

# The Guardian

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## 2022.03.06 - Opinion

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**Opinion****Climate crisis**

# The Observer view on Ukraine and the climate emergency

[Observer editorial](#)

The crisis must not become a reason to drop our commitment to net zero target



Smoke billows from Belchatow power station, Europe's largest coal-fired power plant in Poland. Photograph: Kacper Pempel/Reuters

Sun 6 Mar 2022 01.30 EST

The report last week by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on the need to adapt to global warming made stark, unpleasant reading. Described by the UN secretary general, António Guterres, as “an atlas of human suffering”, it revealed that billions of people now live in parts of the world where they are highly vulnerable to climate change.

Death tolls from droughts, floods and storms are destined to increase in these regions as extreme heat events and inundations become more frequent.

Only urgent action today can halt the worst impacts and prevent a global calamity, argued the IPCC.

In a normal news week, warnings as dire as these would have made front-page headlines in British newspapers. Events in Ukraine ensured they were pushed inside, however. It is not surprising that the unfolding humanitarian crisis occurring in eastern [Europe](#) should be the prime focus of our attention and concern. However, there is a danger that the battle for Ukraine may divert attention from the approaching climate change crisis. Even before Russia launched its invasion and triggered a leap in fuel prices, some Conservative backbench MPs had been pressing for the government to cut back its green agenda, a move that has since been followed with calls for fracking to be resumed in the UK in order to boost fossil fuel production and help curb fuel price increases.

These manoeuvres are being mounted by a collection of MPs and peers known as the [Net Zero Scrutiny Group](#). They have tried to blame the government's green agenda for a cost-of-living crisis, which they say would be better addressed not by raising national insurance payments and imposing green levies but by cutting taxes, resuming UK shale gas extraction, and slowing down the rate at which we impose carbon emission cuts.

Nor are these campaigns confined to the UK. Across the EU, calls have been made for the bloc to reactivate old, decommissioned coal plants “as a precaution and in order to be prepared for the worst”, as the German economy minister, Robert Habeck, said last week.

Across the EU, calls have been made for the bloc to reactivate old, decommissioned coal plants ‘as a precaution’

Such proposals are alarming and the threats they pose should be made clear to the public. In the case of shale gas production, there is simply not enough in the UK to make up for the decline in our reserves of North Sea gas, which have been occurring for more than a decade. [Fracking](#) is also deeply unpopular with the public and given that any shale gas extracted would have to be sold at international market prices, it would have no impact on UK fuel

bills. Shale gas has no part to play in the generation of power in a Britain committed to playing a leading role in the battle against global warming.

Nor is it realistic to consider reopening coal plants. Coal is the dirtiest of all fossil fuels and any return to its widespread burning across Europe would send the worst possible message to developing nations currently resisting pressure to close down mines and ancient power plants as part of the international programme aimed at cutting back carbon emissions.

The real lesson from the battlefields of Ukraine is that Britain needs to rid itself of its fossil fuel addiction entirely and become self-reliant on electricity that is generated cleanly and efficiently. We need to do that to protect our energy supplies, while at the same time sending a message to the rest of the world that we take the coming crisis extremely seriously. The need to follow this course of action is reflected in the final words of last week's IPCC report: "Any further delay in concrete anticipatory global action on adaptation and mitigation will miss a brief and rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a livable and sustainable future for all."

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## OpinionUkraine

# The Observer view on Ukraine and western support

[Observer editorial](#)

We must do all we can to help defeat Vladimir Putin



Thousands turned out in Paris on Saturday for a ‘Stand With Ukraine’ march. Photograph: Yoan Valat/EPA

Sun 6 Mar 2022 01.00 EST

The world has watched in horror as Vladimir Putin has deployed the same tactics of indiscriminate slaughter of civilians in [Ukraine](#) as he did in Syria and Chechnya. The power of despots derives from their willingness to inflict unthinkable evil to bend the will of those they seek to dominate and Putin is no different. Ukrainians are locked into a mortal fight for their freedom and their liberty; the extraordinary bravery of its ordinary citizens should humble us all. Yesterday’s bellicose rhetoric from the Russian leader, including his threat to dismantle Ukraine’s statehood, offers no suggestion of compromise.

His war crimes are intensifying. Over the past week, we have seen civilians targeted with mass shellings. Densely populated cities have been under constant bombardment for days, as people hide in basements with dwindling supplies of food and water. Hospitals and kindergartens have been destroyed by the bombs. Whole families trying to [flee the carnage](#) have been shot in cold blood by Russian soldiers. In Volnovakha, shells hit civilian buildings every five minutes from a line of contact 20km away; [barely a building](#) in the town has been left unscathed. Bodies have been left in the streets; the peril facing those carrying out rescue missions is so great that they have to prioritise the living.

Putin's aim appears to be to break the morale of the Ukrainian people and to brutally terrorise them into surrender

Just as he did in Syria, Putin has ordered that key cities such as Mariupol should be besieged. Just as he did in Syria, he appeared to make concessions for humanitarian corridors to be established from Mariupol and Volnovakha, to allow for the evacuation of civilians, only to rip up the terms of that ceasefire as soon as it had been agreed. Putin's aim appears to be to break the morale of the Ukrainian people and to brutally terrorise them into surrender.

There will be a time to go over the failings of the west that brought us to this dreadful point, where there seems to be no way for other democracies to avert a humanitarian crisis in Ukraine; all they can do is to try to lessen the toll. For now, the most important question is what we can do to support Ukrainians and their democratically elected leader, [President Zelenskiy](#), in their fight and what we can do to limit the scale of the human catastrophe.

There are actions the west can take that should not even be the subject of debate, yet on which the British government seems to be dragging its feet. Despite minor relaxations, the UK's policy with respect to Ukrainian refugees remains far more restrictive than that of the EU. There are stories of families fleeing war who remain separated because of British bureaucracy and mean-spiritedness. This should be a source of national shame.

Nato cannot declare war on Russia, which is what a no-fly zone would amount to. But there are lessons the west must learn from Syria

Economic sanctions on Russian oligarchs may have limited direct effect on Putin on the short term. But there is no justification for not clamping down swiftly and hard: these are people who have profited directly from Putin's regime. Yesterday, the Italian government seized yachts and villas worth at least €140m from four Russians on the EU sanctions list. The UK government's sluggishness is likely to prove costly in terms of allowing individuals to escape the sanctions they must face.

These are the easier questions to answer about what actions the west must take. Far harder is what Nato should do to support Ukrainian forces and minimise civilian casualties in Ukraine itself. Here, the UK has led the way on providing accurate intelligence and military supplies, but there is the ever-present question of what more there is to do.

Nato cannot declare war on Russia, which is what a no-fly zone would amount to. This would be a reckless escalation of conflict with a nuclear power. But there are [lessons the west](#) must learn from Syria about effective military and humanitarian support in the face of Russian brutality. There must be more support for evacuating civilians, especially vulnerable adults and children, from cities not yet under siege. Cities should be flooded with humanitarian supplies and basic infrastructure, such as satellites and generators. Russian guarantees for humanitarian corridors cannot be relied upon. It is vital that war crimes are documented, not just in the interests of justice when the conflict is over, but to assist in negotiations for humanitarian access. Ukraine has reported that some of the anti-aircraft defence missiles it has [received from Germany](#) do not work, and has asked for more, a call that must be heeded.

The bravery of the Ukrainian resistance will be remembered by generations to come: the people from all walks of life volunteering to defend their country; the unarmed protesters marching against their [occupiers in Kherson](#), the only city the Russians have so far captured. Citizens of liberal democracies owe the people of Ukraine a debt of gratitude; they are at the frontline of the fight for freedom and democracy in the face of

authoritarianism, for rights that most of us are complacent about. Russia's strike on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station should serve as a reminder that they are more fragile than we would like to think.

It is too early to know the consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict for the global order. China, guilty of genocide within its own borders, will be watching closely how Nato countries respond to the Russian threat. The people of Ukraine fight for their nation's existence. What the US, Europe and the UK choose to do to support them could shape the course of history.

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[\*\*Observer comment cartoon\*\*](#)

[\*\*Vladimir Putin\*\*](#)

## **Vladimir Putin, war criminal – cartoon**

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## NotebookCoronavirus

# I'm looking forward to après-Covid birthdays

[Kadish Morris](#)

Now that restrictions have been lifted we will all be able to celebrate those significant milestones again



‘Covid changed the way we celebrate birthdays.’ Photograph: Roman Samborskyi/Alamy

Sat 5 Mar 2022 12.00 EST

I’m hopelessly fond of birthdays. My mum put a lot of effort into them when I was younger (she did a scavenger hunt for my 10th and I still have the clue cards). However, Covid-19 changed the way we celebrate birthdays. Not being able to celebrate with family and friends was a real anticlimax for those reaching milestone ages. Imagine turning 18 and not being able to toast it with your mates in an overcrowded club with cheap shots.

Covid-related restrictions ended last month, but will birthdays ever feel special again? My 30th was on Easter Sunday of 2020, at the height of restrictions, and the day that Dominic Cummings went to Barnard Castle to test his eyesight.

But I made the conscious choice to savour the little details: the flowers I received, the music playing while I cooked dinner, the fact it was 18C out.

The pandemic alleviated a lot of the stress that used to come with birthdays, given that everything was out of our control. Still, I am looking forward to the return of unregulated and (safe and responsible) hedonistic birthdays, because I will have an even deeper appreciation of what we're celebrating – life.

## Pity the poor students



Bad exam results could affect young people's chances of getting a student loan. Photograph: Ian Allenden/Alamy

Last month, [the government unveiled plans to change student loan repayments](#), lowering the salary threshold, extending the repayment period and threatening to enforce minimum GCSE and A-level entry requirements.

Many variables can affect a young person's performance and treating maths and English as the sole markers of intelligence devalues other skills needed in higher education, such as creative thinking.

More than half of young people from disadvantaged households fail to achieve GCSE grade 4; now they will be penalised for life for marks they didn't get as teenagers.

Those who do achieve the required grades will still suffer long term. An equality analysis said the proposals would most affect younger and female graduates as well as those from disadvantaged backgrounds or the north of England, Midlands or the south-west.

These reforms aren't about young people's futures, they're about saving money, and it's people from backgrounds like mine who will take the blow.

I went to university aged 18 in 2008, moving from Leeds to London and from a low-income household.

I never imagined I'd idealise my university debt, but payment plan 1 (lower interest rates and debt written off after 25 years) now seems like a sweet deal.

## **After his own art**



British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare poses with his work ‘The British Library’, 2014. Photograph: Stephen Chung/LNP/Shutterstock

Someone who is taking education into his own hands is the British artist [Yinka Shonibare](#), renowned for his brightly coloured Dutch wax fabric sculptures. He has launched an [artist residency](#) programme in Nigeria (where he was brought up) to help foster “exchange between artists of different cultures and career paths” across two sites in Lagos and on a working farm in Ijebu.

Shonibare curated last year’s Royal Academy summer exhibition, to critical acclaim. [I interviewed him](#) then and what was clear is his commitment to community, collaboration and fostering talent among those who come from marginalised backgrounds or lack formal training.

His programme joins similar efforts by artists such as Amoako Boafo, Ibrahim Mahama and [Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi](#) in Ghana and [Kehinde Wiley](#) in Senegal. Artists of the African diaspora, from [Lubaina Himid](#) to [Wangechi Mutu](#), are starting to shift the canon, and Shonibare’s project couldn’t have arrived at a better time.

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**Names in the newsTelevision**

## **Bleak as it is, Euphoria has made cult teen TV finally grow up**

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



Zendaya is brilliant, but it's all too harrowing for those of us still traumatised by Neighbours' Karl/Izzy/Susan love triangle



Zendaya's performance as Rue in *Euphoria* 'anchors the series'. Photograph: Jeff Kravitz/Getty Images for HBO

Sat 5 Mar 2022 10.00 EST

Strange, isn't it, in this era of horrors, that a once-in-a-generation, definitive TV show about teenagers is so unrelentingly bleak. In many ways, one can only hope that *Euphoria* is not definitive, because it makes being 17 look even less appealing than actually being 17 did.

Its characters are a painful mess of drugs, addictive behaviour and self-destruction. Were it not for the calibre of its performances, particularly from Zendaya as Rue, it would be borderline unwatchable. Her Disney-to-grit transformation is remarkable, and she anchors the series.

Viewers love it and the show has become staggeringly popular. Last week, *Euphoria*'s US channel, HBO, revealed that the series is its second-most watched programme since 2004, behind only the behemoth that was *Game of Thrones*. It almost doubled its audience with its second season, which recently ended, and has become the [most tweeted-about show of the decade](#). It was so ubiquitous on social media that it became possible to follow the

drama without watching it and arguably some of the many memes that sprang up around it were better written than the show itself.

Over to the more wobbly set side of TV and the Australian soap *Neighbours* [finally confirmed it would end](#) in the summer, after 37 years on air. It had been coming for some time, after Channel 5 dropped the show, leaving it with “no option” but to cease production.

I haven’t watched *Neighbours* for years, if not decades, and the outpouring of nostalgia for it is both sweet and of the Woolworth’s variety, that particular retrospective fondness for something few have paid much attention to for a long time. Inevitably, I thought of my own *Neighbours* era, in my late teens, when we gathered round the communal TV every lunchtime. That was teen TV, with a bit of late-era *Buffy* on the side; hardly harrowing, despite the trauma of the Karl/Izzy/Susan affair.

Now, more than ever, it is desperately easy to get sucked into a “we didn’t know we were born” mentality, but when I thought about the difference between what we consumed then and the options now, I couldn’t help but laugh. As an adult, I found this season of *Euphoria* to be too bleak for me. Perhaps I have aged out of it. But I can’t say for sure that it is not definitive and I wonder if its heaviness comes at a time when anything lighter would seem like a relic of the past.

## **James Joyce: what am I bid for a rare copy of Ulysses?**



A statue of James Joyce in Earl Street, Dublin. Photograph: Nando Machado/Alamy

In among the many celebrations taking place to mark the 100 years since James Joyce published *Ulysses*, and you could do worse than treating yourself to a glance at Virginia Woolf's increasingly irate account of reading it, a sweet [\*Ulysses\*-related story](#) appeared on BBC News that felt like a celebration of its own.

A mysterious, beautifully bound edition of the novel, from 1936, was donated to the Tenovus charity shop in Cardiff and almost went on sale for £1. (There are few satisfactions greater in life than a charity shop find, a moment of joy that makes all of the duds worth it. For example, it was well worth buying a sleeping bag for dogs, even though dogs aren't as keen on miniature sleeping bags as you'd think, in order to find a signed copy of the Duchess of Devonshire's memoir *Counting My Chickens*.)

“Because I’m not sure on books I would have literally put this book out for £1,” said the charity shop’s manager, Carl Scott. But a colleague recognised it might be worth something and saved it from its £1 fate. It will go to auction in a couple of weeks, where it is expected to fetch more than £800 for Tenovus Cancer Care.

## Pamela Anderson: now for the truth – ‘in her own words’



Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee: now for her side of the story.  
Photograph: Steve Granitz/INACTIVE/WireImage

The small screen is overrun by adaptations of true stories, which are the new reboots in terms of television revealing the limits of its imagination. They all start with a disclaimer, explaining that they're based on true events, but might, wink wink, have made some things up for the purposes of entertainment. The most queasy of the lot has been *Pam & Tommy*, dramatising the story of Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee's romance and the theft and leaking of their sex tape. It was widely pointed out that Anderson's lack of involvement, and rumours about her lack of approval, made the whole thing seem particularly off, given that it was about a woman being violated in the first place. It didn't help that the series seemed not to know what it was trying to say.

With mic-drop timing, Anderson has announced she will be telling her side of the story after all, just not in the form of a drama that features a talking penis. The star posted a handwritten note on Instagram, entitled My Life, in

the form of a sort of declaration of independence. “Not a victim but a survivor and alive to tell the real story,” she wrote.

This will appear as a [Netflix documentary](#), directed by Ryan White, who made *The Keepers*, a series about murder, child abuse and the Catholic church; Netflix says Anderson’s life will be recounted “in her own words this time”. It is only fair that she has the chance to reclaim her own experiences.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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**OpinionShane Warne**

## **Shane Warne: stealer of dreams, tormentor, England's nemesis**

[Emma John](#)



Cricket fans are bereft at the loss of the ebullient Australian bowler, even those whose teams he embarrassed and demolished



We expected Shane Warne to be part of our landscape for years, joking with the England players he used to humiliate. Photograph: Paul Miller/AAP

Sat 5 Mar 2022 14.25 EST

When the news broke of [Shane Warne's death](#) on Friday, there was a common reaction from cricket fans around the world – not just shocked, but instantly bereft. Warne's loss was unexpected and close on the heels of that of another Australian legend, former wicketkeeper [Rod Marsh](#). Marsh was 74. Warne was just 52 and despite his easygoing attitude to diet and fitness, it never occurred that this ebullient commentator, coach, poker player and former world champion was in anything but the prime of life.

Some of the sorrow was, naturally, the tragedy of a life left too early. We expected Warne to be part of our landscape for many years yet, sharing opinions on the game, joking with England players he used to humiliate on the field, managing teams in domestic tournaments and, who knows, perhaps one day taking the reins of an international team and transforming it into an all-conquering behemoth (please, God, let it be ours).

But it was also about something far deeper. Every nation has its sporting heroes, but it is the rare and special talent who can appear to belong to all

the world, beloved and feted by the countries whose downfall they engineered – in Warne's case, to their enduring embarrassment.

He baited, he sledged, he screamed appeals for lbws that weren't even close, just to annoy and confuse

Many England fans spent more than a decade cursing Warne's name. From the moment he bowled his first delivery in Ashes cricket – the “[ball of the century](#)” to Mike Gatting in 1993 – he was Nemesis. He took hundreds of wickets and humbled every Test side and the ones he took against your own always looked like the ones he most enjoyed. In England's case, that was probably true.

And it is in those fans' lament that we perceive something about the man, perhaps even something about this life we live. Warne was a tormentor, both stealer of and laugher at our dreams. He was the completely unfair advantage on the other side of the team sheet. The Australian team of the 90s was intimidating enough without him; his presence made them the determined murderer in an Agatha Christie novel who chooses to poison *and* shoot their victims.

02:47

Shane Warne, 'the King of Spin', dead at 52 – video obituary

Warne didn't just best his opponents, he revelled in it. He baited, he sledged, he screamed appeals for lbws that weren't even close, just to annoy and confuse. He did a complete number on England, neutering their only real assets of that period: a few stalwart batters who looked heroic taking bruises and broken jaws against the world's most terrifying fast bowlers, but like incompetent fools against Warne's indecipherable, unstoppable armoury of spin.

Googlies, flippers, sliders, unnamed mystery balls that probably never existed and *still* scared batsmen out – for a long time we resented him for these. How could we not? We leapt on any apparent flaw – his weight, his dating history, his use of a [diuretic pill](#) that just happened to contain a masking agent. Only when England fans [tasted victory](#) against him, in 2005,

could we finally unclench, to appreciate and celebrate what was there all along – a once-in-a-generation player and man whose exuberant personality was one with the extravagance of his gifts.

Shane Warne was the greatest villain of many sporting fans' lives – but only because we were on the other side. And, now he's gone, we can only wish for him back and to watch him, to enjoy his life, all over again.

Emma John's book, *Self Contained: Scenes From a Single Life*, is out now

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## OpinionLiteracy

# Fronted adverbials be damned. Let's teach the young what really matters

[Cathy Rentzenbrink](#)

New research shows kids don't learn creatively under a Kafkaesque grammar system



A new study by UCL and York University found grammar lessons don't help children to write creatively. Photograph: B Nordholm/IBL/Rex Features

Sun 6 Mar 2022 02.00 EST

Do you know what a fronted adverbial is? *Joyfully, the woman read the report* from University College London and York University, which says that grammar lessons don't help children write stories. There you go. It's where the adverbial phrase is at the front of the sentence, before the verb. Do you feel better for knowing that? More inclined to write a story? Nor do our children, according to the report.

None of which comes as a surprise to me. I was introduced to fronted adverbials in 2020, when I was home schooling my son, Matt. It wasn't an easy time, I'm sure you'll remember, and as I reeled from trying to navigate a changed world, I was stunned by how much of the actual difficulty in my comparatively fortunate daily life came from the agony of trying to help Matt with his grammar lessons.

I tried to have a good attitude about it. I wasn't taught grammar at school and this never prevented me from expressing myself and earning my living as a writer, but maybe I could enjoy learning something new. Anyway, how hard could it be?

Dear reader, it was awful. Now, admittedly Matt is dyslexic, hypermobile and struggles to sit still, which adds complexity to his learning, but I am none of those things and it made me want to cry too. Surely this can't be right, I thought. Surely if a highly literate writer can't understand or see the point in the lesson then there must be something wrong in inflicting this on all 10-year-olds? Because it wasn't just difficult to grasp, most of it would lead to bad writing.

I asked around parents of other children and found Matt and I were far from alone in our anguish. The very best that could be said about it was that it was unhelpful. A writer friend said she'd had to stop offering her daughter any editorial suggestions because she was supposed to be writing clumsy, ugly sentences to demonstrate her knowledge.

"Do you know what Kafkaesque means?" I asked Matt.

We ended up in tears so often that I pulled the plug. It felt grim and wrong to try to force my child to do something I knew was pointless, so I took an executive decision that we would read *Animal Farm* instead. My husband, more of a rule follower, was uneasy at me going off-piste. "He's never going to be able to do it," I said. "And it's making us both anxious and distressed. And if the world does end soon I'm going to be full of rage that I spent my last days on joy-squeezing activities introduced by [Michael Gove](#)."

Could we not ask how we want to educate our children, all of them, with creativity and joy?

The saddest thing for me about the education system, as I have witnessed it, is that it seems almost intentionally calculated to create anxious children, parents and teachers. Matt was only four the first time I was told he was “behind the benchmark”, which I still think is an obscene and revolting way to describe any child, and this emphasis on his shortcomings and failures has continued. The irony is that none of it will really matter in the future. He won’t need to understand grammar or have neat handwriting or even be able to spell to do most jobs. I just have to hope that we have sufficiently mitigated the damage over the years from him constantly feeling stupid for not being able to do things that are beyond his capabilities. Still, he knows what Kafkaesque means, which is the word I most often reach for to describe the education system.

None of this is the fault of the teachers, who are often in a situation of having to implement actions that they know don’t serve the children in their care. And the parents I feel most sorry for are those who aren’t confident writers, who don’t work out that the system is at fault, who are vulnerable to thinking that they and their child are in the wrong, that if only they work harder or concentrate better, then everything will be OK.

It’s a big, complex question, the matter of how we educate our children, and I imagine it feels overwhelming from the inside. I am not an expert. I’m just a parent and a lover of words and stories who feels deeply sad at all the unnecessary stress and missed opportunities and the avalanche of [mental health problems in children](#) and their parents and teachers. The bold thing would be to take a blank sheet of paper and start again. Could we not do that? Could we not ask how we want to educate our children, all of them, with creativity and joy? Failing that, we could undo anything that [Gove had anything to do with](#). Failing that, we could just stop teaching about fronted adverbials.

I promise, dear reader, that even if your child ends up making their living through words, they will never need to know what one is.

Cathy Rentzenbrink is the author of Write It All Down: How to Put Your Life on the Page

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## Observer lettersVladimir Putin

# Letters: the roots of Vladimir Putin's invasion ambitions

Humiliation and western hubris are what drove the Russian president to wage war in Ukraine



Vladimir Putin: the situation can be traced back to western triumphalism after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Photograph: Andrei Gorshkov/AP

Sun 6 Mar 2022 01.00 EST

Andrew Rawnsley is right to note that Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine signals a global contest for the soul of our planet ("[Liberal democracies must defend their values and show Putin that the west isn't weak](#)", Comment).

The current situation can be traced back to western triumphalism after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which may well have fed Putin's drive to address perceived humiliation. The hubris of the west in turn fed strategic inertia and a failure to follow words with action, as in Barack Obama's

refusal to act when Bashar al-Assad crossed his red lines in Syria, when Joe Biden abjectly abandoned Afghanistan, and the UK prostituted itself by accepting foreign investment without any checks on where it came from, turning London into the world's money-laundering capital. The wealth of a small global elite now holds sway over the planet, as noted by Nick Cohen.

This in no way justifies Putin's warmongering. However, I fear things will continue to get worse until and unless a new political leadership emerges that is willing and able to rebuild our economies on a more equitable and environmentally sustainable basis and make the options both electorally attractive and administratively feasible.

**Geoffrey Payne**

London W5

Would that our leaders might implement the punitive sanctions against Putin that Simon Tisdall suggests ("[Timidity, greed and sloth: why the west always loses to Putin](#)", Focus). There are other actions that could be taken through the UN that might ease an earlier, still unresolved, refugee crisis for Europe for which Russia bears much responsibility.

Putin's preoccupation with [Ukraine](#) and the near-worldwide abhorrence of his actions provide the opportunity to make a major effort to reconvene Syrian peace talks without the previous stumbling block of Putin's insistence that al-Assad remains in office. A peace agreement should be followed by UN-supervised elections and both Assad and Putin facing charges at the International Criminal Court.

**Professor Keith Barnham**

Frome, Somerset

The war in Ukraine is devastating and terrifying and Boris Johnson should not be allowed to use it for his career purposes ("[From partygate to Putin's war: PM rides on a rare wave of unity](#)", News). He may think of himself as a second Churchill, but it is up to the media to prevent this mistaken image from taking hold. It should be possible to find the newspaper contributions Johnson published in 2014, when Russia occupied Crimea.

Was he writing about how to preserve peace and protect democracy in [Europe](#)? Or was he already plotting to destabilise the European Union? And ever since 2014, he has spent a lot of his (and everybody else's) energy on creating disunity in the west, instead of the unity he is now suddenly praising. Johnson is no Churchill. He is still the lying opportunist he always has been.

**Aileen Rambow**

London N10

Your leader article's cynicism concerning Johnson's promises to do anything about, let alone clean up, Russian dirty money ("[Putin's Russia is a pariah state. A united front must complete its isolation](#)", Editorial) is understandable. Inured by Johnson's lying, Putin's has been less surprising. It's noticeable, though, that it's taken some Ukrainians just a few days of the war before publicly questioning Johnson's bona fides after he made his pledges, compared to the months or even years it has taken some in his own country to do the same.

**David Murray**

Wallington, Surrey

Our use of Russian oil and gas is helping to fund Putin's war machine. This affects the UK less than some European countries, but surely we and the EU can cooperate to cut back on Russian oil/gas imports, and accept some overnight power cuts as a result. It is our inconvenience against Ukrainian civilians being killed by the Russian military.

**Peter Henshaw**

Sherborne, Dorset

## Supply, demand and degrees

Will Hutton describes the UK university system as a demand-led market ("[Kicking universities is no way to solve the divide between the academic and the rest](#)", Comment).

However, it is a perverse market. In a self-correcting functioning market, when the product yields diminishing satisfaction, demand falls, entrepreneurs reduce output and resources are transferred to more productive uses. However, education markets don't work like this. Instead, when

“consumers” (ie students) perceive that the “product” (ie access to sought-after job opportunities) no longer provides this benefit, demand does not diminish; instead, many students perceive the need for more, not less, education because otherwise they may face long-term unemployment.

A-levels were once necessary for entry to many professions in the UK, then first degrees became essential, and recently those with masters and doctorates far outnumber the job opportunities they aspire to.

Proposals for lowering the level of income at which student loans kick in, and extending repayments from 30 to 40 years, will reduce the amount of debt falling on taxpayers but this delays the need to rethink the future of university funding.

**Lawrence Lockhart**

Bath, Somerset

## Held back by dyslexia

Benjamin Zephaniah’s experiences are an inspiration to us all (“[New rules will stop the likes of me going to uni – Zephaniah](#)”, News). The government must be stopped in its proposals to bar any student who fails GCSE English or maths from securing higher educational loans.

The fact a person has dyslexia shouldn’t inhibit their progress in life. My inabilities at school resulted in years of embarrassment when asked to stand up and read out a passage from our English books. It also led to years of questioning my ability to progress in life.

It wasn’t until I entered university as a mature student that one of my lecturers, himself dyslexic, identified that I had a learning disability. It’s critical that the government develops new educational systems that benefit students with dyslexia and enhances their chances of reaching their goal of entering higher education.

**Stuart Carruthers**

Lewes, East Sussex

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## For the record

# For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 6 Mar 2022 01.00 EST

The journalist Gauri Lankesh, who was shot dead in 2017, was not a Muslim (“[Reviled, harassed, abused: Modi’s most trenchant critic speaks out](#)”, 27 February, News, p30).

We misnamed Vir Technology as Vir Technologies (“[Will we get a single variant-proof vaccine for Covid?](#)”, 27 February, the New Review, p18).

A feature about Shakespeare was illustrated with an image from Akira Kurosawa’s *Throne of Blood* (1957). It should have given the actor’s name, Toshiro Mifune (“[Bard wired](#)”, 16 January, the New Review, p30).

We noted an art historian’s nickname for a portrait of Isabella Clara Eugenia, Infanta of Spain as “‘ ‘Er Indoors’ after *Rumpole of the Bailey*”. That is the moniker Arthur Daley’s character gives his wife in the TV series *Minder*. Hilda Rumpole is “She Who Must Be Obeyed” (“[Hanging in plain sight: art expert learns that £65 ‘replica’ on his wall may be an old master](#)”, 9 January, p11).

We miscaptioned Remedios Varo’s painting *Hacia la torre* (To the tower) as “Bordando el manto terrestre (Embroidering the Earth’s Mantle)” in a review of Tate Modern’s Surrealism Beyond Borders (“[Tales of the unexpected](#)”, 27 February, the New Review, p26).

Homophone corner: “... the wood and bones, it just leeches into everything...” (“[Ticket to Roman Britain](#)”, 27 February, Magazine, p24).

Other recently amended articles include:

[Fungus farming: how to grow your own mushrooms](#)

[The Observer view on Russia's invasion of Ukraine](#)

[The Observer view on the non-aggression pact between Labour and the Lib Dems](#)

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**Opinion**[The far right](#)

## **Far right and far left alike admired Putin. Now we've all turned against strongmen**

[Nick Cohen](#)



After the Ukraine invasion, his former defenders are rushing to distance themselves



Marine Le Pen, leader of France's far-right Rassemblement National party, with Vladimir Putin in Moscow in 2017. Photograph: Sputnik/Reuters

Sat 5 Mar 2022 14.00 EST

The worst people in the west were pro-Putin. They excused his imperialist ideology and crimes against humanity and never paid a price for bootlicking a dictatorship. On the contrary, they took Britain out of the European Union and took over the Labour party. They won the presidencies of the United States and the Czech Republic and seized control of politics and the media in Hungary.

The savagery of Vladimir Putin's assault on Ukrainian democracy has sent them into headlong retreat. Nothing better illustrates their panic than Marine Le Pen having to deny that she had ordered the destruction of 1.2m election leaflets that featured pictures of her giving Putin a firm [handshake](#), as if to thank him for [all the money](#) he had loaned her.

Another French far right leader, Éric Zemmour, announced his affinity with the fascist tradition by defending Vichy's collaboration with the Nazis and the persecutors of Albert Dreyfus. With the first round of the French presidential election opening on 10 April, he returned the support the

Kremlin has given him by saying that the French should not treat Putin's victims as refugees because they would "submerge" France under a wave of immigration.



Éric Zemmour, far-right candidate for French presidential election, is suffering for his anti-Ukraine comments. Photograph: Luc Nobout/via Zuma Press/Rex/Shutterstock

Cheerfully, [Zemmour's image](#) of Ukrainians pushing French heads under water, as if they were aggressors rather than victims, did nothing to stop the decline in his support. In Hungary, the victory of the Putin wannabe Viktor Orbán in the elections on 3 April no longer seems the certainty it once was.

In the UK, the Labour leadership ordered MPs from the rump of the Corbyn left to disassociate themselves from [a letter](#) blaming Putin's war on Nato or lose the whip. Even [Donald Trump](#) and [Nigel Farage](#) are backing away from Putin now and when rats that size abandon ship we know we are in uncharted waters.

Writers have struggled to find a label for the movements that have transformed the west. "Populist" is too vague. "Nationalist" works well until you remember that they hate large numbers of their fellow citizens and are more than willing to ally with their nations' enemies. "Racist"? Certainly in

some cases but how does that oft-repeated insult cover the religious sectarianism of a Modi or Erdogan? “Fascist?” In the rhetorical echoes and common heritage, of course, but not in goose-stepping fact.

But they have all been “Putinist”, and not only because they have flattered the Kremlin.

The appeal of the Russian empire to parts of the far left remains both a cause of outrage and a pitiable demonstration of moral and intellectual decay. From Karl Marx to Oscar Wilde, every 19th-century liberal and socialist knew imperial Russia was the greatest fortress of European reaction. (Wilde was so moved by the struggle against it he wrote *Vera; or, The Nihilists*, a forgotten and truly terrible play to honour an attempt to assassinate the tsarist governor of St Petersburg.)

Boris Johnson also likes to pose as a strongman, who can get Brexit done

The appeal of Putin’s revival of tsarism to the modern far right may be grotesque but at least it makes sense. Putin is anti-democratic and so are they, as Orbán’s quasi-dictatorship and Trump’s attempts to overturn elections show. Putin despises human rights and so do they. Putin trades on a dark nostalgia and so do they. Above all, Putin is a strongman and it is as the tough guys who make their countries great again through a sheer act of will that they have sold themselves to tens of millions of voters.

Did I call them the “far right”? Forgive me, for “far right” doesn’t quite cover it. As I said, the Labour mainstream used the invasion to move against the tyrannophile left. We have seen nothing comparable on the supposedly mainstream right.

No pieces in the *Mail* or *Telegraph* agonising over how they ever came to be fooled by Farage and Arron Banks. No speeches from Boris Johnson warning against the seductions of tyrannical thinking and power worship. The silence shows that the border between the centre right and the far right has fallen into disrepair.

For Johnson also likes to pose as a strongman, who can get Brexit done. He too wallows in nostalgia for the past rather than hope for the future and defines himself against a large portion of his fellow countrymen: the remoaners, the naysayers, the libtards and the woke.

In the most desperate of circumstances, Ukraine cries to be allowed into the European Union, that same European Union a generation of unforgivably trivial Tories have dedicated their lives to destroying. Putin shows his fear of Russians learning the truth about his war by blocking their [access to the BBC](#), the same BBC that Johnson underfunds and promises to ruin whenever he needs to [toss red meat](#) to the Tory right.

Predicting anything in this hellish week is a fool's endeavour but of one thing I am sure: Putin has destroyed the appeal of strongman politics in the 2020s as effectively as Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin did in the 1930s.

The career of Volodymyr Zelenskiy explains why. He has not played the Putinist game of divide and rule or created a personality cult. At his inauguration, he asked government workers to end the Soviet practice of putting pictures of the ruler on their office wall. “Hang your kids’ photos instead and look at them each time you are making a decision,” [he said](#).

Just before Putin’s forces attacked, Zelenskiy appealed to Russians in their own language to reject Putin and emphasised his determination to protect Russian minorities in [Ukraine](#). The broad appeal of his leadership helped create the broad resistance to invasion.

Tom Tugendhat, the chair of the foreign affairs select committee, told me there was nothing soppy about leaders doing all in their power to seek national unity. A nation’s resilience depends on governments seeking to avoid needless dividing lines. “We must unite the country in peacetime so we can defend ourselves in an emergency.”

We are now in an economic war that will send fuel and food prices ever higher. The poorest will hurt the most and in the name of national unity they deserve emergency help. Worse may be on the way than inflation and recession. As things stand, the most fitting epitaph to the Trumps, Farages

and Le Pens who prostrated themselves before Putin is that if economic war is all he brings down on us, we can count ourselves lucky.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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# Headlines

- Cost-of-living crisis Businesses urge Sunak to delay ‘ill-timed and illogical’ NI rise
- Sexual abuse Viewers of online abuse at high risk of contacting children directly, study finds
- London tube strike Workers stage 24-hour walkout in jobs dispute
- Health Muscle strengthening lowers risk of death from all causes, study shows
- Immigration Lords reject clause in bill criminalising refugees who arrive by irregular route

## Manufacturing sector

# Businesses urge Sunak to delay ‘ill-timed and illogical’ NI rise

As Ukraine crisis drives energy prices up, firms say tax rise could put Covid recovery at risk



Make UK, which represents 20,000 firms, said the tax hike planned for April should be pushed back. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

*[Richard Partington](#) Economics correspondent*

*[@RJPartington](#)*

Mon 28 Feb 2022 19.01 EST

Rishi Sunak is facing renewed pressure from business leaders to delay a planned £12bn rise in national insurance, amid warnings over soaring costs for companies and households as the Russian invasion of Ukraine drives up inflation.

The manufacturing trade body Make UK, which represents 20,000 firms of all sizes across the country, said the tax hike planned for April should be pushed back until the UK economy is in a stronger position. It warned the government that pressing ahead would risk firms slamming the brakes on recruitment and putting the economic recovery from Covid at risk.

With concerns mounting over the fallout from Vladimir Putin ordering his troops into Ukraine last week, the business lobby group said now was not the time to add further self-imposed costs on companies.

“The proposed increase remains illogical and will be even more ill-timed given how circumstances have rapidly changed since it was announced,” said Stephen Phipson, the chief executive of Make UK.

“The cost burden on business is continuing to escalate and, while some of these increases are due to global events, government must avoid adding shooting business in the foot by an entirely self-imposed decision.”

According to a survey of almost 300 manufacturing firms by Make UK, as many as three in five said the tax rise would have a moderate or significant impact on their hiring intentions. Almost three-quarters said they would pass on, or would be very likely to pass on, the rise in their costs to customers in the form of higher prices for their products and services.

It comes as the fighting in Ukraine drives up global energy prices, and as the conflict and western economic sanctions unleashed in response lead to tensions over the supply of Russian gas to Europe. Following a sharp rise in wholesale gas markets last week, economists said [UK inflation could rise](#) from the current rate of 5.5% to peak above 8% within months – the highest level for three decades.

Boris Johnson had [attempted to draw a line](#) under demands to delay or scrap the planned tax rise, arguing in a joint letter with Sunak that the policy was the right way to deal with NHS Covid backlog and reforms to social care.

With the prime minister criticised over the “partygate” affair, senior Conservatives had urged him to tear up the plan for a [1.25 percentage point](#)

increase in national insurance contributions for both workers and employers announced last September.

However, the tax-raising plan has led to broader unrest in company boardrooms, when taken together with other steps to raise the UK's tax burden to the highest sustained levels in 70 years.

