and despite the fact that it causes real problems in his marriage – because of a crushing need for external validation from his work. I don't insist that they call themselves addicted, and in general I don't assume that the roots of my own addiction are similar to others', or that others need what I have needed to recover. But I also don't see a tremendous division between me and them. We all suffer from a divided self, and we all have too much confidence in our judgment and our ability to exert power over our environments and ourselves. And in that, I think we share a fellowship, in that addiction is simultaneously a tremendous problem that causes unthinkable suffering, and something contiguous with all of human suffering.

*This is an edited extract from *The Urge: Our History of Addiction* by Carl Erik Fisher, published by Scribe and available at guardianbookshop.com*

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‘It has to be flawless’: long wait for London’s Elizabeth line is nearly over



The opening of the £18.9bn Crossrail project could come in the spring.
Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Our reporter rides the smooth new trains – but transport chief says line will open only when he is certain about reliability



[Gwyn Topham](#) Transport correspondent

[@GwynTopham](#)

Tue 8 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

The Elizabeth line must be “flawless” before it can officially launch this year, London’s transport chief told a press tour on Monday, amid speculation that the £18.9bn [Crossrail](#) project’s opening could be moved to the spring – before the Queen’s jubilee celebrations.

On the first media trip to see the line in action, riding on spacious trains along the tunnels winding from Paddington to Liverpool Street, flaws appeared conspicuously absent. Twelve trains an hour are now running in the central section excavated under the capital, with an official deadline for opening at the end of June.

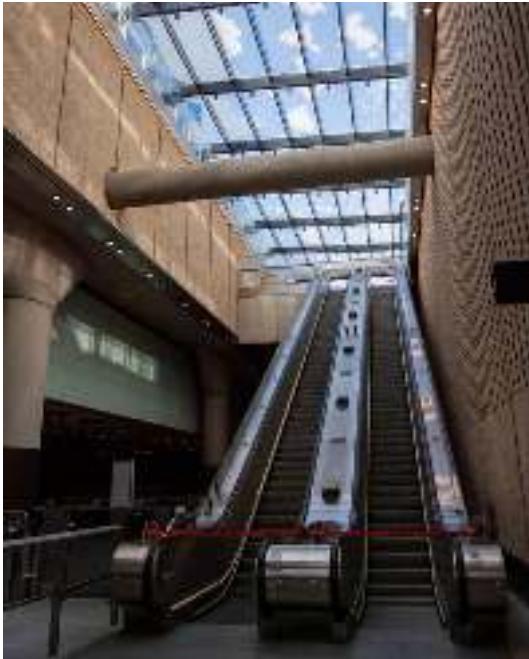


Transport commissioner Andy Byford. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Andy Byford, the transport commissioner, said the opening would be “a massive fillip to London’s morale and confidence” after the capital was drained of so much life during the pandemic. “When people arrive, day one, they will be blown away by the scale and by how quiet and smooth the train ride is.”

On the concourse below the glass roof of Paddington’s Elizabeth line station, Byford’s words seemed no exaggeration, with trains arriving barely audibly behind the screens sealing the track from the platforms.

Mark Wild, the chief executive of Crossrail, said it was “epic, a beautiful outcome”. Most of the volumes of the newly built stations, such as the control rooms, aren’t even visible, he said: “The Shard would fit in here quite comfortably.”



Passenger access to the Elizabeth line. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

For passengers, there is little “clutter”, as he puts it: upgraded information screens are above the automatic doors on platforms; all the trains are fully accessible. On board, it is hard to imagine the trains crowded – each carries up to 1,500 people – but they are wide and high enough to contain two rows of straps for any who do stand, and none should have to crick their neck beside a door.

The scale is such that to walk to the cab for a driver’s eye view takes a good couple of minutes; at Liverpool Street, where the platform curves into the distance, one end comes out at Moorgate, a whole other stop on the tube till now.

The project is in its final [trial operations phase](#), when volunteers are encouraged to dawdle, block the doors and get in the way, to see how it stands up to routine use. Bigger exercises with 1,000 people are due to be carried out, including staged emergencies ranging from fires to gun attacks – complete with huge cans of soup to simulate, for example, the vomit of a fainting passenger.



A view from the cab of an Elizabeth line train. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Bond Street, whose construction fell 18 months behind schedule, has been “clawed back”, said Byford, although it will not open with the rest of the line. It will instead be ready in late 2022, when direct through-trains from the west and east sections that run to Reading or Shenfield respectively will also start running under central London.

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Scepticism over Crossrail has grown after previous management promised it was “on time and on budget” until just a few months before the official opening planned for December 2018 was aborted. Now, though, it is tantalisingly close.

However, Byford said he would not give the go-ahead until entirely satisfied: “It has to be flawless. Better to take an extra couple of weeks, after how long Londoners have had to wait, than have people loving the surroundings but disappointed by the reliability,” he said. “Some days it is 98% on time, but some days have been 80%, and that’s not good enough.”

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Asylum seekers heat up food outside a customs warehouse, now used as a shelter, in Bruzgi, Belarus

[Rights and freedom](#)

In limbo: the refugees left on the Belarusian-Polish border – a photo essay

Asylum seekers heat up food outside a customs warehouse, now used as a shelter, in Bruzgi, Belarus

Offered a route into Europe by the Lukashenko regime in Belarus, thousands of asylum seekers are now stranded on the EU's frontier

By [Lorenzo Tondo](#). Photographs by Alessio Mamo

Rights and freedom is supported by



HUMANITY UNITED

[About this content](#)

Tue 8 Feb 2022 02.15 EST

On 13 August last year, a villager in Ostrówka, in the east of central [Poland](#), posted two pictures on Facebook featuring groups of men, women and children walking through the cornfields with bags on their backs.

They were families from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan, and they were among the first asylum seekers to enter the country from [Belarus](#). The post was accompanied by the following short text: “In the heat of day through wheat, at night through corn, they sneak through, they wander, just to get to the west. Great politics and slight refugees leave their print on the fields near Ostrówka.”

Few could have imagined that those people were the prelude to a border crisis that would result in dozens of deaths.



- The makeshift shelter of a Syrian family with small children in the forest near Narewka, Poland

The Belarusian president, Alexander Lukashenko, had just started to organise [the movement of asylum seekers](#) with the promise of a safe passage to Europe, apparently in reprisal for sanctions that Brussels had imposed on his regime. A new migration route to the EU had opened.

The humanitarian emergency reached its peak in November, when the Belarusian security forces escorted thousands of asylum seekers to the Polish border in an escalation of the crisis. Witnesses told the Guardian how Belarusian troops gathered groups of up to 50 people and cut the barbed wire to allow them to cross. Most of the asylum seekers were caught, and [illegally](#) and violently pushed back to Belarus by Poland's border guards.

But hundreds managed to escape into the forests. Trapped between the violence of the Polish authorities and false promises from the Belarusians, families lived in small tents, trying to keep warm in damp sleeping bags as night-time temperatures fell below zero.