In an intervention ahead of Sunak's spring economic forecast later this month, the Confederation of British Industry urged the chancellor to set out a range of tax cuts and spending commitments to offset the impact on firms.

The CBI said a permanent investment deduction was necessary to help companies boost the amount they spend on productivity-enhancing technologies, machinery and buildings by £40bn a year by 2026. It said firms should be offered a 100% tax deduction against such investments from April 2023, offsetting an increase in the headline rate of corporation tax from 19% to 25% in the same month.

Tony Danker, the director general of the CBI, said: "You've come out of the blocks with a pretty damaging measure, which is that increase in corporation tax. So I think it is incumbent upon government now to compensate for that."

The CBI said firms needed measures to encourage them to spend, after a period of weak business investment since the Brexit vote and during the Covid-19 pandemic. The lobby group estimates that £100bn could be added to the Treasury's coffers by 2030 if the UK bucks current predictions and achieves a more ambitious 2.5% average growth rate for GDP over the remainder of the decade.

"Faced with a record tax burden, a cost-of-living crisis, wage pressures and the end of the super-deduction, firms will be looking to the spring statement for a clear signal that the government's ambition will be matched by action," Danker added.

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## Rights and freedomWorld news

# Viewers of online abuse at high risk of contacting children directly, study finds

Darknet survey finds 42% sought contact after watching sexual abuse online, with escalating porn habits driving users to illegal material



The pandemic has seen an increase in arrests in the UK, mostly of men, for watching online sexual abuse. Photograph: Sandy Gasperoni/Alamy

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[About this content](#)

[Harriet Grant](#)

Tue 1 Mar 2022 01.30 EST

The largest ever survey on the thoughts and behaviours of people who watch child sexual abuse material (CSAM) online has found significant evidence that those who watch illegal material are at high risk of going on to contact or abuse a child directly.

Nearly half (42%) of [respondents to the survey](#), the first of its kind, said they had sought direct contact with children through online platforms after viewing CSAM, and 58% reported feeling afraid that viewing CSAM might lead to them committing abuse in person.

The report, published in the Stanford Internet Observatory's Journal of Online Trust and Safety, is the result of months of [groundbreaking research](#) by Finnish human rights group [Protect Children](#).

Researchers placed surveys on the darknet, tagged with code words used by people searching for child sexual abuse material. About 15,000 people responded and researchers carried out detailed studies on 1,500 who replied in full to the survey.

Tegan Insoll, specialist researcher at Protect [Children](#), told the Guardian: “This is really significant. We now have a peer-reviewed study to prove that watching [CSAM] can increase the risk of contact.”

The study comes as [rising numbers of men are being arrested in the UK](#) and elsewhere for watching child abuse online. “Many offenders claim that watching does not extend to harming children [directly] but we show it can increase the risk of contact and there are other factors linked to dangerous behaviour,” Insoll added. “The darker the material – for example the younger the victims – the more likely a viewer is to go on to contact a child. The same can be seen with frequency of watching this material and the age at which they were first exposed to it.”

The [research has already shown](#) that a large percentage of respondents first saw child abuse material online before they were 18.

“This is a massive human rights issue. Children have a right to wellbeing and health – protected from sexual violence. We are working with people around the world to use our work to show the vital importance of removing child sexual abuse material from the internet.”

The UK’s only helpline for people who want to stop looking at illegal child abuse material online has reported a “monumental” increase in people calling.

[The Stop it Now! helpline](#) supports people who are worried about their own or someone else’s sexual thoughts or behaviours towards children. New data published on Tuesday reports that 165,000 people have contacted them online or by phone during 2021, double that of the previous year.

Experts at the charity say that increased isolation and job losses during the pandemic over the past two years have contributed to the rise, as have escalating porn habits. More than 2,000 people visited the Stop it Now! “get help” website after receiving a warning about their behaviour on porn sites while searching for material featuring under-18s.

Donald Findlater, director of the Stop It Now! helpline said: “Many of those who contact us started out on mainstream porn sites and feel they need more extreme content. A few are struggling with a longstanding sexual interest in children and think that looking at ‘only pictures’ is a way of managing that interest. Everyone needs to know [this] is illegal and children are harmed by it.”

In the UK, the [NSPCC](#) offers support to children on 0800 1111, and adults concerned about a child on 0808 800 5000. The National Association for People Abused in Childhood ([Napac](#)) offers support for adult survivors on 0808 801 0331. In the US, call or text the [Childhelp](#) abuse hotline on 800-422-4453. In Australia, children, young adults, parents and teachers can contact the [Kids Helpline](#) on 1800 55 1800, or [Bravehearts](#) on 1800 272 831, and adult survivors can contact [Blue Knot Foundation](#) on 1300 657 380. Other sources of help can be found at [Child Helplines International](#)

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## London Underground

# London tube strike: major disruption as 24-hour walkout hits travel

Entire underground suspended during Tuesday morning rush hour with picket lines outside stations



People queue to get on to a bus in central London on Tuesday during the first of this week's tube strikes. Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

*[Jamie Grierson](#)*

*[@JamieGrierson](#)*

Tue 1 Mar 2022 09.46 EST

Commuters have been facing chaos after thousands of tube workers went on strike over [Transport](#) for London spending cuts.

TfL encouraged people to work from home on Tuesday and Thursday as a result of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union's strike. The union

said members were “solidly supporting” industrial action with picket lines outside tube stations.

Another 24-hour walkout is planned for Thursday, with knock-on effects on services on Wednesday and Friday. The union fears spending cuts will lead to hundreds of job losses and reductions in pensions and working conditions.

The entire underground was suspended during the Tuesday morning rush hour, although limited services returned later on a few lines. People tried to get to work on buses or in taxis but huge queues formed, forcing many to give up and go home, the Press Association reported.

Angry commuters were left unable to get to work. Sean Reynolds told the Evening Standard: “This is unacceptable. I have only just started going back to the office full time. Fares are going up and now this, it’s just not on.”

Meanwhile, Damian Callaghan said: “This is terrible for the economy. The tube workers should be ashamed.”

Transport for [London](#) (TfL) has said no jobs would be lost and it had not proposed any changes to pensions or terms and conditions.

TfL’s chief operating officer, Andy Lord, said: “We haven’t proposed any changes to pensions or terms and conditions, and nobody has or will lose their jobs because of the proposals we have set out, so this action is completely unnecessary.”

He encouraged people to work from home on Tuesday and Thursday. Asked about what provisions had been made for key workers who were not able to work from home, Lord said: “We’ve laid on extra buses and we also have all our other TfL services which are operating normally. I hope that they will be able to get to work without too much of an inconvenience.”

The RMT general secretary, Mick Lynch, said: “Sadiq Khan should be standing up to Tory ministers who want to needlessly attack jobs, pensions and conditions of key transport workers.

“It is this political failure that has left tube workers with no choice but to strike this week. Our members have been left paying the price for a turf war between City Hall and the government and they are not having it, as can be seen right across London today.”

Train passengers in the south of England were also hit by disruption unrelated to the tube strike. Network Rail said a suspected power supply failure had led to a “complete loss of signalling” in Ashtead, Surrey.

A spokesperson for Khan, the mayor of London, said the strikes would cause disruption to Londoners and businesses trying to recover from two devastating years.

“It will also damage TfL’s revenues at a time when TfL is already under huge financial strain due to the pandemic,” they said. “TfL are working to mitigate the impact of the strikes but disruption is inevitable.

“Sadiq doesn’t want to see strike action and is imploring the unions to come to the table and work with City Hall and TfL.”

The action came on the day rail fares were increased by an average of 4.8%, causing more misery for passengers.

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## Health

# Muscle strengthening lowers risk of death from all causes, study shows

Half an hour a week of activities such as gardening, sit-ups or yoga could help reduce the risk of dying from any cause by a fifth



Dig for vitality: it's recommended adults do exercise working all the major muscle groups at least two days a week. Photograph: Mode Images/Alamy

*[Andrew Gregory](#)* Health editor

Mon 28 Feb 2022 18.30 EST

Half an hour of muscle strengthening activity such as lifting weights, push-ups or heavy gardening each week could help reduce the risk of dying from any cause by as much as a fifth, according to a new global analysis of studies conducted over three decades.

Health guidelines recommend muscle strengthening activities, primarily because of the benefits for musculoskeletal health. Previous research has indicated a link to a lower risk of death, but until now experts did not know what the optimal “dose” might be.

To try to find out, researchers in [Japan](#) scoured databases for relevant studies that included adults without major health issues who had been monitored for at least two years. The final analysis included 16 studies, the earliest of which was published in 2012. Most were carried out in the US, with the rest from England, Scotland, Australia and Japan. The maximum monitoring period lasted 25 years.

The analysis found that 30 to 60 minutes of muscle strengthening activity every week is linked to a 10% to 20% lower risk of death from all causes, and from heart disease and cancer. The results were published in the [British Journal of Sports Medicine](#).

The findings were independent of aerobic exercise. But the analysis pointed to a J-shaped curve for most outcomes, with no conclusive evidence that more than an hour a week of muscle strengthening reduced the risk any further.

UK physical activity guidelines say muscle strengthening activities can include carrying heavy shopping bags, yoga, pilates, tai chi, lifting weights, working with resistance bands, doing exercises that use your own body weight such as push-ups and sit-ups, heavy gardening such as digging and shovelling, wheeling a wheelchair or lifting and carrying children.

It is recommended adults do strengthening activities working all the major muscle groups at least two days a week as well as doing at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity each week. The researchers found people reap the most benefits when they regularly do both.

The analysis included studies with participant numbers varying from about 4,000 to 480,000, and ranged in age from 18 to 97. It showed that muscle

strengthening was associated with a 10% to 17% lower risk of death from any cause, heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

Researchers said the maximum risk reduction of between 10% and 20% was found at 30 to 60 minutes a week of muscle strengthening activities for death from any cause, heart disease and cancer. An L-shaped association was observed for diabetes, with a large risk reduction up to 60 minutes/week of muscle strengthening activities, after which there was a gradual tapering off.

Joint analysis of muscle strengthening and aerobic activities showed the reduction in risk of death from any cause, heart disease and cancer was even greater when these two types of activities were combined: 40%, 46%, and 28% lower, respectively.

The researchers acknowledged limitations to their findings, the main one of which was that data from only a few studies were pooled for each of the outcomes studied. “Given that the available data are limited, further studies – such as studies focusing on a more diverse population – are needed to increase the certainty of the evidence,” they concluded.

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## Refugees

# Lords reject clause in bill criminalising refugees who arrive by irregular route

Attempt to classify refugees into types among four clauses in Boris Johnson's nationality and borders bill to be voted down



Monday evening in the House of Lords as the nationality and borders bill is debated. Peers voted 204 to 126 against an attempt to create a hierarchy of refugees based on how they came to the UK. Photograph: Parliament TV

*[Rajeev Syal](#)*

Mon 28 Feb 2022 17.50 EST

Boris Johnson's nationality and borders bill has suffered four defeats in the [House of Lords](#), including the removal of a crucial plank of the government's immigration strategy that would have criminalised refugees who arrive in the UK through an irregular route.

Clause 11 of the bill would have allowed refugees to be divided into two classes based on how they arrived in the UK. Peers voted by 204 to 126, defeating the clause by a majority of 78.

If the clause had remained, people who made their own way to the UK would be given an inferior form of protection with more limited rights, compared with those who arrived through government-sanctioned routes.

It meant that anyone arriving in the UK by an illegal route, such as by a small boat across the Channel, could have their claim ruled as inadmissible, receive a jail sentence of up to four years, have no recourse to public funds, and could have their family members barred from joining them.

Monday was the first of three days of debate during the bill's report stage. After that, changes made in the Lords will return to the Commons. The government could then accept the changes imposed by the Lords or challenge them.

Steve Crawshaw, the policy director of Freedom from Torture, said the vote had delivered a bloody nose for the government.

"The cruelty and illegality of the nationality and borders bill, for [Ukrainian and other refugees](#), was never in doubt. This resounding victory means that even this government, a stranger to the truth and humanity, cannot avoid confronting that," he said.

Speaking against the clause, the refugee campaigner and Labour peer Lord Dubs said people fleeing Afghanistan and Ukraine "give the lie to the idea that somehow you can get here by the sort of route that the [Home Office](#) approves of".

All four defeats came at the report stage of the controversial nationality and borders bill. Peers also amended the Bill to scrap a controversial measure that would allow people to be stripped of their British citizenship without warning.

The House of Lords supported by 209 votes to 173, majority 36, a move to strike the proposed power from legislation.

Under existing law, deprivation of citizenship can be carried out for those people considered to pose a threat to the UK – including terrorism or war crimes – or if they obtained their citizenship fraudulently.

The bill was supposed to enable citizenship to be removed without notice if it would “not be reasonably practicable”, and in the interests of national security.

Maya Foa, director of the non-profit organisation Reprieve, said: “Government’s powers to strip citizenship are already the broadest in the G20. They are used disproportionately against people from ethnic minority communities. MPs must listen, and strike this discriminatory provision from the bill.”

Home Office examples of where they would strip citizenship without notification include if someone is in a war zone or if informing them would reveal sensitive intelligence sources.

Peers also defeated the government’s plan to stop the relatives of exiled Chagos islanders from being entitled to British citizenship. The House of Lords backed by 237 votes to 154, majority 83, a move that would allow descendants of a person born before 1983 on the Chagos Islands to register as a British overseas territories citizen and as a British citizen.

Arguing the need for the amendment to the bill, Labour peer Lady Lister said it aimed to tackle the “injustice” faced by descendants of Chagossians who were evicted by the British government.

She said: “Those descendants are now denied the right to register as citizens that they would have had were they still resident in their homeland. The reason they are denied that right is because they are no longer resident, but that is because they have been exiled from that homeland by the British government.”

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- [Hidden life of a courier 13-hour days, rude customers – and big dreams](#)
- [The long read Roughly the size of Wales: four reflections on Welsh identity in the 21st century](#)
- ['Brutalist hanging gardens of Babylon' The maddening, miraculous Barbican hits 40](#)
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## The hidden life of a courier: 13-hour days, rude customers – and big dreams



Khan clusters his deliveries to maximise efficiency – and profit. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

An army of drivers risked their health to get us goods during lockdown. But what is it like making deliveries while negotiating parking fines, traffic jams

and spiralling costs?



Sirin Kale

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Abdul Khan has a dream. He wants to own a farm, or maybe a zoo. He will keep rabbits, sheep, cows, dogs, cats, horses and pigeons. There will be a guesthouse that he can rent out to tourists. He doesn't mind where the farm is – in the UK or back home in Pakistan – as long as there is room for his animals. "I love all the animals," he says. "Farming is a dream life. I would love it."

For now, Khan (not his real name) works in London as a courier for a delivery app. Khan, who is in his early 30s, didn't expect to end up couriering. His plan was always to set up a business. He is a natural entrepreneur. When he was at school in Pakistan, he bought sandwiches and sold them for profit at a market. When he was studying business management, he sold sim cards at a train station. He was good at it – and it is not hard to see why. Khan is charming and charismatic, the sort of person who – as his mother-in-law always tells him – could sell sand to Arabs and ice to Inuit.

By 2019, after working in retail for nearly a decade, Khan had saved enough money to buy a hot food van. He planned to sell Pakistani street food at markets in London and burgers and chips on sunny days at beaches on the south coast. He bought all the equipment and did work experience with friends who owned street food vans. He did test runs. A south coast resort on a rainy day was a bust – he made only £20 – but when it was sunny he made £2,000 in four hours. He would have made even more money, but he ran out of food.

By the end of the year, the business seemed viable. Khan had applied for all the permits and identified where he wanted to trade. He had saved enough money to live on until it was profitable. He went on holiday, to visit family, and returned in February 2020, ready to knuckle down.

Then Covid hit. Khan spent all his savings on rent and living costs. He was ineligible for government assistance, as he hadn't been trading long enough, and for months he was unable to take the van out to earn money. "The pandemic killed me," he says.

So, out of necessity, Khan works as a courier. He has six people to support. His wife has health problems and has to look after their two young children, so can't work. His parents in Pakistan are elderly and frail. Khan sends them money every month. He is an only child, so there is no one to share the load.



When considering jobs, he must take into account the congestion charge, the cost of fuel and the likelihood of hitting traffic. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

"I hate running the kitchen," says Khan, using a Pakistani colloquialism that means paying your household expenses. "I can do much better. But I have to provide."

A pot of chewing gum rattles around in the cup holder of his hybrid car; Khan often skips lunch to keep working, so he chews gum to stave off hunger pangs. He has two phones: one plugged to his dashboard, which he uses as a satnav, and one that he uses to select jobs via the company's app and liaise with customers. The second phone pings constantly with notifications that are like sound effects on a video game.

Every morning, Khan logs into the app. It has a bulletin board listing all the available jobs for that day. Khan scans the app, looking to cluster similar postcodes and create an efficient and maximally profitable route. The key is to find the biting point between postcodes and job value. On a good day, Khan will collect a bunch of packages from N5, say, and drop off all of them in SW9, say, and all of these jobs will be high-value, at £15 or £20 each. (It is rare for an inner-London rate to be higher than £25 a delivery. "That is very much a glorious job," says Khan.)

It is more complicated than it sounds. For starters, Khan needs to make sure all the packages will fit in his car. He picks up all sorts of things routinely: supermarket shopping, restaurant equipment, medical equipment, electronics, children's toys, single packs of cigarettes. He needs to be sure that he will be able to collect and drop off the items within the set timeframe, with minimal waiting. He needs to consider whether the order value is worth incurring central London's congestion charge. He needs to assess whether the rate being offered reflects his fuel costs and the amount of time he may spend in traffic. "Time and effort and fuel and price," says Khan. "You take everything into consideration and weigh up the job. Is it worth it?" Khan has only seconds to decide before another driver selects his preferred job from the board. It is a hasty calculus, with financially devastating consequences if he gets it wrong.

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Early November. Work is slow. Khan starts at 9am and finishes at 6pm. In that time, he says he makes £103, which sounds acceptable, until you subtract the congestion charge (£15) and the cost of Khan's fuel (£25). If his figures are correct, he seems to have made just £7 an hour, which is well below the legal minimum wage of £8.91 an hour.

In fact, it works out at even less than £7 an hour, because of all his other costs. Khan owns his car, but he has to pay for insurance (£2,300 a year, paid in monthly instalments) and services (£210, payable each six months), plus new brake pads (£315 a year) and tyres (£320 a year).

This is despite the fact that the platform for which Khan drives has pledged to pay all its drivers the living wage. Khan says, when his costs are accounted for, it can be hard to make the minimum wage. "It is hard for me to pay my rent and put food on the table right now for my family," he says. Fuel prices have been [increasing all year](#), which is hurting self-employed drivers such as Khan. "It's really difficult when they're not increasing your pay," he says. "Petrol has gone up too much."

He used to pay £1.14 a litre. Now, it is closer to £1.45 – an increase of 27%. In January, UK inflation hit [a 10-year high](#). Food prices are soaring. Khan tries not to think about the mounting [cost-of-living crisis](#) and how bad things

might get. “I need to put myself into what I want to achieve,” says Khan. To stay afloat, Khan works between 50 and 60 hours a week.

Sometimes customers are really rude. But what can you do? Argue with them? Then they give you a bad rating

Khan is classified as a self-employed independent contractor, meaning that he has no employment rights, is not entitled to the legal minimum wage and does not receive sick pay, a pension or annual leave. Instead, he is paid only for each drop. There is no compensation for his travel time to collect the parcel, his waiting time (unless the client exceeds the prescribed collection window) or the time he spends stuck in traffic or lost.

In the view of Alex Marshall of the [Independent Workers’ Union of Great Britain](#) (IWGB), which represents gig-economy workers, “these apps bogusly classify workers as independent contractors”. A true independent contractor, Marshall says, is “someone who comes around and offers a quote for a job, like a plumber, and decides if and when they want to work”. Marshall says someone such as Khan, who is reliant on the app for his income and is powerless to negotiate his salary, should be classified [as a worker](#) and be eligible for annual leave, the minimum wage and other benefits. But the apps exploit loopholes in legislation. “There is minimal employment regulation enforcement in this country,” says Marshall.

In March last year, the UK supreme court dismissed [an appeal by Uber against a landmark employment tribunal ruling](#) that its drivers should be classed as workers. At the time, it was hailed as a breakthrough that could put pressure on other gig-economy firms to change tack, but many say little has changed in practice.

Delivery is not, historically, an industry with large profit margins. “The only way it can be profitable is if you underpay the person who is the courier, by not treating them as an employee, by not paying taxes, by not paying their insurance, by refusing to give them sick pay or cover them if they have an accident or train them,” says Prof Annabelle Gawer, the director of the Centre of Digital Economy at the University of Surrey. “That is where the ‘savings’ are coming from.”

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By the first week of December, Khan's financial situation is dire. He had to return to Pakistan for family reasons. His cousin wanted to marry a woman from a different community and it was causing problems. Khan smoothed things out; they got married. Only Khan could have done it. "You know that one character in your family who controls everyone?" he says, laughing. "That's me. People listen. I said to them: 'Come on now! We're living in the 21st century.'" Normally, Khan would pay for flights back to Pakistan in instalments, but because the situation was urgent he had to front the cost, £470, in full.

Luckily, work is busy. Khan leaves home at 9am, then picks up and drops off 11 parcels. "I was everywhere," he says. Horley in Surrey, Wembley in north-west London, Greenwich in the south-east of the city. Because he is so busy, he eats lunch late, at around 4pm – a wrap from a chicken shop. "If you stop for half an hour to take a break, it delays everything," he says. "You are losing money."

Khan has always been a grafter. When he worked in retail, he would sometimes come in on his day off, for free. He learned how to cash up – counting and recording the money taken from the till – even though this was above his pay grade. He progressed from shelf stacker to team leader to deputy manager to store manager. "I love to learn things," he says. "This is why I got progress." With his experience, he could easily go back to the shop floor, but because some of his family have medical conditions Khan wants the flexibility to take them to their hospital appointments.



The cost-of-living crisis – particularly the cost of fuel – is eating into Khan's earnings. Photograph: Daniel Leal/AFP/Getty Images

As he is driving, Khan listens to talk radio. [James O'Brien](#) on LBC is his favourite. He is not so sure about the station's outspoken presenter Maajid Nawaz (who has since left). "Sometimes I love him and sometimes I hate him," says Khan. He speaks to his mum and dad on the phone. After 12 years of living in the UK, his mum still asks him the same question every time Khan calls: what did he have for dinner last night? Khan considers ringing his newly married cousin, but he doesn't want to disturb his conjugal bliss.

After 200 miles and a 13-hour shift, Khan gets home at 10pm. He attends to his animals: dogs, a tank full of fish and a parrot. They get only the best: Royal Canin food for the dogs, which he supplements with fresh chicken, tuna and sardines; nuts for the parrot. The fish tank, meanwhile, needs to be heated to 30C. His wife has waited up for him, so they eat dinner together, which makes Khan happy, as he hates eating alone. Afterwards, he checks his app. He has made £250, although he believes it is closer to £130 after costs.

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In the second week of December, the pre-Christmas rush picks up. It is the busiest time of the year for couriers. At 9am, he picks up a job heading into

central London – a smart move, because he knows he will be able to pick up other jobs while he is there. At 7pm, he is almost ready to come home when he sees a job going – to Brighton – for £60. Khan is already heading that way, as he has a drop off in Crawley, West Sussex. By the time he gets home, it is 12.30am. For his fifteen and a half hour day, he earns £208.

“These companies operate in ways that are hyperexploitative,” says Marshall. “People aren’t making the minimum wage and they’re running around like headless chickens.”

Khan’s wife has waited up for him, as usual. They eat dinner and she goes to bed, but Khan stays awake, going through the paperwork on his outstanding parking tickets. He has three fines, totalling £600. “The tickets are really, really stressful,” he says.

Urban planning is not designed for car couriers. “If anyone can be a courier, that means that, theoretically, any number of cars can be on the road at any time,” says Dr Oliver Bates of Lancaster University. “Are these platforms talking with city planners about the need for drop-off and collection points? Or are we just building new blocks of flats in areas with double-yellow lines all over the place? Because these are the people who, through the pandemic, risked their health to bring us food and consumer goods. I wonder whether cities take account of that.”

Khan always appeals his tickets, but two of his appeals have been rejected, so he has no choice but to pay them: £260.

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Christmas week. Khan is working furiously, partly to pay for the parking tickets, but also because he knows his work will dry up in the post-Christmas slump. “It’s always less busy in January,” he says. “People spend so much money on Christmas and new year.” Cab drivers also log on to courier apps to pick up some jobs, meaning there are more drivers than work to go around.

Khan picks up a job, collecting from a restaurant in east London and going to south-west London, for £20. It has been booked into the system as a 5kg job, but when Khan arrives he sees that it is actually a large number of much

heavier items. He refuses the job. “I’m not having it,” he says. “It’s not right. It’s not worth it.”

Khan should receive a small cancellation fee, because the order was incorrectly booked on the system. But to try to weasel out of paying it, someone has claimed that Khan was rude and chose not to take the job. After arguing about it all day, Khan eventually gets paid the cancellation fee.

The decision went his way, this time, but, as an independent contractor, Khan has no rights. He can’t make the app pay him a cancellation fee and he can’t query or negotiate the rates it offers. The only power Khan has is to accept or reject jobs that are offered to him, which, when times are lean, isn’t much power at all.

“How many other jobs do you have where your rate of pay is changing in front of your eyes and there’s no minimum standard, or transparency about how you get paid and how they calculate it?” says Marshall. “You take what you’re given and it’s yes or no. They think the freedom is that you can say yes or no. Like it or lump it. But that’s not freedom. These apps prey on people’s desperation.”

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Work is slow the week after Christmas. Khan takes a job he would ordinarily avoid: picking up groceries from a supermarket and dropping them at someone’s house. For this, the app will pay him £10. He arrives at the shop and contemplates the order. There are 14 crates of shopping to be delivered to a third-floor flat. Khan isn’t allowed to take the crates with him, only the plastic bags. He calculates that it will take him an hour and a half to load the bags into his car, drive to the block of flats and carry up the bags. “It’s too much,” he says. “It’s not worth it for £10. I’m not doing it for that.” He rejects the order at the supermarket, meaning that he travelled there for nothing.

People aren’t making the minimum wage and they’re running around like headless chickens

*Alex Marshall, IWGB union*

Khan is used to delivering groceries: before he began working for his current app in November 2021, he drove for another delivery company, which included delivering for a major supermarket. Khan earned more money then: the company had a minimum income guarantee and he sometimes earned £15 an hour. He worked hard for it, delivering groceries throughout the pandemic, sometimes even sleeping in his car at night because he finished work late and had a shift in the morning. He wanted to keep driving for the company, but the work dried up.

Khan tries to help fellow drivers. He has been involved in helping drivers come together to lobby their bosses for better pay. Gig-economy workers are often migrant workers of colour. “Most don’t speak English as a first language,” says Marshall. “They are indoctrinated to believe they are lucky to have any job at all in a society that constantly says they are unskilled workers.”

When Khan was at school, he helped organise pupils in a campaign to get air conditioning in classrooms. The staff room had air conditioning: it wasn’t fair. After a year and a half of organising, which included direct action – the boys unplugged the teachers’ air conditioning unit – they were victorious. “I don’t know why I’m like this,” says Khan. “I can’t handle something being wrong.”

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A few days later, Khan is at one of his regular pickup spots, a warehouse in south-west London. He is friendly with the client and they get to griping about the cost of living. Fuel prices keep increasing. Khan is now paying £1.55 a litre. The client tells him that the app has put its rates up. Khan is incensed, because his pay has not gone up. “The company increases the cost to the customer, but they are not paying us proper money,” he says.

A few days before new year, Khan leaves home at 9.15am and drives to his first booking, a bijou party store in south London. He has been booked to collect two packages of inflated balloons and drop them at two separate addresses in north London, for £23. He arrives at 9.55am. The package can be collected at any time from 10am.

His phone goes. The client tells him that he can't collect until 10.20am. Khan remonstrates with her, pointing out that she booked the delivery for 10am. "I don't have it ready," she responds. In the end, the balloons aren't ready until 10.40am, at which point he drives away with them bobbing on the backseat.



Khan keeps gum in his car to stave off the hunger pangs that result from regularly skipping lunch. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

As customers go, Khan is used to worse. "Sometimes they are really rude," he says. When he gets lost and asks for directions, they're dismissive and won't help. "They say: 'I don't know! This is your job. You should find it.'" If Khan asks them to come out to collect a parcel, because there is nowhere for him to park without getting a ticket, they refuse. "They say: 'It's not my problem. You shouldn't have taken this job.'"

Previously, the disrespect would grind Khan down. "It used to annoy me too much, but now I'm used to it," he says. "What can you do? Argue with them? Then they give you a bad rating and you're not going to get more jobs."

The rest of the day is quiet. He drops off the last of the balloons at a multimillion-pound townhouse. He carries a laptop to the seventh floor of a

building and returns to his car, out-of-breath and worried that he will have been given a parking ticket. (He hasn't.) He collects boxes of food that makes his car smell of tomato and garlic from a catering business. He drops off his final package in central London just after 3pm and hangs around for a bit, to see if there are any other jobs. There aren't, so he goes home.

He calculates he has earned £75 before expenses. It is not enough. "Now, if I don't work, I have no money for next week. How am I going to pay my bills?" he says. "I've never been in this position before." He says this matter-of-factly, without a shred of self-pity. He makes just £306 all week, before expenses.

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The first week of January, things are dead. "Not too much work nowadays," Khan says. "Not good. Struggling time." He earns £252 in a week, before expenses. "It's nothing," he says. "Not even paying my bills."

Khan has one good day during the second week of January. He makes £152, driving from Lewisham in south London to Wembley, then central London, Wimbledon in south-west London and Horsham, West Sussex. But it is a one-off; the other days are slow.

To save on having to heat his car, Khan stays at home, constantly checking to see if anything half-decent has come in. There are plenty of supermarket pickup jobs, but it is not worth it for £6. "The whole job will take one hour, and I'm not even making £6 an hour, after car costs," he says. "Will be more like £2 to £3. What's the point?"

Khan and his wife have decided it is best that he sells some of his animals. The parrot, the fish and one of the dogs. He can't afford to keep them. Heating the fish tank adds to the electricity bill. Each dog eats half a kilo of food a day. The parrot needs nuts to snack on and toys for stimulation.

"Obviously, it's not nice," he says, his voice totally flat. "But if I can't afford it, what can I do? They deserve a better life. I need to provide for my children." Letting one of his beloved dogs go will be unbearable. "It's hard," he says, after a big pause. "It's hard. Really sad."

He wonders if there is any other work he can do until things pick up. Gardening? Odd jobs? He is endeavouring, as always, to maintain a serene outlook. “By stressing out, you won’t get jobs,” he says. “There’s nothing to be stressed about. Stress won’t solve the problem.”

For now, he sits at home, waits, refreshes the app. He worries about how he will pay his rent and bills, send money to his parents, save enough to get his catering business going again, make it profitable enough to buy his farm. Of his dream, he says: “Let’s see if it ever comes.”

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Snowdonia in north Wales. Photograph: Realimage/Alamy

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## Roughly the size of Wales: four reflections on Welsh identity in the 21st century

Snowdonia in north Wales. Photograph: Realimage/Alamy

From addressing the grievances of history to making ancient music modern, four writers consider what it means to be Welsh today

by [Martin Johnes](#), [Cerys Hafana](#), [Darren Chetty](#) and [Andy Welch](#)

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**‘Sometimes Welsh – and British – identities are trapped by their pasts’**

History helps people feel they belong. This is why people can feel angry when history is reinterpreted or retold in ways that make them feel uncomfortable. And yet that is not always a bad thing, since so many comforting views of the past are deeply flawed. History should not just exist to serve the present, but to challenge it, too.

This has all been particularly evident in [Wales](#). In the 19th century, English observers were often struck by the Welsh obsession with the past. Matthew Arnold, a Victorian professor of poetry at Oxford, claimed that everywhere in Wales had its own traditions, and that the Welsh people knew and clung to this living past. History gave the Welsh dignity. It provided them with tales of times when the Welsh were self-governing or rose up against their chains of servitude. It was a refuge from an economic and political system that rarely favoured them and a challenge to those who belittled them.

But the past was also problematic for the Welsh. Although the tales of medieval princes could inspire, they were, ultimately, tales of defeat. Wales lost its independence. Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, its last recognised prince, ended up with his head on a London spike. More than a century later, the rebellion of Owain Glyndŵr returned some dignity to the Welsh people and he planned something resembling a Welsh state, with universities and its own parliament. Yet his dreams came to nothing and his rebellion was crushed by English military might. He was never captured, which gave him a romantic halo, but his tale remained one with an unhappy ending.

Such stories from the past complicated relations with the English. In the middle of the 19th century, Henry Richard, who would later become an influential Liberal MP, wrote that in Wales, “a fierce and vindictive patriotism” was “constantly fed by stories, half fact and half fable, transmitted from father to son, of the cruelty and perfidy of their Saxon and Norman oppressors, and of the victories and defeats which had marked their long struggle for independence”.



Welsh rebel leader Owain Glyndŵr. Photograph: Lordprice Collection/Alamy

History became more important as the Welsh language, the most potent symbol of Welsh identity and difference to England, weakened. Wales became a modern industrial nation in the 19th century, but greater contact with the wider world came at a linguistic cost. The Welsh language slipped into a precarious minority position. In the 20th century, English became more familiar through education, railways and the mass media. The future of Welsh was further imperilled through homes being turned into holiday cottages and the young moving away in search of work. If the language was Wales, as many believed, then the nation itself seemed to be in danger of dying. In this context, history gained a new function. It provided some solace through the idea that the Welsh were, in the words of Dafydd Iwan's [famous song](#), "*yma o hyd, er gwaetha pawb a phopeth*" ("still here, despite everyone and everything").

But new concerns emerged in the 20th century about whether Wales's history was well known enough. Calls for Welsh history to be taught more in schools date back more than a century, but recently they have become increasingly angry. Despite devolution, Wales is still not at the heart of most pupil's history education. There is a belief that if people knew more about how Wales had fought for its freedom in the past, they would do so again.

Over the last century, some nationalists have certainly tried to use history to fuel national sentiment. Given how the Welsh have voted for the past century, it is reasonable to argue they have remained part of the United Kingdom through choice rather than through coercion. But, no matter how often historians point to the nuances of the past, popular understandings or tellings of Welsh history have often slipped into an accumulation of wrongs endured.

It is difficult not to wonder sometimes if people actually do want more Welsh history taught, rather than just their narrow version of it. It is difficult not to worry how a history based on grievance shapes the sense of belonging of the hundreds of thousands who have moved from England to Wales, and how it might shape the political decisions we make about our shared future as citizens of this small country.

Nonetheless, there have been times when Wales has been badly treated and let down by rule from England. Perhaps more damaging than dismissive and patronising attitudes to the Welsh language and Welsh people has been central government's marginalisation of the Welsh economy. As the days of heavy industry drew to an end, little substantive was done to revive the fortunes of communities built around mines, metalworks or quarries that no longer existed. Many in Wales are much happier hearing about these slights than the more nuanced picture of the past painted by historians.

The defensiveness and anxiety that interpretations of the past can generate shows how emotional history can be, and how Welsh and British identity are sometimes trapped by their pasts. In Kazuo Ishiguro's 2015 novel *The Buried Giant*, a magical mist of forgetfulness has been cast on the Britons and Saxons to ensure neither remembers the wrongs and atrocities committed by each against the other. This ensures old grievances do not fester and the two peoples can live side by side. It is a powerful parable about the dangers of remembering, but also people's desire to do just that.

Whether Wales remains in the UK or not, geography means its most important external relationship will always be with England. It is much easier to accept this if it is remembered that the two nations have not always been at loggerheads. Indeed, Wales has often benefited from its relationship with England, whether through trade, the welfare state, fiscal transfers or

international security. Recognising all this might move any campaign for Welsh independence away from the xenophobia that too often marked Brexit. It might also help ensure that any decision on Wales' status is based on the needs of the future and not whatever did or did not happen in the past.

*Prof Martin Johnes is a historian of Wales, sport, politics and popular culture at [Swansea University](#)*

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## **‘My definition of folk music: music that can, and will, be changed’**

I am a Welsh folk musician, and to be a folk musician means to be constantly in collaboration and conflict with your history, or, as it's more commonly known, “the tradition”. Musicians everywhere face choices as to whether to embrace, subvert or reject the tradition, but they will always be in a relationship with it. As a Welsh folk musician, the tradition within which I exist is defined by melodies, songs and instruments being passed down through the generations, unchanging. The story I am told usually focuses on the things that have stayed the same, the things that will always and forever make Welsh folk music Welsh.

But I believe the story of Welsh folk music could be told the opposite way: as a story of change, of new influences and ideas being brought in by people from other places, and a story of new struggles and challenges that will inevitably enact changes over the centuries. My definition of folk music: music that can, and will, be changed.

I have been playing the harp since I was eight. I started learning on the Celtic harp, before moving on to the triple harp, which has three rather than one row of strings, removing the need for levers or pedals to play chromatic notes. It originated in Italy as a baroque instrument, before arriving in London in the 17th century and being adopted by Welsh Londoners, soon becoming known as the Welsh harp. I’m lucky enough to be one of a tiny group of young people in Wales, and the world, who play this instrument today.



Cerys Hafana playing the triple harp. Photograph: Avi Allen

My first harp teacher's house is a museum that also happens to be a home. It is exactly where you want to go to receive a thorough education in the history of Welsh folk music. You are surrounded by artefacts, manuscripts and instruments that are kept warm and loved, and which in other less careful hands may have found themselves gathering dust. My first harp teacher is a gatherer, a protector, a collector. She takes this job seriously. It is her lifeblood, her passion, but the responsibility weighs heavily on her shoulders.

She can often be found shaking her head and wringing her hands, aghast at the young people today who show no interest in their history or their music. Most of those who have taken on the role of protecting and preserving the tradition have an overwhelmingly pessimistic outlook on the future of Welsh folk music: these young people just don't get it. They don't care. They have no respect for history and tradition, no understanding of where they come from, and are changing Welsh folk music beyond recognition.

One of my formative experiences in folk music was attending an annual week-long course for young people at an outdoor education centre in north Wales. Before I arrived the first time, harp in tow, I was very much under the impression that I was the only young Welsh folk musician left in Wales. So

what I found came as a bit of a rude awakening. There were about 50 other teenagers filling every corner of the centre with jigs and reels, singing folk songs in improvised four-part harmony until 3am. I spent most of my first visit hiding on the top bunk in my room, but over the years I began to feel more and more at home in this noisy, frenetic community of passionate young musicians.

This other tradition has a very different approach. Tunes are there to be used and abused. The musical points of reference come from far and wide, with jazz perhaps the most obvious external influence. I am now a member of the Youth Folk Ensemble of Wales, a continuation of the course, and though the majority of melodies and songs we use are Welsh, we have arrangements inspired by eastern European turbo folk and Daft Punk.

For a while, at these events, I felt as though I'd found "my people". It was a breath of fresh air to me, as a young queer person with no friends at school, to be surrounded by such open-minded, enthusiastic and welcoming people. And then one night, while a group of us were sitting around playing games, the clock struck midnight and someone gleefully declared: "Right! It's past midnight, which means we can now be as homophobic and racist as we like!" and proceeded to play a game involving guessing who in the room was most likely to be gay.

One key event in the Welsh folk calendar is the Mari Lwyd – a traditionally south-Walian celebration of the new year which, in short, involves a pub crawl with a horse's skull on a stick. But the village of Dinas Mawddwy in Snowdonia in north Wales plays host to a Mari Lwyd that, despite being relatively recently established, pays its respects to much more traditional aspects of Welsh folk culture, perhaps most notably folk dancing, which takes place on the street, led by a group of dancers in authentic Welsh costumes. Everyone, regardless of age, nationality and language will come out, wait for the accordions and fiddles to start up, and be organised into pairs by the more seasoned dancers.

It is, however, incredibly important that these pairs are all man and woman. This is often checked a few times before starting a dance, to make sure everyone is following this sacred rule. And every time we change partner, I get asked the same question: "Are you a man or a woman?!" I try to answer

with whichever I think I'm supposed to be in the dance, to minimise confusion. This may be a reinvented tradition, and it may involve a horse's head on a stick and a man in drag, but heteronormativity and the gender binary are apparently two traditions that must be protected and respected at all costs.



Mari Lwyd celebrations in south Wales in 2018. Photograph: Jessica Gwynne/Alamy

I have a theory that the triple harp is seen by many as a symbol of Wales, its plight mirroring that of Wales and the Welsh language in the last century. Many influential players today came to the instrument as adults with a passion for Welsh history, and saw learning it as the ultimate manifestation of their interests. It is viewed as a kind of historical artefact, hailing from a better time when everyone in Wales spoke Welsh (and was born in Wales), when every young person was passionate about their native culture, and when rich landowners made their servants work in national dress in the name of preserving the tradition.

But when people imply that things were better for Wales back then, I can't help but suspect that what that really means is that things were better for the Wales of rich white men. It's an erasure of all the things that have changed for the better. And it's an erasure of all the kinds of people who weren't

around, or weren't able to participate then, but who have so much to offer now. Where do we draw the line between preserving tradition and excluding people who aren't considered "traditional"?

*Cerys Hafana is a triple harpist, pianist and composer from mid-Wales*

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## **'The first time I saw that sign I remember thinking: who is that boy?'**

It's Saturday 14 October 2017 and I'm back in Swansea. It's evening and I'm staring up at the sign outside a pub in the Killay area of the city. The pub is very familiar, but the sign is not. It's nondescript, in stark contrast to the sign that hung there years before. I can still picture [the old one](#): a portrait of a young boy with dark brown skin. His head is turned to the right; his eyes look into the distance. White teeth are visible; he might be smiling. He wears a bright pink shirt with a mandarin collar, and a matching turban. It is large, pleated and decorated with pearls. In the centre of the turban there is an oval jewel set in gold, and a yellow feather. A painted ornate livery surrounds the portrait. Whitbread is painted in white letters above the image. Beneath, The Black Boy.

The first time I saw that sign I was sitting in my dad's blue Mini in the car park. I remember wondering: who is that boy? Did he used to live here? Was he black in the sense of being African, as the name and his face suggested? Or Indian, as his clothes suggested? What was his connection to the area? The "ugly, lovely town" of Dylan Thomas's childhood was a city by the time I was born there. Killay, once a mining village, was now a suburb. We moved there from nearby Fforestfach in 1977 and lived there until the summer of 1982. But that sign no longer hangs outside the Black Boy. It was replaced by a different sign, which was soon replaced by the one that hangs there today. Both these later signs depict boys, but neither are black.

What happened to the old sign? And how did it come to be there in the first place? That boy was only the third dark-skinned boy I'd ever seen in Killay. The other two were my older brother and a classmate of his, the son of a Sri Lankan doctor. My brother and I were Indian-South-African-Dutch. The only person in the known history of my family to be born in Wales, I grew

up with a definite sense of being Welsh, bolstered by my love of sport, and early aspirations play football for Swansea City and Wales. Having parents who had grown up in two different countries, and who put a great emphasis on fitting in, contributed to my sense of being Welsh.

I can vividly recall the first time I considered the question of whether or not I was black. I was seven years old. We lived on an avenue up the hill from the Black Boy pub, where kids regularly played outside. I was running from my house to the end of the street. As I passed our nextdoor neighbour Mr Thomas's green Triumph, I "pushed off" with my right hand. The car pulled alongside me a few moments later. Mr Thomas leaned towards the open window on the passenger side: "Keep your filthy hands off my car you black bastard."

Things fade from memory – or they don't. The old pub sign is gone. It was first replaced by a picture of a smiling white boy with coal on his cheeks. This sign gave way to [the present one](#): a white boy in perhaps Victorian garb, including a black jacket and hat, slightly unkempt, looking to his left, his eyes not visible.

I find one explanation at the library. "In Wales during the 18th century it was the height of fashion to employ a black servant. In the popular mindset Africa and the West Indies conjured up images of ivory, Guinea gold, sugar and coffee; in short, a limitless reservoir of wealth and luxury goods. A black domestic servant enables the owner to associate him- or herself with all that was fashionable about the New World. It also brought a touch of African exoticism into the parlours of rural Wales," writes David Morris in Identifying the Black Presence in Eighteenth Century Wales, published in a 2008 issue of [Llafur](#), the journal of the Welsh people's history society of the same name.

This might go some way to explaining the name of the pub and the original sign, which was similar to paintings by William Hogarth from the 18th century. But there is more.

Swansea's growth as a town was largely due to its copper industry. Copper, mined in Cornwall, was brought by boat to Swansea where it was smelted.

By 1823, 10,000 of Swansea's 15,000 residents were supported by the copper industry, earning the town the nickname "[Copperopolis](#)".

This copper had many uses, including "copper bottoming" Nelson's ships before the battle of Trafalgar. And, as historian Chris Evans explained in 2011, "Copper and brass articles were important as trade goods on the Guinea coast of Africa, either in the form of copper rods, wire or ingots, or as readymade semi-decorative items, such as manillas (bracelets), that eventually acted as an African currency ... You could buy human beings with copper." One such copper manilla can be viewed at Swansea Museum.

Evans [nominated](#) the White Rock Copper Works in Swansea to be an entry in the book 100 Places That Made Britain. He noted that the earliest known illustration of the copper works identifies one of its buildings as "Manilla House". Black boys were bought with copper smelted at White Rock.

I am not the only person who [has noticed](#) the changing signs outside the Black Boy in Killay. The artist Daniel Trivedy exhibited [a replica sign](#) featuring the original image of the turbaned Black Boy on one side and the image from the current sign on the other. "Occasionally people find it necessary to alter the accounts of history to provide a more palatable version of events," Trivedy told the South Wales Evening Post. "Perhaps this is the case with the Black Boy pub sign. However, to ignore the black presence in our history (and pub signs) is to deny the roots and heritage of multicultural Britain."

The Black Boy Inn in Caernarfon, north Wales, which was named "the Welshest pub in the world" in 2016, has been the subject of some controversy over its name. But in 2008, John Evans, the owner, [told](#) the North Wales Daily Post: "I would never consider changing it, even if it was bad for business, because we have to hold on to our heritage." The images of black boys on the signs outside his pub look to me like racist caricatures. Perhaps these, too, are part of "our" heritage?

*Darren Chetty is a writer, teacher and researcher*

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**'Essentially, there is no such thing as a Welsh accent'**

One of my closest friends, born and bred in London, has joked for as long as I've known her about me not having a Welsh accent. It mirrors a conversation I've had hundreds of times. "Really? You don't sound Welsh," is about the size of it. Admittedly, I speak very differently to someone with what you might call a stereotypical Welsh accent. I'm not sure what people are expecting. [Uncle Bryn](#) from Gavin and Stacey, perhaps? Tom Jones? But I grew up at the other end of the country, more than 100 miles away from Barry and Pontypridd. Why would we sound the same?

The idiosyncratic cultures of Liverpool and Manchester, just 30 miles apart, are so widely understood, I don't see why it should be so hard to grasp that a country of 8,000 square miles might have some regional variation in accent. Of course, given the common and pointless use of Wales's landmass as a unit of measurement, I should say, rather than it being a country of 8,000 square miles, that it's four times the size of Iceberg A-68, formerly of the Larsen C ice shelf, or that it's equivalent to two million rugby pitches. Ah, rugby. We love rugby, us Welsh. All of us.

I love Wales, but that doesn't mean I hate or even mildly dislike any other country, particularly England, where I've lived for more than 20 years. The rugby players from Caernarfon who used to refer to me and the rest of the Rhyl Youth team as "the Brookside 15" (after the 1980s TV soap set in Liverpool) as we stepped down from the coach really wound me up. But fair play, that's what they were trying to do. The newcomer making conversation at a party, however, doesn't deserve this level of discourse because a) they're not Henry Higgins and b) I don't sound like Richard Burton reading Under Milk Wood, or Vanessa Shanessa Jenkins ordering a takeaway.

But I am from Rhyl in north Wales, and sound very much as if I am. Beating any wags to the punchline, there's absolutely no way you'd say you were from Rhyl if you weren't. Having always spoken the way I do, in an accent many hear as a Lancashire/Cheshire hybrid with Welsh remnants in certain vowels and extended consonants, I just put it down to a bit of basic geography and received local wisdom. The town is 30 miles from the border with England, and there are lots of English residents in Rhyl – a legacy of postwar migration and, ever since, retirees seeking out some fresh seaside air. During non-pandemic summers, there are always plenty of English tourists around on the "Liverpool Riviera", as it's sometimes called. During

the many summers I worked in the McDonald's on the high street, had I not been surrounded in the kitchen by friends from school, I could easily have convinced myself I was working on Liverpool's Lord Street or Oxford Road in Manchester.

"The accent in north Wales today will be pretty similar to what we would have heard after the second world war," says Prof David Crystal, honorary professor of linguistics at Bangor University and a leading authority on accent and dialect. "After the first world war, you would have heard a stronger traditionally Welsh influence, but it still would have been broadly similar. In the late 19th century, however, Rhyl would have been very 'Welsh' sounding," he says, suggesting the accent would have been much more in line with what we hear elsewhere in Denbighshire, a few miles south of Rhyl, and in Conwy, 18 miles west – that is, something more identifiably, stereotypically "Welsh" to outside ears.

In 2005, while presenting the Voices series for the BBC, Crystal travelled all over Wales to sample the accent in every corner of the country. "There's a real switch around Conwy," he told me of his findings. During Voices, Crystal and his team interviewed a number of people in my home town, including a family who have, for at least four generations, run the donkey rides on Rhyl beach. "They sounded as Lancashire as anything," says Crystal. "Not *exactly* Lancs, but that's the point. Even so, they felt as Welsh as the hills."

For an explanation, we must go back to 1858, when Rhyl's train station was opened. My accent, reasons Crystal, is more likely a result of Victorian tourism than anything else. Now mostly private houses and flats, the streets of the town's West End were once lined with hotels and B&Bs catering for English visitors. Given Rhyl's proximity to the north-west of England, tourists from Merseyside, Lancaster, the West Midlands and beyond, keen to see the sea, could visit for the day if they pleased.



Rhyl pier circa 1880. Photograph: Science & Society Picture Library/Getty

As Crystal explains, when two people meet, an accommodation occurs, the shifting of accents towards or away from one another, depending on their relationship. It's easy to imagine a situation in Victorian Rhyl where, as trainloads of holidaymakers with money to spend arrived in the town, entrepreneurial locals softened their Welsh accents to welcome their guests and make sure they were understood.

"There are always two forces driving language – intelligibility and identity," says Crystal. "I have to understand you, but I also don't want to be you. I wonder how much of the dilution in the Rhyl accent came from well-to-do English tourists not understanding the locals, and them modifying to allow for that."

It's definitely one in the eye for the old yarn in which the English visitor enters a pub in Wales only for the locals to stop nattering away in English and switch to their mother tongue. It was much more likely the other way around. Along the border with England, accents more traditionally associated with Gloucester and Hereford appear, while in Pembrokeshire – once referred to as Little England Beyond Wales – the English accent is strong, even among those born and raised there.

The Valleys accent – so often the Welsh accent people associate with the whole country – where did that come from? “Somerset,” says Crystal. “People arrived from Somerset to the Valleys, and if you think about it, they really are not that far apart. Essentially, there is no such thing as a Welsh accent. There are many, each as valid as another.”

So I do have a Welsh accent. It’s just not one you may have heard before.  
*Andy Welch is a writer and editor at the Guardian*

This is an edited extract from Welsh (Plural): Essays on the Future of Wales edited by Darren Chetty, Grug Muse, Hanan Issa, Iestyn Tyne, published by Repeater Books on 8 March and available at [guardianbookshop.com](https://guardianbookshop.com)

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## **‘A brutalist hanging gardens of Babylon’ – the maddening, miraculous Barbican hits 40**



‘If she can find her way, Helen Mirren will be appearing in A Midsummer Night’s Dream’ ... the newly completed centre in 1982. Photograph: Peter Bloomfield

Conceived as a utopian city within a city, the labyrinthine London landmark had a troubled path on its way to being hailed as an architectural icon. But is this world-class arts centre now in danger of being turned into a shopping mall?



[Oliver Wainwright](#)

[@ollywainwright](#)

Tue 1 Mar 2022 01.00 EST

It looks like something from a wildly imaginative sci-fi comic, an impossible vision of worlds slamming into each other in a fantastical collage. Elevated walkways leap across the sky while a trio of towers rise up like serrated blades, their edges sawing at the clouds. Beneath them, fountains cascade and cafes spill across lush waterside terraces, while an art gallery and library jut out overhead. A tropical conservatory wraps around the top of a subterranean theatre, next to a cinema buried beneath a crescent of apartments. And the entire multilayered edifice floats above a 2,000-seat concert hall carved into the ground.

This is no sci-fi comic, but a [cutaway diagram](#) of the Barbican arts centre dating from 1982, rendered in vivid orange, red and green. Somehow, this miraculous Escher-like wonder really did get built, and it hits 40 this month,

with celebratory events and a handsome new book modestly titled [Building Utopia](#).

As well as charting the last four decades of performances, exhibitions and events staged in the bowels of this brutalist behemoth, the book sheds light on the battles that were fought to realise the entire [Barbican](#) project, not just its world-class arts centre. We learn about its long struggle for acceptance – and the intractable quirks that have plagued the development since opening. “It took more than a generation and a half to be constructed,” recalls Frank Woods, an architect who worked on the project, “another generation to be absorbed into the culture of the City and another to be regarded as an international model of its kind.” For some, this is a battle still to be won.



‘Truly urban’ ... a cinema brochure from the 1980s shows off the centre.  
Photograph: Barbican Archive

The idea for the Barbican was driven by the need to save the Corporation of [London](#) from oblivion after the second world war had devastated the residential population of the Square Mile. By 1951, Cripplegate had a population of just 48 – a century earlier, it had been home to 14,000. Without residents and voters, the City faced losing its centuries-old powers and being absorbed into the wider London County Council.

Imagined as a “[city within a city](#)”, the Barbican was concocted to lure well-heeled middle-class professionals into the centre, providing a utopian community for 4,000 residents, with unparalleled cultural facilities on tap, along with schools, a church, shops and pubs, all arranged around an artificial lake. The raw concrete look of the estate has led many to believe it was originally built as social housing, but it was nothing of the sort. The flats were designed to be high density and high value, to help pay for the vast cultural podium on which they stood. The arts centre – which trebled in size during the design process – would be buried, so as not to obstruct the view from the luxury apartments.

An essay in the book by Elain Harwood, postwar specialist at Historic England, unpicks the evolution of the scheme, by the young architecture firm Chamberlin, Powell & Bon. “We strongly dislike the Garden City tradition,” the architects declared, “with its low density, monotony and waste of good country, road, kerbs, borders and paths in endless strips everywhere.” Instead, they wanted to make a “truly urban” place, inspired by their visit to [Le Corbusier’s Unité d’Habitation](#) in Marseille. Harwood notes how they also drew on historical references, from the stark medieval towers of San Gimignano in Italy to the repeated barrel-arched roofs of the churches on the Greek island of Mykonos. The brick used at the lowest levels was a nod to the warehouse basements that had stood there until hit by Luftwaffe bombs.

The result was a beguiling cocktail – part bastion, part brutalist hanging gardens of Babylon – and it stood as the ultimate expression of the modern movement’s search for a monument. As the Architects’ Journal put it: “The Barbican, now it is completed, has all the aspects – gigantisms, singleness of purpose – of that bygone age when architects had the confidence (or naivety) to believe that monumentality had a place in architecture – and that part of their job was the imposition of discipline and order on the users of the buildings.”



Luxurious fixtures and fittings ... the Barbican terrace and artificial lake today. Photograph: John Bracegirdle/Alamy

By the time it was finally finished in the 1980s, such modernist dogma was anathema. Massively delayed and hugely over budget, the Barbican was seen by many as a concrete albatross around the City's neck. In one heated, high-level debate, a city official argued that the money would have been better spent on prisons. The Aberdeen Press and Journal's review was typical of the reaction to the opening in 1982: "From the outside, the much-publicised Barbican Centre hardly looks like £152m worth" – a figure that would be almost £600m in today's money.

Once inside, however, the reviewer was won over. "The overpowering imagination, skill and effort which has gone into the 25-year project becomes apparent immediately. It is engrained in the pine-clad walls, the polished teak flooring, the subtle lighting, the overall design. In fact, the Barbican has been described as 'a haven of cultural perfection in the midst of the City of London.'"

[Christoph Bon](#), the Swiss architect of the trio, had been adamant that fixtures and fittings in the public areas should be as luxurious as possible. As a result, visitors glide over end-grain wood-block flooring, run their fingers along polished brass handrails and lounge inside the Peruvian walnut cocoon

of the theatre – materials all chosen to contrast with the artfully rugged surface of the pick-hammered concrete walls. There were innovations at every turn, like the fact that each row of theatre seating had its very own door – a boon for latecomers trying to sneak to their seats.

And latecomers did not always have themselves to blame. The complexity of incorporating so many venues on so many levels across a 40-acre site has always made the place an infuriating labyrinth for the uninitiated, with successive decades of signage and way-finding strategies deployed in an attempt to ease the maze-like passageways. Even before the arts centre opened, it had garnered a reputation as impossibly difficult to navigate. One official advertising poster even quipped: “If Helen Mirren can find the new Barbican Centre before it opens in March, she will be appearing there in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.”



Interior in the early 1980s. Photograph: Peter Bloomfield

While not shying away from the Barbican’s more dysfunctional sides, the book contains some eye-opening recollections from those who have had to endure its back-of-house areas, including [actor Fiona Shaw](#), who arrived when the Royal Shakespeare Company’s tenure here was only two seasons old. “Its early reputation among the RSC actors was as a very luxurious but terrifying building,” she writes, describing how the stage door was “hidden

like an afterthought”, and how actors spent their time “lost on the staircases and the inhospitable corridors”, forced to rehearse in underground rooms “like canaries in a mine”.

Some of these enduring idiosyncrasies are part of the reason why the Barbican recently launched [a £150m architectural competition](#), to seek “a new vision for a global icon”. Fans of the place have good reason to be wary. There have been many past attempts to tame the beast, most of which have come a cropper. In the early 1990s, Theo Crosby of Pentagram was charged with creating a new look for the centre, which introduced pastel colours and [gilded fibreglass statues](#) in a bizarre whimsical pastiche – derided as “feeble tinkering” by Geoffrey Powell, one of the original trio.

Gillian Darley’s review in the Observer was damning: “Crosby’s peculiar attempts to jolly up the Barbican suggest a damp squib of a student project rather than a scheme drawn up by an international design group.” Another rebranding project in 2000 prompted [the Guardian to note](#): “The world’s most bewildering arts centre is solving the problem of its notorious signs once and for all – by getting rid of most of them.”

But this latest venture rings louder alarm bells still. While admirably aiming to improve the accessibility and sustainability of the complex, the brief also talks of “a huge opportunity to bring currently under-utilised spaces to life ... in support of our creative and commercial ambitions”. It sounds suspiciously like a euphemism for turning it into a mall. The shortlist of architects charged with coming up with “bold” and “radical” solutions includes David Adjaye, Bjarke Ingels and Diller Scofidio + Renfro, a starry cast known neither for their subtlety nor their sensitive restorations of postwar buildings.

The Barbican may be a great hulking brute, but it is a carefully composed, grade II-listed one. It demands delicate intervention with a lightness of touch – not more shops squeezed into every available cranny.

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## Byelections

# ‘People who voted Tory are embarrassed’: Labour in buoyant mood before Birmingham Erdington byelection

Labour candidate Paulette Hamilton believes Partygate and cost of living crisis are damaging the Conservatives



Paulette Hamilton meets members of the public while out campaigning in Erdington. Labour insiders say they expect it to be high on the Tories' attack list for the next general election. Photograph: Andrew Fox/The Guardian



[Heather Stewart](#) Political editor

Tue 1 Mar 2022 01.00 EST

Paulette Hamilton can barely leave her campaign headquarters on Erdington high street without being approached for a chat. “I want Boris Johnson out. I don’t like him,” young mum Sabrina Simmonds tells her.

Another supporter, Dave, takes a poster to display in his window, while a third wants to complain about the dilapidated state of the street.

Hamilton, who has lived nearby for 35 years, agrees: “You can always tell when an area’s going down, when it starts to get filled – not with the big name shops, but with your pawnbrokers, your bookies, your gambling slot machines.

A former nurse, mother of five and local councillor, Hamilton is Labour’s candidate in Thursday’s byelection, which was triggered by the [sudden death of the area’s longstanding MP Jack Dromey](#) in January.

Labour held this seat in 2019 with a slim majority of 3,601, and party insiders say they expect it to be high on the Tories’ attack list for the next general election.

Yet less than a year on from the humiliating loss of the Hartlepool by-election, which raised the prospect of the [Conservatives](#) continuing to make advances into Labour territory, Keir Starmer's party is confident of holding on here.

Starmer has visited several times, as have much of the party's frontbench, including the deputy leader, Angela Rayner, and shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves. "When Sir [Keir Starmer](#) came and walked down the high street, that was phenomenal – people couldn't believe he was here," Hamilton says.

Labour is buoyed by the shift in the polls since Partygate began to damage the Tories' popularity, and in particular by signs that voters are starting to trust them more on the economy.



Paulette Hamilton with the Labour leader, Keir Starmer, during a visit by the Labour leader to Erdington on Saturday. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

A recent Ipsos poll showed Labour still six points behind on the question of which party should be trusted to grow Britain's economy, but 17 points ahead when it came to tackling the rising cost of living.

Hamilton says that's the first thing most voters want to raise. "The uplift with the electric, gas, with the inflation rate, with the 1.25 percentage point

national insurance increase – that has been one of the massive issues in this area, and it's bubbling,” she says

In Erdington, Labour has a clear policy offer: a cut in VAT on fuel bills, plus means-tested help for the poorest households funded by a windfall tax on the energy giants. Hamilton says she has been able to contrast that with Rishi Sunak’s promise of a £200 loan, to be paid back from future energy bills, plus a council tax rebate.

The proportion of people claiming unemployment benefits in Birmingham Erdington is twice the national average, and 31% of children are growing up in poverty against 19% for the UK as a whole.

Hamilton says voluntary groups are stepping in. “Even though people say it’s a poor area, the community spirit and what people are doing is absolutely phenomenal,” she says.

Gerard Goshawk from Erdington food bank says it has handed out more than 13,000 parcels of provisions, many to families with children, in the current financial year, even before much of the energy price rise has taken hold – and with worse to come in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

“It’s shocking. We have got busier in the pandemic and we’re busier now because of the concerns – well, the reality – of the impact of the cost of living. And just the impact of the universal credit system. People that are in debt to the government, or that have been sanctioned for all sorts of reasons,” he explains.



Paulette Hamilton out campaigning on Erdington high street. Photograph: Andrew Fox/The Guardian

While the prime minister's lockdown-busting antics aren't high on voters' list of concerns, Hamilton says they do come up. "People who voted Conservative in 2019 are embarrassed, because what he's done is literally said one thing and done another, and people feel as if he's broken their trust."

The shadow work and pensions secretary, Jon Ashworth, who visited Erdington to campaign last Wednesday, says he feels the state of the economy and Johnson's character have become closely entwined.

"They don't trust him, they don't believe him – they don't think he's got the abilities to grip the real issues facing the country. It all reinforces a sense that he's not up to it," he says, adding, "I think it's quite a significant time, politically."

Since Ashworth's visit, the headlines have been filled with Russia's devastating invasion of Ukraine. Robert Hayward, the Conservative peer and pollster, says such events tend to benefit the incumbent government electorally: "There's no question that foreign affairs will have an impact, but it will be a small impact in my view."

He says it has also helped Starmer's party that they have been able to turn the conversation from Covid – or before that, Brexit – on to “bread and butter issues, where the Labour party is getting traction”. It is unclear whether that opportunity will now be curtailed by events in Ukraine.

Alison Farrell, behind the counter in Farrell's Caribbean grocers on Erdington high street, votes Conservative but has no sympathy for Johnson. “It would have been much easier if he'd just told the truth in the first place. Honesty is the best policy,” she says. “All this he's doing to make people go back to liking him – it doesn't work like that.”

She does “think he needs to go,” she says – but in a warning of how much work remains for Starmer's party, adds, “not to say, put in Labour.”

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## 2022.03.01 - Coronavirus

- [Pfizer Vaccine significantly less effective in children ages five to 11, data show](#)
- [Matt Hancock I didn't break Covid rules when kissing aide, says former minister](#)

## US news

# Pfizer vaccine significantly less effective in children ages five to 11, study shows

Strikingly higher rates of decline in effectiveness for younger children suggest the lower dose they receive may be the reason



In the last week of January, vaccine effectiveness against hospitalization among 12-year-olds was 67% – but just 11% for 11-year-olds. Photograph: Hannibal Hanschke/AFP/Getty Images

*[Maya Yang](#) in New York*

Mon 28 Feb 2022 14.50 EST

The Pfizer/BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine is less effective in children aged five to 11 than in adolescents and adults, according to new data from New York state health officials.

The new research was announced shortly after federal authorities relaxed masking guidance and a day after Eric Adams, the mayor of New York, said he would probably follow Governor Kathy Hochul in [ending a mask mandate](#) in city schools.

The study was carried out during the Omicron variant surge but was made public at a time of rapidly dropping cases and hospitalizations in New York and elsewhere.

In the study [released on Monday](#), not yet peer-reviewed, six New York state public health scientists analyzed cases and hospitalization rates from 13 December 2021 to 30 January 2022 among 852,384 fully vaccinated children aged 12 to 17 and 365,502 fully vaccinated children aged five to 11.

Results revealed that vaccine effectiveness against hospitalization during the Omicron variant surge declined from 85% to 73% for children aged 12 to 17.

Among children aged five to 11, effectiveness fell even more significantly, from 100% to 48%.

Vaccine effectiveness against testing positive declined from 66% to 51% among children aged 12 to 17. In the younger group, effectiveness dropped from 68% to 12%.

In the last week of January, [vaccine effectiveness](#) against infection among 12-year-olds was 67% – but just 11% for 11-year-olds.

“The difference between the two age groups is striking,” Florian Krammer, an immunologist at Mount Sinai’s Icahn School of Medicine, told the New York Times.

He noted that 12-year-olds were administered 30mg of the vaccine, the same dose given to adults. But 11-year-olds were given only 10mg.

“This is super interesting because it would almost suggest that it’s the dose that makes the difference … the question is how to fix that,” Krammer said.

Eli Rosenberg, the New York state deputy director for science, told the New York Times that although it was disappointing to see the decline in vaccine effectiveness, it should be acknowledged that the Pfizer/BioNTech shot was developed in response to an earlier virus variant.

“It looks very distressing to see this rapid decline but it’s again all against Omicron,” he [said](#).

Additional research was needed, he said, to determine the best dose to administer to children, taking into consideration factors such as the number and timing of shots.

News of the research came shortly after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [outlined](#) new mask guidelines for more than 70% of the US population.

The new system changes the CDC risk map and puts more than 70% of the population in counties where coronavirus is posing a low or medium threat to hospitals. Those people can stop wearing masks in many settings, the agency said.

Nevertheless, the CDC is still advising that people including schoolchildren wear masks where the risk of Covid-19 is high. That is the situation of approximately 37% of US counties, where about 28% of Americans live.

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## Coronavirus

# I didn't break Covid rules when kissing aide, says Matt Hancock

Ex-minister explains why he resigned last year after CCTV showed him embracing adviser Gina Coladangelo

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



'I fess up, I broke the guidance, and there were only two people responsible for this.' Matt Hancock at a pro-Ukraine demonstration in London on Saturday. Photograph: David Cliff/AP

*Peter Walker* Political correspondent  
[@peterwalker99](#)

Mon 28 Feb 2022 04.57 EST

Matt Hancock has insisted that he broke only Covid guidelines rather than rules in kissing his aide and friend in his ministerial office, events that forced his resignation as UK health secretary after CCTV images of the clinch emerged.

Hancock also said his [decision to step down](#) more than 24 hours after the pictures were published was made after people he knew and respected got in touch to remind him they had been unable to see dying relatives because of Covid regulations.

He resigned in June last year after CCTV footage was leaked to the Sun showing him [kissing his closest aide, Gina Coladangelo](#), in his personal office.

In a lengthy interview for the podcast Diary of a CEO, Hancock made the distinction that he did not believe he had broken any legally set rules, although he accepted it was inevitable he had to step down.

“I resigned because I broke the social distance in guidelines then,” he said. “They weren’t actually rules. They weren’t the law. But that’s not the point. The point is they were the guidelines that I’d been proposing.”

He added: “It actually happened after … the rules were lifted, but the guidance was still in place. So I’m not trying to claim that I hold no bitterness about this because I broke the rules, I fess up, I broke the guidance, and there were only two people responsible for this.”

It happened, he said, “because I fell in love with somebody,” describing Coladangelo, a close personal and family friend before they began a relationship, as someone he had known “for more than half of my life”.

Hancock has left his wife, with whom he has three children, to live with Coladangelo. The PR and lobbying manager, who at the time was a non-executive director at the health department, is also married with three children.

“I brought her into the department to help with public communications,” Hancock told the podcast. “And so we spent a lot of time together, ironically, trying to get me to be able to communicate in a more emotionally intelligent way.

“And we fell in love. And that’s something that was completely outside of my control. And of course, I regret the pain that that’s caused and the very, very, very public nature. Anybody who’s been through this knows how difficult it is, how painful it is doing that in public is incredibly painful, but I fell in love with someone.”

Hancock told the podcast that his decision to resign was not necessarily a result of the intense media pressure: “It was that some people I really respect got in contact and told me about things that they had been not able to do.”

Asked to explain, he said: “Like seeing dying relatives. And … I realised that it was unsustainable.”

The release of the CCTV images “caused a huge amount of pain”, Hancock said: “Anybody knows how difficult it is ending a relationship, and we have six children. It’s tough. But Gina and I love each other very deeply.”

Hancock said he still did not know how CCTV images from his personal office were leaked and that he knew nothing about the progress of an investigation by the Information Commissioner’s Office.

He said: “The thing that we’ve learned, and I think all my other colleagues in cabinet learned immediately, is why did you have a CCTV in the secretary of state’s office? Obviously, I didn’t know about it because even who’s in the office is an important fact and a sensitive piece of information.”

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## 2022.03.01 - Opinion

- First food banks, now bedding banks: in my time in politics, this is the worst poverty I've seen
- How could anybody dream of turning the brilliant A Little Life into another Sex and the City?
- Letting families in England choose schools hasn't made things better – just more stressful
- Why Vladimir Putin has already lost this war

## OpinionPoverty

# **First food banks, now bedding banks: in my time in politics, this is the worst poverty I've seen**

[Gordon Brown](#)



There are families who can only turn on their heating for two hours a day and use torches at night rather than spending on electric light



Lisa Hamilton-North packing bedding at the Big Hoose project, Lochgelly, Fife. Photograph: GMP/The Big Hoose Project

Tue 1 Mar 2022 03.00 EST

“Bedding banks” are about to take their place alongside food banks, baby banks and children’s clothes banks as the new face of charity. Parents unable to afford their heating bills are now turning to blankets, sheets, duvet covers and sleeping bags for their children as their cheapest available protection against the cold winter nights. All because, no matter how prudently they budget, families do not have the cash to feed their prepayment gas and electric meters – it is an 18th-century answer despite there being a 21st-century solution.

In all my time in politics I have never witnessed so much poverty and hardship. In Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, the constituency I grew up in and represented for 32 years and where I am patron of the [local family centre](#), there are more children than ever going to school ill-clad and hungry; desperate mothers falling into the hands of loan sharks; and [mental health problems escalating](#) with little NHS provision to cope.

A few weeks ago a local charity found three children sleeping on the floor under just one blanket

A few weeks ago hundreds of anxious mothers queued up outside their local Co-ops after the family centre staff raised funds to add a £50 credit to their gas and electricity prepayment cards.

This is poverty at its demeaning and degrading worst. Even before the April energy price rises, I am hearing stories I thought I would never hear in 2022: of children obsessively checking the electricity meter when they wake up in the bitter cold; of families who can only turn on their heating for two hours a day and use torches at night rather than spending on electric light; and of mothers unable to hide their tears when they cannot provide their children with either winter clothes and shoes or basic warmth.

Sadly the welfare state safety net has been torn apart. A few weeks ago a local charity found three children sleeping on the floor under just one blanket. Food banks are now helping a stream of mothers unable to afford cookers to give their children hot food even once a week. They are among the nearly [4 million families](#) who are already behind with their bills. Last week, because of help from Amazon, the Co-op and Scotmid, the Kirkcaldy family centre was able to acquire hundreds of bedding items but now, as they run out again while the need continues to rise, it has sent out direct appeals to established bedding and bedding goods companies for any surplus blankets and bedding.

In 1993, during a previous economic crisis, the then government raised VAT and national insurance despite all promises not to do so and millions of people paid the price as family poverty shot up. In the austerity years, benefits were cut – first after 2010 and then more savagely after 2015. But nothing in recent years compares to what's ahead as simultaneously food costs rise 5%, and gas and electricity prices increase as much as 50%, with benefits subject to only a 3.1% rise even as inflation [heads to 7%](#) and the national insurance hike costs the typical family about £20 a month.

So with only five weeks to go before the biggest hit to living standards for decades, it's time to call a halt to the economic madness of allowing, at one and the same time, tax rises, food price hikes, escalating heating bills and real-terms benefit cuts – the quadruple whammy that will tip already hard-pressed families over the edge. It's time for ministers to wake up to the pain already being felt in places they are unlikely to ever visit, and to the

suffering of people they may never see; for no government can justify the further deprivation being imposed on millions of its citizens.

Loughborough University's [minimum income standard project](#), led by Donald Hirsch, has worked out what families need as a baseline income, drawing on research into what the general public considers "essential" expenditures. Last year a couple with two children, aged three and seven, [needed £482 a week](#) after paying rent, council tax and childcare. Inflation, Hirsch tells me, has already pushed this up by 6% to £511. Yet come April, [benefits for a family like](#) this will rise by only £8 a week – meaning they would have only £274 a week in available income once the contribution to council tax is paid. They have already lost the £20 uplift in universal credit that was cruelly removed last October and, with their income now barely covering half (54%) what they need, they are much worse off than last year.

This is why, to ensure their children have food and other essentials, parents often go without necessities themselves. According to the minimum income standard, the full cost of food, gas, electricity, water and home insurance for our family of four is £153 a week, leaving only £4.30 a day per person to cover everything else – from clothes, mobiles and laundry to bedding, toilet rolls and other sanitary goods.

When asked, Boris Johnson [refused to answer](#) if he could live on universal credit. And no wonder: the weekly personal allowance for couples over 18 would total £121 from April, only a £3.60 rise; and the [single person's rate](#) for those over 25 will be £77 – just a £2.30 rise that will never cover the rising food prices and record heating bills, even after [the £200 loan](#) households will have to pay back over the next five years. How can a single woman, looking for work, make ends meet when the mobile phone, broadband and bus fares that she needs for job hunting could each cost about £10 a week and when, like thousands, she has to contribute towards her council tax and rent and repay a loan? Any thought of clothes or even laundry or toiletries is out, and the only way £77 can cover her bills is by cutting back on meals and warmth. This is why, even before its economic statement on 23 March, ministers must – as the [Child Poverty Action Group](#) and others have consistently demanded – reverse the £1,000 a year cut in

universal credit and do more to help with heating and benefits as well as postponing the national insurance rise.

It is often said that true leadership is leading by example. All of us will fall short and Partygate is an especially shameful and painful episode that has distressed millions who made the sacrifices that their leaders were not prepared to make themselves. Povertygate, though, plumbs new depths: leaders are knowingly imposing hardship they will not experience themselves on those already too poor to protect their families. And unlike Partygate, poverty does not end, but goes on day after day, heartbreaking and cruel even beyond austerity. No government should be allowed to get away with it.

- Gordon Brown is the World Health Organization ambassador for global health financing, and was UK prime minister from 2007 to 2010
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[Opinion](#)[Fiction](#)

## **How could anybody dream of turning the brilliant A Little Life into another Sex and the City?**

[Zoe Williams](#)



Hanya Yanagihara has written a screen adaptation of her acclaimed novel and the studios are not interested. But done right, it could be the ultimate box set



Hanya Yanagihara's novel *A Little Life* was shortlisted for the Man Booker prize in 2015, but will it make it to the screen? Photograph: David Levenson/Getty Images

Tue 1 Mar 2022 02.00 EST

Hanya Yanagihara, author of the acclaimed Man Booker prize-nominated, million-copies-and-counting *A Little Life*, has been working for years on a screen adaptation. It should be the ultimate box set: epic, engrossing, “right up against the line of melodrama”, as she once described her intention. Yet it has been “pretty much rejected by everyone”, the [author said in an interview](#) at the weekend.