- Polish border guards at a checkpoint near the border with Belarus and with a family who were hiding in the forest

In response to the Belarusian threats, Poland's hard-right government quadrupled the presence of border guards and troops in the area and created a two-mile-deep militarised zone ringed with razor-wire.

It was a show of force not seen in the country since the end of the cold war. Dozens of checkpoints punctuate the perimeter of this so-called red zone, which is inaccessible to aid workers and journalists. The soldiers stop and search every car as police vehicles and helicopters monitor the area.





- Top, a family from Duhok, Iraq, in Narewka, Poland, after crossing from Belarus. Above left, an Iraqi woman and her baby are taken to safety by aid workers before certain capture by Polish border guards

Every night in the forests, there is a race between border guards and aid workers to reach the asylum seekers hidden among the trees. If the Polish police arrive before the volunteers and doctors, they will probably send the migrants back to Belarus, with the risk that their health may deteriorate.

Many of those found in the woods can barely walk after travelling long distances on foot. Some have not eaten in days. The children often have signs of hypothermia.



- The graves of asylum seekers in the Polish village of Bohoniki. Most of the people known to have died since the start of the border standoff were killed by the cold

At least 19 people have died since the beginning of the border standoff between Poland and Belarus. Most of them froze to death. Some were buried in the village of Bohoniki, near the Polish town of Sokółka, in the heart of the forest that claimed their lives. People told the *Guardian* they found the bodies of refugees torn apart by animals.

A family of asylum seekers said they had to bury their mother, covering her with leaves. “In the area of forest where migrants normally camp, you can smell an intense stench of decay,” says one resident.

Some Polish families have been hiding desperate asylum seekers in their homes. In the attics of the cottages scattered in the forests along the border, Iraqi Kurds and Syrians tremble with cold and fear, while border guards search for them outside. If found, the Polish families who have offered them shelter risk being charged with aiding illegal immigration.





- Kamil Syller, a lawyer, top, and his wife, Maria Przyszychowska, with their daughter, above left. The green light in their home in Hajnówka, near the border, right, is a welcome sign for refugees

Kamil Syller and his wife, Maria Przyszychowska, started a network of residents and activists who put green lights in their windows to show that their home is a temporary safe space for refugees.

“We are trying to protect asylum seekers and now our activity has become a form of resistance,” says Kamil. “But we don’t want to be heroes and it’s becoming really frustrating.”

The green lights have also come to the attention of the Polish authorities. For weeks, Maria and Kamil’s home has been under surveillance. Border guards patrol the streets around their home and lie in wait for people to come out of the forest so they can capture them and push them back into Belarus.



- A young Iraqi Kurd hides in a small attic. Border guards entered Syller's house to take away two Syrians. The Polish lawyer filed papers with the European court of human rights in an effort to stop them being deported to Belarus

According to [data from Grupa Granica](#), a Polish network of human rights organisations, about 10,000 asylum seekers reached Germany from Belarus via Poland by December. Many others were transferred to migrant camps near the Belarus border.

The Guardian spoke to dozens of asylum applicants in the Polish city of Białystok. All said they had arrived in Minsk by buying packages from travel agencies, which, according to the refugees, appeared to be closely connected to the Belarusian authorities. Despite [promises from Turkish and Belarusian airlines](#) to limit these flights, the crisis appears to be far from over. Thousands of asylum seekers remain in Belarus.



- Inside a customs warehouse in Bruzgi, Belarus, which now houses about 1,000 asylum seekers



- Asylum seekers washing outside in Bruzgi, where temperatures can fall to -12C, left. Alima Skandar, 40, right, from Iraqi Kurdistan, who was separated from her three children in November as they tried to cross the Polish border

As temperatures plummeted at the end of November, the Belarusian authorities began to move the asylum seekers to a customs warehouse in the village of Bruzgi, which has been turned into a dormitory for refugees. In this 10,000 sq metre space, patrolled by dozens of armed soldiers, about 1,000 asylum seekers are sleeping in makeshift cots made from planks and cardboard on shelving units once used for merchandise.

There are dozens of children and elderly people, many in need of medical help. Outside, people sit around and heat up food on a wood-burning stove. There are showers but no hot water. Winter temperatures in Bruzgi can fall to -12C.



- Scraps of clothing hang from barbed wire at the checkpoint in Kuźnica as a reminder of those who tried to cross

Asylum seekers stranded in Bruzgi are clinging to the hope that Europe will rescue them, sooner or later. But their hopes were dealt a blow when Poland announced it had started building a €353m (£293m) wall along its frontier with [Belarus](#) aimed at preventing refugees from entering the country.

Little remains of the migrants who camped at the border for months – just a pile of rags and bottles. Scraps of clothing hang from the barbed wire, a bleak reminder of those who tried to make it to the other side.

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Education

Pupils in England reluctant to return to school after lockdown, says report

Ofsted found online lessons affected some children's view of the need to be in class, leading to high absence rates



Attendance in state-funded schools fell to 87.4% on 20 January. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

[Sally Weale](#) Education correspondent

Mon 7 Feb 2022 12.38 EST

Pupils who were sent home to learn remotely during lockdown may no longer feel the same need to turn up for school, according to an Ofsted report, which also cites parents requesting online lessons for their children during term-time holidays.

The report comes after an investigation into low attendance in schools, which found the switch to online lessons had “negatively affected” some secondary school pupils’ perceptions of the need to be in school and could be contributing to high absence rates.

Some parents who felt their children had learned well using remote lessons wanted to continue, while others whose children have a history of poor attendance used “possible Covid” as an excuse for absence, sometimes resulting in 10 days off school without a confirmatory PCR test.

Others had apparently misunderstood the role of online lessons. “Some parents think that remote education can be provided for non-Covid-related circumstances, such as being on holiday, which leaders have to explain is not the case,” the report says.

According to the latest government statistics, attendance in state-funded schools fell to 87.4% on 20 January, with 415,000 pupils off for Covid-related reasons. Pre-pandemic, the overall absence rate in 2018-19 was 4.7%.

The report, published by the schools watchdog on Monday, confirmed that the most common reason for higher than normal absences was pupils having Covid, but parents’ and pupils’ anxieties were also having an impact, as well as the shift in attitudes to school among some young people.

It also found that some parents were keeping children home unnecessarily after a contact with someone who tests positive for Covid, “finding it hard to move on from the ‘bubble-isolation mentality’”.

The report, *Securing Good Attendance and Tackling Persistent Absence*, follows a call last year by the education secretary, Nadhim Zahawi, for a close examination into low attendance rates in schools in England.

“It appears that the provision of remote education during national lockdowns has negatively affected some pupils’ perceptions of the need to be in school, particularly in secondary schools,” the report states.

“There is a sense from some pupils, as one leader explained, that ‘you weren’t fussed when we weren’t in school all that time in lockdown and we did our work at home, so why does it matter so much now?’” it went on.

Many schools have continued to make lessons available online because of continuing high Covid rates with many pupils still off sick and isolating. Some pupils have told teachers, however, they would prefer to work at home and can’t understand why they can’t work remotely rather than coming into school.

The report says: “Where one pupil has Covid-19 and is receiving remote education, this can affect other pupils’ perceptions: ‘My mate’s home, learning online, so the provision must be there, so why can’t I have it too?’, as one leader put it.”

Ofsted said some absences were linked to families who feel they have not had a holiday in a long time, with some taking a previously cancelled holiday during term time, though some schools reported fewer term time holidays.

Among other influences, one school leader said some families were affected by reports of rising Covid rates in their local area and kept their children off school as a result.

Ofsted’s chief inspector, Amanda Spielman, said: “There’s no doubt that schools continue to face some very tricky challenges around pupil attendance. But it is clear that leaders who have previously improved pupil attendance have managed to maintain good levels this term by applying the same principle of ‘listen, understand, empathise and support – but do not tolerate [absences]’.”

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2022.02.08 - Opinion

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- I voted Tory for 30 years until my dad died alone from Covid. I’ll never forgive them
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OpinionUK news

Boris Johnson incited a violent mob. Even loyal Tories must now realise he has to go

[Chris Bryant](#)

Protesters targeting Keir Starmer yesterday cited foul slurs hurled by the PM. It is clearer than ever that Johnson is unfit for office

01:36

Anti-vax protesters shouting false Savile slurs target Keir Starmer – video

Tue 8 Feb 2022 04.27 EST

Words matter. They are all you have as a politician. They are your only weapon. We wage war and we broker peace with words. We inflame or we calm. That is why it is so important to deploy them carefully and responsibly.

Unfortunately, a cynic knows how to cast aspersions, make an insinuation and whisper sweet nastiness in the public ear – preferably without anyone noticing. But it's a dangerous business. The poison you pour in the well may be intended for your enemy, but it can all too easily poison your friends and all around you too.

This is my problem with [Boris Johnson's foul slurs](#) against Keir Starmer.

Johnson knew precisely what he was doing when he falsely claimed Starmer failed to prosecute Savile when he was director of public prosecutions. He had discussed it with his advisers beforehand. He knew he was up against the wall, and he desperately wanted a distraction. He was advised against it, in the strongest terms. He was told it was irresponsible and dangerous. He was leaching off the conspiracy theories of the very hard-right in the UK and

the US and giving dangerous elements in society succour. It would provide an authoritative platform for the very nastiest characters in the body politic.

It was bound to inflame feelings – and yesterday we saw precisely what it could do, when an [angry mob lambasted Starmer](#) as he returned to parliament from the Ministry of Defence.

The fact that the braying crowd recited the prime minister's vicious slurs would have counted as a victory for Johnson. He had achieved his aim. They were ventriloquising him. He had incited them. There was malice aforethought.

Perhaps the most cynical aspect of this is the fact that Johnson seems to have no thought for Savile's victims – whose representatives have universally condemned him – nor is he doing anything to ensure that present and future generations of child abusers are brought to justice. He doesn't care about child abuse. The victims are just collateral in his insidious ploy.

It is not the first time Johnson has done this. He loves inflammatory language. It is his modus operandi. When he is in trouble you can see him reach for a more exorbitant metaphor, a sharper quip, a harsher turn of phrase.

Back in 2019 he was endlessly accusing everyone who disagreed with him of “surrender” and “betrayal” and being a “traitor”, deliberately whipping up anger. When the Labour MP Paula Sherriff took him to task for it in the Commons and begged him to moderate his language because of the daily death threats she and other female MPs were receiving, he launched another attack at her. She was almost in tears, but he said he had never heard [such “humbug”](#) in all his life. Then the predictable (and intended) result was that all the demons of Hades were unleashed upon her on social media.

And so it has been this week. As minister after minister has [defended the PM](#) in ever more outlandish fashion, criminal and unsavoury factions have taken to social media to back him up.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Johnson's Savile slur was 'perfectly reasonable' – video

We know how this plays out. We have seen the same tactics in the US. It ends up on the [steps of Congress](#).

But it's not yet too late to stop that fatal trajectory here. It will require, as a very minimum, that the PM apologises fully and with genuine contrition, withdraws the remarks and condemns those that repeat them. But I suspect he can't do that. It's not in his nature. He'd far prefer to smirk, like [Muttley the cartoon dog](#), at the success of his cunning plan. That's why he really will have to go – and Tory MPs will have to do the deed sooner rather than later.

- Chris Bryant is the Labour MP for Rhondda
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OpinionInequality

Heed a warning from Manchester: the ‘levelling up’ strategy doesn’t work

[Christine Berry](#)

Here in the north, we know we need to think differently about development, but central government hasn’t got the memo



The Erie basin, Salford Quays, Manchester. Photograph: Dave Porter/Alamy

Tue 8 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

It is hard to imagine a Tory government even five years ago promising to “end the geographical inequality that is such a striking feature of the UK”. In Philip Hammond’s 2016 [“northern powerhouse” strategy](#), the word “inequality” did not appear once. But there it is in the government’s [levelling-up paper](#), released last week, mentioned no less than 35 times.

Buried in the 300 pages, we [find an argument](#) that “market forces” cannot simply be “left to their own devices”, and even an admission that the “wrenching structural changes” of the Margaret Thatcher years “caused large and lasting economic damage to significant parts of the UK”.

But old habits die hard. The paper acknowledges – implicitly and occasionally explicitly – that the UK’s growth model is broken, failing to spread prosperity evenly among people and places. Yet it fails to pursue this reasoning to its logical conclusion, and is thus left [trying to solve these problems](#) using the same thinking that created them in the first place. Apparently, levelling up is “about growing the economic pie, everywhere and for everyone, not re-slicing it”. Or, in other words, about having our pie and eating it too.

The prescription for areas that are “lagging behind” London and the south-east is depressingly familiar; it’s the same prescription that has shaped cities such as Manchester, where I live, over the past decade. In brief, the government will attract inward investment by private capital in leading-edge, hi-tech sectors and upgraded infrastructure. This will create growth and boost productivity, generating plenty of high-skill jobs and triggering a “virtuous circle” of agglomeration.

There’s just one problem with this: it doesn’t boost living standards “everywhere and for everyone”. It doesn’t work for exactly the same reason that [soaring GDP in London](#) hasn’t benefited the rest of the country, or even most Londoners. It doesn’t work because great wealth in a few hands does not trickle down.

Hi-tech sectors such as life sciences and advanced materials have helped drive gentrification in Manchester city centre, while outlying towns such as Bolton and Wigan continue to be hollowed out. Meanwhile, neither the jobs created in these sectors nor [the shiny flats](#) that have popped up around them are accessible to people in deprived inner-city areas such as Moss Side.