Is it because she wanted too much editorial control, she wonders. Or because studios were looking for something more *Sex and the City*? If you have read it, you will be reeling, of course, at the ridiculousness: who would ever want to take control away from Yanagihara? I would put her in charge of everything. And how on earth could you *Sex and the City*-fy *A Little Life*? It would be like trying to make *Titus Andronicus* more like *Friends*. If you haven’t read it, I can’t tell you what it’s about, unfortunately: it sounds too harrowing, too much. And if that put you off, I would have ripped 10 or 15 hours of pure pleasure out of your hands for no good reason.

However, for the studio execs red-lighting this, I have only sympathy. It is impossible to adapt truly popular books in a digital age. Unpopular books, difficult books, books that didn't quite come off, those are all useful jumping-off points. Works that readers become attached to so profoundly that they walk around in T-shirts that list the main characters never get on to the screen without a massive freight of disappointment – all it takes is one guy's hair to be not how a reader imagined it. Multiply that by a thousand details and a million readers, and you have one billion chances to screw up.

Once upon a time, people would just grumble to themselves in isolation. Fifty Shades of Grey? Nobody admitted to liking it in the first place, and they sure as hell weren't going to admit to the disappointment of the film coming out like a really long Calvin Klein ad. With *A Little Life*, the stakes are too huge. And nobody should even think of adapting To Paradise, her new novel, without figuring out what happens at the end.

Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionSchool admissions

## Letting families in England choose schools hasn't made things better – just more stressful

[Aveek Bhattacharya](#)

On national offer day, maybe it's time to look to Scotland for a different way of doing things

- Aveek Bhattacharya is chief economist at the Social Market Foundation



'English policymakers cannot have anticipated the psychological toll of choosing a school.' Photograph: David Davies/PA

Tue 1 Mar 2022 02.00 EST

In thousands of calendars across the length and breadth of England, 1 March will have a circle around it to mark that today is national offer day – when children find out where they will be starting secondary school in September. Some will greet their missives from the council with relief and even joy, marking the end of an ordeal that has lasted for months or even years. For others the news will bring disappointment and perhaps a rancorous appeals process.

After more than three decades of policy promoting school choice, the rituals are well established. Every autumn, secondary schools host open days and pump out literature, wooing the next cohort of prospective students, as well as the keenest families scouting their options a year or two in advance. Parents are encouraged to do their own research, consulting league tables and inspection reports, often supplemented with a good deal of school-gate gossip. Application forms ranking between three and six schools have to be submitted by the end of October, before a four-month wait for a verdict. The dates are different, but the process is similar for primary schools.

As I grew up in Scotland, all of this was alien to me before I began researching it. In Scotland, the vast majority of students go to their local catchment school by default, although around one in eight make a “placing request” for a different school. That reflects the different approach Scottish policymakers have taken, resisting marketisation where governments in England have embraced it.

The English system was constructed with the best of intentions. Making schools compete for students was meant to incentivise them to up their game. Giving families more choice was meant to create empowered consumers. Yet it has not quite worked out that way. The evidence, [from England](#) and [abroad](#), suggests such measures have had minimal impact on educational attainment and have worsened class-based segregation between schools. Far from giving people a sense of control, the process has created a maelstrom of anxiety and disenchantment.

English policymakers cannot have anticipated the psychological toll of choosing a school. In interviews for my PhD research, which compares school choice in England and Scotland, English parents routinely described

the experience as “stressful”, “frantic”, “a nightmare”. They spoke of being “dizzy”, overwhelmed and consumed by it. They put hours of work into it. One mum cancelled almost all her social engagements for a couple of months. Another delayed her return to full-time work until the application was in.

The pressure can be extreme. Some told me about suffering sleepless nights. A mother from Poland said that picking a school felt almost as momentous as deciding to come to the UK. Perhaps the most heart-rending story I encountered was the homeless father who felt guilty that he lacked the mental energy to engage with his son’s school choice: “It does weigh heavily on me,” he said. “Sometimes I’m just so preoccupied just getting by day-to-day that it goes in the back of my mind and niggles me.” Such feelings are amplified by social pressure – I was told by a different parent that “if you don’t put that time into it you’re not bothered about your child’s education”.

While those that make placing requests could identify with some of those feelings, for most Scottish families the transition to secondary school is relatively serene. In fact, Scottish parents tended to be shocked and somewhat horrified by the English system when I described it to them. Parents on both sides of the border generally try to shield their children from worry and uncertainty, but there are clear benefits to having advance notice of where you will be going. For example, a family in Dundee described how through a series of visits they were able to gradually ease their son with autism into his new school, a process that would have to be substantially compressed in England.

There are steps that could be taken to make school choice more tolerable. Policymakers could reduce some of the uncertainty around school admissions by guaranteeing each child a place at a local catchment school so that they always have a clear backstop. They could expand the number of places, especially at the most popular schools. This would reduce the proportion of students that fail to get their first choice school, currently 19% and likely to rise given a demographic bulge in the coming years, and in turn assuage families’ fears of missing out. They could bring back choice advisers, professionals whose role was to help families navigate the complexity of the process.

Could the government in England go further by taking a leaf out of Scotland's book and trying to limit school choice? Perhaps, but it will be hard to stuff the genie back in the bottle. English parents, used to the system, may resist efforts to take back their perceived rights. That said, New Zealand reintroduced catchment areas in 2000 after abolishing them for many schools in 1991, showing that school choice need not be a one-way ratchet. In any case, with such strong social norms having developed around actively choosing a school, the extent to which a change of policy would alter parents' mindsets and approaches is uncertain.

- Aveek Bhattacharya is chief economist at the Social Market Foundation, a cross-party thinktank
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## OpinionUkraine

# Why Vladimir Putin has already lost this war

[Yuval Noah Harari](#)

The Russians may yet conquer Ukraine. But Ukrainians have shown in the past few days that they will not let them hold it



Members of an Ukrainian civil defence unit pass assault rifles to the opposite side of a blown-up bridge on Kyiv's northern front, 1 March.  
Photograph: Aris Messinis/AFP/Getty Images

Mon 28 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

Less than a week into the war, it seems increasingly likely that [Vladimir Putin](#) is heading towards a historic defeat. He may win all the battles but still lose the war. Putin's dream of rebuilding the Russian empire has always rested on the lie that Ukraine isn't a real nation, that Ukrainians aren't a real people, and that the inhabitants of Kyiv, Kharkiv and Lviv yearn for

Moscow's rule. That's a complete lie – Ukraine is a nation with more than a thousand years of history, and Kyiv was already a major metropolis when Moscow was not even a village. But the Russian despot has told his lie so many times that he apparently believes it himself.

When planning his invasion of Ukraine, Putin could count on many known facts. He knew that militarily Russia dwarfs Ukraine. He knew that Nato would not send troops to help Ukraine. He knew that European dependence on Russian oil and gas would make countries like Germany hesitate about imposing stiff sanctions. Based on these known facts, his plan was to hit Ukraine hard and fast, decapitate its government, establish a puppet regime in Kyiv, and ride out the western sanctions.

But there was one big unknown about this plan. As the Americans learned in Iraq and the Soviets learned in Afghanistan, it is much easier to conquer a country than to hold it. Putin knew he had the power to conquer Ukraine. But would the Ukrainian people just accept Moscow's puppet regime? Putin gambled that they would. After all, as he repeatedly explained to anyone willing to listen, Ukraine isn't a real nation, and the Ukrainians aren't a real people. In 2014, people in Crimea hardly resisted the Russian invaders. Why should 2022 be any different?

With each passing day, it is becoming clearer that Putin's gamble is failing. The Ukrainian people are resisting with all their heart, winning the admiration of the entire world – and winning the war. Many dark days lie ahead. The Russians may still conquer the whole of Ukraine. But to win the war, the Russians would have to hold Ukraine, and they can do that only if the Ukrainian people let them. This seems increasingly unlikely to happen.

Each Russian tank destroyed and each Russian soldier killed increases the Ukrainians' courage to resist. And each Ukrainian killed deepens the Ukrainians' hatred of the invaders. Hatred is the ugliest of emotions. But for oppressed nations, hatred is a hidden treasure. Buried deep in the heart, it can sustain resistance for generations. To reestablish the Russian empire, Putin needs a relatively bloodless victory that will lead to a relatively hateless occupation. By spilling more and more Ukrainian blood, Putin is making sure his dream will never be realised. It won't be Mikhail

Gorbachev's name written on the death certificate of the Russian empire: it will be Putin's. Gorbachev left Russians and Ukrainians feeling like siblings; Putin has turned them into enemies, and has ensured that the Ukrainian nation will henceforth define itself in opposition to [Russia](#).

Nations are ultimately built on stories. Each passing day adds more stories that Ukrainians will tell not only in the dark days ahead, but in the decades and generations to come. The president who refused to flee the capital, telling the US that he [needs ammunition, not a ride](#); the [soldiers from Snake Island](#) who told a Russian warship to "go fuck yourself"; the civilians who tried to stop Russian tanks by [sitting in their path](#). This is the stuff nations are built from. In the long run, these stories count for more than tanks.

The Russian despot should know this as well as anyone. As a child, he grew up on a diet of stories about German atrocities and Russian bravery in the siege of Leningrad. He is now producing similar stories, but casting himself in the role of Hitler.

The stories of Ukrainian bravery give resolve not only to the Ukrainians, but to the whole world. They give courage to the governments of European nations, to the US administration, and even to the oppressed citizens of Russia. If Ukrainians dare to stop a tank with their bare hands, the German government can dare to supply them with some anti-tank missiles, the US government can dare to [cut Russia off Swift](#), and Russian citizens can dare to demonstrate their opposition to this senseless war.

We can all be inspired to dare to do something, whether it is make a donation, welcome refugees, or help with the struggle online. The war in [Ukraine](#) will shape the future of the entire world. If tyranny and aggression are allowed to win, we will all suffer the consequences. There is no point to remain just observers. It's time to stand up and be counted.

Unfortunately, this war is likely to be long-lasting. Taking different forms, it may well continue for years. But the most important issue has already been decided. The last few days have proved to the entire world that Ukraine is a very real nation, that Ukrainians are a very real people, and that they definitely don't want to live under a new Russian empire. The main question

left open is how long it will take for this message to penetrate the Kremlin's thick walls.

- Yuval Noah Harari is a historian and author of *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*

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## 2022.03.01 - Around the world

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## Covid: the global political impact**Money**

# Pandemic spurred record numbers of ‘ultra wealthy’ in 2021

Rising global stock markets and increased property prices swelled ranks of ultra-high net worth individuals, according to new report



‘2021 was a good year for those lucky enough to be the owners of property or other tangible assets,’ according to property consultants Knight Frank. Photograph: yoh4nn/Getty Images/iStockphoto

*[Rupert Neate](#) Wealth correspondent*

*[@RupertNeate](#)*

Mon 28 Feb 2022 19.01 EST

More than 51,000 people joined the ranks of the “ultra-wealthy” last year as the fortunes of the already very rich benefited from rising global stock markets and increased property prices during the pandemic.

The number of ultra-high net worth individuals (UHNWIs) – those with assets of more than \$30m (£22.4m) – rose by a record 9.3% last year to 610,569, according to a report by the property consultants Knight Frank.

“By any of the measures that we track, whether luxury property prices, UHNWI populations or even private jet traffic, 2021 was a good year for those lucky enough to be the owners of property or other tangible assets,” said Rory Penn, the head of Knight Frank’s private office, through which he advises ultra-rich clients across the world.

“Notwithstanding uncertain times, we have still seen substantial wealth creation globally with the number of people with net wealth of US\$30m or more increasing by almost 10% last year.”

Globally there are now more than 600,000 ultra-high net worth individuals with assets of more than \$30m (£22.4m)

The number of ultra rich people in the UK increased by 11% to 25,771 – more people than could fit in the football stadiums of Watford, Burnley or Brentford.

The number of Britons with assets of more than \$30m has doubled since 2016, and Knight Frank predicts the total will rise to more than 32,000 by 2026. There are more than 3 million people in the UK classed as dollar millionaires (£750,000), a 54% increase on five years ago.

The UK had the second-fastest rate of growth of ultra-rich people behind the US, where the number increased by 13% to 210,353. The ranks of the wealthy grew on every continent except Africa, where 17 people fell off the list, taking the total to 2,240.

Monaco stood out as the country with the most super-rich people per capita, with 199 people holding assets of \$30m or more out of a population of just 39,000 – which works out as five people in every thousand. Just under seven in 10 people living in Monaco are dollar millionaires.

Monaco is home to several rich Britons, including the former Topshop boss Sir Philip Green and his wife, Tina; billionaire Brexit backer and

petrochemicals tycoon [Sir James Ratcliffe](#), property billionaires Simon and David Reuben; John Hargreaves, the founder and chairman of Matalan; John Caudwell, the billionaire founder of Phones4u; and Formula One driver Lewis Hamilton.

### [The number of ultra-high net worth individuals rose in every global region bar Africa in 2021](#)

Knight Frank's report shows that on average the ultra-wealthy hold just under two-thirds of their wealth in property. Unsurprisingly, the most expensive property is found in Monaco, where homebuyers would need to spend at least \$34m to join the top 1% of most expensive properties.

A million dollars buys just 14.6sq m of residential space in the Mediterranean principality, compared with 30.6sq m in London, or 256 sq m in São Paulo.

Conscious of the lack of space available to attract more billionaires to Monaco, [Prince Albert II, the reigning monarch, is overseeing a \\$2bn \(£1.5bn\) scheme to reclaim six hectares \(15 acres\) of land from the sea.](#)

The sovereign city-state – which is only slightly bigger than Regent's Park in London – said it was embarking on the [“offshore urban extension project”](#) because it had run out of space for those seeking the “fiscal advantages” the tax haven offers.

The reclaimed land will allow the creation of 120 luxury homes selling for more than \$100,000 per sq metre – more expensive than One Hyde Park in London and 15 Central Park West in Manhattan.

On average ultra-rich people own 2.9 homes, according to Knight Frank's survey of private bankers and wealth advisers.

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[Nasa](#)

## **Nasa explores how to keep international space station in orbit without Russian help**

Space agency says Northrop Grumman and SpaceX could assist after Russia raises prospect of pulling out over sanctions punishing its invasion of Ukraine

- [Ukraine Russia news: latest updates](#)



Russian cosmonauts and a Nasa astronaut train together ahead of their trip to the international space station in March last year. Nasa is working out how to keep the ISS going if Russia pulls out over its invasion of Ukraine.  
Photograph: Reuters

*Agence France-Presse*  
Mon 28 Feb 2022 22.20 EST

Nasa is exploring ways to keep the international space station in orbit without Russian help, but doesn't see any immediate signs Moscow is withdrawing from the collaboration after the invasion of [Ukraine](#).

The US side of the international space station (ISS) supplies power and life support, [Russia](#) is responsible for propulsion and keeping the station afloat: it does this by using docked Progress spacecraft to periodically give the station a boost to maintain its altitude of approximately 400km (250 miles).

Last week, though, Russia's Roscosmos space chief Dmitry Rogozin raised the prospect of pulling out of the partnership in response to US sanctions.

Kathy Lueders, who heads the agency's human spaceflight program, said US aerospace and defense company Northrop Grumman had offered a reboost capability.

"And, you know, our SpaceX folks are looking at can we have additional capability," she said.

Lueders added that operations at the space station were proceeding "nominally" and "we're not getting any indications at a working level that our counterparts are not committed".

"That said, we always look for how do we get more operational flexibility and our cargo providers are looking at how do we add different capabilities," she said.

The last Northrop Grumman Cygnus cargo vessel that arrived at the ISS on 21 February was the first to boast a capacity to "reboost" the outpost without Russian help.

On Friday, SpaceX boss Elon Musk tweeted his company's logo in response to Rogozin's rhetorical question about who would save the ISS from an uncontrolled de-orbit.

But Lueders stressed that such plans were a contingency measure only. "It would be very difficult for us to be operating on our own – ISS is an

international partnership that was created ... with joint dependencies," she said.

"As a team, we are looking at where we may have operational flexibilities, but ... it would be a sad day for international operations if we can't continue to peacefully operate in space," she said.

A symbol of post cold war detente, the ISS has been continuously habited for more than 21 years and has weathered past geopolitical storms, notably Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014. But some observers believe the invasion of Ukraine could hasten the demise of US-Russian space cooperation.

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[Japan](#)

## China rattled by calls for Japan to host US nuclear weapons

Influential former prime minister Shinzo Abe called for Tokyo to consider hosting US nuclear weapons in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine



Abe, who presided over record defence budgets before resigning in 2020, said Japan should cast off taboos surrounding its possession of nuclear weapons following the outbreak of war in Europe. Photograph: Kim Kyung Hoon/Reuters

*[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo*

Tue 1 Mar 2022 01.02 EST

China has reacted angrily to calls by Japan's influential former prime minister, [Shinzo Abe](#), for Tokyo to consider hosting US nuclear weapons in the wake of [Russia's invasion of Ukraine](#) and rising concern over Chinese aggression towards Taiwan.

Abe, who presided over record defence budgets before resigning in 2020, said [Japan](#) should cast off taboos surrounding its possession of nuclear weapons following the outbreak of war in Europe.

“In [Nato](#), Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy take part in nuclear sharing, hosting American nuclear weapons,” Abe said in a TV interview, according to Nikkei Asia. “We need to understand how security is maintained around the world and not consider it taboo to have an open discussion.

“We should firmly consider various options when we talk about how we can protect Japan and the lives of its people in this reality.”

[Japan](#), the only country to have been attacked with nuclear weapons, in [Hiroshima](#) and Nagasaki, is part of the US nuclear umbrella but has for decades adhered to the three non-nuclear principles – that it will not produce or possess nuclear weapons or allow them on its territory.

Japan’s prime minister, [Fumio Kishida](#), quickly rejected Abe’s call for a debate on the nuclear-sharing option. “It is unacceptable given our country’s stance of maintaining the three non-nuclear principles,” Kishida, who represents a constituency in Hiroshima, told MPs this week.

Wang Wenbin, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, told reporters in Beijing: “Japanese politicians have frequently spread fallacies related to [Taiwan](#) and even blatantly made false remarks that violate the nation’s three non-nuclear principles.

“We strongly ask Japan to deeply reflect on its history”, Wang added, and warned Tokyo to “be cautious in words and deeds on the Taiwan issue to stop provoking trouble”.

Under Abe, a conservative whose lifelong political ambition is to revise Japan’s “pacifist” constitution, said any conflict involving [China](#) and [Taiwan](#) would also constitute an emergency for Japan.

He called on the US to end its “ambiguity” on the defence of Taiwan, which China regards as a renegade province, noting that the island is just 110 km from Yonaguni, Japan’s westernmost inhabited island.

“The US takes a strategy of ambiguity, meaning it may or may not intervene militarily if Taiwan is attacked,” Abe said. “By showing it may intervene, it keeps China in check, but by leaving open the possibility that it may not intervene, it makes sure that the Taiwanese forces for independence do not get out of control.”

Abe, leader of the biggest faction in Kishida’s ruling Liberal Democratic party, has made several hawkish interventions on security policy that enjoy support inside the party but could provoke a backlash among voters nervous about Japan’s potential involvement in regional conflicts.

China’s state-run tabloid Global Times accused Abe of attempting to “unlock” Japanese militarism. “It is not only ironic, but also a huge real risk, that a group of people in the only country in the world that was bombed by atomic bombs would call for an invitation to the culprit to deploy nuclear weapons in their own territory,” it said in an editorial.

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## Dinosaurs

# Tyrannosaurus rex may have been three species, scientists say

Experts say there is enough variation in samples to argue there was also a Tyrannosaurus imperator and a regina



A Tyrannosaurus rex skeleton at the French National Museum of Natural History in Paris. Photograph: Philippe Wojazer/Reuters

*[Nicola Davis](#) Science correspondent*

*[@NicolaKSDavis](#)*

Mon 28 Feb 2022 20.00 EST

With its immense size, dagger-like teeth and sharp claws, Tyrannosaurus rex was a fearsome predator that once terrorised North America. Now researchers studying its fossils have suggested the beast may not have been the only tyrannosaurus species.

Experts studying remains thought to belong to T rex have suggested their variation shows evidence of not one species but three.

The lead author of the research, Gregory Paul, who was a dinosaur specialist on the film Jurassic Park, said the findings had multiple implications, noting that previously experts had studied the growth of the T rex using remains from different rock layers.

“That may not be a good idea to do because you may be [looking at] different species,” he said.

The team say it is to be expected that more than one tyrannosaurus species evolved over their million-or-so years on Earth, as has been found for other dinosaurs who lived at the same time, such as triceratops.

[Writing in the journal Evolutionary Biology](#), Paul and colleagues report how previous work has revealed that fossilised bones designated as being from T rex vary in terms of their stout build or “robustness”, and different specimens had one or two pairs of lower incisor-like teeth.

Paul and colleagues studied a total of 37 specimens attributed to T rex, in particular looking at the length and circumference of the thigh bones, available for about two-thirds of the specimens, to assess their robustness.

The team say their findings suggest differences in the robustness of the thigh bones are unlikely to be down to individual variation.

“We found that the robustness in the sample we have of tyrannosaurus, the variation of the femur is greater than all other tyrannosaurids combined over 10m years of evolution,” said Paul. “You can’t just not pay attention to that.”

The team say the variation does not appear to be linked to the overall size of the specimen or how mature the animal was when it died, while other factors – such as the uneven ratio of more robust bones to those that were more slender, or “gracile” – suggests such variation is unlikely to be linked to the sex of the beasts.

What's more, fossils with more gracile bones were only found in higher layers of sediment, and these and more robust specimens found alongside them tended to have only one incisor-like tooth in the lower jaw, in contrast to the robust specimens in lower layers.

While the team say they cannot rule out other explanations for the findings, they propose that specimens found in lower layers are probably from one species they have called *Tyrannosaurus imperator*, or tyrant lizard emperor; the later, stocky-boned specimens are from *Tyrannosaurus rex*; and the slender-boned specimens are from a third species the team have called *Tyrannosaurus regina*, or tyrant lizard queen.

Prof Steve Brusatte, a palaeontologist at the University of Edinburgh who was not involved in the work, said he was not convinced.

"I understand the temptation to divide T rex into different species, because there is some variation in the fossil bones that we have. But ultimately, to me, this variation is very minor and not indicative of meaningful biological separation of distinct species that can be defined based on clear, explicit, consistent differences," he said.

Prof Thomas Carr, a T rex expert at Carthage College in the US, also disputed the results, saying the definitions of the different species put forward by the team were vague, and the findings were at odds with his [own work](#) in which he analysed variations in 1,850 different features in 31 specimens. "I found no evidence of more than one species. And if that signal was in the data, I would have picked it up," he said.

Carr said another concern was that the study included specimens from privately owned or commercial outfits, affecting the ability of researchers to reproduce the results.

Nevertheless, Paul said it would be decades before there were enough museum specimens to do a statistical analysis. He said the variations were significant. "Other dinosaurs species have been named on less data," he said.

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## Germany

# Germany's 'Putin-caressers' start coming to terms with their naivety

Analysis: politicians who believed Putin could be 'tamed by empathy and accommodation' are having to hurriedly rethink their positions

- [Russia-Ukraine crisis: live updates](#)



The Reichstag building in Berlin on Sunday. The Nord Stream 2 pipeline led a number of German politicians to court the Russian president. Photograph: Hannibal Hanschke/Getty Images

*[Kate Connolly](#) in Berlin*

Mon 28 Feb 2022 12.45 EST

Prominent figures in Germany are coming under increasing pressure to publicly distance themselves from [Vladimir Putin](#) amid accusations that they

are bringing shame on the country and themselves.

The range of so-called Putin-Versteher (Putin-understanders) – those who have sought to explain or justify the Russian leader’s actions – include figures from the far-left Die Linke and the far-right AfD, as well as members of the Social Democrats and some conservatives who have tried to keep him on side in the interests of their constituents and German energy security.

“Putin-Versteher are on the precipice,” the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung on Sunday (FAS) said, listing an array of German politicians it said were now paying the price for having mistakenly thought they could “tame Vladimir Putin with empathy and friendly accommodation”.



The former German chancellor and head of the Nord Stream 2 administrative board, Gerhard Schröder, emphasised Putin’s ‘clubbability’. Photograph: Kay Nietfeld/AP

The tabloid Bild went further, describing a range of politicians as “Putin Streichler” – or Putin caressers – saying over the past 20 years these included not just former chancellor Gerhard Schröder, but the former Social Democrat foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, now Germany’s president, the former state leader of Bavaria, Edmund Stoiber, and Angela Merkel, who it accused of pushing the building of Nord Stream 2 and

holding back with sanctions even amid widespread evidence of Kremlin misbehaviour.

But the invasion of [Ukraine](#) has marked a turning point, with analysts concluding that many politicians had been stunned into a change of heart.



Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer has now expressed regret over past policy failures relating to Russia. Photograph: Jens Schlueter/AFP/Getty Images

Germany's former defence minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer implied that some Germans, including herself, had taken a shamefully naive approach towards Putin's politics.

"I'm so angry at ourselves for our historical failure," she [wrote on Twitter](#). "After Georgia, Crimea and Donbas, we have not prepared anything that would have really deterred Putin."

But many German politicians actively courted Putin, most prominently Schröder, who went out of his way to emphasise the Russian leader's harmless clubbability.

Schröder, who is reportedly recovering from coronavirus, was called upon at the weekend to condemn the invasion or face being thrown out of the Social

Democratic (SPD) party over his close business ties to Russian energy companies Gazprom and Rosneft.

In its strongest appeal yet to Schröder, Lars Klingbeil, the SPD's co-head, a former close ally, urged him to cut all business ties with Putin. "This war starts with Putin and Putin only, and therefore it can be the only logical conclusion that you cannot do business with an aggressor, a warmonger," Klingbeil said.

Rainer Arnold, a former MP and an SPD member who was the parliamentary group's spokesman on defence between 2002 and 2018, went further, appealing to Schröder to "save the SPD and you yourself further sustained embarrassing and excruciating debates about your egotistical engagement with Putin, a man whose interests are just as egotistical as well as inhuman".

Schröder, who had previously referred to Ukraine's request for arms as "sabre rattling", on Thursday called on the "government in Moscow" to end the conflict "as soon as possible" saying it was not in Russia's security interests to pursue the conflict. But he stopped short of mentioning Putin or referring to a war.

Others associated with Nord Stream 2 appear to be rapidly distancing themselves from the project, which was halted by the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, (also of the SPD) last week in direct response to the invasion.

Within the far-left Die Linke, Sahra Wagenknecht has admitted she was wrong to insist Russia was not planning to invade Ukraine. Insiders have said she had been forced into a rethink, particularly over sanctions, which she has rejected in the past.

Stephan Protschka of the AfD told the FAS he felt "deeply deceived" by Putin, which elements of his party have admired for standing up to the "imperial west". He told the paper he had, at most, expected there to be a trade war between Russia and the west and had accordingly "stocked up with wood" for his oven heater in order to brave an energy crisis. "I had had

a degree of understanding for the way in which Putin felt he had been driven into a corner,” he said. “But now my understanding has run out.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/28/germany-s-putin-caressers-start-coming-to-terms-with-their-naivety>.

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- [Glastonbury 2022 Paul McCartney and Kendrick Lamar to headline festival](#)
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## Birmingham

# Birmingham Erdington byelection winner is Labour's Paulette Hamilton

Hamilton says retaining seat with majority of 3,266 shows party is 'finally turning a corner'



Paulette Hamilton speaks at Erdington academy after being declared the winner in the byelection contest. Photograph: Darren Staples/Getty Images

*[Jessica Murray](#)*

Fri 4 Mar 2022 11.35 EST

The new Labour MP for [Birmingham](#) Erdington has said her byelection victory shows the party is "finally turning a corner" after she secured the seat with a majority of 3,266.

Paulette Hamilton, a former nurse, will become the city's first black MP after [getting 9,413 votes](#), beating the Conservative candidate, Robert Alden,

who got 6,147. Labour's vote share rose to 55.5% from 50.3% in 2019.

"We heard the issues, we shared our policies and I believe the [Labour](#) party is finally turning a corner ... Labour policies are now actually seeping through," she told the Guardian after the result was announced in the early hours of Friday.

"This byelection has shown that with the right campaign, with listening to what the public are telling us and acting upon that [the party can secure more success]."

The contest was triggered by the sudden [death in January of Jack Dromey](#), who had held the seat for Labour since 2010. After the result was announced, Hamilton paid tribute to the late MP, saying: "He was a wonderful MP for his constituency and in the past few weeks campaigning across Erdington, Castle Vale and Kingstanding, I have heard so many stories of the difference Jack made to the people's lives."

Labour was the [favourite to win](#), having held the constituency since it was created in 1974, but the Conservatives increased their vote share in recent years and there were jitters a low turnout [could produce a surprise result](#).

In her victory speech, Hamilton said: "I'm truly humbled and honoured to be elected as a member of parliament. I will not take your vote for granted. I have met many of you and I have heard what you have to say and I commit to you now: I will work for you ... I will be your voice in Westminster."

Hamilton said the party had been expecting a comfortable victory. "We were confident that with knocking every door and doing what we needed to do, we would secure the win," she said. "But we knew we couldn't be complacent, we knew we had to fight for every vote, because people needed to hear our voice."

Turnout was low, at 27%, with a total of 17,016 ballots cast – fewer than the 17,720 votes Dromey received in 2019. Alden, Hamilton's main rival, has fought the seat for the past four general elections, and is leader of the Tory group on the city council.

Dromey, who was married to the former Labour cabinet minister Harriet Harman, held the seat with a majority of 3,601 in 2019 when the [Conservatives](#) made significant gains in the region, including taking the former Labour stronghold Birmingham Northfield.

Hamilton, 59, is the cabinet member for health and social care on Labour-controlled Birmingham city council and has lived in the seat for 35 years. After a smooth campaign, on the eve of the vote comments emerged that were made by Hamilton in 2015 at an event called “The Ballot or the Bullet – does your vote count?”

“I’m not sure we will get what we really deserve in this country using the vote,” she said. “But I don’t know if we are a strong enough group to get what we want to get if we have an uprising … I am very torn.”

Labour said the comments were “misrepresented and taken out of context as part of a deliberate attempt by the Conservatives and their allies to hijack a democratic election … These attacks on a black woman seeking to become the city’s first black MP are deeply disturbing.”

On Friday Hamilton said she had received “horrendous” abuse online as a result and added: “I could start an argument or discussion about it. But the community that I serve deserves a fresh start, we need to move on and something that is seven years old, we need to leave that there.”

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## Labour

# Erdington result shows there might not yet be enough enthusiasm for Labour

Analysis: Despite a relatively comfortable victory, there is little for the party to be complacent about



Labour's Paulette Hamilton speaks after winning the Birmingham Erdington byelection. Photograph: Darren Staples/Getty Images

*[Heather Stewart](#) Political editor*

Fri 4 Mar 2022 02.25 EST

Labour activists may have been beset by last-minute nerves on a rainy polling day in [Birmingham](#) Erdington but, in the end, Paulette Hamilton's victory was a comfortable one.

Her [55% of the vote](#) beat Labour's 50.3% the last time it was contested, in the December 2019 general election, by the [much-loved veteran MP Jack](#)

## Dromey.

The [Conservatives](#), meanwhile, had aimed to maintain their 2019 vote share of 40% – but were beaten back to 36.3%, after Labour poured MPs and campaigners into the seat to get out the vote on Thursday.

Keir Starmer's team feel they have come a very long way since the [humiliating loss of the Hartlepool by-election](#) to the Tories last May.

Erdington never appeared likely to go the same way as Hartlepool. Despite being a constituency that voted to leave the EU, with 63% in favour, there was no significant Brexit party vote from 2019 for the Conservatives to squeeze – and more importantly, [Labour](#) is in a much stronger position.

Starmer has carried out a painful restructuring of the party's internal machinery, and a major reshuffle of his frontbench – and since the Partygate revelations, Labour has consistently led the Tories in the polls.

Most importantly, though, they feel the public are beginning to give them a hearing on day-to-day, bread-and-butter issues including the cost-of-living crisis, which repeatedly came up on the doorstep in Erdington.

That has been all but impossible for much of Starmer's two years as leader, as the pandemic dominated people's lives and captured the headlines.

Despite its relatively comfortable victory, there is little for Labour to be complacent about, however, and there are two particular worries.

First, there is no sign yet either in the Erdington result or national polling that Russia's invasion in Ukraine, and Boris Johnson's approach to it, have caused voters to rally to the government's side.

But it may make it harder for Labour to raise the issues on which Starmer and his team feel they have a strong offer to make to the public.

And, like the early days of the pandemic, it demands staunch support for the government's position, as seen in the cross-party ovation given to the Ukrainian ambassador in the Commons on Wednesday.

Starmer has pushed the government to go further, in imposing sanctions on Russian oligarchs, for example, but there is a tacit acceptance that this is not a time for politicking – which is hard for any opposition party.

Second, while his personal popularity is rising steadily, there are still qualms among some in his party about whether he has the star quality to lead them to a general election victory, and the [27% turnout in Thursday's poll](#) has done nothing to assuage that view.

Erdington is traditionally a low turnout seat, and Labour activists pointed to the grotty March weather as another explanation. But they had poured activists into the seat for weeks, including much of the frontbench.

Byelections do tend to attract a lower turnout, without the weeks of national fanfare that precede a nationwide poll. But the total vote on Thursday, of 17,016 voters, was lower than Dromey's individual vote in 2019.

That may suggest that, as yet, Labour is not generating great enthusiasm among the voters in heartland seats it needs to hang on to – or in Tory-held seats win back to its side – if it is to win the next general election.

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## Music

# Paul McCartney and Kendrick Lamar to headline Glastonbury 2022

As the festival returns from Covid-enforced hiatus, over half of the acts announced so far feature women



(Clockwise, from left) Megan Thee Stallion, Paul McCartney, Kendrick Lamar, Kacey Musgrave and Olivia Rodrigo are among the stars announced for the first Glastonbury Festival since 2019. Composite: AP/Getty/PA

[Nadeem Badshah](#) and [Laura Snapes](#)

Fri 4 Mar 2022 03.30 EST

Paul McCartney, Kendrick Lamar and Olivia Rodrigo have been announced as among the stars performing at this summer's [Glastonbury festival](#).

Out of the 89 names announced so far, 48 are women or acts that include female artists, meeting festival co-organiser Emily Eavis's previously stated

intention for Glastonbury to achieve gender parity on its bill. “Our future has to be 50/50,” she [told the BBC](#) in 2020.

The festival, which was cancelled for the last two years, makes its return with McCartney as Saturday night headliner – his second time atop the Pyramid stage, having performed in 2004 – and Pulitzer prize-winning rapper Lamar, who will make his debut at the festival to close the Pyramid Stage on the Sunday night.

It had already been announced that [Billie Eilish](#) will make her second appearance at Worthy Farm in Somerset on the Pyramid stage, along with Diana Ross, who will be following in the footsteps of fellow veteran superstars including Dolly Parton, Lionel Richie and James Brown in the Sunday “teatime legend” slot.

Eilish is among a strong pop presence at the festival, with Rodrigo, Doja Cat, [Megan Thee Stallion](#), Charli XCX and Caroline Polachek all appearing.

The festival will also feature debut sets from Herbie Hancock, Phoebe Bridgers, Sam Fender, Turnstile, TLC, Wet Leg and Yves Tumor.

Other acts announced include [Kacey Musgraves](#), Noel Gallagher’s High Flying Birds, Pet Shop Boys, Foals, Haim, Lorde and Robert Plant, who will appear alongside Alison Krauss.

The names announced are the first shortlist of acts for this year’s festival, which takes place on 22-26 June. The full lineup is expected to be published in May.



Over half of the acts announced so far for this summer's Glastonbury festival are either women or feature women. Photograph: Glastonbury

McCartney and Lamar were among the headline acts for the cancelled festival in 2020, which would have been its 50th anniversary year. [Taylor Swift](#) was also due to headline in 2020, but thus far does not appear to be performing this year.

Prior to the announcement, McCartney teased the news on Twitter in the form of a [Wordle](#) clue. He used six squares rather than the traditional five, presumably to hint at the word “Glasto” – and not “Mexico”, to the chagrin of hopeful South American fans.

He gave the game the number 121 and wrote 25/6 in the field that usually indicates how many attempts it took for the player to correctly guess the word to reveal the date of his performance: When he tweeted the clue, on 24 February, it was 121 days until 25 June, which he is due to play.

Wordle 121 25/6

□□□□□

— Paul McCartney (@PaulMcCartney) [February 24, 2022](#)

This year's Glastonbury will act as a belated birthday celebration for McCartney, who turns 80 on 18 June, making him the oldest ever headliner at the festival.

By contrast, the Friday night headliner Eilish will be the festival's youngest ever solo headliner.

Festival organiser [Emily Eavis](#) said: "It really is so exciting to be back. And it feels like we all need it. Everywhere I go, people tell me how much they're looking forward to the festival's return and how they've all been waiting for it. This will be our first Glastonbury for three years. It's the biggest buildup we've ever had!"

### **This year's Glastonbury lineup so far**

Billie Eilish  
Paul McCartney  
Kendrick Lamar  
Diana Ross  
Amyl and the Sniffers  
Angelique Kidjo  
Arlo Parks  
The Avalanches  
Beabadoobee  
Bicep  
Big Thief  
Black Midi  
Blossoms  
Bonobo  
Burna Boy  
Caribou  
Caroline Polachek  
Cate Le Bon  
Celeste  
Charli XCX  
Clairo  
Confidence Man  
Courtney Barnett

Crowded House  
Declan McKenna  
Doja Cat  
Dry Cleaning  
Easy Life  
Elbow  
Emma-Jean Thackray  
First Aid Kit  
Foals  
Fontaines DC  
Four Tet  
Gabriels  
Ghetts  
Girl in Red  
Glass Animals  
Greentea Peng  
Griff  
Haim  
Herbie Hancock  
Holly Humberstone  
Idles  
Inhaler  
Jarv Is...  
Jessie Ware  
The Jesus and Mary Chain  
Joy Crookes  
Kacey Musgraves  
Khruangbin  
Koffee  
Leon Bridges  
Lianne La Havas  
Little Simz  
Lorde  
Megan Thee Stallion  
Metronomy  
Mitski  
Nightmares on Wax

Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds  
Nubya Garcia  
Olivia Rodrigo  
Pet Shop Boys  
Phoebe Bridgers  
Primal Scream  
Robert Plant and Alison Krauss  
Róisín Murphy  
Rufus Wainwright  
Sam Fender  
Sampa the Great  
Seun Kuti and Egypt 80  
Self Esteem  
Sigrid  
Skunk Anansie  
Sleaford Mods  
Snarky Puppy  
Squid  
St Vincent  
Supergrass  
Tems  
TLC  
Turnstile  
Warmduscher  
The Waterboys  
Wet Leg  
Wolf Alice  
Years and Years  
Yves Tumor

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## Climate crisis

# UK not prepared for climate impacts, warns IPCC expert

Sewage works, airports and seaports among key infrastructure at risk, says intergovernmental report



Flooding in Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, last month. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

*[Damian Carrington](#) Environment editor*

*[@dpcarrington](#)*

Fri 4 Mar 2022 04.40 EST

The UK “is very much not adapted to climate change and not prepared”, according to a lead author of a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The [study](#), published this week and approved by 195 countries, says the worldwide impacts of the climate crisis are more severe than predicted and there is only a narrow chance of securing “a liveable future for all”.

In the UK, more flooding from rivers, at the coasts, and from intense downpours in urban areas is one of the biggest impacts, the report says. Sewage works, airports and seaports are among the key infrastructure at risk, along with the impacts of storms on the electricity and communication networks.

While winters are getting wetter, summers are becoming drier, and water shortages are on track to increase in England and Wales, the report says, doubling in frequency within decades.

Heatwaves are also a rising and deadly threat, with many homes and hospitals unprepared. One in three heat-related deaths in the UK between 1991 and 2018 were caused by global heating, according to a [study](#) cited in the report.

Global climate impacts will also cause shortages of imported goods and increase their price in the UK, the report says, as well as damaging markets for British exports. The report even warns of financial instability due to economic shocks caused by climate change.

“The IPCC report backs up the conclusions of the UK climate change risk assessment (CCRA) published in 2021,” said Prof Richard Betts, at the UK Met Office and a lead author of both the IPCC report and the CCRA. “The key point is that the UK is very much not adapted to climate change and not prepared.”

Sir Patrick Vallance, the chief scientific adviser to the UK government, [responded to the IPCC report](#) by warning of increasing extreme weather in the UK. He said: “This will strain housing, agriculture, transport and supply chains – little of which was built with such pressure in mind.”

He also warned of more wildfires endangering cities near moorland, such as in Manchester and Sheffield. “The challenge is enormous but it can be met,”

Vallance said.

The [IPCC report](#), which is based on 34,000 scientific studies, says that over the past three decades the UK and Europe have experienced the highest number of river floods in the past 500 years.

It says some coastal communities in the UK may have to move inland and that the number of people at risk of annual coastal flooding in the UK would rise from 3.2 million to more than 5 million in a worst-case scenario.

“As an island nation, what happens on the coast is a particular issue,” said Mike Morecroft, at Natural England and one of the 234 lead authors of the IPCC report.

But he said restoring nature on the coasts could provide better protection than hard defences, such as at the [Steart salt marshes in Somerset](#).

Peter Alexander, at the University of Edinburgh and another IPCC author, said climate impacts on farming in the UK and around the world affected people.

“We are part of a global food system. We import close to half the food that we consume and, if the rest of the world’s agriculture is being impacted by climate change, then we’re going to effectively import those impacts to the UK, largely through potentially higher food prices,” he said.

The Climate Change Committee (CCC), the UK government’s official advisers, said in June 2021 the [government was failing to protect people](#) from the fast-rising risks of the climate crisis, with action to improve resilience not keeping pace with the impacts of global heating.

The CCC’s experts said they were frustrated by the “absolutely illogical” lack of sufficient action on adaptation, given that taking action is up to 10 times more cost-effective than not doing so.

“We must go much further and faster to truly prepare for the impacts of a warmer world,” the government acknowledged in its [legally required assessment of climate risks](#), published in January. “In the majority of risk areas we need to take more action.”

The IPCC report was “stark”, a UK government spokesperson said: “We are working at pace on our national adaptation programme [due in 2023], with robust measures, including £5.2bn to tackle flooding and coastal erosion in the UK.”

The IPCC report strongly emphasises that the climate crisis hits the poor, vulnerable and excluded in society the most, and that addressing inequality is an essential part of tackling global heating.

“Different segments of the population can be more or less vulnerable, and that applies not just in developing countries but within the UK as well,” said Prof Lindsay Stringer, at the University of York and an IPCC author.

The chair of the CCC’s adaptation committee, Julia King, writing with the former chair, John Krebs, said: “Adaptation should be integral to ‘levelling up’ [in the UK]. Poorer households are more severely affected by the health and financial consequences of flooding and other extremes.”

“The UK has the capacity and the resources to adapt but the government is simply not doing enough,” they said. “Lack of action now is storing up problems and costs for future generations: they will have to pay for our negligence.”

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## 2022.03.04 - Spotlight

- ['The canon is so heavy with the male genius' Neneh Cherry and Robyn on changing the face of pop](#)
- [Kapow! Our writers pick their favorite Batman movie](#)
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[Neneh Cherry](#)

Interview

## **‘The canon is so heavy with the male genius’: Neneh Cherry and Robyn on changing the face of pop**

[Laura Snapes](#)



Robyn and Neneh Cherry. Photograph: Fredrik Skogkvist

As they reboot the classic Buffalo Stance, the friends talk sisterhood, being Swedish and fighting the system



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As two of pop's most innovative stars convene on Zoom – [Neneh Cherry](#) in bed in London, Robyn at home in Stockholm – it's telling that they spend most of their conversation celebrating their collaborators and creative communities.

Thirty-three years since Cherry emerged from the punk underground into the pop mainstream with Buffalo Stance, [Robyn](#) (alongside the producer Dev Hynes and the Swedish rapper Mapei) has covered that timelessly bolshie hit for a new covers collection celebrating Cherry's first three albums. What may appear to be a pop year zero, says Cherry, was simply a threshold in an ongoing continuity that started in her native Sweden's collectivist spirit, grew through New York City's burgeoning rap scene and London punk and street style, and, ultimately, swept a preteen Robyn into its orbit.

They first encountered each other through a mutual friend, the late producer [Christian Falk](#). He was the only collaborator from Robyn's 90s teen-pop career that she maintained once she quit the major-label system in the 00s

and changed the face of pop. Her impact influenced dozens of young musicians, including Cherry's daughter, the R&B star Mabel, who would play Robyn songs on the family piano as a teenager.

You get the sense that these connections are the spoils both Cherry, 57, and Robyn, 42, live for, more than anniversaries and glitzy celebrations. "You make me make sense," Cherry tells Robyn in a conversation that spans age, independence and creating an alternative to the male rock canon. "I treasure the sisterhood and the exchange of ideas and the heart that it has."

## **Robyn, did you have any trepidation about approaching such an iconic song?**

**Robyn:** Just getting the request to do it made me feel confident because I had Neneh's blessing. I feel very comfortable with the song because it's been with me such a long time. I was 10 years old when I started listening to Raw Like Sushi on summer vacation with my best friend. There's so much nuance in the words that I could draw from. There's a deep sense of belonging. It has to do with being present in your own life, being brave, being defiant – these core feelings that have shaped how I look at making music and what I think is important when you perform for other people.

**Neneh Cherry:** I'm not really into nostalgia, but I think that the journey of history is really important and so to be in this space where Robyn, who is one of the loves of my life, has put her voice to Buffalo Stance and made it hers feels monumental. You could say all the work is connected, but there are these thresholds and Buffalo Stance is one of those.

**The prehistory to Buffalo Stance is really well known – the Bristol scene you came out of – but it's often up to women in music to assert the importance of their history. It's not always canonised.**

**R:** So true. I didn't even know you were Swedish when I first heard it. That blew my mind because I had already identified with you without knowing anything about you. I was really little – I didn't know what you were saying, I just knew this music was made for me. Then, as I got older, your legacy unfolded.

**NC:** We grew up in a similar environment with creative parents who were working among other people to drop the shackles and find a creative free space. I came in wanting to break out and be unapologetic about owning the space. I grew up between Sweden and the US. There was a duality where I was always being – not defensive, but unwilling to back down, but also there's a self-consciousness about Sweden that I found quite overbearing. There was this release in coming to London where I could take all of it – the quiet, the loudness, the unusual background that I grew up in – and the world of people that I found here. Finding a way into music was a way of exposing it.



BFFs stance ... Robyn and Neneh Cherry. Photograph: Fredrik Skogkvist

**R:** I was looking through a book that [Neneh and her family has made about her parents](#) and I saw this chapter that says “Report to ABF”. ABF is the [workers' educational institution](#). It was all about bringing the working class out of poverty through education. You could apply for money if you wanted

to learn a new language or play an instrument. [Neneh's parents] Don and Moki [Cherry] taught courses. My parents were active in that world 20 years later. They were studying collective knowledge and collective collaboration. My parents educated me in how to work in a collective. I feel like you work that way, too?

**NC:** I've become more and more conscious of what an amazing gift my parents gave me. Not everything worked! But they were pioneers. We had a schoolhouse [in Sweden] that we moved to in 1970 having been in the US. The Vietnam war was still going on. Being in America as an interracial couple, and all the shit that came with it, my parents decided to go to Sweden where they could focus on making the things they believed in happen, together with the other people from that movement.

**Coming from those strong collective backgrounds must have helped you survive the harder parts of the music industry? Like leaving the major label system, Robyn?**

**NC:** When I first came here to London, it wasn't like: "Oh, I'm following in my parents' footsteps." But we were educated to try to be ourselves, like I say to my kids now: "Own it! Don't let them change you, whoever *they* are."

**R:** I was educated in how to protect my process and that you get to the better solution if you are working together with the people you're around.

**NC:** You need to be with the right people. Quite often when I'm writing with Cam [McVey, Cherry's husband], I'll do some weird mumbling on the tape and what he hears will be the wrong words. They're much better than my mumbling, so the wrongs make the rights, the rights make the wrongs. But it's very frail, the creative process. It can leave you so vulnerable and unsure. You start overthinking.

**R:** But if you don't go there, it's like you haven't risked anything. It must have been amazing to come to London and meet all these people that you

kept working with like [stylist and jewellery designer] [Judy \[Blame\]](#) and your husband.

**NC:** My first friend here was [Ari from the Slits](#). From there, again, one thing led to another. I think we were all very committed – but we were also quite free and a lot of things were able to happen because there was a spontaneity.

**R:** And not thinking about money.

**NC:** Yeah, we didn't have a lot of money, but we didn't think that much about it either!

**R:** That is a huge thing, too. The place where our parents came from was totally disconnected from making something for an audience, to make money.



Neneh Cherry and Robyn at the Swedish Music Hall of Fame in Stockholm, 2015. Photograph: Shutterstock

**It must be a challenge when the product of that creative community is exposed to the world. Neneh, many people responded strongly to your**

**pregnancy. And Robyn, your second album didn't come out in America because it contained a song about abortion.**

**NC:** In those days, Top of the Pops was *it*. I remember having a weird internal alarm bell: “I don’t want to sell out here!” No, we’re not gonna sell out, we’re gonna do this in another way because why not? That uncompromising, cocky [stance] – take it, leave it, let’s go – became a protective forcefield.

**R:** I didn’t even register that my song was going to be a problem. It blew my mind – but a lot of things blew my mind about America when I started working there as a teenager. Swedish teenagers are more respected. The age groups were so separated in America – if you’re a teenager, you’re not supposed to do certain things or talk about sex. Looking back, I was definitely lost in translation coming from Sweden to America in the 90s.

**NC:** Everything was so segregated. You’d go to a city and there’s Black radio, white radio. In that way, England was so much more diverse and eclectic – and Sweden on a smaller scale. The first few trips I made to America after Buffalo Stance, there were a lot of super seedy things. There’s always been a silent revolution – these obstacles are real and I choose to battle within.

**Neneh, your daughter Mabel is a big star, and Robyn, you work with younger artists. Has pop got any easier for young women?**

**R:** There is a transparency in the music industry that wasn’t there when we started. There was a lot of funky stuff going on. But there’s a lot of pressure now that’s very hard to protect yourself from.

**NC:** There’s a problem with temporary-ism. Everything is so fast-moving and artists work in an environment where you’ve got very little time to keep coming back to an idea. Not everything is gonna be the best thing you ever

did. That's not why you're doing what you do – you're doing it because it's what you need to do. There's got to be space for growth.

**Robyn, you've said the music industry's conventional idea of sexuality made you rebel against it, but then you reached an age where you wondered if you had lost something by denying yourself that dimension. Neneh, you described your toughness. Was there a time where you could drop the forcefield? What did it take to let go?**

**NC:** Those things change as you get older. Needing to be quieter or more vulnerable, or to scream, or how I've chosen to show my body or not – what I've wanted to do was to be able to express whatever that is as I get there. Maybe I jumped out of being in a very mainstream place to give myself more space to grow.

**R:** Don't you feel like there is a way now to combine those worlds that wasn't established when we started? It wasn't easy to be super feminine and still be taken seriously.

**NC:** Maybe that's what we're talking about – breaking through stereotypes. That has been very important within my continuity – to break through my own stereotype and comfort zones.

**There are so many archetypes for older male musicians. For older women in music, there are fewer role models and stereotypes. And so the field is wide open for invention.**

**R:** It's freeing. You can be under the radar. You don't have as much pressure in a lot of ways. You have less to refer to. It's more queer, it's more open. It's like we're filling in the gaps but in a much more conscious way. The

canon is also so heavy with “the male genius”, the one person that came in and did *the thing*. As a woman, you’re less a slave to that way of thinking around what’s good or bad.



Cherry in 1989. Photograph: Alamy

**NC:** It's a very interesting place to be where I am – I'm a bit older than you – and feeling so unfinished and like I've got so much more to say and do. I was on a battleship for a while when I felt – not insignificant but very conscious of ageism, in particular when I was in the middle of menopause. Now I'm on the other side and I feel a quite deep sense of freedom. It's about the quality of the work. It's not so much about keeping up with what's ultra cool, but feeling still that it can be cool without being strapped down by trends. It is different for a woman. A guy literally can turn up with a beer belly ...

**R:** And *kind of* know what he's doing!

**NC:** And it's totally fine. While as a woman, I felt conscious of this sell-by-date issue. [Now] I can engage in my own time in a different way than I did before. I'm loved and of course my kids need me but they don't *need* me on a daily basis in the same way. It was a bit daunting in the beginning but now I'm starting to feel very at ease with it. I can coexist in a different way.

## **You've been writing a memoir, Neneh?**

**NC:** [She puts her face in her hands] Oh my God.

**R:** She's gone shy! She's blushing!

**NC:** The things that we've been talking about are the reasons I felt I wanted to try to do it. It's not about spilling the beans. It's more about needing to pay homage to the awesomeness of the journey and also to figure out how the fuck I got here!

## **Robyn, would you write one?**

**R:** I think you shouldn't be afraid of writing about your life. It's so challenging, but it helps, the act of defining your thoughts and knowing what you went through. When I go back through my notes, I always remember things that I would have never remembered [otherwise]. I wish I did it more. That's what keeps me from saying that I would because I don't think I have the discipline – yet. Maybe I'll get there.

## **Are there are more collaborations in your future?**

**NC:** Of course! Because we collaborate even if we are not making things together, so we will be collaborating until we drop.

## **What are you both working on at the moment?**

**NC:** I haven't done any music for ages, so that's where I'm going next.

## **Robyn, is it going to be eight years until another album?**

**R:** No! That's never gonna happen again. That was too long. During the pandemic I've just been in the studio, so I'm working on an album. I hope that it's going to be done this year, but I don't know when it will be released.

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## Kapow! Our writers pick their favorite Batman movie



(From clockwise) Batman, Batman Forever, Batman vs Superman, The Dark Knight and Batman: Mask of the Phantasm Composite: Getty Images/Alamy/Allstar

To celebrate the release of The Batman, Guardian writers have written about their all-time favorite Caped Crusader films from Adam West to Ben Affleck

[Peter Bradshaw](#), [Andrew Pulver](#), [Radheyen Simonpillai](#), [Janelle Zara](#), [Lisa Wong Macabasco](#), [Charles Bramesco](#), [Simon Abrams](#), [Luke Holland](#), [Benjamin Lee](#), [Toby Moses](#), [Nicholas Barber](#) and [Ben Child](#)

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## Batman (1966)



Adam West and Burt Ward in Batman. Photograph: AF archive/Alamy

Of all the superheroes, DC Comics' Batman is now endowed with the most Dostoyevskian seriousness. It wasn't always like this. And, in my heart, my favourite Batman is the first movie version, from 1966, which grew out of the wacky TV show in the era of Get Smart and I Dream Of Jeannie and Mad magazine. As kids, we watched the program religiously on TV, which is where I caught up with the film about Batman and Robin taking on Joker, Penguin, Catwoman and Riddler – never dreaming that it was anything other than deadly serious. I watched it in the same spirit as I now watch Michael Mann films. I was thrilled by the (genuinely) propulsive and exciting “dinner-dinner-dinner-dinner” theme tune (how I resented the vulgar

playground joke about what Batman's mum shouts out of the window to get him in at mealtimes) and quivered at the brilliant, psychedelically conceived title-cards for fights: BAM! I also fanatically pored over the novelisation tie-in – [Batman vs The Fearsome Foursome](#).

The show-stopper was the famous, entertainingly tense sequence where Batman can't find anywhere to dispose of a smoking bomb, something that surely inspired the later Zucker/Abrahams comedies. Adam West played the sonorous Bruce Wayne and Batman and Burt Ward was Robin (confusingly, his alter ego Dick Grayson was often described as Wayne's "ward"). Their costumes, with luxuriant silk capes, were gorgeous. Brilliant acting talent lined up for the villains: Latin lover Cesar Romero was the Joker; veteran Hollywood character turn Burgess Meredith was Penguin, Lee Meriwether fused glamour and comedy as Catwoman (replacing TV's Julie Newmar) and impressionist and night-club comic Frank Gorshin was Riddler. Much is said about the campiness of this show – and yes, there is a case for retrospectively re-interpreting this Batman and Robin as a covert queer statement. (In fact, it was Cesar Romero who kept the press guessing about his sexuality.) But in a way, it was more about goofiness as part of the Sixties Zeitgeist: being silly, even at this level, was countercultural seriousness. I suspect that every single Batman director, from Joel Schumacher to Christopher Nolan, measures their work against the addictive Day-Glo potency of the '66 Batman. Pow! *Peter Bradshaw*

## **Batman (1989)**



Michael Keaton and Kim Basinger in *Batman*. Photograph: Moviestore Collection Ltd/Alamy

In the flood of frowningly serious superhero films that have emerged since, the true brilliance of Tim Burton's then-revolutionary two Batfilms has become somewhat obscured, largely because of the silly Joel Schumacher follow-ups that demonstrated that the wrath of fanship was something Hollywood had to be careful of. But it's totally worth another look: drinking deep of the gothic/deco vibe beloved of comic-book rebooter Frank Miller, Burton adds that distinctive combination of beautiful detailing and lurid trashiness that has marked out all his best work.

When I saw it back in the day, I remember thinking Michael Keaton was bit of a waste of space, but in retrospect his straight-arrow blandness works superbly off Jack Nicholson's gurning and Kim Basinger's sultriness. It's worth remembering too, that this was the first major Batman feature since the Adam West one in 1966 – hilarious, but one Burton clearly wanted to put some distance from. Tonally, the whole thing is just great, it hits that sweet spot between flippant self-parody and unironic spectacle – most superhero films since have veered too close to either. No Batman film, in this writer's opinion, has come close since. *Andrew Pulver*

## Batman Returns



Michelle Pfeiffer and Michael Keaton in *Batman Returns*. Photograph: Warner Bros/Sportsphoto/Allstar

I yearn for the day that comic book movies can be sexy again, when a new Caped Crusader and Catwoman can exude just a fraction of the pheromones fogging up the screen in *Batman Returns*. The moonlight tussles between those iconic characters played by [Michael Keaton](#) and Michelle Pfieffer are an alluring and thorny mix of acrobatic choreography and S&M violence that simply would not fly today.

*Batman Returns* belongs to Pfeiffer, whose purrr-fect take on Catwoman, AKA Selina Kyle, as a feral woman scorned is unparalleled. And it's not just because she makes people weak in the knees with her throaty delivery of "hear me roar." Her origin story involves being demeaned at the office and then shoved out a window by her Trump-like boss Max Shreck (Christopher Walken), a bully with sexual menace in his eyes.

Pfieffer absorbs that trauma into her performance as a Catwoman who is at once vulnerable and dangerous, seductive and afraid, craving affection but brimming with anger. That complicated push-pull is even there in a steamy and thrilling fireside canoodle with Bruce Wayne, where she's torn between giving her all and hiding her scars before the sex is interrupted. *Radheyen Simonpillai*

## Batman: Mask of the Phantasm



A still from Batman: Mask of the Phantasm. Photograph: Warner/Dc Comics/Sportsphoto/Allstar

Even as a cartoon, Batman: Mask of the Phantasm's got it all – gangster thrills, municipal corruption and the residual anguish of long lost love. Set in the 1940s, it follows our hero's pursuit of the Phantasm, a seemingly supernatural angel of death who appears in Gotham equipped with a voice modulator and menacing scythe. As they snuff out the city's mob bosses one by one, they frame [Batman](#) for the murders. The Caped Crusader, meanwhile, is haunted by his own memories from a decade earlier, when his broken engagement to the wealthy and beautiful Andrea Beaumont drove him to his current life of darkness.

As a spinoff of Batman: The Animated Series, arguably the greatest iteration of the franchise there ever was, Phantasm offers the same intricate plotlines that cemented the TV show's greatness – Bruce Wayne was not just brooding, he was emotionally complex. Plus, the film's got style; having emerged after the Day-Glo camp of the 1960s Batman and just before Joel Schumacher's similarly kitschy universe, Phantasm marked a pendulum swing into a darker iteration, of an art deco Gotham filled with film noir shadows, and a cinematic score with the sweeping love scenes of a second

world war epic. Phantasm is one of those rare childhood favorites that holds up into adulthood. *Janelle Zara*

## Batman Forever



Tommy Lee Jones and Jim Carrey in *Batman Forever*. Photograph: Warner Bros/Allstar

Gaudy, kaleidoscopic and winkingly homoerotic, the 90s-saturated *Batman Forever* is a growing addiction that I can't deny, the light on the dark side of the *Batman* film franchise.

Consider the blockbuster's cast: Val Kilmer, Nicole Kidman, Tommy Lee Jones, Jim Carrey and Chris O'Donnell, all at the height of their powers, with appearances by Drew Barrymore, George Wallace and members of En Vogue. Each embodies *Forever*'s more-is-more ethos: an orange-haired, jumpsuit-clad Carrey air-thrusts, mimics pitching a baseball, twirls a question-mark-shaped cane, and screams "Joygasm!" all while [destroying the Batmobile](#); Kilmer rasps, "[Chicks love the car,](#)" as an oversexed Kidman caresses his [infamous nippled Batsuit](#); and just about everything about Jones's grunting and cackling Two-Face, from his fuchsia-colored scars to his [puffing of two cigarettes](#), one lit via flamethrower, from each side of his mouth. Not to mention the chart-topping soundtrack featuring songs by '90s

mega acts U2, Method Man, Brandy, Massive Attack, the Offspring and the Flaming Lips – and led by Seal’s unforgettable Grammy-winning karaoke classic, Kiss From a Rose.

More than 26 years later, it’s safe to say Joel Schumacher’s first foray to Gotham will never be the cinematic classic that Tim Burton’s or Christopher Nolan’s takes on the tale have become. But in dark times, Batman Forever’s light hits the gloom on the gray. *Lisa Wong Macabasco*

## Batman & Robin



George Clooney and Chris O'Donnell in *Batman & Robin*. Photograph: United Archives GmbH/Alamy

Consider, for a moment, that a film beginning with snap zooms on its main characters’ taut tushes, proud codpieces and pert nipples may be in on its own joke. Those erroneously defaming Joel Schumacher’s camp classic as “bad” most likely subscribe to the confused notion that superhero movies are serious business, a belief estranged from the color, humor and roiling homoeroticism of old-school comics revived here.

Even if the Adam West TV show hadn’t provided us with a clear precedent for a sillier Batman, there’s still too much deliberate artistry at play to write

off Schumacher's choices as invalid: the stunning soundstage sets under exploded-rainbow lighting, the magnificent costume design splitting the difference between the Met Ball and a drag ball, the Marlene Dietrich gorilla-costume striptease that explains what Uma Thurman's doing with her voice as Poison Ivy. Schumacher seized on the oft-denied truth that there's a fundamental absurdity to encasing one's self in spandex and fighting crime, his direction suggesting that donning the bat-suit still counts as playing dress-up. You don't like Mr. Freeze's unlimited supply of cold-themed puns delivered in the blunt-force howl of [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#)? Fine, just have the decency to admit that that's a you-issue, a matter of tastes rather than garden-variety incompetence. *Charles Bramesco*

## Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker



A still from Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker Photograph: YouTube

The surprisingly rich 2000 animated adventure Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker stands apart thanks to its dark, character-driven mystery plot. Return of the Joker should, in that sense, work just as well with Bat-fans who are unfamiliar with Batman Beyond, a sci-fi spinoff of the acclaimed Batman: The Animated Series that takes place in the Gotham City of the future (2019!) and follows angst teenager Terry McGinnis (Will Friedle) as

he takes over the role of Batman from old man Bruce Wayne (Batman: The Animated Series's Kevin Conroy).

In Return of the Joker, Terry takes on the Joker (Mark Hamill), whose reappearance, after decades of being presumed dead, reminds Bruce of a traumatic memory involving his kid sidekick Tim "Robin" Drake (Matthew Valencia) and Barbara "Batgirl" Gordon (Tara Strong), who replaced her father as Gotham's police commissioner.

Fan-favorite screenwriter Paul Dini focuses on Terry and Bruce's frustrated mentor/pupil relationship, as when Bruce confesses to Terry: "I had no right to force this life on you or anyone else." And the great character actor Dean Stockwell complements the typically sharp ensemble voice cast as an adult Tim, now retired and seemingly happier for having escaped Bruce's influence. *Simon Abrams*

## Batman Begins



Christian Bale and Cillian Murphy in Batman Begins. Photograph: David James/Warner Bros/D C Comics/Kobal/Rex/Shutterstock

Joel Schumacher's lysergic, almost enjoyably appalling Batman & Robin – the Bat-movie least likely to appear elsewhere in this article – was both a

blessing and a curse for Christopher Nolan. On the one hand, when the then-hotshot writer-director of sleeper hits *Memento* and *Insomnia* signed on to resurrect the franchise, Schumacher had set the bar so low that all Nolan had to do was make a film without [Bat-nipples](#) in it and it would be an improvement. On the other, Schumacher had taken any goodwill that somehow remained after *Batman Forever*, said “Ice to meet you,” and then flushed it down the toilet. An origin story for a superhero no one cared about any more? Why bother?

Nolan’s pitch to Warner Bros executives only [lasted 15 minutes](#), which is indicative of the focused, brilliantly singular film it produced. *Batman Begins* did the impossible: answering the question “how does a billionaire playboy become a face-pummelling, chiroptera-stanning martial-artist vigilante” in a manner that’s logical, even believable, grounding Gotham City in general and Bruce Wayne in particular like no Bat-film before, shorn of the funereally frilly, wink-wink indulgences of Tim Burton or Schumacher’s neon plasticity. Christian Bale was perfectly cast (yes, even with the silly voice), the action was robust and moody, the story twisted and yawed until the final epic showdown, and it isn’t an overstuffed, three-hour delusion of grandeur like the two films that followed it. Everything about *Batman Begins* just *works*. This, more than any other, is the film R-Patz has to beat. *Luke Holland*

## The Dark Knight



Christian Bale in *The Dark Knight*. Photograph: Warner Bros/Allstar

It's impossible to look back on Christopher Nolan's glum 2008 sequel without an exhausted eye-roll, it being *the* superhero film that unfortunately inspired an unending glut of unbearably self-serious emo imitators. But it's also impossible not to rewatch it without seeing exactly why it became so wildly influential, a sleek but punishing upgrade of what we had come to expect from a Batman movie.

Sure, *Batman Begins* had already introduced Nolan's new, straight-faced universe, a world away from the copiece camp of Joel Schumacher's fun and flashy fripperies, but it was a flawed introduction, hemmed in by some slightly laborious world-building, an aggressively underwhelming lead villain and ... Katie Holmes. [The Dark Knight](#) was freer, if still tightly controlled, and gave us both a better bad guy (in Heath Ledger's terrifying Joker, an unpredictable and unbridled agent of pure chaos) and love interest (Maggie Gyllenhaal adding some texture to Bruce's doomed childhood sweetheart Rachel). It was a shocking jolt at the time, and still remains so, staggering for how far Nolan was willing and able to take a film of this scale (without seemingly being micromanaged by studio execs), an unusually nihilistic PG-13 provocation that wrestled with weighty, unresolved issues but, unlike those that came after, did it without a heavy hand. Because importantly, nestled alongside the dour grisliness, was a string of dazzling,

seat-clenching action set pieces, Nolan smartly playing to all seats. The poorly calibrated murk of the Snyderverse wouldn't exist without it but *The Dark Knight* proves that it's a price worth paying. *Benjamin Lee*

## The Dark Knight Rises



Christian Bale and Anne Hathaway in *The Dark Knight Rises*. Photograph: Warner Bros./Sportsphoto/Allstar

*The Dark Knight Rises* may well be the ugly sister of Nolan's Batman trilogy – but for all its flaws it is hard to resist the ludicrous bombast on display, all accompanied by Hans Zimmer's honking score. In truth it shares more in common with Adam West's iteration of the Caped Crusader than the supposed “grounded” take that Christian Bale was embodying.

From the nonsensical plot of the villain – a neutron bomb used to hold Gotham island hostage for ... reasons – to the absurdity of Tom Hardy's Bane, with his barely audible mumbling behind his mask endlessly amusing; and the Scooby Doo reveal of the real big bad, *Rises* ditches the realism in favour of spectacle. And isn't that what we want from our superhero films? Sure, the treatment of Catwoman isn't ideal (goggles that flip up to look like cat ears, really?) and the ease with which Alfred abandons his charge is entirely out of character, but for every misstep there's something to enjoy.

The Broken Bat finally translated to the silver screen; Cillian Murphy's Scarecrow sending the rich to their deathly exile on the icy river from his kangaroo court; we even got Robin (sort of). And the coup de grace, [in what was surely a tribute to the first Batman big screen outing in 1966](#), we have the world's greatest detective scrabbling to dispose of a nuke over the water that surrounds Gotham – and apparently dying in the process. Indeed, some days you just can't get rid of a bomb. *Toby Moses*

## Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice



Ben Affleck and Henry Cavill in Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice.  
Photograph: Clay Enos/AP

For geeks of a certain age, the definitive Batman graphic novel will always be *The Dark Knight Returns*, written and drawn by Frank Miller in 1986. And the closest thing we will ever get to a big-budget Hollywood adaptation of *The Dark Knight Returns* is not Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*, or even *The Dark Knight Rises*. No, that honour goes to Zack Snyder's dystopian [Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice](#).

Admittedly, you have to do a little mental editing. You have to imagine that Jesse Eisenberg is playing the Joker rather than Lex Luthor, and that the alien zombie has been cut out altogether. But a good proportion of the film is

pinched from Miller's tale: the hefty, short-eared Batsuit design, the vicious Bats-versus-Supes punch-up, Alfred's waspish wit and, most importantly, the obsessive, ruthless central character. For once, Batman actually resembles the towering tough guy in the comics. Well over six feet tall, [Ben Affleck](#) looks as if a) he could beat all of the other Bat-actors to a pulp, and b) he might even enjoy it. Nolan's Dark Knight trilogy may have borrowed Miller's title, but Batman v Superman is the only film to have a properly dark Dark Knight. *Nicholas Barber*

## The Lego Batman Movie



The Lego Batman Movie. Photograph: Courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures

Which Batman movie has the coolest gadgets, the greatest villains - Sauron, King Kong and Voldemort in a single episode! - and the most epic-scale Batcave of any film made about Gotham's dark knight? Why, it's The Lego Batman movie, a film that even manages to be the only decent big screen take on the caped crusader to feature Robin.

Chris McKay's movie was made in 2017, at a time when Batfleck was sporting the cape and cowl in live action, so it's no surprise he's something of a selfish, prideful jerk. Voiced by Will Arnett (who brilliantly borrows Christian Bale's sandpaper-thick growl) this Batman loves heavy metal and

rap music, and is more obsessed with his own independent self-image than he is with taking down the bad guys.

Batfans may long for Gotham's finest son to battle his rogue's gallery in solo mode - the last time Robin and Batgirl got involved on the big screen did not exactly go well. But *The Lego Batman Movie*, in keeping with its kid-friendly aesthetic, ponders whether the dark knight can ever really be happy when he's keeping all those victories to himself and cutting out those who get close to him. It's a premise that's ripe for comedy, but there's also a keen-eyed understanding of the original DC superhero that will keep hardcore fans of the character happy, especially when it comes to Batman's enduring love-hate relationship with Zach Galifianakis's loathsome Joker.

*Ben Child*

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## Thailand

# Bangkok's illicit craft brewers risk arrest under draconian laws

Big brewers maintain monopoly as smaller operations incur huge fines for even sharing photos of their beer



Despite laws banning the production and sale of product by small breweries, an underground craft beer scene still thrives in Bangkok. Photograph: Lauren DeCicca/Getty Images

*[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#) and Navaon Siradapuvadol in Bangkok*

Fri 4 Mar 2022 00.00 EST

Naamcial's craft beers often have distinctly Thai flavours, as he experiments with the country's native produce, boiling the pulp of jackfruit and mango to mix into different creations. Yet his homemade products are forbidden in the kingdom.

Talking to the Guardian under a pseudonym, Naamcial says he would like to operate a legal brewery, but Thailand's laws around alcohol production make this ambition almost impossible for newcomers. Current laws restrict brewing licences to manufacturers that have capital of 10 million baht (£230,000), while brewpubs must produce at least 100,000 litres a year and only serve their beer on their premises. The legislation effectively blocks new, small breweries from opening, and tips the market firmly in favour of two powerful companies – Thai Beverage, which produces Chang beer, and Boon Rawd Brewery, which produces Singha and Leo.

Attempting to loosen these companies' grip on the Thai beer market, an MP for the opposition Move Forward party, Taopiphop Limjitrakorn, has proposed a new draft law on excise tax, which is under consideration by the Thai cabinet, and which he hopes will make the market accessible to smaller producers.

The law would boost the economy, he says. Furthermore, if passed, the law would mark a symbolic change. "It will let ordinary people do the same business as rich people do."

In 2017, before he entered politics, Taopiphop was arrested for brewing craft beer at home. He was fined 5,000 baht for brewing illegally without a permit, and a further 500 baht for owning brewing yeast.

For some, craft beer is associated with anti-establishment politics. "It's very similar to the French Revolution, which started from a cafe in Paris, where people drank coffee," says Taopiphop. "The fuel of the revolution is not coffee any more, it's craft beer." Taopiphop adds that, after the 2014 coup in Thailand, many pro-democracy activists chose to meet in Bangkok's craft beer bars.

At Bangkok's Dok Kaew House Bar, a craft beer bar based in a 100-year-old house – which owners say is also inhabited by five ghosts – locals perch at the bar sipping pale ale and cider. Co-owner Nuttapol Sominoi hopes for change. "It's a monopoly, a closed market, where there is no competition," he says.

Beside him, a chalkboard lists the various beers on tap, most of which are international. In a fridge lined with cans and glass bottles, there are a few Thai options. One, though, bears a label saying it has been manufactured in Vietnam. Some Thai companies resort to brewing their beers in neighbouring countries and importing them to Thailand to get around the law, though doing so is costly.



Bangkok's bars and tourist sector have suffered greatly during the pandemic, and continue to operate under restrictions. Photograph: Jack Taylor/AFP/Getty Images

A ban on alcohol advertising in Thailand makes business harder still for newcomers. Even sharing a picture of your beer on social media can result in a fine of 50,000 baht if the logo is visible.

"It affects us a lot," says Supawan Kaewprakob, co-founder of Ther, an all-female brewing project. "We can't advertise or communicate with our customers about the product at all. We can't even describe the ingredients or post pictures. It's illegal, which doesn't make sense. It clearly blocks small businesses from growing."

The laws are stifling creativity and the economy, Nuttapol adds, and result in less choice for consumers. It's particularly galling, given that Thailand offers

such advantages for craft brewers. “In western countries they have to use extracts, but we have the fresh ingredients,” he says.

Were the craft beer scene allowed to develop, it would boost agriculture by drawing on local products, and attract tourists to Thailand’s resorts, Nuttapol says.

Bars, along with the tourist sector, have struggled immensely during the pandemic, and face continued restrictions on their operations. Dok Kaew House Bar received no compensation during the pandemic, according to its owners. They are surprised they have managed to stay open.

Supporters of Thailand’s alcohol laws and restrictions on its sales during Covid say such measures are necessary to protect public health.

However, Taopiphop argues that alcohol has been unfairly scapegoated in Thai society, especially during the pandemic. Policy is also influenced by a Buddhist belief that alcohol is sinful, he adds.

If his proposed bill is passed, he hopes it could pave the way to removing laws that stifle entrepreneurship in other industries.

For now, much of Thailand’s craft beer network is operating underground. Naamcial says he is trying to limit his social media presence to avoid attracting attention from the authorities. He finds most of his customers through word of mouth from trusted contacts. It’s normally neighbours who tip off the police, he adds, but his are yet to complain.

He hopes the law will change, but says he’ll continue to brew his beer regardless. He loves the craft of brewing, and the uniqueness of the end result. “[With] my process, and my tools, it’s the only way to make my beer,” he says.



Nakiba, 30, holds her two-month-old son Mustafa, in the doorframe of what was once Sangin's clinic, now bombed out and destroyed. Photograph: Stefanie Glinski

[The Guardian picture essay](#)

## Afghanistan six months on from the Taliban takeover – photo essay

Nakiba, 30, holds her two-month-old son Mustafa, in the doorframe of what was once Sangin's clinic, now bombed out and destroyed. Photograph: Stefanie Glinski

The photojournalist Stefanie Glinski reports on a country traumatised and tired, with an uncertain future as unemployment and poverty spread and memories of freedoms fade

by [Stefanie Glinski](#) in Kabul, Afghanistan

Fri 4 Mar 2022 02.00 EST

August's adrenaline may have worn off but the harrowing memories have not faded. It's been six months since the [Taliban](#) took Kabul, the country's then president and his cabinet fled and thousands of people flooded the airport in panic, so desperate for a way out that several men tried to hold on to a departing plane and fell to their deaths.



- Food distribution in the northern Jowzjan province. Due to the economic crisis, many people cannot afford food, even though it's widely available in the market.





- Shaista, 50, from Jowzjan, says that since the Taliban's takeover, her husband and children have lost their jobs. Right; Madina, 50, from Jowzjan.