To its credit, Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) has recognised the problem, creating an [independent inequalities commission](#) to tackle it. The commission recommended that GMCA refocus its economic

strategy on achieving “good lives for all”, not just growth and productivity. But, despite announcing a dizzying array of new “missions”, central government doesn’t seem to have got the memo.

The levelling-up white paper ponders “why measures of quality of life are often lowest in otherwise well-performing areas of the UK, such as London”, but doesn’t pause to ask what on earth it can possibly mean for an area to be “well performing”, if it is not about better lives for the people who call it home.

The answer, of course, is that “well performing” simply means that someone, somewhere is making a lot of money. In London, this is largely driven by an oversized financial sector and an overheated property market – both of which have been shown to [have adverse effects](#) on the wider economy. The idea that it is either possible or desirable for every part of the country to be “levelled up” to the status of London is pie in the sky.

But the very phrase “levelling up” is based on precisely this fallacy. It soothingly reassures Conservative donors that their wealth and power will not be threatened by this agenda. Instead, we will simply raise everyone else up to the same dizzying heights. In reality, we can’t all be billionaires.

This leaves the government with little to say to underpaid workers in “[everyday economy](#)” sectors such as retail, hospitality and care. This is perhaps not surprising, since most of the things required to improve these workers’ incomes are anathema to the Tories: securing workplace rights, properly funding childcare and social care, and tackling the [extractive ownership models](#) which suck billions out of the system every year. Much easier to repeat tired platitudes about higher productivity being a surefire route to higher wages – a claim that the [New Economics Foundation debunked](#) last week. These workers are not failing to prosper because they are not productive enough: the problem is that they are not powerful enough.

At the other end of the scale, the notion that we can all be economic winners conveniently ignores the fact that some of our economy’s biggest winners are gaining at the direct expense of somebody else. They are, as geographer Brett Christophers has pointed out, “[rentiers](#)”. Like landlords, they extract

rents by controlling valuable assets, be that homes, essential infrastructure, or natural resources like oil and gas. They are not outstandingly wealthy because they are outstandingly productive, but because the value of their assets keeps on climbing – contributing to rising costs of living for the rest of us.

London is the death star of this model of capitalism, which is etched in the skyline of Canary Wharf's skyscrapers and Kensington's luxury flats. It has been propped up through the pandemic by measures such as quantitative easing and stamp duty holidays. Once again, the white paper seems more apt to replicate this model than to challenge it. We are promised “transformational developments” of housing, shops and businesses in 20 towns and cities, but nothing is said about who will own these developments or who will benefit.

If the government was serious about doing things differently, it might have looked to Preston, whose much-celebrated “community wealth building” model was sparked by the collapse of just such a development. Instead, it simply promises to repatriate government spending to UK firms – reducing community wealth-building to a sort of performative nationalism. It might even have looked to inspiring experiments in London itself, such as the proposed community-led redevelopment of the Latin Village in Seven Sisters, north London – recently endorsed by the council after a major developer pulled out – for fresh thinking on how to build “beautiful new neighbourhoods” that empower people rather than exclude them.

If “levelling up” is to mean anything, it has to be the start of a national debate about who does well in the UK economy and how we can rewire it to spread prosperity more fairly. Without this, all that will be levelled up are the profit margins of a select few.

- Christine Berry is a writer and researcher based in Manchester

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OpinionCoronavirus

I voted Tory for 30 years until my dad died alone from Covid. I'll never forgive them

David Garfinkel

The pandemic has proved that the Conservatives have no interest in protecting vulnerable people like my father

- David Garfinkel is a spokesperson for Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice



‘The prime minister has become a walking public health hazard who puts lives at risk.’ Photograph: Reuters Tv/Reuters

Tue 8 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

I grew up in a household where we all voted Conservative. I live in a constituency that has voted Tory for the past decade. And if you'd said to me a few years ago that I'd be voting for another party, or perhaps not voting at all, I wouldn't have believed you. But here I am. Because after seeing how the [Conservatives](#) have handled this pandemic, I will never vote for anyone associated with this government. As for the Tory party: our 31-year relationship is over.

Like many people, growing up I took my political cues from my dad. On 11 August last year, at 3.03pm, he passed away after a short battle against Covid, a disease that lasted a mere 11 days from when he first tested positive. He was one of the millions of shielders in the UK who were given a stark choice on "freedom day" last July: stay a prisoner in your own home or risk your life when venturing out. He was 76 and double vaccinated, with an underlying condition for which he took immunosuppressants. But he was full of life and vigour and hope. He wanted to live out his retirement safely and peacefully.

And then came freedom day on 19 July. This was a politically charged decision to pretend Covid wasn't a danger any more. My dad was as cautious as he could be. All he did was go to the shops to buy food and attend his medical appointments. Yet even that was enough to kill him. He was utterly let down by those in power, who he had trusted to make the right decisions and protect vulnerable people.

02:04

Boris Johnson dodges questions around No 10 parties – video

Tragically, we're living through the whole process again, as the plan B restrictions introduced to fight the Omicron variant are lifted in England – despite the fact that there are still hundreds of people dying every day. I can't tell you how painful it is to think of other families going through the same trauma as mine, all because the same mistakes are being repeated in Westminster.

Of course, any restrictions the government introduces in the future if we face new, more dangerous variants will probably be pointless. Who will listen to rules from a government that couldn't care less about obeying the rules

themselves? My dad passed away from Covid-19 on his own, without his family at his side. We barely saw him during the previous 18 months, as we did everything we could to protect each other and our communities.

We missed out on every family gathering. We couldn't see my dad when he was sick with Covid. He was so poorly when he caught the virus that I couldn't even speak to him. When he entered hospital we couldn't be near him or help him. And once he was in the ICU, that was it. We spent hours trying to get someone to give us updates or find a doctor with whom we could discuss treatment options. But even when someone answered the phone you could hardly hear what they were saying through all the PPE. We couldn't say goodbye. And that will live with me for ever.

Meanwhile, politicians and their advisers in 10 Downing Street were apparently breaking their own laws, regularly and obnoxiously. Every news story about yet more Downing Street parties has been devastating for those who have lost loved ones to Covid. The pandemic has been unbelievably hard on so many people. But those who stuck to the rules can at least say we did everything to protect others. That's something some of those working in Downing Street cannot say.

Boris Johnson is a disgrace and an embarrassment. To hear him brag about his handling of a pandemic that has killed more than 175,000 people in Britain is nauseating. Several parties he allegedly attended are now under police investigation, after he repeatedly insisted all guidelines were followed. Just as bad are the Tory MPs who keep him in power. The prime minister has lost all credibility. He has become a walking public health hazard who puts lives at risk. But all the Conservatives seem to care about is how he affects their electoral fortunes. It's painful to watch them try to defend his actions; they disgrace their country every time they do so.