Already scarred by four decades of war, Afghanistan's rapid regime change has left a mark that will take a long time to process. As the Taliban are slowly putting their government in place, many Afghans feel lost and confused. With uncertain futures, some see little alternative but to seek a new life abroad, adding to a diaspora of more than 5 million worldwide.



- Most people, even in Kabul, have no access to clean water in their homes. Here, people are seen filling up jerrycans with water for drinking and cooking.



- Tea vendors warm their hands on a cold day in Kabul.



- Taliban guards drink tea in Kabul. Right: a Taliban soldier stands on a Kabul street.

Some of those who decided to stay, or who did not have an option to leave, say they will have to give the Taliban a chance, even though the group has not been recognised internationally. There isn't a large enough opposition

anyway, and Taliban fighters have been stationed even in the most remote valleys of Panjshir, where the last battles of resistance played out.

“We will keep fighting if we have to, we’re not tired,” said Ziaul Rahman, a 21-year-old Talib stationed in Afghanistan’s Logar province. Resistance fighters, whether in Panjshir or in the Uzbek-dominated Jowzjan province, say the same.



- Ziaul Rahman, a 21-year-old Talib stationed in Afghanistan’s Logar province.

For the past three and a half years of living and working as a journalist here, I have visited most of the country’s provinces. Since the Taliban’s takeover, I managed to return to many of them again, learning more about how people across the almost nation of 40 million perceive their new rulers.

The Taliban have been accommodating to foreign journalists, a privilege that has not been granted to all Afghan reporters. Several have been tortured, beaten, detained and intimidated and have since either left the country or are trying to get out.

To summarise – or even generalise about – the sentiment of a place as diverse as Afghanistan is, of course, impossible.



- Destruction is widespread in Sangin, Helmand, previously right on the frontline. Here, every house is destroyed, few have been rebuilt, and people are starting over.





- People cleaning up debris in Sanin, Helmand. Right: construction workers starting to rebuild their houses.

The data is bleak: last week Joe Biden announced that \$3.5bn of frozen Afghan funds – including the private savings of ordinary Afghans – would be distributed to 9/11 victims, even though not a single Afghan was involved in the attacks.



- Herat's old city.

The United Nations says at least half a million Afghans have lost their jobs since the Taliban takeover, and estimates that by mid-year up to 97% of people could be living below the poverty line. The majority of development aid – funding almost 80% of the previous government's expenditure – has ceased, throwing the country into economic crisis.

Human Rights Watch has reported executions and enforced disappearances of former government officials, and to this day many people live in fear and remain in hiding. With the newly appointed all-male cabinet and divisions within the Taliban, Afghanistan's future remains uncertain.



- Taliban fighters sit by the roadside in Logar's Mohammad Agha district.

“As we feared, the situation is worsening in most respects – a reflection of the Taliban’s determination to crush dissent and criticism,” said Patricia Gossman, an associate Asia director for Human Rights Watch. “Revenge killings, crushing women’s rights, strangling the media – the Taliban seem determined to tighten their grip on society, even as the situation grows increasingly unstable in the coming months.”



- A boy flying his kite from a rooftop in Kabul.



- Kabul's Mandawi market is always busy.

At first sight, the changes on Kabul's streets aren't all too visible. Surrounded by majestic mountain peaks, parts of the city are still bustling. Kebabs wrapped in fresh warm bread are sold by the roadside, and boys selling balloons navigate through busy traffic. The Taliban's post-victory euphoria has ebbed, and while the city was flooded with insurgents in summer, most of them now seem to have left. Those remaining man checkpoints or work in the newly established government.



- Taliban on the streets of Kabul.



- While the Taliban initially detained all drug addicts and moved many of them to prisons, now more are again seen on Kabul's streets. Right: Sayed Jafar, a carpet vendor, sits in his shop in Kabul. Since the Taliban takeover, business has essentially stopped as his customers have left the country.

Yet at a closer look the city is emptier, though the number of beggars has increased significantly. Once buzzing coffee shops are vacant; several restaurants have permanently closed. Outside the Iranian embassy, long queues of people wait for visa appointments; they say they are hopeless. At a Kabul maternity clinic, a newborn boy lies abandoned. “His family doesn’t have the money to take care of another child,” said Latifa Wardak, one of the hospital’s doctors.



- A nameless boy lies abandoned in the prenatal ward at Rabia Balkhi hospital.



- Rahela Shahavi, 25, works as a nurse in the postnatal ward at Malalai maternity hospital, where up to 100 babies are delivered each day. Out of the 446 staff, 400 are women. Right: nurses and midwives working in the prenatal ward at Rabia Balkhi hospital in Kabul sit down for lunch.

The trauma of the last months haunts many, and although Afghans are private people who often choose to conceal emotion, they visibly carry their pain. I've noticed it when interviewing people. The conversations last longer, because there is a real need to talk and process. With countless cups of green tea consumed, many describe the loneliness felt after their family members escaped the country. Memories of the past Taliban regime are recalled, often linked to present fears. Tears are shed.



- A man walks through fresh snow in Panjshir's Hezarak district.



- Leftovers from America's longest war: a destroyed army vehicle sits by the roadside in Panjshir's Hezarak district.

There are good moments, too. On a snowy morning, Naim Naimy, 63, from the southern Kandahar province, said he had travelled six hours to see a white Kabul. "I've been watching the weather forecast," he said, standing amid trees in a park, soft white flakes melting on his skin. "I love snow," he added, smiling.

In Kan-e-Ezzat village, as on many other similar frontlines, the guns have fallen silent since the Taliban's takeover. Wardak had been one of the first provinces to see a resurgent Taliban after the start of the 2001 US-led invasion, with conflict almost a constant over the past decade.



- Lal Mohammad, 48, from Wardak.

Whenever fighting erupted, Lal Mohammad, 48, would run through the family's compound gathering his children and other relatives, shoving them towards a small, dark, underground cowshed. They would sit amid the dung, crammed in and scared, around 40 of them, sometimes for hours, listening to the sounds of bullets and mortars, often in the cold of the night, waiting for the flare-up to pass.



- Naila, 10, from Wardak, has been having nightmares for months, even now that the war has stopped.

The Kabul-based International Psychological Organisation (IPSO) has said Afghanistan is a “trauma state”, estimating that 70% of Afghans are in need of psychological support.

Lal admitted to being traumatised too. He never aligned with the Taliban, but said he was glad that fighting had at least stopped. Most of his family sustained injuries over the years. He pointed to his 12-year-old nephew Sheer, sitting on a cushion next to him, his right hand deeply scarred by a shrapnel wound. Little aid had trickled down to Lal’s village. “The foreigners brought us cookies but little development,” he said cynically.

“Everyone in this village has either lost a family member or has an injury. Everyone is traumatised and tired. We didn’t want the Russians, nor the Americans, nor the Taliban. We just want peace. Today I can at least tell my children that the war is over.”

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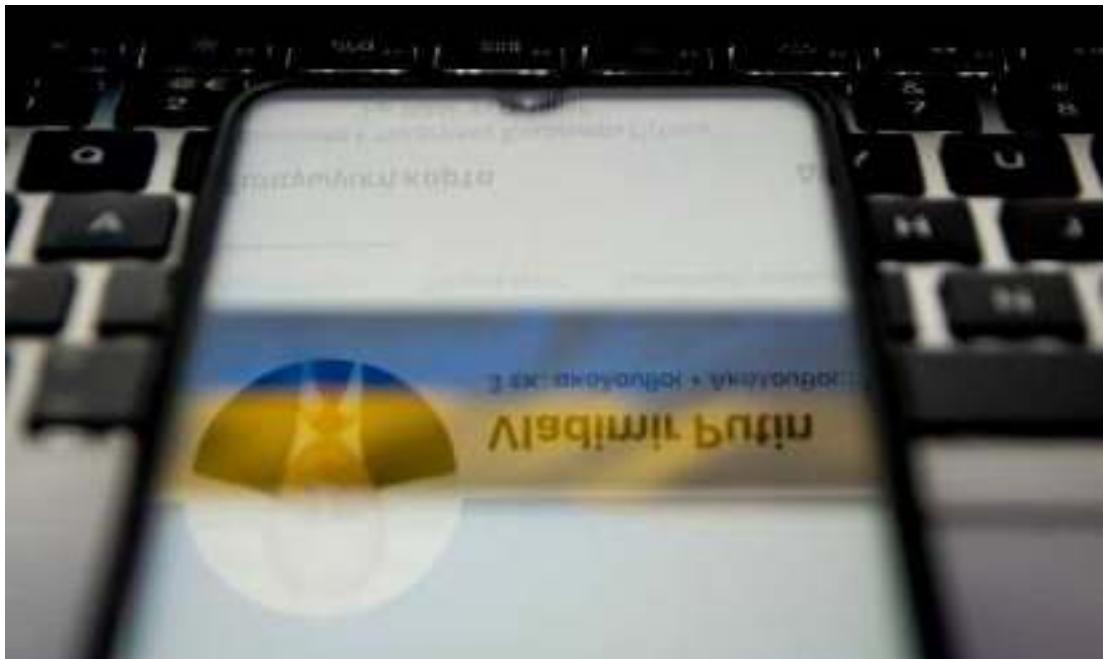
## 2022.03.04 - Coronavirus

- ['Bot holiday' Covid disinformation down as social media pivot to Ukraine](#)
- [Hong Kong Shops ration food and drugs to curb panic buying amid Covid lockdown fears](#)

## Social media

# ‘Bot holiday’: Covid disinformation down as social media pivot to Ukraine

The usual deluge of invective prompted by coronavirus and vaccine issues is absent – Russia’s invasion may be a factor



‘We’re seeing a seismic shift in the disinformation sphere towards Ukraine entirely,’ said online campaign analyst Joel Finkelstein. Photograph: Nikolas Kokovlis/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Melody Schreiber](#)*

Fri 4 Mar 2022 02.00 EST

When David Fisman tweets, he often receives a deluge of hate within moments of posting. Fisman, an epidemiologist and physician, has been outspoken about Covid and public health.

Even when he tweets something innocuous – once, to test his theory, he [wrote](#) the banal statement “kids are remarkable” – he still receives a flood of angry pushback.

But in recent days, Fisman noticed an “astounding” trend, he said. He posted about topics like requiring vaccination and improving ventilation to prevent the spread of Covid – and the nasty responses never came. No support for the trucker convoy, no calls to try the Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, for treason.

Others have observed the same phenomenon; those who frequently encounter bots or angry responses are [now seeing a significant drop-off](#). Covid misinformation, which has often trended on social media over the past two years, seems to be taking a nosedive.

The reasons for this “bot holiday”, as Fisman calls it, are probably varied – but many of them point to the Russian invasion of [Ukraine](#).

Russia’s information war with western nations seems to be pivoting to new fronts, from vaccines to geopolitics.

And while social media has proven a [powerful tool](#) for Ukraine – with images of Zelenskiy striding through the streets of Kyiv and tractors pulling abandoned Russian tanks – growing campaigns of misinformation around the world could change the conflict’s narrative, and the ways the world reacts.

The likely reasons for the shift in online chatter are many. Russia began [limiting access](#) to Twitter on Saturday, sanctions have been levied against those who could be financing disinformation sites and bot farms, and social media companies are more attuned to banning bots and accounts spreading misinformation during the conflict.

But something more coordinated may also be at play.

Conspiracy theories around the so-called “New World Order” – loosely defined conspiracies about shadowy global elites that run the world – have converged narrowly on Ukraine, according to [emerging research](#).

“There’s actually been a doubling of New World Order conspiracies on Twitter since the invasion,” said Joel Finkelstein, the chief science officer and co-founder of the National Contagion Research Institute, which maps online campaigns around [public health](#), economic issues and geopolitics.

At the same time, “whereas before the topics were very diverse – it was Ukraine and Canada and the virus and the global economy – now the entire conversation is about Ukraine,” he said. “We’re seeing a seismic shift in the disinformation sphere towards Ukraine entirely.”

Online activity has surged overall by 20% since the invasion, and new hashtags have cropped up around Ukraine that seem to be coordinated with bot-like activity, Finkelstein said. Users pushing new campaigns frequently tweet hundreds of times a day and can catch the eye of prominent [authentic accounts](#).

“We can’t say for certain that Russia is behind this or that it contributes directly to the propagation of these messages. But it’s pretty difficult to believe that it’s not involved,” Finkelstein said, with topics strikingly similar to Russian talking points about the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, being controlled by the west and the need to dissolve Nato.

A Russian bot farm reportedly produced 7,000 accounts to post fake information about Ukraine on social media, including Telegram, WhatsApp and Viber, [according](#) to the security service of Ukraine.

And influencers who previously demonstrated against vaccines are now turning their [support](#) to Russia.

Social media users may see a topic trending and not realize its connection to conspiracy theories or disinformation campaigns, said Esther Chan, Australia bureau editor for First Draft, an organization that researches misinformation.

“A lot of social media users may just use these terms because they’re trending, they sound good,” she said. “It’s a very clever sort of astroturfing strategy that we’ve seen in the past few years.”

The topics pushed by [troll farms](#) and Russian state media are often dictated by [Russian officials](#), said Mitchell Orenstein, a professor of Russian and east European studies at University of Pennsylvania and a senior fellow of the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

In this case, it seems “their orders got changed because priorities shifted”, he said.

Russia has coordinated [significant misinformation campaigns](#) to destabilize western countries, including topics like the 2016 election and the pandemic, [according to several reports](#).

Inauthentic accounts are [not fully responsible](#) for real hesitations and beliefs. But they amplify harmful messages and make pushback seem more widespread than it is.

“They’ve had tremendous success with social media platforms,” Orenstein said. “They play a pretty substantial role and they do shift people’s perception about what opinion is.”

Fake accounts will frequently link to “pink slime” or low-credibility sites that once carried false stories about the pandemic and are now shifting focus to Ukraine, said Kathleen Carley, a professor at Carnegie Mellon University.

“The bots themselves don’t create news – they’re more used for amplification,” she said.

These sites frequently sow division on controversial issues, [research](#) finds, and they make it [more difficult](#) to spot disinformation online.

The escalation of narratives like these could have wide-ranging consequences for policy.

“Right now, we’re in the beginning of a war that has a consensus, right? It’s clear that what Russia’s doing is against the moral order of the modern world. But as the war becomes prolonged, and people become exhausted, that may change,” Finkelstein said.

As “we enter into more unknown territory, these narratives will have a chance to grow … it gives us a window into what these themes are going to be like.”

The research around these changing campaigns is limited, looking at thousands of tweets in the early days of an invasion, Carley cautioned. It’s very early to understand what direction the misinformation is going and who is behind it – and conspiracies tend to follow current events even when there aren’t coordinated campaigns.

And “that does not mean that all the disinformation, all the conspiracy theories about Covid are not still there,” she said. “I would not say the bots are on holiday. They have been re-targeted at different stories now, but they’ll be back.”

On 3 March the surgeon general, Vivek Murthy, asked tech firms to cough up what they know about who is behind Covid-19 misinformation. Murthy wants social networks, search engines, crowdsourced platforms, e-commerce and instant messaging companies to provide data and analysis on the kind of vaccine misinformation identified by the CDC, such as “the ingredients in COVID-19 vaccines are dangerous” and “COVID-19 vaccines contain microchips”.

Misinformation campaigns around the New World Order, however, have more longevity than some other conspiracy theories, because they can quickly morph depending on the target. “They probably will still exist for a long time,” Chan said. “The question for us is whether they would have an impact on people – on real life and also on policymaking.”

It may be too soon to say what’s emerging during the invasion of Ukraine, but leaders should understand what terms are emerging in conspiracy theories and disinformation campaigns so they don’t inadvertently signal support for the theories in their public statements, she said.

“They need to take note of what terms are commonly used and try to avoid them,” Chan said.

A global agreement on how to address misinformation or disinformation would be key, Carley said.

“Each country does it separately. And the thing is, because we’re all connected very tightly throughout the world in social media, it doesn’t matter that one country has some strong reactions because it’ll still go from another country’s machines on to your machines,” she said.

Such rules would also need to have teeth to prevent further campaigns, she said. And educating the public about how to parse misinformation and disinformation is also important. “We need to start investing better in critical thinking and digital media literacy.”

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## Hong Kong

# Hong Kong shops ration food and drugs to curb panic buying amid Covid lockdown fears

Government is planning to test entire population for virus but insists it will not impose ‘complete lockdown’

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



Hong Kong shops have begun rationing some food and drugs in a bid to stop panic buying, as fears spread of a citywide Covid lockdown.  
Photograph: Keith Tsui/Zuma/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Vincent Ni](#) and agencies in Hong Kong*

Fri 4 Mar 2022 12.28 EST

Soaring Covid-19 cases in [Hong Kong](#) have led to court services being suspended for a month as the two largest consumer retail chains ration certain items.

The Asian financial hub has recorded more than 50,000 new coronavirus cases for the third consecutive day in what the authorities called a “fifth wave”, overwhelming hospitals and shattering the city’s zero-Covid strategy.

In an attempt to curb panic buying, supermarket chain ParknShop on Friday announced limits of five items per customer on staples such as rice, canned food and toilet paper while pharmacy Watsons put the same limits on medication for pain, fever and colds, Hong Kong media reported.

ParknShop had already announced shorter opening hours earlier in the week, with some of its 200 branches shutting at 3pm – by which time many shops across the Asian financial hub have been stripped of fresh and frozen meat and vegetables in recent days.

ParknShop and Watsons are units of the Hong Kong-listed conglomerate CK Hutchison. Hong Kong officials have repeatedly urged people against panic buying this week, saying supplies were adequate.

The two supermarkets’ decisions came despite calls from Hong Kong’s leader, Carrie Lam, for the territory’s 7.5 million residents not to panic over food supplies and daily necessities. On Wednesday, she tried to reassure them that Hong Kong had enough supplies of goods, thanks to Beijing’s assistance.

As case numbers rise, some institutions in Hong Kong also appear to be struggling to function properly. On Friday, the city’s judiciary said it would adjourn most hearings between 7 March and 11 April, after “striking a balance between public health considerations and due administration of justice”.

The judiciary added that it may need to further cut back operations as a result of mandatory virus testing. Last week, Lam’s government said the

entire population of Hong Kong would have to undergo mandatory Covid-19 testing in March.

In February, Lam's administration decided to postpone this month's chief executive elections to 8 May because, it said, the government's focus now had to be on the fight against the pandemic.

Cases have been rising across the city. Earlier this week, authorities said about 1,000 prisoners had tested positive and local media reported that judges had also been infected.

Many Hong Kong residents have blamed the authorities for confused messaging. The semi-autonomous Chinese city has officially insisted on a “dynamic zero Covid” strategy – in line with that implemented on the mainland.

On Friday, authorities reported 52,523 new infections. The figure has brought the total to more than 390,000 since the highly transmissible Omicron variant broke through. In the latest wave, 1,341 deaths have been reported, with more than half of the deceased being elderly people living in care homes.

“Hong Kong is facing a serious challenge,” said Siân Griffiths, who chaired Hong Kong government inquiry into Sars in 2003. “The policy of admitting all positive cases to hospital is putting huge pressure on the healthcare system despite the special facilities and use of hotels. Domestic workers face particular problems as the system treats them differently from locals. A major challenge has been to increase vaccination rates amongst the older population.”

Griffiths, who is an emeritus professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, added that Hong Kong’s opening of the border with the mainland, which remains Lam’s government’s top priority, would only happen with a zero-Covid policy. “But this latest wave has added new uncertainty into this planned move,” she said.

The surge in cases and fears over a potential mainland-style lockdown have sparked mass departures of people from the city, where authorities are clinging to a “dynamic zero Covid” policy that seeks to eradicate all outbreaks.

But Lam said her government had no plan for a “complete lockdown”, and the government would announce details of the plan when finalised, she said.

Nevertheless, many restaurants and shops have been shuttered, while the city’s central financial district is eerily quiet and few people are out in normally bustling neighbourhoods.

Highlighting growing public frustration, Allan Zeman, a government adviser, said on Tuesday that Hong Kong’s international reputation had been “very damaged” and alarm had been created by the confusing messages.

*With material from Reuters and AFP*

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## 2022.03.04 - Opinion

- Using only a phone, Zelenskiy is trading in that most human of qualities: hope
- Unmasking school pupils in New York already feels like yesterday's news
- Cleaning London of dirty Russian money would be great – but won't topple Putin
- Tucker Carlson suddenly has questions about Ketanji Brown Jackson's credentials – I have questions about his

[OpinionUkraine](#)

## **Using only a phone, Zelenskiy is trading in that most human of qualities: hope**

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



In Ukraine, horror is mingled with stories of inspiration – and every night that Kyiv holds out feels like a miracle



Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy in a mobile phone video posted from Kyiv. Photograph: Ukrainian Presidential Press Service/Reuters

Fri 4 Mar 2022 03.00 EST

Wake up, roll over, check the phone for news from Kyiv. It's becoming a habit now, a strange new morning routine, and not just for journalists whose working days have long dawned like this. Millions are now following this war in real time on social media, immersed in it more intimately and personally than ever before. If the advent of 24-hour rolling TV news brought audiences at home closer to faraway conflicts, subtly changing our understanding of them, then smartphones have put war right into the palms of our hands. [Doomscrolling](#) is becoming an addiction, although doom seems the wrong word for a conflict where horror mingles with so many stories of hope and inspiration; stories with the shimmering qualities of modern myths, viral and unforgettable, if not always instantly verifiable, and often helpfully translated into English.

The [young Ukrainian sapper](#) said to have heroically blown himself up along with the bridge he was charged with destroying in order to slow the Russian advance. The villagers filmed courageously [standing in front of tanks](#). The [female MPs](#) posting pictures of themselves training to use rifles, and the soldiers of Snake Island greeting demands for their surrender with the now

famous response: “Russian warship, go fuck yourself.” (Like a new [No pasarán](#), that slogan is everywhere; splashed on T-shirts sold in aid of Ukrainian charities, even iced on cookies sold by a [Texas bakery](#).) And then there is the tale of how President Volodymyr Zelenskiy supposedly rebuffed an American offer to whisk him to safety with the words “I need ammunition, not a ride.” War has [transformed a former comic actor](#) once mocked for his hamminess into an iconic leader for the times whose powerfully emotive short videos posted from beneath his bombed capital seem made for sharing: a real-life [Scheherazade](#), telling captivating tales to the world in the hope of keeping his countrymen alive for one more night.

To talk of stories sounds frivolous, when war crimes are [almost certainly now unfolding](#). But the bleaker the news from the front, as Russian troops begin encircling cities and shelling civilians into submission, the more they matter. Hopelessness makes the rest of the world look away because it’s all too much to take, or else share well-meaning posts about how it’s fine to switch off the news if it makes you sad and do some yoga instead. Hope, on the other hand, keeps people emotionally invested, both at home and abroad; energises us to give to charities, pressure governments to act and big companies to disinvest, and sturdily accept the sacrifices now looming as prices of gas, oil, wheat and raw materials soar. [Polling for ITV](#) last week found a resolute 68% of Britons agreeing the government should impose whatever economic sanctions are effective, even if that raises energy prices, although feelings may change when bills start hitting doormats. But strategic communications (to give stories their technical name) perhaps matter most if, as the foreign secretary insists, Nato member states are digging in for [the long haul](#).

03:50

Moments of defiance: how Ukraine has stood up to Russia – video

For years now Russia has brilliantly exploited the storytelling power of social media to manipulate emotions and destabilise governments across Europe. Its army of bots, trolls and useful idiots has stoked culture wars, amplified conspiracy theories, spread fake news and latched on to any glimmering of doubt and division, while the liberal west has largely floundered in response. Now something has shifted. Social media giants

have been at least briefly galvanised into action, with Google [blocking the propaganda channels](#) Russia Today and Sputnik on YouTube in Europe and [Meta](#) (nee Facebook) targeting disinformation networks. The BBC is racking up new listeners in Russia suddenly hungry for the reality-based reporting they can't get at home. Next time our own government attacks the BBC, remember it's going for the home of Lyse Doucet, calmly broadcasting under shelling, and of 3am World Service bulletins that reach people too scared to sleep.

It's striking, too, how openly western intelligence communities have shared information about Russian invasion plans and supposed Russian operational difficulties, as if taunting a paranoid Kremlin about its apparent leakiness. For the first time in years, it feels as if the west is telling its story with confidence again – an age-old tale of liberal values versus tyranny, but given new life by a democracy young enough not to take freedom for granted. What remains elusive so far, however, is the sense of a happy ending.

If this war had been scripted in Hollywood then it would end just as the [mayor of Lviv suggested](#), with oligarchs' mansions in London being seized and used to house Ukrainian refugees, although only until those refugees could triumphantly return home. But in real life nobody yet has a convincing narrative for how Vladimir Putin can be stopped, given Nato countries' understandable reluctance to use force against a leader threatening nuclear Armageddon. Diplomatic hopes seem pinned on [China helping](#) to broker some kind of peace, though that would mean yet another tectonic shift in global alliances, with unpredictable consequences. And meanwhile that murderous convoy inches closer every day to Ukraine's capital, evoking grim memories of how Russian siege tactics ended in Grozny and Aleppo.

But every day that Zelenskiy evades assassination, every night Kyiv can hold out, feels like a miracle now. That's why we can't stop ourselves compulsively checking for news. Just one more night. Just one more story. Just one more hopeful morning.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
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[\*\*Opinion\*\*](#)[\*\*New York\*\*](#)

# Unmasking school pupils in New York already feels like yesterday's news

[Emma Brockes](#)



With Ukraine coverage displacing Covid, there's a strong feeling that the caravan of history has abruptly moved on



‘As the kids adjusted to masks overnight, they’ll almost certainly snap back just as seamlessly.’ Photograph: John Angelillo/UPI/Rex/Shutterstock

Fri 4 Mar 2022 01.00 EST

My children can’t remember a time when they didn’t go to school in masks. The first lockdown, in March 2020, happened halfway through kindergarten, and as far as they’re concerned they’ve never seen their teachers’ faces unmasked, or enjoyed an unmuffled exchange with them. They are masked in the playground and the gym and at their after-school programme, for up to nine hours at a stretch. They are so accustomed to masks at this point that they ask to wear them when it isn’t required.

All of this is about to change, when New York, which still has some of the strictest Covid regulations in the US, prepares to [relax its school mask mandate](#) next week. Barring an “unforeseen spike”, Eric Adams, the city’s mayor, announced that, on Monday 7 March, he was willing to allow New York’s one million public schoolchildren to return to unmasked learning. Elsewhere, mask use is visibly waning, even among the vulnerable elderly. It was noted on Tuesday night that, prior to President Biden’s [State of the Union address](#), the 79-year-old moved through the chamber unmasked, dispensing hugs.

The US is, in this regard, a stage or so behind England, which has abandoned all Covid precautions either as a sensible gesture towards moving on, a piece of political cynicism or a sign of giving up.

It's an odd effect of Ukraine displacing Covid in the news that, overnight, wearing a mask seems simultaneously a more trivial inconvenience ("try sleeping in a bomb shelter") and, for a lot of people, I suspect, a less pressing need. In New York, the daily average of people testing positive for Covid has dwindled [to 1.9%](#), well down on the 3.41% average for the past month, but that's not the whole story. My own lassitude – I still wear a mask in public indoor settings, but mainly out of politeness, habit and conformity – is less linked to the numbers than to an abrupt and acute sense of history moving on.

One strand of this is the experience of seeing a lot of people catch Omicron and sail through it without symptoms. Another, not articulated perhaps but still setting off internal sirens, is the restlessness caused by an imminent season change. It's about to be spring, a new dawn; vaccines are available for everyone over five; we did the right thing for two years; this is enough now. There are obvious flaws to this logic. It's myopic. It's insensitive towards those for whom Covid still represents a significant risk. It's also irrational. To give up worrying about Covid because Russia invaded Ukraine doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

The truth is that any significant shift back to normalcy requires a level of arbitrary line-drawing. Given that Covid can't be eradicated, a measure of community infection will always be present, requiring a balance of risk and reward. I'm convinced that the quieter of my two kids has never uttered a sentence her teacher has been able to hear. Where, on the scale between death and "no big deal", does this rank? I keep reading pieces about how the old world has gone, how there's no "going back" to the way things were, but that seems to me a truism of time passing. And, just as anti-mask campaigners are powered by factors not based in science, plenty of people are invested, for obscure psychological reasons, in catastrophising the data. There will come a point, relatively soon, when, if you want to ride the elevator alone, you'll be expected to bear the inconvenience and step out to wait for the next one rather than expecting others not to step in.

The kids will do as they're instructed and, as they adjusted to masks overnight, they'll almost certainly snap back just as seamlessly. Which isn't to say we'll throw all ours out next Monday. It will come down to numbers, and not Covid ones. For the first few days after the mandate lifts, my assumption is that everyone will send their kids to school in masks. Slowly, and without a decision expressly being made, the kids will start shedding their masks in the playground. Through lack of enforcement, those masks will quickly be lost. Until a new variant changes the parameters again, the guiding principle will be less one of herd immunity than herd behaviour. When I asked my two what they wanted to do on Monday, they said: "Let's wait and see what everyone else does."

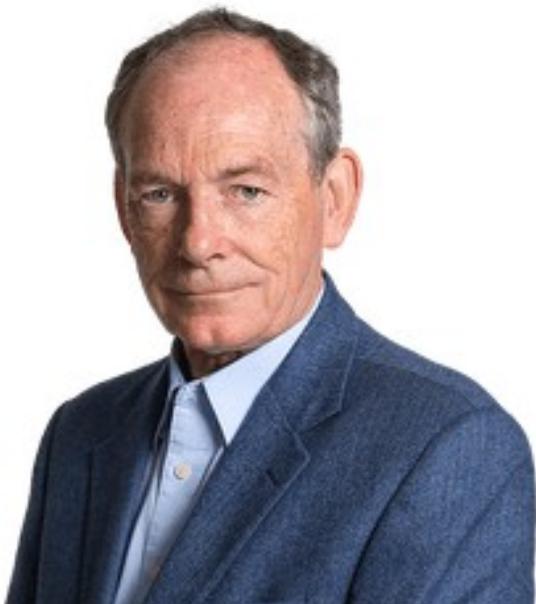
- Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist
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**OpinionRussia**

## **Cleaning London of dirty Russian money would be great – but won't topple Putin**

[Simon Jenkins](#)



The UK government is directing its impotent fury at the oligarchs it has courted for 20 years. It will achieve little



'It remains outrageous that individuals can buy and leave vacant whole streets and tower blocks in the middle of a capital city.' St George's Wharf Tower, London. Photograph: Jonathan Brady/PA

Fri 4 Mar 2022 03.30 EST

We yearn to help. Wrong must be put right. Something must be done. [The agony was plain](#) on Boris Johnson's face as a Ukrainian berated him for refusing to impose a [no-fly zone](#) on Russia. When an outrage is being perpetrated and untold numbers of people are dying hourly on our screens, impotence is misery. So we loudly voice our support of Ukraine. We hate Vladimir Putin, hate oligarchs, hate Russians. It eases our pain.

The early stages of war are always moments when reason is told to leave. As the drums of battle roll, courage demands emotion and unity is all. The only resolution is death or glory. Talk of compromise is treason. This is especially true in [Europe](#), with its long history of bilateral conflicts that demand to be seen as "world wars".

There are specific actions that Britain can take to ease Ukraine's suffering, and Britain has been clearly reluctant to take them. The most immediate is to throw open Britain's borders to Ukrainian refugees, as EU countries have

done with [their plans](#) to allow Ukrainians to live and work in the EU for up to three years. London's Home Office, clearly under orders, [turned back desperate refugees in Paris](#), demanding work-related visas and "security clearance". There are also reports of border bureaucracy at the Channel stalling humanitarian supplies from local aid centres. The sacred rituals of Johnson's Brexit must outrank even Putin's war.

Beyond that, horror at what Putin is doing must be expressed through the instrument of [economic sanctions](#), the hope being that he will see the error of his ways or be toppled in a coup. The difficulty is that the very fact of war as the ultimate expression of a nation's will reduces all other aspects of statehood to irrelevance. Once under arms, a ruler such as Putin, who has been the target of severe sanctions [for eight years](#), is plainly deaf to their impact.

Democracies allow dissent – though even Britain seems [unable to tolerate](#) RT's pro-Russian propaganda – but dictatorships tend to be strengthened not undermined by economic siege. Coups are always unpredictable, and we can only pray that Moscow 2022 will be the exception that disproves the rule. It is puzzling, therefore, that the west is weakening its case by continuing to buy [Russian oil and gas](#).

Most bizarre is the fate of the eccentric bystanders of this drama, the so-called oligarchs. This freemasonry of mostly expatriate Russians has, for 20 years, been feted with open arms in London, with gilded retinues of lawyers, accountants and lifestyle consultants. Their "[golden visas](#)" and [party donations](#) enable them to come and go as they please. They are permitted to [hide from taxation](#), regulation and scrutiny behind shuttered Georgian windows, [empty tower blocks](#) and in secretive [British Overseas Territories](#).

While in times past Putin is known to have had links with such people, I have seen no report out of Moscow that indicates they nowadays enjoy any access to or influence over him, let alone the power to reverse war or depose him. Recent books by [Catherine Belton](#), [Oliver Bullough](#) and others depict him rather as a mafia boss, terrorising the oligarchs with a mix of extortions, bribes, imprisonment and attempted murder. But to a desperate British government they are the only manifestations of Russian power to hand, and must be hurled symbolically on to Putin's pyre.

This is not an attack on Russia so much as a massive course correction in Britain's attitude to foreign money. It would be truly ironic if it took the invasion of Ukraine to cure London of its favouritism [towards money launderers](#), many of whom are Ukrainian. No one can calculate the sums appropriated to Britain from Russia's sovereign assets since 1989, as from other sources of dodgy cash from Africa, the Gulf and the far east. The British Treasury has long been a co-conspirator in depriving countries around the world of their rightful revenues.

The manifestation of this in London is the conversion of its more salubrious districts into storehouses of vagrant money. It remains outrageous that individuals can buy and leave vacant [whole streets](#) and tower blocks in the middle of a capital city. They are charged [less than £3,000](#) in annual council tax for multimillion-pound properties that in New York would be taxed at 50 times that, with local and national income tax on top. The latest research from Transparency International estimates that [40% of luxury properties](#) on the London market now go to "suspect" buy-to-leave investors.

Johnson has long been wildly in favour of this racket. As mayor of London he called these luxury properties a "thrilling inward investment". He toured Malaysia to help sell empty properties at Battersea Power Station and [dismissed any critics](#) as "gloomadon poppers".

As many have found, nothing is more dangerous than to have Johnson as a fan. If he cannot topple Putin, he is determined to at least humble some of his former associates. But what will he do? Confiscate private houses, fine their owners for being Russian, expel them from the country? Unless they are criminals, we surely do not punish people for their nationality.

I enjoy the company of many Russians and, unlike the government, I do not hold them responsible for their monstrous ruler. News that Roman Abramovich feels he must sell his London palace and [football team](#) will not lift spirits in a Kyiv bunker or lose Putin much sleep. If this really signals the end of a long-running London scandal, then good. But what is needed is action, not words.

The current economic assault on Russia and Russians is unprecedented and its outcome is therefore impossible to predict. Feelgood sanctions in the past

have inflicted poverty and injustice on peoples around the world to no political or other benefit. We can only wait to see if Russia capitulates to them. For the time being, I am left hoping only that a few oligarch mansions in Kensington find their way into the hands of Ukrainian refugees.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
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**Fox News**

## **Tucker Carlson suddenly has questions about Ketanji Brown Jackson's credentials – I have questions about his**

[Arwa Mahdawi](#)



Joe Biden has nominated the first Black female justice on the supreme court, Carlson is questioning her LSAT scores



Tucker Carlson is now very interested in learning supreme court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson's LSAT score. Composite: Shutterstock, AP Images

Fri 4 Mar 2022 01.00 EST

What does it mean to live in a democracy? Well, according to the [Fox News](#) host Tucker Carlson, it means having the right to harangue Black women and force them to show their papers.

On Wednesday Carlson went on a tirade about the District of Columbia circuit Judge [Ketanji Brown Jackson](#), who Joe Biden has nominated to replace supreme court Justice Stephen Breyer. Jackson's confirmation, if it happens, would fulfil Biden's campaign promise to nominate a Black female justice.

"So is Ketanji Brown Jackson – a name that even [Joe Biden](#) has trouble pronouncing – one of the top legal minds in the entire country?" Carlson asked. "[I]t might be time for Joe Biden to let us know what Ketanji Brown Jackson's LSAT score was. How did she do on the LSATs? ... It would seem like Americans in a democracy have a right to know."

Before we get on to Jackson's qualifications, perhaps we ought to have a word about Tucker Swanson McNear Carlson's own credentials. If he thinks Ketanji Brown Jackson's name is difficult to pronounce, perhaps he shouldn't be a television presenter. Of course, Carlson has no problem saying Jackson's name. He's just being racist: which seems to be the only qualification one needs to get a gig on [Fox News](#).

The LSATs are a multiple-choice exam that you have to take to get into most law schools in the US. Carlson must have only realized that it was written in the constitution that all Americans have a right to view a judge's LSAT exams recently because there's no record of him asking for the LSAT scores of recent supreme court nominees, such as Amy Coney Barrett and Brett Kavanaugh, to be released. I wonder why he's so worked up about them this time?

While Jackson's LSATs may not be public knowledge (her kindergarten report cards have also not been released to the American people), her [qualifications are impeccable](#). She went to Harvard Law School; served as a supervising editor for the Harvard Law Review; clerked for three judges including Justice Breyer; spent 15 years as a public defender; eight years as a trial court judge in the US district court in DC; was vice-chair of the US Sentencing Commission; and has issued a number of notable rulings. But none of that's good enough for Carlson. He will not rest until we see her LSATs, a flawed measure of student potential that helps candidates get into law school, but has zero to say about their ability after they graduate. Even if it turned out Jackson's score was stellar, no doubt Tucker would want to see her [birth certificate](#) as well. And maybe pull out the calipers and take some head measurements while he's at it.

It doesn't matter how hard you work or how many accomplishments you rack up, if you're a minority there is always someone like Carlson ready to tell you that the only reason you've got to where you are is because of things like affirmative action or political correctness. I've certainly had my own Carlson moment. My first job out of university was a trainee solicitor at a corporate law firm. A white guy at my law school had a minor meltdown when he found out I'd got into the same firm he had been rejected by. "Probably a diversity hire!" he told me in a "jokey" tone of voice.