I would love to believe that the problem is just Johnson, but the pandemic has shown that the rot runs much deeper. It goes to the heart of the Conservative party. Why did they stick with the prime minister as his government stumbled from one pandemic disaster to the next? Why did they line up to defend Dominic Cummings when he broke lockdown rules, and do the same again for Johnson?

Ask yourself: who will they replace him with? Rishi Sunak, who has remained notably quiet about the prime minister's misconduct? Sajid Javid, who accused families like mine of "cowering" from the virus? A lifetime of voting habits die hard. And I know there are many Conservatives who will dismiss this piece, as I would have done a few years ago. But the Tories have shown that they're not interested in protecting ordinary families. They seem more like a knock-off version of Donald Trump's Republican party than that of Winston Churchill. I urge you not to vote for them.

- David Garfinkel is a spokesperson for [Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice](#)
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OpinionPollution

This lawyer should be world-famous for his battle with Chevron – but he's in jail

[Erin Brockovich](#)



Chevron is accused of polluting the Amazon for 26 years. The only people who've paid the price are a human rights lawyer and those whose land was poisoned



‘Twenty-nine Nobel laureates signed an open letter in Donziger’s defense, and members of US Congress and European parliament have called for investigations.’ Photograph: Shannon Stapleton/Reuters

Tue 8 Feb 2022 11.54 EST

Most people have probably heard of Chernobyl, or the BP oil spill. You may also know about my legal battle over contaminated water in California, dramatized in the movie *Erin Brockovich*. Yet far fewer people have heard about what transpired in the Ecuadorian Amazon – though it’s considered by some activists, journalists, and members of US Congress to be one of the world’s worst environmental disasters.

What if I told you that a multinational oil company allegedly polluted the Amazon for almost three decades? And that the oil company has spent even more years refusing to accept liability? Or that a US attorney who agreed to represent thousands of Ecuadorian villagers in a lawsuit against that oil company has lost his law license, income, spent hundreds of days under house arrest in New York, and in 2021 was sentenced to six months in prison?

From 1964 to 1990, Texaco, which merged with Chevron in 2001, allegedly spilled more than 16m gallons of crude oil – “80 times more oil than was spilled in BP’s 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster”, according to Gizmodo – and 18bn gallons of polluted wastewater in the Amazon rainforest. The pollution allegedly contaminated the ground and waterways with toxic chemicals that the plaintiffs – mostly Indigenous people and poor farmers – say has caused cancer, miscarriages, skin conditions and birth defects. (Chevron has said that Texaco’s operations were “completely in line with the standards of the day” and told the New Yorker, in 2012, that “there is no corroborating evidence” for the health allegations.)

In 1993, Steven Donziger, a recent Harvard law school graduate and human rights attorney, began working on an environmental case on behalf of Ecuadorians allegedly affected by Texaco’s drilling. The case eventually became a 30,000-person class action lawsuit against Texaco in New York federal court.

Texaco/Chevron did not dispute that pollution occurred, and “freely admits that large sludge pits still dot the Amazon”, the New Yorker reported. The company argued that the Ecuadorian government released it from liability after paying for an earlier cleanup, and that Ecuador’s state oil company, Petroecuador, was responsible for the remaining damage. The plaintiffs argued that the earlier cleanup was woefully insufficient; that Texaco, not Petroecuador, directed actual operations in the area; and that Chevron’s earlier agreement with the government of Ecuador did not bar lawsuits by individuals. (The government of Ecuador also disagrees with Chevron’s claims.)

A jury trial in the US might have put Texaco under an embarrassing and costly spotlight, so, perhaps for that reason, the company lobbied to move the legal proceedings back to Ecuador, which has no jury trials and is heavily dependent on the oil industry. Texaco argued that Ecuador had a fair and competent legal system. A US judge agreed to relocate the case on the condition that Texaco accept the verdict of the Ecuadorian system.

Texaco’s maneuver backfired: In 2011, Donziger and the plaintiffs won the case there. An Ecuadorian court ruled that Texaco, which had been bought by Chevron at this point, was “responsible for vast contamination”,

according to [the New Yorker](#), and “ordered it to pay \$18bn in damages – the largest judgment ever awarded in an environmental lawsuit”.

Both parties appealed the decision: Chevron [said](#) it was “illegitimate and unenforceable” and accused the plaintiffs of having ghostwritten an expert environmental opinion; the plaintiffs denied that the opinion was fraudulent and said that, if anything, the monetary judgment was too low given the scale of pollution.

Chevron’s accusation that the judgment was illegitimate relied heavily on testimony by an Ecuadorian judge, [Alberto Guerra](#), whom Chevron [relocated](#) to the US and, as of 2015, [paid](#) a \$12,000 monthly salary. Guerra testified that the plaintiffs had bribed him to sway the Ecuadorian judgment against Chevron. Guerra later recanted much of his claim – admitting, Vice News [reported](#) in 2015, that “there is no evidence to corroborate allegations of a bribe or a ghostwritten judgment, and that large parts of his sworn testimony … were exaggerated and, in other cases, simply not true”.

(Chevron disputes the significance of Guerra’s change in testimony, [telling](#) Vice News, in 2015, that trial “transcripts make clear that Chevron proved its case before the international arbitration tribunal”.)

Part of the Ecuadorian judgment against Chevron was a fine for not apologizing for the pollution; in 2013, Ecuador’s national court of justice determined that “there had been no legal basis to sanction Chevron for not apologizing,” according to Reuters, and [reduced](#) the judgment to \$9.5bn, but otherwise affirmed the original decision.

Instead of accepting the legal outcome and the responsibilities that come when you acquire a company (see [Dupont-now-Chemours](#) or [Monsanto-now-Bayer](#)), Chevron “made clear that it would not be paying the judgment”, according to the [Intercept](#), and “moved its assets out of the country”. The company went from claiming Ecuador’s legal system was fair to claiming it was too corrupt to trust.

“We’re going to fight this until hell freezes over, and then we’ll fight it on the ice,” a Chevron attorney [vowed](#) – “a remark that became a watchword at the company”, according to the Wall Street Journal. Chevron has more than

made good on that promise. It has pursued a years-long campaign against the plaintiffs, their lawyers, and even the entire country of Ecuador.

Chevron's legal strategy is masterminded by Gibson Dunn, a [notoriously](#) aggressive [corporate law firm](#) that the Montana supreme court [rebuked](#) in 2007, in a different case, for "legal thuggery" and "actual malice". [Randy Mastro](#), a former federal prosecutor and aide to New York mayor Rudy Giuliani, leads the firm's Chevron file. A "merciless litigator", according to the [New Yorker](#), Mastro was once described as "the only person in the Giuliani administration who made the mayor seem like a nice guy".

Here's the thing: a massive multinational corporation such as Chevron can afford to pay millions of dollars in legal fees, indefinitely – and doing so will almost always be cheaper than paying a fine or settling. Chevron "insists that delay is not its object", [Vanity Fair reported](#) in 2007, but the plaintiffs and their attorneys "are persuaded that it is."

"Take \$6bn as a figure," Donziger explained to [Vanity Fair's William Langewiesche](#). "Simply by sticking the money into a savings account [Chevron](#) could make \$300m for every year it doesn't pay. That sum multiplied by the four years of the trial so far would amount to \$1.2bn, which is far more than, say, \$50m spent on legal fees, even if Chevron now loses the case. And what if Chevron wins – what would the calculation be then?"

Corporations can also sue plaintiffs back – crushing any opposition under, to use [Chevron's words](#), "an avalanche of paper". This is part of a disturbing legal playbook sometimes known as [Slapp](#) – strategic lawsuit against public participation. Massive corporations can fund endless litigation against activists or critics. They don't even need to win in court, because they can intimidate or bankrupt their opponents in legal fees. (Chevron [disputes](#) that it engages in Slapp tactics, though an anti-Slapp organization twice [named](#) Chevron "corporate bully of the year" and in 2021 [bestowed](#) a "lifetime achievement award" on the company.)

After Chevron "successfully defeated a lawsuit seeking to hold it responsible for the shooting deaths of protesters on an offshore oil platform in Nigeria", it even tried, unsuccessfully, "to compel the impoverished Nigerian

plaintiffs, some of whom were widows or children, to reimburse its attorneys' fees", the New Yorker [reported](#) in 2012.

"That's how they litigate," Bert Voorhees, an attorney who represented the Nigerian plaintiffs, told the New Yorker's Patrick Radden Keefe. "The point is to scare off the next community that might try to assert its human rights."

In 2018, an international tribunal [ruled](#) that Chevron had been previously released from liability for pollution in the Amazon and [ordered](#) Ecuador not to enforce the \$9.5bn judgment. Ecuador continues to maintain that the judgment is legitimate.

In retaliation, "the giant US oil company objected last June when Washington proposed allowing duty-free rose imports from the world's poorest countries, including Ecuador", the Wall Street Journal [reported](#) in 2021. "Letting Ecuador save money on flowers after blatant 'acts of defiance' would tell the world the US rewards bad behavior, the oil company said."

Chevron has also [asked](#) the international tribunal to order that "nearly \$800m of Chevron's legal costs [be] paid by Ecuador, a country whose gross domestic product is about half of Chevron's stock-market value".

Then there's Donziger. PR advisers for Chevron [promised](#) to "demonize" Donziger in the public eye. The oil company "hired private investigators to track Donziger, created a [publication](#)" which smeared him, and "put together a legal team of hundreds of lawyers from [60 firms](#), who have successfully pursued an extraordinary campaign against him", the Intercept [reported](#) in 2020.

Donziger has spent years of his life fighting seemingly endless litigation. In 2011, Chevron sued Donziger and members of the lawsuit in a US court for [\\$60m in damages](#), accusing them of extortion and invoking a sweeping and [controversial](#) statute originally created to fight the Mafia. Chevron's case rested in large part on Guerra's since-recanted corruption claims; Donziger and his codefendants denied the charges.

“The approach of accusing victims’ attorneys of being fraudsters has been honed with particular energy by [the] law firm Gibson Dunn,” Bloomberg [noted](#) in 2014. Shortly before the suit went to trial, Chevron dropped the demand for monetary damages, thus denying Donziger the right to a jury trial.

During the suit, which Chevron won, the company demanded that Donziger turn over his phone and computer to their legal team. After Donziger refused, arguing that doing so would violate attorney-client privilege, the judge in the case charged him with criminal contempt of court.

The US attorney’s office [declined](#) to prosecute Donziger for contempt, so the judge in the case made the [extraordinary move](#) of appointing a private law firm to represent the government in prosecuting Donziger – a development that two US senators have [called](#) “highly unusual” and “concerning”. The senators also noted that the firm appointed to prosecute Donziger [previously represented](#) Chevron.

Because he was deemed a “flight risk”, Donziger spent more than 800 days under house detention, with an electronic ankle bracelet, while awaiting the outcome of the trial. In 2020, according to [the Intercept](#)’s Sharon Lerner, Donziger’s “bank accounts have been frozen. He now has a lien on his apartment, faces exorbitant fines, and has been prohibited from earning money. As of August [2019], a court has [seized his passport](#) and put him on house arrest. Chevron, which has a market capitalization of \$228bn, has the funds to continue targeting Donziger for as long as it chooses.”

Donziger eventually lost the contempt case, which he called a “charade”. As a consequence of the charges against him, he also lost his law license – [against the recommendation](#) of the judicial officer who refereed the professional conduct hearing. The officer, a former federal prosecutor, [described](#) Donziger as a stubborn gadfly who is “often his own worst enemy” but called the move to disbar him unjustified, and decried the “extent of his pursuit by Chevron” as “extravagant, unnecessary and punitive.”

In October, Donziger [reported to a federal prison](#) to begin a six-month contempt sentence. (In December he was [returned](#) to home detention as part

of a Covid-related early-release program.) He still cannot make a living as a lawyer, cannot collect any legal fees from the Ecuador judgment, and had to wear an electronic ankle bracelet [until last weekend](#).

In November, nine members of US Congress signed a letter [calling](#) Donziger's treatment "unprecedented and unjust imprisonment". [International judicial monitors, lawyers' associations](#), members of [European parliament](#), and Amnesty International have also [criticized](#) the charges against Donziger as excessive and punitive, and 29 Nobel laureates from around the world signed an [open letter](#) arguing that Donziger is a victim of "judicial harassment".

I've dealt with similar cases myself, with different companies. In 1993, I was part of a team that filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of 650 plaintiffs against PG&E, alleging that the California utility company knew that harmful chemicals, particularly hexavalent chromium, were seeping into groundwater in Hinkley, California, and contaminating the town's water supply. That case ultimately resulted in the largest medical settlement lawsuit in history at that time and changed my life.

After Hinkley, we discovered other towns nearby in California where hexavalent chromium was causing health problems and wreaking havoc on lives. In 2006, PG&E agreed to pay [another \\$295m](#) to settle a series of lawsuits over contaminated water affecting another 1,100 people.

Imagine if instead of a movie telling my story, I'd gone to jail. That's essentially what has happened to Steve Donziger. And, since this litigation started in 1993, Chevron has [not paid a cent](#) or performed any cleanup. So far the only people who have paid for Chevron's alleged behavior are Donziger and those affected by the contamination – the poor and indigenous Ecuadorians who continue to [live every day](#) with the pollution's effects.