It is true, of course, that a significant number of unqualified people get into prestigious universities and top jobs thanks to affirmative action. But you know who benefits from affirmative action the most? Rich white people. Take Harvard, for example. A [2019 analysis](#) of the Ivy League's school admissions data found that only around 57% of white students were admitted to Harvard on merit. A whopping 43% of them were there because they were "ALDCs": athletes, legacy students (their parents went to the school), on the dean's list (their parents donated to the school) or the children of Harvard employees. By contrast, [less than 16%](#) of African American, Hispanic and Asian American admits were ALDCs.

Once you're out of university there's still plenty of affirmative action for well-connected white people. One analysis [found that](#) an American male is 8,500 times more likely to become a senator if their dad is a senator. The same study found American men are 1,895 times more likely to become a famous chief executive, 1,639 times more likely to win a Pulitzer, and 1,361 times more likely to win an Academy award if daddy did the same thing first.

If Carlson really is so keen on ensuring that the US is a meritocracy, then I suggest he worry less about making Jackson's LSAT scores public and focus on rather different data instead. How exactly did Jared Kushner get into Harvard, for example? Did it have anything to do with the \$2.5m his dad [pledged to the school](#)? How did Donald Trump get into the prestigious University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Finance? Is it true his dad [pulled a few strings](#)? Americans in a democracy have a right to know.

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## 2022.03.04 - Around the world

- [New York Soprano Anna Netrebko withdraws from Met performances rather than renounce Putin](#)
- [US Biden to sanction Russian oligarchs as Putin shows no let-up](#)
- [NFTs Ukraine to issue non-fungible tokens to fund armed forces](#)
- ['We can influence morale' Polish ambassador last to remain in Kyiv](#)

[Russia](#)

## Soprano Anna Netrebko withdraws from Met performances rather than renounce Putin

The Russian opera singer said she was ‘opposed to this senseless war of aggression’, but wouldn’t drop support for Putin



Anna Netrebko performed at a gala concert at the Kremlin celebrating her 50th birthday last year. Photograph: Yuri Kochetkov/EPA

*Associated Press*

Thu 3 Mar 2022 14.38 EST

Soprano Anna Netrebko withdrew from her future engagements at the [Metropolitan Opera](#) rather than repudiate her support for Russian president Vladimir Putin, costing the company one of its top singers and best box-office draws.

“It is a great artistic loss for the Met and for opera,” the Met’s general manager, Peter Gelb, said in a statement on Thursday. “Anna is one of the greatest singers in Met history, but with Putin killing innocent victims in Ukraine, there was no way forward.”

Gelb had said on Sunday that the Met would not engage artists who support Putin.

The Met made repeated efforts in recent days attempting to convince Netrebko to repudiate Putin but failed to persuade her, a person familiar with the developments said, speaking on condition of anonymity because that detail was not announced.

The invasion of Ukraine has led to a show of solidarity in the arts and culture world with Ukrainians and a backlash against the Russian government and those with ties to it that won’t reject Putin’s actions. The ripple effects have also reached the international sports world.

Netrebko, a 50-year-old from Krasnodar, received the People’s Artist of Russia honor from Putin in 2008.

She was [photographed in 2014](#) holding the flag of the Russian-controlled territories in Ukraine after giving a 1m rouble donation (then \$18,500) to the opera house in Donetsk, a Ukrainian city controlled by pro-Russia separatists.

On Tuesday, Netrebko withdrew from all her upcoming performances. Her next listed performance was at Barcelona’s Gran Teatre del Liceu on 3 April, followed by three concerts with her husband, Azerbaijani tenor Yusif Eyvazov, and a 13 April concert with the Berlin Philharmonic.

“I am opposed to this senseless war of aggression and I am calling on Russia to end this war right now, to save all of us. We need peace right now,” she said. “This is not a time for me to make music and perform. I have therefore decided to take a step back from performing for the time being. It is an extremely difficult decision for me, but I know that my audience will understand and respect this decision.”

There was no immediate response from Netrebko to Gelb's announcement.

Netrebko made her Met debut on 14 February 2002, in Prokofiev's War and Peace and quickly became a house favorite. She has appeared in 192 performances at the house, the last a New Year's Eve gala she starred in on 31 December 2019.

Netrebko will be replaced by the Ukrainian soprano Liudmyla Monastyrskaya in Puccini's Turandot for five performances from 30 April to 14 May, including a 7 May performance broadcast to theaters worldwide. The Met said Netrebko also will be replaced as Elisabetta in Verdi's Don Carlo for five performances from 3 to 19 November.

The Met also said it would construct its own sets and costumes for next season's new production of Wagner's Lohengrin rather than share them with Moscow's Bolshoi [Opera](#), as originally planned.

The Met's decision followed the collapse of the international career of Russian conductor [Valery Gergiev](#), who has been close to Putin as artistic and general director of the Mariinsky in St Petersburg.

Gergiev was fired this week as chief conductor of the Munich Philharmonic, and the Gergiev festival, an annual event since 1996, was canceled by the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, where he was principal guest conductor from 1995 to 2008. He also was dropped by the Vienna Philharmonic, the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland and Milan's Teatro alla Scala.

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## US foreign policy

# US sanctions Russian oligarchs as Putin shows no signs of de-escalating

Biden says sanctions will target those who ‘line their pockets with the Russian people’s money’

- [Russia-Ukraine war – latest updates](#)



Biden talks to reporters before a cabinet meeting at the White House on Tuesday. Photograph: Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

*Joan E Greve in Washington*

[@joanegreve](#)

Thu 3 Mar 2022 15.16 EST

The White House imposed new sanctions on Russian oligarchs and their families on Thursday, as [Vladimir Putin](#) showed no sign of de-escalating

Russia's devastating military attacks on Ukraine.

Joe Biden said the sanctions will target those who "line their pockets with the Russian people's money" as the Ukrainian people seek shelter from air strikes.

"Our interest is in maintaining the strongest unified economic impact campaign on Putin in all of history, and I think we're well on the way to doing that," Biden said in a cabinet meeting.

"Today I'm announcing that we're adding dozens of names to the [sanctions] list, including one of Russia's wealthiest billionaires, and I'm banning travel to America by more than 50 Russian oligarchs, their families and their closest associates."

The financial sanctions target at least eight Russian elites and their family members, in an attempt to prevent the oligarchs from transferring assets to spouses or children to circumvent the restrictions. Those sanctioned include billionaire Alisher Usmanov, a Putin ally whose super-yacht was just seized by German authorities, and Dmitry Peskov, the spokesperson for the Kremlin.

The sanctions terminate the oligarchs' access to the American financial system, while their US-based assets will be frozen and their property will be blocked from use. The State Department has also imposed US visa restrictions on 19 oligarchs and 47 of their family members and close associates.

The White House has said the new sanctions are designed to put more pressure on Putin by targeting his inner circle of allies.

"We want him to feel the squeeze. We want the people around him to feel the squeeze," said the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki.

The announcement marks an escalation by the Biden administration, which had already imposed sanctions on Putin, his foreign minister and some of the top executives of Russia's largest companies following the invasion of [Ukraine](#). Biden indicated in his State of the Union speech on Tuesday that

his administration would crack down on oligarchs' assets as part of the west's efforts to further isolate Putin.

"I say to the Russian oligarchs and the corrupt leaders who've bilked billions of dollars off this violent regime: no more," Biden said Tuesday. "We're joining with European Allies to find and seize their yachts, their luxury apartments, their private jets. We're coming for your ill-begotten gains."

The new sanctions came as the White House asked Congress for another \$10bn in aid to Ukraine. Shalanda Young, acting director of the Office of Management and Budget, [said](#) the money would be used to provide Ukraine with more defense equipment and emergency food assistance, as well as bolster enforcement of the sanctions against Russia.

"Given the rapidly evolving situation in Ukraine, additional needs may arise over time," Young said.

The House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, said Thursday that she supports including the funding for Ukraine in the omnibus spending package currently being debated in Congress. Pelosi also echoed demands to ban US imports of Russian oil, telling reporters: "I'm all for that. Ban it. Ban the oil coming from Russia."

But the White House has voiced a more skeptical opinion of sanctioning Russian oil companies, amid concerns that the crisis in Ukraine could drive gas prices higher. "We don't have a strategic interest in reducing the global supply of energy," Psaki said. "That would raise prices at the gas pump for the American people."

Any sanctions imposed by the White House may be coming too late for millions of Ukrainians. More than 1 million people [have already fled the country](#) because of the Russian invasion, and the president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has begged for more assistance from western allies to end Putin's airstrikes.

"If you do not have the power to close the skies, then give me planes!" he said Thursday. "If we are no more, then, God forbid, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia will be next."

Ukrainian and Russian officials held another round of peace talks in Belarus, but they could only agree on establishing humanitarian corridors to evacuate civilians. A [phone call](#) between Putin and the French president, Emmanuel Macron, on Thursday yielded no major breakthroughs, and concerns are mounting over a [large Russian convoy](#) of tanks and artillery outside the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv.

The French Élysée palace said after the call: “We expect the worst is yet to come.”

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## Ukraine

# Ukraine to issue non-fungible tokens to fund armed forces

Announcement by vice-prime minister follows appeal for cryptocurrency donations that has raised £38m



A cryptocurrency exchange in Kyiv. There have been more than 102,000 crypto donations since last week. Photograph: Vladimir Sindheyev/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Dan Milmo](#) Global technology editor*

Thu 3 Mar 2022 14.38 EST

Ukraine has announced it will issue non-fungible tokens to fund its armed forces, as cryptocurrency becomes an increasingly popular means of giving support to the government in Kyiv.

Mykhailo Fedorov, Ukraine's vice-prime minister, said on Twitter on Thursday that the government would soon issue NFTs to help pay for its military.

[NFTs confer ownership](#) of a unique digital item – with [pieces of virtual art](#) proving particularly popular – upon their buyer, even if that item can be easily copied. Ownership is recorded on a digital, decentralised ledger known as a blockchain.

Fedorov did not give further details of the NFTs but said the government had cancelled earlier plans to reward cryptocurrency donors with an airdrop, a free digital token typically used by the crypto community to encourage participation in a project.

After careful consideration we decided to cancel airdrop. Every day there are more and more people willing to help Ukraine to fight back the aggression. Instead, we will announce NFTs to support Ukrainian Armed Forces soon. We DO NOT HAVE any plans to issue any fungible tokens

— Mykhailo Fedorov (@FedorovMykhailo) [March 3, 2022](#)

The move comes as a Ukrainian appeal for cryptocurrency donations passed \$50m (£38m), after Fedorov posted a request for donations in bitcoin, ethereum and tether on Twitter last week.

Stand with the people of Ukraine  
Now accepting cryptocurrency donations. Ethereum. Bitcoin and Tether (USDTtrc20)

BTC — 357a3So9CbsNfBBgFYACGvxxS6tMaDoa1P

ETH — 0x165CD37b4C644C2921454429E7F9358d18A45e14

USDT (trc20) — TEFccmfQ38cZS1DTZVhsxKVDckA8Y6VfCy

— Mykhailo Fedorov (@FedorovMykhailo) [February 26, 2022](#)

The appeal has now [raised \\$54.7m](#) for the Ukrainian government and a Ukrainian NGO, according to Elliptic, a blockchain data and analytics company. Most of the funds have gone to the government, with a smaller amount being sent to [Come Back Alive](#), an organisation that funds the “real-time needs of defending Ukraine”.

According to Elliptic there have been more than 102,000 cryptoasset donations since the start of the invasion last week, including a \$5.8m donation by Gavin Wood, the British co-founder of the blockchain platform Polkadot. Elliptic added that a donation worth \$1.86m appears to have originated from the sale of NFTs originally intended to [raise money](#) for Julian Assange, the WikiLeaks founder. A [CryptoPunk NFT](#) worth \$200,000 has also been sent to the Ukrainian government.

“The majority of donations received to date have been in bitcoin and ether, although US dollar stablecoins contribute a significant proportion,” said Elliptic this week. The company added, however, that scammers also appear to be piggybacking on the fundraising drive by tricking users who are attempting to donate to Ukrainian causes.

The global NFT market reached \$25.5bn last year, according to DappRadar, a firm that tracks sales, marking a meteoric rise from just \$100m in 2020. The soaring value of NFTs has prompted warnings from sceptics that the craze for the tokens bears all the hallmarks of a [speculative bubble](#). DappRadar’s head of finance and research, Modesta Masoit, said the Ukraine move was a “watershed moment” for cryptocurrencies and blockchain technology.

Ukraine has also raised more substantial sums through conventional means. Last week it raised £200m in a sale of war bonds and is in discussions with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank over raising further funds.

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## Ukraine

# ‘We can influence morale’: Polish ambassador last to remain in Kyiv

As his EU counterparts leave for western city of Lviv and home, Bartosz Cichocki wants to keep up spirits in capital

- [Russia-Ukraine crisis: live news](#)

01:04

Drone footage shows devastated town near Kyiv – video



*[Shaun Walker](#) in Kyiv*

Thu 3 Mar 2022 14.11 EST

Some members of Kyiv’s diplomatic corps have moved to the western city of Lviv, others have crossed the border and are working from neighbouring countries, while most have been evacuated back home.

But inside the Polish embassy compound in the centre of an eerily quiet Kyiv, the ambassador Bartosz Cichocki is still at work.

“It was rather 24/7,” he said, of his working week since the Russian attack on [Ukraine](#) began.

Dressed in chinos and a Shakhtar Donetsk football shirt, Cichocki offered whiskey and cigarettes to his visitors in a meeting room at the embassy, a Soviet modernist building in central Kyiv.

He is the only remaining EU ambassador in the capital and one of just a handful of western diplomats of any rank remaining in Kyiv, but answered questions about his continued presence with studied nonchalance.

In response to a question about whether he was sleeping underground, Cichocki said: “Why? People sleep in beds. Why should I sleep in a basement?” Hundreds of thousands of residents who remained in the capital are spending the night sleeping in metro stations or basements.

A large part of the city’s population has fled Kyiv on trains and in cars, towards the safer western part of the country or across the border to [Poland](#), Hungary, Slovakia, Romania or Moldova.

Poland, in particular, has taken in [hundreds of thousands](#) of Ukrainians, and an enormous civil society effort has been launched to help get them settled in the country.

If the war continues and intensifies, many millions more may flee. Cichocki said that, while he does not make policy, he would be surprised if his country would start to reject entry to Ukrainians. “I don’t think there’s a limit. I cannot imagine that Poland closes the door,” he said.

Some have pointed out a troubling difference between the enormous effort by Poland and other central eastern European countries to welcome Ukrainians, and their actions towards refugees from the Middle East. In particular, Polish police [violently pushed thousands of refugees back in](#)

Belarus last autumn, after the dictator Alexander Lukashenko had lured them to the country with a promise of free passage to Europe.

“This is a genuine refugee phenomenon while that was completely artificial,” Cichocki claimed. “It was refugee tourism.”

In the run-up to the invasion, Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, criticised western countries for moving their diplomatic missions to Lviv, in the west of Ukraine. Cichocki said that while there were many tasks that could only be done by being physically in place, the most important reason to stay in Kyiv was symbolic.

“I believe that today what we can influence is the morale, the spirit,” he said. “They have arms, they have food, they have everything, but I think leaving them now would be something that could decrease their spirits.”

The US embassy left Kyiv for Lviv well before the Russian attack, and once the assault began, the Americans evacuated further, and the embassy team now works from across the border in Poland. Some missions are based in Lviv, while the vast majority of diplomats and almost all of their families have been evacuated back to their own capitals.

“They are not free to decide, their capitals decided. I don’t judge,” Cichocki said, of his long-departed colleagues in the diplomatic corps.

He was reluctant to talk about his own contingency plans, insisting that as long as a democratically elected Ukrainian government remained in place, he would be in Kyiv, describing the city as “uninvadable”.

He conceded he would leave if he was ordered to do so by his foreign ministry, but doubted such an order was imminent.

Outside the embassy, central Kyiv was deserted on Thursday, with few people in the streets save for the queues outside pharmacies and food shops. A missile strike on the television tower on Tuesday killed at least five people, but the city has been relatively quiet in the past two days, although the occasional boom can be heard from fighting to the west and there were several small explosions audible while the ambassador spoke.

There is a sense of dread in the air at what might be coming, particularly after Vladimir Putin made a public appearance on Thursday giving little sign he was ready to back down. Residents have seen footage of indiscriminate shelling in the second city of Kharkiv and fear the same fate may await them in Kyiv.

“I cannot imagine Russians taking this city by land, [but] they may destroy it, they may shell and bomb it,” said Cichocki.

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## Shane Warne

# Shane Warne death: authorities reveal attempts to save life of cricket legend

Thai police say Warne was taken to hospital after being found unconscious at the Samujana Villas resort

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02:47

Shane Warne, 'the King of Spin', dead at 52 – video obituary

*[Angus Fontaine](#) and Navaon Siradapuvadol in Bangkok*

Sat 5 Mar 2022 08.52 EST

The desperate attempts to save the life of cricket legend [Shane Warne](#) have been detailed by police officers and rescue teams on the Thai island of Koh Samui, as the sports world mourns and the 52-year-old leg-spinner's final moments are pieced together by authorities.

Warne was on a week-long holiday with three friends at the Samujana Villas resort, the start of a three-month lay-off after covering the 2021-22 Ashes series for Fox Sports.

"They were going to go out for a drink at five o'clock," explained Warne's manager, James Erskine. "[They] knocked on his door at 5.15pm because Warnie was always on time and said: 'C'mon you're going to be late,' and then realised something was wrong."

Four days ago the champion leg-spinner had posted on Instagram his plan to drop weight and get back to his peak physical condition, telling his 1.3 million followers: “Operation shred has started (10 days in) & the goal by July is to get back to this shape from a few years ago! Let’s go.”

Warne had retired to his room on Friday afternoon to watch coverage of the Australia-Pakistan Test with plans to meet again that night for drinks and dinner. His final Instagram message was to wish “good night” to his followers from the villa with an image of the island and the infinity pool. When Warne did not arrive for dinner as scheduled, his friends returned to the room and found the 52-year-old unresponsive. Warne’s business manager, Andrew Neophitou, was attempting CPR on the father-of-three when local medics arrived.



People gather to pay their respects to Shane Warne at his statue outside the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Photograph: Chris Putnam/Rex/Shutterstock

According to Thai local news, the Wat Plai Leam rescue team was first on the scene. “We got a call around 5.30pm about an unconscious case,” said the rescue team chief, Phet Boonrak. “We got there in five minutes ... The person was unconscious and had a weak pulse, so we tried CPR and called the ambulance. His friends were so shocked. They said they had found him unconscious on the bed and moved him to the floor to attempt CPR.

“In the room, there was vomit on the floor but no sign of injuries. The ambulance arrived within 15 minutes, they took him to the hospital immediately.”

Warne was pronounced dead at the hospital, with Bo Phut police confirming his death shortly afterwards.

“I got a call around 7pm yesterday to go to Thai international hospital about the death of a tourist,” Lieutenant-colonel Chatchawin Nakmusik told the Guardian. “The villa manager took me to check at the scene ... His friends told me that Shane was sleeping in his bedroom in the afternoon. Later on, when they wanted to have dinner, they went to call him but he already passed out. They informed the villa management and called the ambulance. They tried to do CPR but Shane was already dead.”



The local hospital where the body of Shane Warne is waiting to be repatriated. Photograph: Reuters

As the cricket world mourns, Thai police outlined the next grim steps. Investigators will send Warne's body for autopsy at Surathani hospital to find the cause of death and inform the embassy of Australia in [Thailand](#) of results. Investigators will also now check CCTV footage at the hotel to collect further evidence for the case report.

“This afternoon, I will call his friend and manager to give a statement at the police station,” said Lt Col Nakmusik. “I am waiting for the autopsy report. If there is nothing suspicious, then the case is closed. The family will be responsible to take the body back to their home country.”

The Australian foreign affairs minister, Marise Payne, said Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade officials had spoken to those travelling with Warne, and would arrive in Koh Samui late on Saturday. “Dfat is working with Thai authorities to confirm arrangements following his passing, assist with his repatriation and provide other assistance on the ground,” she said.

Allan McKinnon, Australia’s ambassador to Thailand, later added: “There won’t be a proper statement as you would like tonight, but I would like to, on behalf of Shane Warne’s family and his travelling companions, thank [the] team here at the Bo Phut provincial police station and the hospital in Koh Samui for facilitating this process and getting Shane Warne back to Australia as quickly as possible. They have been very compassionate, very efficient and very understanding, so thank you. And that is the only statement we will be making at this time.”

Tributes from around the world continued to be paid on Saturday. Elizabeth Hurley, who was engaged to the cricket legend from 2011 until their split in December 2013, described him as her “beloved Lionheart”. Sharing a photo of them together on Instagram, she wrote: “I feel like the sun has gone behind a cloud forever. RIP my beloved Lionheart shanewarne23.”

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## [Cricket](#)

# Shane Warne obituary

Devastatingly inventive Australian leg-spin bowler widely regarded as one of the best cricketers of all time



Shane Warne took 708 wickets in 145 Test matches with Australia.

Photograph: William West/AFP/Getty Images

[Matthew Engel](#)

Fri 4 Mar 2022 14.04 EST

Shane Warne, who has died aged 52 of a suspected heart attack, was almost certainly the greatest spin bowler cricket has ever produced. More than that, he was one of the most outsize personalities of any sport. Everything he did in his game and his life was on a grand scale: he lived fast and, it transpires, died young.

Warne singlehandedly revived the discipline of leg-spin, which by the time he burst into Test cricket in the 1990s was almost a lost art. He arrived into an Australia team that had already embarked on a run of eight Ashes series

wins and made it overwhelmingly stronger – he was still in the business of terrorising Englishmen when he retired from Test cricket 14 years later.

Spin bowlers in his era, certainly English ones, often found themselves apologetic figures brought on to give a little breather to the fast men, who had begun to dominate the sport, certainly outside Asia. Warne was the reverse: he was not just a master of his craft; he commanded the arena.

He made that clear from the first ball he bowled in an Ashes Test, to Mike Gatting at Old Trafford: “Two-thirds of the way down the pitch the ball dipped into the leg-side, opening Gatting up like a can of beans, before ripping diagonally across his body to clip the outside of off-stump,” wrote Mike Selvey in the Guardian. “Gatting stood his ground, not in dissent or disappointment but in total, utter disbelief.”

At the time some called it the Ball from Hell. As time went by it was sanctified as the [Ball of the Century](#).

Warne was born and brought up in the Melbourne suburbs, the son of Bridgette, who had come to Australia aged three, and Keith. He was not remotely academic but at 15 he won a sports scholarship to Mentone grammar school which, he concluded, licensed him not to be academic at all. [Cricket](#) was not his obvious sport; at first, Australian Rules, tennis and swimming might have been ahead of it.

Yet his special brilliance at cricket was connected with the attributes needed for those three; he had extraordinary upper-body strength: shoulders, arms and wrists. Warne himself thought this might be connected with him breaking both legs when he was eight and having to wheel himself round in a cart. Plus he had a natural gift at spinning a cricket ball. At first he was seen as a batsman who bowled a bit. But as he moved through the ranks at one of Melbourne’s top-grade clubs, St Kilda, bowling took over.



Warne celebrates after dismissing England's Andrew Flintoff on the final day of the fifth Test at the Oval in 2005. Photograph: Rui Vieira/PA

Warne was always an Australian archetype – the lovable larrikin who disobeys the rules but triumphs. He irritated teammates with his flash cars (from teenage days) and dyed blond hair. He irritated by-the-book coaches, notably at the Australian cricket academy, with his disdain for their idea of fitness and discipline.

But he proved himself cricket-fit and was plunged into the Australia team against India in January 1992, although he did nothing in that match and was dropped. The following winter he bowled Australia to a stunning victory over West Indies when he turned 143 for one to 219 all out. Then in New Zealand he took 17 wickets in three Tests, and [Martin Crowe](#), the opposing captain, called him the best leg-spinner in the world.

When he came to England with Australia that spring, Warne worked away early in the tour at Worcester while Graeme Hick hit him everywhere except into the river and the cathedral. Overhyped, it was said. With hindsight, that day must be seen as part of the masterplan. There were no unbelievers after the Gatting ball.

Unlike the previous leg-spin standard-bearer, the Pakistani player [Abdul Qadir](#), Warne did not use the googly as his major weapon. He quickly became a master of the flipper, which also turned the presumed wrong way, but with the help of backspin. He mastered many other variants, some of which may have existed only in opponents' heads. "If the batsman thinks it's spinning," as one old-timer put it, "it's spinning."

He was also a master of performance art, facial expressions, unexpected stops and starts, never letting the batsman settle. And, when all else failed, good old Australian sledging.

The wickets and landmarks kept coming, but so did the scrapes. It was belatedly revealed that he had been involved in the first manifestation of cricket's problems with match-fixing when he had taken money for giving information about pitches and weather to a Sri Lankan bookmaker. It was at the bottom end of the scale of potential illegality but caused great reputational damage at the time.



Warne acknowledges the acclaim of the crowd after playing in his penultimate Test match, on his home ground in Melbourne in December 2006. Photograph: William West/AFP/Getty Images

More scrapes followed, above all the use of a banned diuretic, for which he was banished for a year and which he rather ungallantly appeared to blame on his mother. Thus Warne never did become Australia captain, at which he might well have excelled. But his Test career ended in a blaze of glory when Australia avenged England's nation-stopping theatrical Ashes victory of 2005 by crushing England 5-0. In his 144th and penultimate Test, he took his 700th Test wicket.

Warne also broke the mould by proving spin bowlers could succeed in one-day cricket. He captained Rajasthan Royals to the first Indian Premier League title in 2008 and proved an effective and popular captain and coach in England with Hampshire. He enjoyed his celebrity and all that it brought him. There was a brief, highly publicised relationship with Liz Hurley.

He remained a handsome, charismatic, fun-loving figure who did not slow down. Behind it all, he was charming and at heart a true son of the game. He was named one of the five cricketers of the 20th century by Wisden in 2000 and was both gracious and chuffed to bits. Everyone in cricket will be devastated that the carnival is over.

He is survived by three children, Jackson, Summer and Brooke, from his 1995 marriage to Simone Callahan, which ended in divorce in 2005.

Shane Warne, cricketer, born 13 September 1969; died 4 March 2022

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/mar/04/shane-warne-obituary>.

**Rishi Sunak**

## **Unions urge Sunak to address Ukraine and cost of living in spring statement**

Letter from union leaders calls for financial support for the people of Ukraine as well as for UK families



Rishi Sunak in Westminster, London on 4 March 2022. He is due to give his mini-budget on 23 March. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/ZUMA Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Richard Partington](#) Economics correspondent*

*[@RJPartington](#)*

Sat 5 Mar 2022 01.00 EST

**Rishi Sunak** is facing pressure to use his spring statement this month to launch an emergency support package in response to the war in Ukraine, with measures to boost humanitarian aid and help for UK households with soaring energy bills.

Urging the chancellor to announce a comprehensive set of measures at the mini-budget due on 23 March, the heads of the TUC and Britain's biggest trade unions said financial assistance was vital to cushion the impact from Russia's invasion.

In a letter to Sunak seen by the Guardian, the union leaders said a step-change in financial support was required for the people of [Ukraine](#) as well as for UK families struggling with a cost of living crisis as the conflict drives up energy prices.

The wholesale cost of gas broke records on Friday, with the UK benchmark rising to 480p per therm, while petrol hit a new high at the pump of 153p per litre.

Frances O'Grady, the general secretary of the TUC, said: "Working people in the UK will need protection from even steeper hikes in gas bills from the conflict. The chancellor should introduce grants to help with energy prices, roll out an emergency programme of home insulation, and fund it with a windfall tax on excess energy profits."

The intervention comes as analysts warn the conflict in Ukraine could [add to the highest rates of inflation for three decades](#), should a sustained rise in oil and gas prices feed through to household bills.

Poverty campaigners have called on the government to increase the value of universal credit benefits by more than the 3.1% planned for April to prevent a sharp increase in hardship, alongside demands to overhaul the [package of energy support](#) announced last month.

Inflation reached 5.5% in January, the highest level since the early 1990s, while economists have warned the rate of increase for the cost of living could hit 8% this year after Vladimir Putin ordered troops into Ukraine, sparking an energy crisis.

The independent Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates the planned real-terms cut to benefits in April could pull 400,000 people into poverty, at a time when the UK's main out-of-work support is already at a 30-year low

after a decade of cuts and less than six months on from the [f20 a week cut to universal credit](#).

In their letter to the chancellor, the union bosses from the TUC, Unite, Unison, GMB, teachers' unions and other leading groups said more needed to be done to protect working families from further energy price rises as a result of the crisis.

It said more generous grants could be offered instead of a £200 repayable loan, universal credit could be increased by more than is planned, while the value of the warm homes discount for the poorest families could be increased and more funds made available to people wanting to insulate their properties.

Against a backdrop of surging energy prices, the unions said a new 100% tax on “additional profits” made by UK based companies from their shareholdings in Russian state-backed enterprises that have profited from the gas price crisis could be launched to help fund its recommended measures.

It said this would include profits made by firms like Shell and Vitol from their shareholdings in oil and gas fields in Russia in joint ventures with Kremlin-backed companies Rosneft and Gazprom. Several western energy giants, including [Shell and BP](#), have announced plans to divest multibillion-pound stakes in Russian projects since the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine.

Urging the government to pursue all diplomatic efforts towards peace, the trade union leaders said safe routes to the UK were needed for those fleeing conflict and that changes to government legislation that would close the door on people fleeing war and threats to their lives needed to be scrapped. They said funding for humanitarian assistance for displaced people, including essential medical supplies, were also vital.

A government spokesperson said: “We recognise the pressures people are facing with the cost of living, and are providing support worth around £20bn this financial year and next to help.

“This includes a £200 reduction on bills this autumn and a £150 non-repayable reduction in council tax bills, on top of the existing £12bn of support we have in place already. The energy price cap also continues to insulate millions of customers from volatile global gas prices.

“We are also putting an average of £1,000 more per year into the pockets of working families via changes to universal credit and boosting the minimum wage by more than £1,000 a year for full-time workers.”

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## Scotland

# Corporate tree-planting drive in Scotland ‘risks widening rural inequality’

Surge of estate sales to big firms has driven up prices and increased elitism of land ownership, says report

- [Lost Forest: why is BrewDog’s green scheme causing controversy?](#)



An estate cottage. Land prices have more than doubled in some areas of Scotland as the competition for upland estates and farmland intensifies.  
Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

*Severin Carrell* Scotland editor

[@severincarrell](#)

Sat 5 Mar 2022 03.00 EST

A drive by wealthy companies to plant forests in the Scottish Highlands to offset their carbon emissions risks creating even greater inequalities in rural areas, a major report has warned.

The analysis says a surge of Highland estate sales to major corporations and cash-rich investors, such as Aviva, Standard Life [and BrewDog](#), has driven up land prices sharply and increased the elitism and exclusivity of land ownership, while they aim to limit climate heating.

John Hollingdale, a community ownership expert, argues that much stricter rules on land ownership, tax breaks and forestry subsidies are needed to ensure the rush to meet government forestry and net zero targets has the widest public benefit.

The Scottish and UK governments have targets to plant 30,000 hectares (75,000 acres) of new woods and forests across Britain a year. Scottish Forestry, a government agency, is midway through a three-year programme worth £217m to plant 46,500 hectares (115,000 acres) of new woodland by April 2025, roughly equivalent to 93m trees.

In [a report for Community Land Scotland](#), a land reform body, Hollingdale said those investments were further subsidised by exemptions from inheritance tax, business property tax relief, and income and corporation tax on profits for commercial woodland, as well as non-domestic rates exemptions.

Calum MacLeod, policy director for Community Land [Scotland](#), said: “The paper’s detailed analysis and recommendations shows that green finance mechanisms need to be fit for purpose in terms of a just transition by making land use sustainable in ways that significantly benefit local communities.”

Standard Life Investments, Aviva and BrewDog are the best-known examples of companies that have spent tens of millions of pounds in the last year buying land for forestry, peatland restoration and woodland creation to offset their carbon emissions or sell climate-focused investments to their clients.

Known as natural capital or green finance investments, corporations have come under intense pressure to absorb or offset their carbon emissions to hit the Paris climate accord goal of limiting global heating to 1.5C by 2050.

To the alarm of land reform campaigners and the National Farmers' Union, that has led to land prices more than doubling in some areas of Scotland, as the competition for upland estates and farmland intensifies.

Purchases by big companies such as the beer company [BrewDog](#) remain relatively rare but they reinforce another more subtle trend, Hollingdale argues. Increased funding for forestry and its tax advantages means existing owners can increase the value of their land and businesses by moving into woodland creation. While that has environmental benefits, it can make owners less likely to sell, pushing up land values by increasing scarcity.

Hollingdale's report warns this trend also prices out local communities hoping to buy their land to increase local employment, tourism, ecological management and micro-businesses.

In 2020, the Scottish Land Fund, which funds community buyouts, stopped taking applications after five months because its £10m budget was oversubscribed. That has since been doubled to £20m, but surging land prices may soon swallow up that increased funding.

Hollingdale recommends green financing projects are regulated to ensure they support genuine carbon offsetting; that ministers remove tax exemptions which distort land prices, and increase sales taxes on agricultural buildings; and that land owners are required to produce management plans and introduce public interest tests for large estates.

Hamish Trench, the chief executive of the Scottish Land Commission, an official body focused on reforming highly concentrated patterns of land ownership, believes there is a “real risk” green finance investments will further concentrate the ownership of land and its benefits.

In 2019, the commission said, just 87 owners – made up of private owners, charities and state-run bodies – controlled 1.7m hectares of rural Scotland. Trench said it was essential the financing was used in the public interest.

“How do we harness this new finance coming in so it actively supports the mixed and community ownership model? We see an opportunity to do that,” he said.

Sarah Jane Laing, the chief executive of Scottish Land and Estates, which represents many large landowners, said this trend was still in its infancy but had tremendous economic potential. There were still numerous opportunities for community groups and social enterprises to buy land, often with public or private support.

“Significant funds could flow into Scotland – benefiting nature, people and jobs,” she said. “Green investment has the potential to provide landowners of all types with revenue streams and community owners and farmers may well benefit from these emerging opportunities. However, these are very early days for all landowners.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/05/tree-planting-drive-scottish-highlands-risks-widening-inequality>.

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## **Lost Forest: why is BrewDog's green scheme causing controversy?**



Looking beyond pines to Geal Charn Mòr. BrewDog has bought the Kinrara estate. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Firm has pledged to plant huge forest in Scotland, but some of its environmental claims have raised eyebrows

- [Corporate tree-planting drive in Scotland ‘risks widening rural inequality’](#)

*Severin Carrell* *Scotland editor*  
*@severincarrell*

Sat 5 Mar 2022 03.00 EST

It is a typically eye-catching boast by the great provocateur of British brewing. James Watt, co-founder of the [beer company BrewDog](#), pledged to plant “the biggest ever” forest in Scotland to help regenerate ancient woodlands that once carpeted the Highlands.

BrewDog’s Lost Forest would stretch over a “staggering” 50 sq km (19 sq miles), Watt said, and involve millions of trees. One promotional film said the forest would be “capable of sequestering up to 550,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> each year”. Good soundbites, but not entirely accurate.

Kinrara, a former Highland sporting estate, climbs from the River Spey just outside Aviemore high into the sub-Arctic reaches of the Monadhliath Mountains. It is perfectly suited for the millions of birch, oak, rowan, alder and Scots pine trees BrewDog plans to plant.

To a tourist’s eye, Kinrara is picture perfect. Lone specimens of Scots pine punctuate the skyline alongside a hill track winding into the mountains known as the Burma Road. These veterans are in fact evidence of the loss centuries ago of huge woodlands and forests that once covered the flanks of these hills, a loss BrewDog has pledged to reverse. It also has plans for a distillery, eco-tourism and adventure sports on the site.



Increased competition has steeply driven up rural land prices. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

BrewDog paid £8.8m for Kinrara, according to Land Registry records, although many media reports at the time said it cost more than £10m. Its total size is equivalent to 37 sq km – not the 50 sq km it originally claimed. About a third of that has been dedicated to new woodlands. There is also a peatland restoration project.

Watt is the latest of Scotland's green lairds, a pejorative label coined for the new generation of largely absentee Highland landowners who have bought rural estates with the climate and biodiversity in mind.

Some, such as the [Asos billionaire Anders Povlsen](#), invest their wealth in rewilding and conservation tourism, heavily culling deer, abandoning grouse-shooting and removing sheep to promote natural regeneration and recolonisation by previously persecuted birds of prey.

Some major corporations, including the investment companies Aviva and Standard Life, have bought land purely to plant forests and restore peatland. That is being driven by pressure from activists and shareholders to cut or offset their emissions.



Deer fences at Kinrara. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Rural estate agents such as Strutt & Parker and Galbraith report a surge in buyers seeking land for woodlands projects, sometimes exclusively or as additional factors in their quest for a private Highland sporting retreat, increasing competition for the few estates that come onto the market.

That [has steeply driven up land prices](#), to the alarm of land reform campaigners who want the Scottish government to break up large Highland estates. Hill ground with natural capital potential can sell for £1,200 to £1,600 an acre, double its value several years ago.

That demand is expected to intensify. Major corporations have set aside billions of pounds globally to invest in green capital projects. Some have approached government agencies with offers to buy Highland estates or invest in nature reserves, promising budgets of hundreds of millions of pounds. [An analysis for Community Land Scotland](#), which represents Scotland's growing number of community-ownership projects, has found most woodland finance schemes have come from existing landowners.



A Brewdog bar. Photograph: Geoffrey Swaine/Rex/Shutterstock

By December 2021, 638 new Scottish forests and woods had been registered with the Woodland Carbon Code, an official scheme that allows their owners to sell carbon credits, where the CO<sub>2</sub> captured by new trees is sold to companies to offset their carbon emissions. Most are still at the planning stage.

Many will be subsidised by Scottish Forestry, the agency that runs the Woodland Carbon Code, which is spending an average of £70m a year over three years to hit a government target to plant 46,500 hectares (115,000 acres) of new woodland and forest by April 2025. Many schemes are small but can also push up the value of rural land, further concentrating wealth in the hands of those able to afford them, say critics.

BrewDog has applied for forest grant scheme subsidies for the first phase of Lost Forest and could gain up to £1.25m, spread over several years. That will not cover all BrewDog's costs, which could be significant and include consultancy fees and the culling of about 145 deer to prevent its saplings being grazed to death.

Early promotions for the Lost Forest suggested each can or pack of Lost Lager sold would fund a tree at Kinrara. A recent advert on BrewDog's

online store on Amazon stated “for every pack we plant a tree in the BrewDog Lost Forest”. A BrewDog tweet offering free packs of Lost Lager in January 2021, which has been taken down, included a film about the Lost Forest under the wording “we’ll plant a tree in our forest” for every pack given away.