- Erin Brockovich is an environmental advocate and author of the book [Superman's Not Coming: Our National Water Crisis and What We the People Can Do About It](#). She is a Guardian US columnist
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Ottawa protesters defy growing calls to end occupation of capital



Truckers and their supporters continue to protest against Covid-19 vaccine mandates in Ottawa, on Sunday. Photograph: Patrick Doyle/Reuters

- Hundreds of trucks and cars have blockaded downtown areas
- [How did the Ottawa protests begin and what's next?](#)

Tracey Lindeman in Ottawa

Mon 7 Feb 2022 16.10 EST

Protesters against Covid vaccine mandates have defied government calls for them to end a 10-day occupation of Canada's capital, a day after the city's mayor declared a state of emergency and promised to "get the city back".

Ottawa police have described the protest as a "siege" on the city, where hundreds of trucks and cars have blockaded the downtown areas. On Sunday, Mayor Jim Watson warned that officials were "losing this battle", and a civil class-action lawsuit was filed against protesters over the incessant horn blasting and disruption to daily life.

But on Monday morning a 10am deadline outlined in the class action suit – which asked protesters to leave of their own volition or face damages of nearly C\$10m (US\$7.9m) – came and went with no sign that the protest would end soon. Even after an Ontario judge approved the class's request for an injunction to end the honking, the protest continued on Monday afternoon.

Dozens of big-rig trucks, RVs and pickups remained parked in front of Parliament Hill and nearby streets, and protesters showed no signs of leaving. Free food and drink tables, a firewood distribution station and other infrastructure is helping them to stay put. Despite the cold, most of the protesters seemed to be in good spirits, and many of them professed to be there "out of love".

Ron, a highway rescue worker from a small community in rural British Columbia, was taking shelter at a disused bus stop. (Services have been suspended because buses are unable to reach the city centre.)

"I came here for my grandbabies," he said, arguing that Canadians had been robbed of making medical choices. "I don't want them to live under the thumb of the government."

Canada has one of the world's highest rates of vaccination against Covid-19 (some 85% of the country's truckers are vaccinated) and public health

measures have been broadly supported.

But Ron teared up describing an elderly neighbour who died two days after being vaccinated. A doctor said she had died of a rapid onset of cancer, but Ron said that he didn't believe him.

The “freedom convoy” began in the final week of January as a demonstration against vaccine mandates for truckers but has morphed into protest against broader public health measures – and as a rallying point for both conspiracy theorists and opponents of the government of Justin Trudeau.



A man holds a Canadian flag near Parliament Hill as demonstrators continue to protest the vaccine mandates implemented by the prime minister, Justin Trudeau, in Ottawa, on Monday. Photograph: Dave Chan/AFP/Getty Images

Swastikas, Confederate flags and QAnon symbols have all been seen at the protests. Hundreds of signs hung from the front gates of parliament, accusing the government of stripping away Canada’s freedoms and demanding that people “wake up”. With temperatures hovering below freezing, protesters warmed up around small fires.

One homemade sign on a protester’s car appeared to equate the vaccine mandate with the Nazi persecution of the Jews.

A red-haired man who did not give his name said he had travelled from Alberta – more than 3,000km away – to join the protest. He said that staying on might “financially break” him, but argued that a “slippery slope” of worse outcomes would await if vaccine mandates were allowed to remain in force.

“They’re calling us xenophobes but how could xenophobes be uniting the world?” he said.

The protests have drawn considerable support from US groups opposing Covid-19 restrictions and prominent Republican figures including Ted Cruz, Ron DeSantis and Donald Trump, who has called Trudeau a “far-left lunatic” who had “destroyed Canada with insane Covid mandates”.

Gerald Butts, a former senior adviser to Trudeau, tweeted: “For some senior American politicians, patriotism means renting a mob to put a G7 capital under siege.”

Many small businesses in the downtown core of the city remained shuttered on Monday, with owners preferring to shut down than risk altercations with the protesters – who often refuse to wear masks inside.

00:50

Trucker Covid protest paralyses Canadian capital – video

On Sunday night, police began removing gas and fuel supplies at a logistics base set up by protesters. “We are turning up the heat in every way we possibly can,” Ottawa police chief Peter Sloly told reporters.

But anger was growing among local residents at the failure of the police and city officials to disperse the protest, amid reports that truckers and their supporters had harassed or threatened locals.

Alexa Reedman, who was out walking her dog not far from the protest, had no patience with the protesters. “They should just leave. Now.”

She described an atmosphere of constant stress over the past week.

“You just don’t feel comfortable – you don’t feel 100% safe any more. It was initially called a protest, but when people use the word ‘occupation’ that really resonates – it does feel like an occupation. You just can’t live normally,” she said.

After residents of a nearby apartment block argued with truckers on Sunday night over the constant barrage of airhorns, two protesters allegedly started a fire in the building’s lobby and taped the doors shut. Ottawa police said on Monday that its arson unit was investigating.

But the convoy has also won supporters: thousands of people came to the protest site on Saturday. The convoy has also gained millions of dollars in crowdfunding support, now being gathered by a Christian crowdfunding site called GiveSendGo, after the original GoFundMe, which amassed more than \$10m, was cancelled.

Last week, Ottawa police said the crowdfunding had attracted “significant” support from the US.

In the few days since the new crowdfunding page was launched, supporters have sent in nearly \$5m.

On Monday, GiveSendGo tweeted “money for what you’re passionate about. We won’t stop you like others will!”

Directly in front of parliament, the driver of a semi-tractor parked in the road was sounding his horn and revving his engine, sending out plumes of black exhaust. Emblazoned on the side of the vehicle was the slogan: “God-given immUNITY works best.”

An elderly man in a face mask walked past, holding a sign saying: “Truckers go home.”

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Canada

Ottawa protesters turn to Christian crowdfunding site after GoFundMe snub

GoFundMe blocked fundraising after Canadian city declared emergency over protests against vaccine mandates



GoFundMe revoked millions of dollars in funding to the 'Freedom Convoy' after the demonstration became an occupation. Photograph: Cole Burston/Getty Images

[Kari Paul](#)

Mon 7 Feb 2022 19.12 EST

A trucker-led protest against vaccine mandates in [Canada](#) has raised several million dollars on a Christian crowdfunding site after being removed from

GoFundMe, sparking debate over how online platforms moderate campaigns.

The mayor of Ottawa [declared a state of emergency](#) over a week-long protest led by truck drivers over Covid-19 restrictions, three days after GoFundMe blocked fundraising for the “Freedom Convoy”.

The protest began in response to requirements that cross-border truckers between US and Canada be fully vaccinated. By Saturday, Ottawa police had reported about 5,000 protesters and at least 300 counter protesters in the city’s streets with trucks blocking the street and shooting off fireworks.

In response, GoFundMe stated that the “previously peaceful demonstration has become an occupation” and revoked more than \$8m protesting truckers had raised on the crowdfunding platform. GoFundMe [said on Saturday](#) the group had violated its terms of service, and that the platform automatically refunded those who had donated to the cause.

In response, the protestors migrated their fundraising to GiveSendGo, a self-proclaimed Christian crowdfunding site that in the past has hosted fundraisers for far-right groups including members of the Proud Boys and participants in the 6 January Capitol riots.

GoFundMe’s decision to block fundraising for the group has drawn criticism from both ends of the political spectrum, with some condemning tech platforms for allowing fringe groups to fundraise while Republicans claim anti-conservative bias.

Republican attorney general Patrick Morrisey of West Virginia urged residents on Friday to report GoFundme if they had been “victimized by a deceptive act or practice” and Donald Trump Jr tweeted that “All GOP Attorney Generals” should follow suit.

Four other states over the weekend promised to investigate GoFundMe, including Florida, Louisiana, Ohio and Texas. Ohio attorney general Dave Yost told the Washington Post he is looking into GoFundMe’s policies on refunds and suspensions of campaigns.

“What are you going to do next time when it’s not as visible a thing and you decide to pull out of a fundraiser for your own purposes?” Yost said, adding that the automatic refund “shouldn’t just be a result of public pressure, that should be the way they do business.”

Texas attorney general Ken Paxton, also a Republican, said his office has “assembled a team to investigate” possible wrongdoing. On Twitter he called GoFundMe a “BLM-backing company” that “went woke”, referring to the Black Lives Matter movement.

This article was amended on 11 February 2022. GoFundMe blocked fundraising for the “Freedom Convoy” before the state of emergency was declared, not after as an earlier version stated.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2022/feb/07/gofundme-criticism-pulling-funding-ottawa-protests>

Canada

Ottawa protests: how did the rallies against vaccine mandates begin and what's next?

Protesters occupying Canada's capital city say they will not leave until all vaccine requirements and mandates have been abolished

00:50

Trucker Covid protest paralyses Canadian capital – video

[Justin Ling](#) in Montreal

Mon 7 Feb 2022 11.52 EST

For more than a week, the centre of Canada's capital city has been paralysed by protestors who have blockaded the downtown area with trucks and cars. City police have described the protest as a “siege” and on Sunday the mayor of Ottawa declared a state of emergency.

How did this begin?

In early January, a relatively unknown group called Canada Unity announced they would be launching a “freedom convoy” to protest vaccine passports and mandates installed by various levels of government in Canada. This group has unsuccessfully tried to launch such a convoy before, but this time, things took off thanks to frustration with a new requirement that all truckers crossing the US-Canada border must be vaccinated against Covid-19.

While the vast majority of Canadian truckers are vaccinated, there were fears that forcing any number of truckers off the job could worsen supply chain pressures.

Some trucks travelled more than 5,000km to reach Ottawa, [where the convoy started to arrive on January 28.](#)

What have the protestors been doing?

After pulling into Ottawa, the convoy has morphed into a rolling protest in Ottawa's downtown core. Trucks and cars roamed through the city, laying on their horns and snarling traffic. Bands of protesters wandered the city, many pushing their way into malls and businesses – maskless, despite a provincial requirement that face coverings be worn indoors.

The size of the protest swelled to roughly 10,000 over its initial weekend, but declined significantly and last week, the protest became an occupation. More than 100 trucks sat parked on the main thoroughfare in front of Canada's parliament buildings. Protesters built a makeshift kitchen and a well-coordinated delivery network brought in hundreds of jerry cans of diesel to those running low on fuel.

Who's protesting?

While there are certainly some members of the convoy who are in Ottawa to protest the trucker vaccine mandate, convoy members raise a varied list of complaints.

Canada Unity, which operates as an umbrella organization for many of the protesters, is collecting signatures for its “memorandum of understanding”, [a document that demands the Canadian government rescind all vaccine requirements or “RESIGN their lawful positions of authority immediately”](#).

The group's founder, James Bauder – who has written on Facebook that Canada's prime minister, [Justin Trudeau](#), ought to be tried for treason, and who has endorsed the baseless QAnon conspiracy theory – insists that, should the document get enough signatures, an election will be triggered.

Joining Canada Unity is a motley crew of anti-vaccine and rightwing activists. Tamara Lich, who has coordinated a wildly successful GoFundMe, and Pat King, who has coordinated with many of the truckers, were involved

in efforts to declare the oil-rich Western provinces' independence from Canada.

Others who have latched on to the movement include QAnon figure [Romana Didulo](#), the self-proclaimed "Queen of Canada".

Speakers and protesters have rejected the science behind vaccines, called for Trudeau's arrest and trial, and waved Nazi and confederate flags.

What do they want?

The protesters say they will not leave Ottawa until all vaccine requirements and mandates have been abolished, a demand that is very unlikely to be met. Some have gone further and said they will camp out until Trudeau leaves office.

Who's supporting them?

The truckers have become a cause celebre for anti-vaccine groups and rightwing influencers. Their cause has been heralded by Elon Musk, Donald Trump, Tucker Carlson, and a host of others.

Bauder's memorandum of understanding has now collected about 300,000 signatures, while the occupiers' GoFundMe surpassed CAD\$10m (\$7.88m USD) – of that, CAD\$1m was released to cover expenses, while the remainder was returned to the donors after GoFundMe determined the protest violated their terms of service. That decision led Florida's governor, Ron DeSantis, to pledge an investigation of the company for alleged "fraud".

Other fundraisers have quickly made up the difference: another crowdfunding effort pulled in nearly CAD\$500,000, while a Bitcoin fundraiser has already raised nearly 9 BTC (\$389,955).

The Canadian public has been less supportive. Polling data suggests that roughly a third of the country has a positive impression of the truckers, but that number seems to be falling as the occupation wears on. Canada has one of the world's highest rates of vaccination against Covid-19, and vaccine mandates remain broadly popular.

Ottawa residents are growing particularly hostile and resentful after days of disruption. A class action lawsuit has been filed, seeking damages of nearly CAD\$10m over the incessant horn blaring that has disrupted daily life for the thousands of residents who live near the occupation zone.

What are the police doing?

Ottawa police have called in backup from other police forces around the province, but [the chief, Peter Sloly, has confessed that they are woefully outnumbered](#). While the crowd numbers may not be terribly impressive, they have a physical advantage thanks to their vehicles.

Police have increasingly laid fines and charges for mischief, and recently began blocking fuel deliveries to the occupiers – but it hasn't broken the occupation yet.

How does this end?

There's little chance that the Trudeau government will acquiesce to the protesters' demands – indeed, most of the vaccine requirements are administered at the provincial level, outside federal jurisdiction.

Ottawa's mayor, Jim Watson, is encouraging the federal government to appoint a mediator to find common ground with the protesters, but given their extreme demands, a compromise seems unlikely.

Ottawa police are unlikely to clear the occupation by force. They may begin laying more fines against the occupiers – but their impressive fundraising haul means they can withstand significant financial penalties.

Morale in the encampment has only been boosted by solidarity convoys to provincial capitals in Toronto and Quebec City, and planned convoys across the United States, Europe and Australia.

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