The company denies it intended to claim a tree would be planted at Kinrara for every sale of Lost Lager; it told the Guardian that promotion was linked to an Eden Project forest it supports in Madagascar. It changed its Amazon advert last week after it was flagged by the Guardian and promised to amend the film claiming Kinrara was 50 sq km in size.

### [map](#)

It said similar claims linking lager sales to tree-planting in the Lost Forest carried in licensed trade newspapers last year were “an error in communication”. BrewDog also accepted the claim Kinrara could capture up to 550,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> a year was wrong. The correct figure was up to 1m tonnes over 100 years, it said.

BrewDog said the vast bulk of the Lost Forest’s overall costs would be met by the company. It had devoted tens of millions of pounds to making its business “carbon negative”, a spokesperson said. “The Lost Forest will, in time, contribute to our pledge to remove twice as much carbon from the air as we emit.”

Questions about the Lost Lager promotion were a distraction, he said, since every bottle of beer it sold contributed to its climate strategy. “None of this should distract from the fact that our No 1 priority is to reduce emissions,” he said. “The more beer we sell the more we invest in these schemes.”

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## 2022.03.05 - Spotlight

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Angela Davis, photographed in Berkeley, California, last month.  
Photograph: Jessica Chou/The Guardian. Styling: Indya Brown

## **Angela Davis on the power of protest: ‘We can’t do anything without optimism’**

Angela Davis, photographed in Berkeley, California, last month.  
Photograph: Jessica Chou/The Guardian. Styling: Indya Brown

In 1972, the former Black Panther was facing the death penalty. Five decades after the campaign for her release went global, she still believes people are the ‘motors of history’

by [Simon Hattenstone](#)

Sat 5 Mar 2022 03.00 EST

The last time Angela Davis was in Birmingham, Alabama, she caught up with childhood friends and her Sunday school teacher. While many of us would reminisce about favourite classes and first kisses, they discussed bombs.

“We talked about what it was like to grow up in a city where there were bombings all the time,” she says. Most notoriously, in September 1963, the Ku Klux Klan bombed the 16th Street Baptist church, killing four girls. It wasn’t a one-off, says the legendary radical feminist, communist and former Black Panther. “People’s homes were bombed, synagogues were bombed, other churches were bombed. People think of that as a single event, but it was more indicative of the pervasive terror at that time in Birmingham.”

When the girls were killed, Davis was 19, a brilliant young scholar travelling through Europe. She read about the attack in newspapers. “It was one of the most devastating experiences of my life. My sister was very close with one of the girls, Carole Robertson. I just recently spent time with Carole’s sister, Diane, who was one of my close friends growing up.” When Davis managed to phone her family from France, her mother told her she had driven Carole’s mother to the church after the bombing. “And, of course, she received the terrible, terrible news ...” She trails off.

“The back yard of one of the other girls almost abutted ours. We were neighbours and friends. And my mother taught yet another of the girls. So we had connections with three of the four girls who were killed on that day.” By 1965, the FBI had the names of the bombers, but there were no prosecutions until 1977.

Is this what turned her into a revolutionary? “I experienced it as a deeply personal assault, and it was a little while before I could stand back and think about the larger impact of it; the way it represented an effort to wipe out the resistance of youth. I think it was probably one of the moments that helped me find that path.”

Does she think Birmingham shaped her politics? “Absolutely. I do. I *do*,” she says in her low-pitched, mellifluous voice. So if she had grown up in New York she would have become a different Angela Davis? She grins.

“Well, I went to high school in New York and it was at high school that I first read The Communist Manifesto!” So we would have had the same Angela Davis either way? “Exactly. Exactly.”



Davis is interviewed in Marin county jail, 1972, for the documentary The Black Power Mixtape. Composite: Guardian/Kobal/Shutterstock

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Back in the 1970s, Angela Yvonne Davis had one thing on her mind: revolution. She was public enemy number one to some, a beacon of hope to others. When she went on the run from the law [charged](#) with the murder of a judge and five counts of kidnapping, newspapers splashed her face across their front pages, naming her one of the FBI's 10 most-wanted criminals. A few months later, her face was on the T-shirts of young radicals across the world, fighting for her release.

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Davis's became the public face of resistance, pinned to myriad badges, placards and posters. Her great natural afro became *the* hairstyle of revolution. In the past she has said it is “humbling and humiliating ... to be remembered as a hairdo”. Anybody who was anybody in the world of

culture supported her. When Nina Simone visited Davis in prison, she was overwhelmed by all the books in her cell and decided she needed to learn more about social justice. [Aretha Franklin offered to pay her bail](#). James Baldwin [wrote her a letter](#) saying, “We must fight for your life as though it were our own – which it is – and render impassable with our bodies the corridor to the gas chamber. For, if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night.” This provided the title for [If They Come in the Morning ...](#), an anthology of prison writings edited by Davis and published in 1971 when she was in jail.



Davis speaking at a college in California, October 1969. Composite: Oakland Tribune/Getty Images

At 78 and today talking to me on a video call from sunny Oakland, California, Davis has become an elder stateswoman of the civil rights fight, but her radical spirit shines as bright as ever. Her hair is now a grey corkscrew bob – in its own ways every bit as distinguished as the iconic afro of yesteryear. She has just reissued her classic memoir, with a new foreword. *Angela Y. Davis: An Autobiography* was first published in 1974, edited by the great Toni Morrison, two years after Davis was acquitted of murder, kidnap and criminal conspiracy. When Morrison first talked to her about writing a book, she wasn’t interested – she thought that at 26 she was too young to say anything significant, and didn’t want to write something that

“focused on personal trajectory”. In the new foreword, she says Morrison convinced her to do it by insisting “on the importance of a political biography” in which she not only told the story of her life but also the history of the movement she had become involved with.

She says revisiting her younger self for the new edition has both shocked and comforted her. “When I reread the autobiography, I was disturbed by my language and by what I did not know then, but I was also impressed by the continuity – the fact that we are still addressing issues that we were trying to address at that time. The dissonance I experienced, particularly in terms of the language, helped me to measure our progress, and how far we’d come.”

Davis speaks in beautifully measured sentences, but sometimes you have to dig for the details. I ask if she is talking about her attitude to gay culture in prison, which seems surprisingly judgmental – not least because she has been in a relationship with a woman for the past 20 years. “Exactly!” she says, laughing. “I *cringed*.”

In the memoir, she describes how women would replicate traditional family structures, “marrying” other women and referring to them as husbands. Davis didn’t get it. Why ape the patriarchy? In jail she couldn’t bring herself to refer to a woman as a husband or father. Now she says she was narrow-minded. “At the time, we weren’t even using the word gay. We used homosexual. And reading that made me cringe, too, because now we have developed a really capacious vocabulary to talk about both intimate and political experiences.” She’s being tough on herself. The remarkable thing about her autobiography is how relevant it still feels.



Davis with Jane Fonda at a Vietnam war demonstration, 1970. Composite: Getty Images

In the 1960s and 70s, Davis says, everything was rigidly defined – not simply in terms of sexuality, but also revolutionary activity. “I didn’t regard those [prison marriage] practices as resistance practices. I had an intransigent notion as to what counts as resistance.” Everything was about belonging to a party and toeing that party line. “Now I see we are where we are today precisely because of large acts of resistance *and* small acts of resistance ... I believe we need organised resistance *and* the forms of resistance that become practices in our daily lives.”

While many people become more insular as they get older, she has become ever more outward-looking. Perhaps it’s this that distinguishes the older Davis from the twentysomething Black Panther who found herself in prison facing a possible death sentence 50 years ago. Today, she has an extraordinary capacity to absorb and juggle ideas, many seemingly at odds with each other.

Davis is talking to me from a room lined with books in the home she shares with her civil partner, Gina Dent, a fellow professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz. The two women have a lot in common. They have just written [Abolition. Feminism. Now.](#) together with two other authors

(Erica R Meiners and Beth E Richie). At the heart of the book is the demand to defund the police, demilitarise the army and halt prison construction. The authors argue that all three perpetuate violence, inequality and structural racism. Davis's politics are expressed not merely in what she writes, but how she writes. Although there are four authors, the book is written in one voice. Its form reflects her belief in collective action.

When she wrote her memoir, the concept of intersectionality was not widely known, though many women of colour had been struggling with the ways they were discriminated against because of both their sex and their race, and how they impacted on each other. Although Davis was already a famous radical feminist, she says she often felt isolated, and questioned her place within the movement.

There was a backwardness in the early days of feminism. I was asked, ‘Are you Black or are you a woman?’

“There was a backwardness in the early days of certain elements of feminism that refused to recognise the degree to which gender is historically and socially constructed. This is why I refused to consider myself a feminist for a while – the insistence that all of your loyalty has to be to women, and that tended to mean white women. I can remember being asked, ‘Are you Black or are you a woman?’”

*What?*

She laughs. “Yes. I was asked that. Even when we had no precedents for intersectional notions I made it very clear, and I’m not the only one, that for many Black women the issues were intertwined. We could not separate one from the other.”

Who asked this? “Oh, some of those white feminists I did not like.” She smiles. No names. What did you say? “I said it’s a ridiculous question. This is the power of racism, that they could not recognise, for example, that in struggling against gender violence directed against women, one also had to take up the racist use of the rape charge, and they were part and parcel of the

same battle. Of course, the intransigent white bourgeois feminists could not accept that.”

Davis is no stranger to splits on the radical left or factional feminism. She has seen it all her life, and regretted it all her life. She doesn’t understand why some feminists today see trans women as a threat. “There are some feminist formations that are very opposed to the trans presence, and that is so backwards. Those of us who are more flexible argue that if you want to get rid of violence directed against individuals in the world, whether it’s racist violence or gender violence, you have to support Black trans women who are the target of more violence than any other group of people. And if we make advances in our struggle to defend Black trans women, those victories can be felt by all communities that suffer violence.”



‘My mother always said: never forget that the world is not organised in the way it should be and that things will change, and that we will be a part of that change.’ Photograph: Jessica Chou/The Guardian. Styling: Indya Brown

She says this fight reminds her of the days when she was asked to choose between being a woman and being Black. In her autobiography, she describes how many of the Black male revolutionaries regarded their activism as an assertion of their masculinity and believed women had no leadership role to play. Even so, she says, back then she didn’t fully

appreciate how she had been shaped as much by gender as by race. In the intervening half-century, she has realised how the two are umbilically linked in the fight for a better world.

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Davis inherited her revolutionary spirit from her mother, Sallye, a schoolteacher and activist who was involved in the Southern Negro Youth Congress, organised by Black communists. Sallye was part of the successful campaign to release the Scottsboro Boys (nine Black teenagers falsely accused of raping two white women) – a case seen as a milestone in the emergence of a national civil rights movement. Davis's father, Frank, was also a teacher and an Episcopalian lay minister. “He was not as outspoken as my mother, but he made his contributions in a quieter way.” Both her parents grew up “dirt poor” and only managed to become teachers because they were financially supported – her mother by the principal of her high school, her father by the Episcopalian church. Her father gave up teaching and bought a service station and parking lot to enable him to better support Angela and her three siblings.

Davis grew up with a burning sense of justice – and injustice. She received a good education at her segregated school, where she was taught about Black history, and endowed with pride. “The teachers felt the need to cultivate a generation who would be capable of resisting the ideological racism surrounding us.” Her mother told young Angela that the world they were living in was not the world of the future. “She always said: never forget that that world is not organised in the way it should be and that things will change, and that we will be a part of that change.”

In her late teens, Davis worked part-time to earn enough money to travel to France and Switzerland, and to attend the eighth World Festival of Youth and Students in Helsinki. When she returned home in 1963, the FBI interviewed her about her attendance at the Soviet-sponsored festival. After a year studying literature in France, she enrolled on Herbert Marcuse's philosophy course at the University of Frankfurt. Davis later said: “Marcuse taught me that it was possible to be an academic, an activist, a scholar and a revolutionary.”

In 1969, aged 25, she was hired as an assistant professor of philosophy at UCLA. A campaign [spearheaded by California governor Ronald Reagan](#) resulted in her sacking for being a member of the Communist party USA. By then she was also known as a radical feminist and affiliate of the LA chapter of the Black Panther party. When a court ruled she could not be fired solely because of her affiliation with the Communist party, she resumed her post, only to be fired again in June 1970 for “inflammatory language” used in four speeches, including repeatedly referring to the police as “pigs”.

By this time her mentor was the Black Panther George Jackson, who had been convicted of armed robbery in 1961. In January 1970, Jackson and two others were charged with murdering a prison officer in Soledad prison, California. The three men became known as the Soledad Brothers and Davis campaigned for their release. Davis came to love Jackson and befriended his younger brother, 17-year-old Jonathan, who accompanied her on public appearances as an informal bodyguard.

On 7 August 1970, Jonathan Jackson used guns registered in Davis’s name (she was regularly receiving death threats from white supremacists at this point) to hold up a courtroom at Marin county courthouse. He took superior court judge [Harold Haley](#) and four others hostage to secure the freedom of the Soledad Brothers. As he attempted to drive away, police opened fire, and Jonathan Jackson, Judge Haley and two prisoners were killed. The siege was headline news. As was the fact that the guns Jackson used were owned by Davis.

I felt terrified that I might end up in the gas chamber in San Quentin. Ronald Reagan wanted to see that, Richard Nixon wanted to see that

On 14 August, Davis was charged with “aggravated kidnapping and first-degree murder in the death of Judge Harold Haley”, and a warrant was issued for her arrest. By then, Davis had gone on the run. Four days later, FBI director [J Edgar Hoover](#) put Davis on the [FBI’s 10 most-wanted fugitives list](#); she was only the third woman to be listed. On 13 October 1970, FBI agents found her in New York.

Davis has always said she had no prior knowledge of Jackson's plans, and was shocked by the incident and the death of her young friend. How does she look back at her time in prison? It's complex, she says. In one way, it was terrifying; in another, she got a better education than any university could provide. She saw for herself how much easier it was to end up in prison if you were working class and a person of colour, and how much harder it was to get out. Many women she met were locked up for petty crimes but couldn't afford the \$500 bail, so were stuck in the system. She discovered that, although slavery had been abolished in 1865, it was thriving in US jails thanks to the 13th amendment making a special allowance for penal labour. Davis realised she had to synthesise race, class and gender in her analysis. "It was a time of learning. Deep learning. That period defined the trajectory of the rest of my life."

Was there a time when she thought she would be executed? "Yes, there was. There was. There was." She repeats it gently, like a mantra. "I felt terrified that I might end up in the gas chamber in San Quentin prison. Ronald Reagan wanted to see that, Richard Nixon wanted to see that, J Edgar Hoover. So many people were convinced that despite my innocence of the actual charges I would be like [Sacco and Vanzetti](#), [the Rosenbergs](#), or any of the other political figures who have been put to death. And, yeah, it was terrifying. I had nightmares."

But on the outside, the fight for her release grew bigger and bigger. It is this, she says, that gave her hope. "You know, I received over a million letters from schoolchildren in East Germany alone." *One million*, I repeat, trying to picture that many letters. "Yes! A million postcards. Schoolchildren were supposed to send me a rose for my birthday, so they drew roses on postcards. It was called [1 Million Roses for Angela Davis](#). At first they started to come in big mailbags. They are at Stanford University now, in the archives."



At a press conference after being released on bail, San Jose, February 1972.  
Composite: Bettmann Archive

There were campaigns worldwide. “Eventually the terror was displaced. I realised that even if I ended up being put to death I would not be alone; that they would all be walking with me. And that is what gave me courage. I learned about the value of mass movements and collective struggle; that lesson has remained with me.”

It seems to me she has always been an optimist. “Well, you know, we need hope. We can’t do anything without optimism. My friend [Mariame Kaba](#), who is part of the prison abolitionist movement, says hope is a discipline. Our job is to cultivate hope, and that is what I always try to do.”

The campaign made her feel less isolated but she found the attention embarrassing; shaming, even. There were so many women in jail with nobody for support, and here she was with her million postcards. She was thankful, but she had never wanted to be a pin-up. “I feel best when I’m working in the background – teaching and organising is the work I love doing. I was very disturbed in jail because I saw so many women who got such a bad deal. It was not right for me to be the focus of so much attention when I already had a network of people.”



Davis raises her fist after being cleared of charges of murder, kidnap and conspiracy, San Jose, California, June 1972. Composite: Polaris/San Francisco Chronicle/Polari/eyevine

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Davis was released from prison after 16 months and acquitted four months later, in June 1972. Again, she was lucky. While she was jailed, the death sentence was abolished in California, allowing her to be bailed. At her trial, the prosecution argued that she was not a political prisoner; that she had provided the gun simply because of her love for George Jackson. It was an easy argument to refute. There was so much evidence of a life of political struggle and that she had campaigned vigorously for all three Soledad Brothers.

By the time she was released, George Jackson was dead, killed while trying to escape prison. Does she think they would have married if he had lived? “That may have been a possibility, but I can’t say for sure because I do know that feelings are intensified under the pressure of incarceration, and people change.” As far as men go, was he the love of her life? For once, her speech becomes broken. “Erm, well, that may ... you may express it that way. Erm, yeah.” She quickly gathers herself. “At the same time, I want to emphasise how deep that political relationship was. I spent the majority of my time with George communicating with him about radical issues, and also with other partners that I’ve had, male and female.”

With Dent, who is in her late 50s, she says it's been the same. "We got to know each other because I was making a contribution to a book she was editing, so we were working together intellectually long before we came together." She takes a sip from her mug. I ask what she is drinking. "Green tea and ginger." That's another big change. She lives a healthier life now. Is it true you used to smoke four packets of cigarettes a day? "Yeah, I was a terrible smoker. I smoked Gauloises. Now I try to exercise and eat vegan." As she talks, I'm looking at her perfectly painted black nails. "I painted them myself!" she says proudly. She looks youthful and stylish – dressed all in black, except for satin-blue streaks in her scarf.



Addressing a rally in North Carolina, July 1974. Composite: Bettmann

It was only when she came out of prison she discovered what her family had done for her and what it had taken out of them. "My mother would tell me about people who she thought were her friends who severed connection with her because they did not want to be associated with somebody who had a communist daughter."

I bet there were times she wished you weren't a communist and hadn't got yourself in so much trouble, I say. "Oh yeah! I'm sure. *I'm sure!*" She laughs. "I thought about that myself sometimes. But both my mother and father were really proud of the work that I did and the support that came

from my siblings. My sister Fania travelled all over the world when I was in jail. My brother Ben, who was a football player in the NFL, suffered as a result – they put him on the bench. Nevertheless, his wife organised the largest political rally in Cleveland around the demand for my freedom.” Why did they bench him? “Because he called out the journalists and asked them: why are you not asking me about my sister, who is in jail? We see the NFL at the centre of many waves of resistance now, but there was a nascent politicisation at that time and my brother was a part of it.”

I don’t think Black Lives Matter would have emerged except within the context that was created by the election of Obama

She talks about an image she loves that symbolises the way her family fought for her. “There is footage of my mother speaking at a rally where she’s holding my sister’s baby girl in one arm, with the other arm outstretched in a fist and calling for my freedom. I said: ‘Wow! I *am* my mother’s daughter.’”

After her release, Davis continued where she had left off – with her career and her activism. She became a professor of ethnic studies, and is now professor emerita of history of consciousness and feminist studies at UC Santa Cruz. She ran twice as vice-president for the Communist party USA, and dedicated much of her life to fighting for fellow activists who remained in jail and for the abolition of the prison system. Her ideas on abolitionism have evolved over decades, and are now championed by sections of the Black Lives Matter movement and feature prominently in [Ava DuVernay’s](#) documentary on the subject, [13th](#).

It’s funny, she says – so many people tell her it must be depressing fighting for the same things she was fighting for 60 years ago. But she’s not having any of it. So much has changed; she cites the fact that America elected Barack Obama twice. How does she think he did? “He could have done a lot more, and I’m angry that Guantánamo is still there, because he was going to shut Guantánamo, right? But at the same time, it was a world historical moment, and I treasure that moment and that it was enabled by young people who refused to believe it was impossible to elect a Black person.”



Speaking at the Women's March on Washington, January 2017. Composite: Noam Galai/WireImage

She says you can't simply blame Obama for any disappointments. "Again, we can't project all of our power as a collective of human beings on to a single individual. So my critique is also a self-critique; there should have been mass demonstrations forcing him to move in a more radical direction. At the same time, I don't think Black Lives Matter would have emerged except within the context that was created by the election of Obama." The fact that there is now a mass mainstream anti-racist movement, involving white people as well as people of colour, is true progress, she says.

As for President Biden, Davis believes his conservatism is a historical inevitability post-Trump. "When there are moments of upheaval, the recovery period always tends to emphasise the conservative." But she says she has never focused on the dominant parties. "I think it's important to think more capaciously about the meaning of politics. The millions of people who poured on to the streets in the aftermath of [George Floyd](#)'s lynching constituted a force that was so much more powerful than any political party. And if there is a new moment of trying to recognise structural racism that occurred as a result of those demonstrations, then I would say those people are the motors of history. It's not about who the president was or is." She

had witnessed deaths in police custody throughout her life. The difference now was that mass protest (and digital technology) ensured officers could no longer go unpunished. Last June, Floyd's killer [Derek Chauvin was sentenced](#) to 22 years and six months for second-degree murder.

Good comes out of bad, Davis says. The pandemic highlighted structural racism in both the US and the UK. In May 2020, research from the non-partisan APM Research Lab revealed Black Americans were [three times more likely](#) than white Americans to die of Covid. In the same month, the Office for National Statistics revealed that Black people were [four times](#) more likely to die of Covid than white people in England and Wales. Not only is the research being done to prove the existence of structural racism, Davis says, but people now are shouting about it. "There are young activists and scholars who are so much better at explaining what we tried so hard to figure out. Now they just take it for granted, and I love that."



With Nelson Mandela, in South Africa, 1991. Composite: Getty Images

You seem so content, I say. "Well, at this particular moment I really am happy to be alive and healthy and to be able to link what is happening at this moment to past histories." Again, she says how lucky she is. "I treasure this time, because it means I get to see that the work that was done 50 and 60 years ago really mattered, even though there were moments when all of us

felt it was in vain.” So many of the people in her life didn’t live to see the progress that has been made – her parents; George and Jonathan Jackson; the four girls murdered at the Birmingham church. “I feel that I’m a witness for those who did not make it this far.”

An Autobiography by Angela Y Davis is published by Penguin (£20). To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](https://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply. Abolition. Feminism. Now. is published by Penguin (£14.99); order your copy [here](#). Angela Davis wears (main image) coat by Theory, top by Eileen Fisher and trousers by Zero + Maria Cornejo. Above: shirt by Christopher John Rogers.

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## Blind date: ‘She ordered four shots of tequila before she’d sat down to dinner’



Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

Sam, 29, lawyer, meets Jenn, 30, HR manager

Sat 5 Mar 2022 01.00 EST



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## Sam on Jenn

### **What were you hoping for?**

Good food, decent chat, to avoid being embarrassed in a national newspaper.

### **First impressions?**

Very strong. Jenn had ordered four shots of tequila before she even sat down.

### **What did you talk about?**

Cyrano de Bergerac. Mountaineering. Miami. Karaoke. Berlin nightlife. Ghosting. Finsbury Park. Pub quizzes. Urban vineyards. Classical music.

### **Any awkward moments?**

When Jenn expressed disappointment that I'm not quite 6ft tall.

### **Good table manners?**

Impeccable. She averted her gaze when I removed the fish bones from my teeth.

**Best thing about Jenn?**

Her stamina – Jenn goes hard or goes home. She only yawned once during our eight-hour date.

**Would you introduce her to your friends?**

100%. She is great fun and could charm the skin off a snake.

**Describe Jenn in three words?**

Hilarious, loquacious, effervescent.

**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](http://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](mailto:blind.date@theguardian.com)

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

**What do you think she made of you?**

That I wooed her with my encyclopaedic knowledge of London bus routes and my ability to finish all the free drinks.

**Did you go on somewhere?**

The rooftop bar at Duck & Waffle.

**And ... did you kiss?**

What happens at Duck & Waffle stays at Duck & Waffle.

**If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?**

Three espresso martinis would have been more than enough.

**Marks out of 10?**

6.

### **Would you meet again?**

Yes, definitely, as friends. Sadly, I don't think there was a romantic spark, but I loved every minute of our marathon date.



Sam and Jenn on their date



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### **Jenn on Sam**

**What were you hoping for?**

A hilarious anecdote for my friends, a great dinner and a fun night.

**First impressions?**

Sam was friendly and enthusiastic, with a lovely smile – and he shared my approach to the meal: to overorder.

**What did you talk about?**

The simple pleasures of a microwave meal. Where the north begins.

**Any awkward moments?**

He told me he was going to Miami, and I said I'd never been to the west coast of America ... I immediately realised my mistake by the look on his face.

**Good table manners?**

Excellent, although his attempt to impressively debone his sea bream was a bit anticlimactic.

**Best thing about Sam?**

He's fun! I felt at ease and time flew by.

**Would you introduce him to your friends?**

Yes, he's super-interesting.

**Describe Sam in three words?**

Massive fish person.

**What do you think he made of you?**

A hardy northern lass who was mad for not wearing a jacket.

**Did you go on somewhere?**

We only had one option: a taxi to Duck & Waffle, where we stayed until 3am.

**And ... did you kiss?**

A lady doesn't kiss and tell ... (we did).

**If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?**  
I would've had more of his truffle chips at 2am.

**Marks out of 10?**

A strong 8.

**Would you meet again?**

We exchanged numbers, so who knows.

*Sam and Jenn ate at [Hawksmoor Borough](#), London SE1. Fancy a blind date? Email [blind.date@theguardian.com](mailto:blind.date@theguardian.com)*

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## **‘I felt different as a child. I was nearly mute’: Elena Ferrante in conversation with Elizabeth Strout**



A still from the 2018 film adaptation of *My Brilliant Friend* by Elena Ferrante. Photograph: ©Wildside/Umedia 2018

The author of the Neapolitan quartet and the Pulitzer prize-winning novelist discuss identity, ambition, truth – and the ‘convulsive’ urge to write

*Elena Ferrante and Elizabeth Strout*

Sat 5 Mar 2022 04.00 EST

## Dear Elena Ferrante,

Thank you for all of your work. I am a huge fan, and I have read all your books, and by reading them I was able to take new risks with my own work. So thank you for that as well. In this new book you go deep, deep into the things that matter for readers and writers alike. I am very glad to be in a conversation with you about it.

To write about artistic mystery is as mysterious as the art itself but in your new book, In the Margins, you give an amazing depiction of what has driven you and how you have evolved as a writer. What a fascinating read it was, all the way to the exalted end with Dante and Beatrice. How different is it to write a book like this one, as opposed to writing one of your pieces of fiction? Are you more conscious of trying to “stay in the margins”? And yet it seems to me this book also excites itself to a high pitch.



Elizabeth Strout: ‘My very puritanical New England background insisted that one never call attention to themselves.’ Photograph: Ali Smith/The Observer

In your first essay/lecture you twice describe yourself as timid, but your work is extremely brave. I assume this is because the “I” that you describe as timid or lacking courage disappears and becomes many other “I’s as you write. You quote from a conversation between [Virginia Woolf](#) and [Lytton Strachey](#). He asks:

“And your novel?”

“Oh, I put in my hand and rummage in the bran pie.”

“That’s what’s so wonderful. And it’s all different.”

“Yes, I’m 20 people.”

You also speak of this directly when you say that the “excited I” had not written a story “but another I, tightly disciplined”. Can you explain these different “I’s a bit more?

I think – I don’t know – that we all experience this. In acting class when I was 16, the teacher spoke of the different “I’s we all have, and this was the

first time it had been named for me. It was (quietly, privately) very liberating.

I'm glad you referenced how [Virginia Woolf](#) puts in her hand and "rummages in the bran pie", as she writes a novel. For many years I had a sense of myself when writing, as placing my hand in a big box and trying to feel the shapes but I could not see them, I could only feel them as I tried to arrange them. Have you had any image of something like this for yourself, or does Virginia Woolf's bran pie do it for you?

You write: "For me true writing is that: not an elegant, studied gesture but a convulsive act." I'm really interested in the two kinds of writing you describe in that first lecture. The writing that stays inside the margins, and the writing that becomes, as you say, "almost a convulsive act". Can you tell us just a little more about *when* this transformation comes in the writing itself?

## Dear Elizabeth,

Thank you for your kind words about In the Margins. I really loved your novels [Amy and Isabelle](#), [The Burgess Boys](#), and naturally the amazing [Olive Kitteridge](#).

But, I must tell you, I value your opinion of In the Margins especially because of your novel [My Name Is Lucy Barton](#), or, to be precise, because of the fleeting but memorable relationship between Lucy and the writer Sarah Payne. I like narratives that include the story of the effort of writing, along with the problems that writing involves. Whenever in the vast literary production of today, especially by women, I find a novel with that particular feature I underline the passages that interest me and then put the book on a separate shelf of my bookcase with the intention of returning to it. My Name Is Lucy Barton is there, and I'm happy to make use of it now, during this conversation.



Laura Linney in *My Name Is Lucy Barton* at the Bridge theatre, London, in 2018. Photograph: Manuel Harlan

What interested me in the story of Lucy? A double impulse: on the one hand, she doesn't like those who, as creators of poems or prose or art in general, consider themselves superior to all other human beings; on the other, she assigns an enormous task to the creators of poetry or prose or other artistic forms. It's a double impulse that I also recognised in myself. I don't like artists who imagine themselves shamans, and I would prefer that we definitively stop making the alphabet sacred, that we complete the secularisation of literature, that we stop feeling we're just below the gods and directly inspired by them. This is why – I say this in answer to your questions – I separated the very precarious, uncertain "me" who writes from the other, more solid "mes", occupied by roles both private and public. I did it in order to feel writing as a function not different from many others – sometimes pleasant, sometimes difficult, sometimes frustrating. And that's why I so much appreciated your Sarah Payne, the writer, when she says to Lucy: "I'm just a writer." If I had to develop Sarah's remark in my own way I would say I'm only one of my "I"s, the "I" that writes: an unstable "I", which at times exists, often sinks, frequently splits into 20 other people, the 20 Woolf speaks of ironically. One holds my hand in check, one wants me diligent and careful, one digs down bringing unnamable things to light, one

erupts unexpectedly – at no precise moment, it could be never – and drags me to name those things, with no regard for anyone or anything.

Even so, of course, that “I” may seem a manifestation of exceptionality, if a painful one. In fact, like you, I felt different as a child. I was nearly mute, or expressed myself in timid monosyllables. But then my moment arrived and it seemed to me that I lowered a bucket into my head and pulled out words. The words carried a story with them. The more the story advanced, and the wilder the pace of the bucket as it went up and down, bringing me pleasure and unease, the more enthralled the other children were. But was I really different? No. Just think of when, in ordinary conversation, we proceed in disjointed phrases, either weighing our words or using an ironic tone that drives out a melodramatic one. Then, unexpectedly, suddenly, something breaks through the margins and speech becomes a flood, liberating, moving, passionate, fierce, until we’re embarrassed, we’re sorry, we say: I don’t know, something got into me. Well, that something – an “I” crouching in our brain – grabs us and tears us away from a prudent or calculating “I”, dragging us along, imposing its rhythm: it’s a common experience for us all. We know it, whether we’re writers or not.



The HBO adaptation of Elizabeth Strout's novel Olive Kitteridge, with Frances McDormand, Devin Druid and Richard Jenkins. Photograph: Hbo/Playtone Productions/As Is/Kobal/Rex/Shutterstock

Of course, it's different when it happens in writing, but all the more reason to need unexpected breaches of the margins. It's the undisciplined eruptions of truth that, when we have grand ambitions, motivate our writing. Lucy Barton justly sets a very high goal for herself, saying: "I will write and people will not feel so alone." Sarah Payne is her equal, saying: the job of "a writer of fiction [is] to report on the human condition". Both Lucy and Sarah emphasise: you have to write the truth, without protecting anyone or anything; you have to strip yourself of any judgment, understand the other by getting to the depths. But here the second impulse I mentioned earlier appears: with the claim of superiority set aside, with self-deification set aside, Lucy and Sarah and all of us who have a passion to write nevertheless take on ourselves the old task with sensitivity and intelligence, with specialised knowledge, and with an extremely high rate of failure.

Is it too much for us ordinary people, who no longer feel the solidity of the great authors of the past but are, instead, fragmented into many "I's"? Does the arrogance of the writer's role, pushed out through the door, necessarily come back in through the window? Along with the "I" that makes poetry or prose or art in general, should our ambitions be reduced, and will writing become – has it already become – a transcription of trite facts?

A person I love said to me long ago: "Although you writers today behave with humility, deep down you can't accept the idea that you aren't omniscient, that you aren't the prophets of some god – you still think your stories can encompass a world that not even a team of specialists can explain. Resign yourself: if you like, and if people read you, you'll become part of a sector – a fairly irrelevant one, among other things – of the enormous entertainment industry." At the time I didn't know how to respond, today I know but in a confused way. I'd like to hear what you have to say. You've written powerful books and maybe your ideas are clearer.

## Hello again Elena,

What came to mind immediately as I read your question to me was the poem by [Emily Dickinson](#) "I'm Nobody! Who Are You?":

I'm Nobody! Who are you?

Are you – Nobody – too?

Then there's a pair of us!

Don't tell! they'd advertise – you know!

How dreary – to be – Somebody!

How public – like a Frog –

To tell one's name – the livelong June –

To an admiring Bog!

“To tell one's name ... ” (How I admire you for keeping your name to yourself.) But this poem is so fresh, so innocent in a way. And those first few lines I think have always stayed with me since I first heard them as a very young girl, because that is how I feel – happily, that is how I feel. I'm Nobody!

I think that very few people understand this about me; I have been (I believe) accused of false modesty, and yet it is not false, and it is not modesty. It is simply that when I write – the me that people see, the person people think I am – just disappears and I become the text itself. And when I emerge, my sense of that original me goes back to being Nobody. This is hard for people to grasp.



‘Suddenly, speech becomes a flood, liberating, moving, passionate, fierce, until we’re embarrassed, we’re sorry, we say: something got into me’ – Elena Ferrante. Illustration: Andrea Ucini

My own understanding of this is that such a thing came from my very puritanical New England background, which insisted that one never call attention to themselves. (Even today when someone asks my mother if she is proud of me, she will say, “No, why should I be proud of her?” And I actually understand her answer.) And yet I think it is more than the cultural heritage I was raised with. I really feel almost that I have no self – even as I know that I do. (I remember when I was a teenager my mother asked me one day with great irritation, “Why can’t you just be yourself?” And what I did not say but thought was: But I am so many selves.) And yet here I say I am Nobody. Because I am. But I am aware that this is not entirely the truth. But it is not false either. And therein lies the rub.

The person you love who spoke to you about writers feeling omniscient – what interests me is the phrase, “you still think your stories can encompass a world that not even a team of specialists can explain”.

Frankly, I would like to think that was true. That writers do exactly that, “encompass a world that not even a team of specialists can explain”. Otherwise, why am I doing it? (I am speaking for myself here.) If it can be

explained some other way, then let it be. But I want to believe that what I write cannot be explained any other way than through the story that I am telling.

When you ask, should our ambitions be reduced? I say very strongly, No!

This implies that I am very ambitious, that I am working from that Lucy/Sarah starting point of thinking I can do it. And that is true. Although I never know if I can do it, and I frequently fail. But the I who am Nobody and the ambitious person (me) who tries to put something down on paper that cannot be explained by a team of experts – Well, both are true, being Nobody and ambitious at the same time; there we are.

But when you ask, should our ambitions be reduced, and will writing become – has it already become – a transcription of trite facts? I say very strongly, No! We should not reduce our ambitions, and writing – dear God, I hope my writing – never becomes a transcription of trite facts!

Here is what I believe: it is the pressure between the lines of the text, and the pressure rising up from under the text, and the pressure that is running above the text, that gives the writing its meaning, it is the unwritten sitting right next to the written, which makes something go beyond the explanation of the team of experts. And this is what happens when you go outside the margins (if I understand you correctly) and it is this which is mysterious, that we aim for.

You say your loved one said, “Resign yourself: if you like, and if people read you, you’ll become part of a sector – a fairly irrelevant one, among other things – of the enormous entertainment industry.” I am resigned to this. But it is not something I dwell upon. You say, before asking my opinion, that at the time when the loved one first said this to you, you did not know how to respond, but that today, you know, but in a confused way. What is it, in your confusion, you have come to believe about this?

I would like to ask you one more question: In your third essay/lecture in this book you say: “We fabricate fictions not so that the false will seem true but

to tell the most unspeakable truth with absolute faithfulness through fiction.” I agree with this entirely. But my question to you now is about voice. I was interested to hear that you had spent time writing in the third person. What is it that you have found to be so liberating about writing in the first person that has allowed you “to tell the most unspeakable truth with absolute faithfulness”? For me, Lucy was her voice. And in your work, the protagonists are their voice. Your ability to play [Lila off of Lenù in the Neapolitan novels](#) is a brilliant way to use first person. Can you talk a bit more about this choice of the first person voice, as opposed to writing in the third person?



Dakota Johnson and Olivia Colman in the Netflix adaptation of Elena Ferrante’s novel *The Lost Daughter* (2021). Photograph: Yannis Drakoulidis/AP

## Dear Elizabeth,

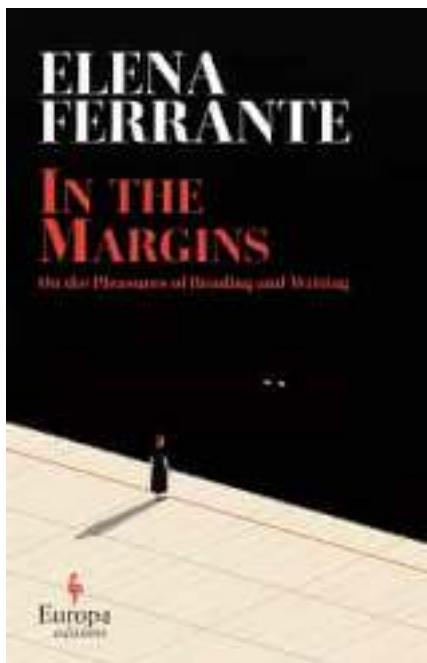
I’m glad your response was so passionate, and I read it with great pleasure and profit. To explain my point of view – not so different from yours, I think – I’ll start with the final question.

Why did I abandon the third-person narrative? I’ll give you a brief answer so as not to bore you. At a certain point, I began to feel that the third person –

especially if skilfully used – was a trick. In reality there is no story of the other that is not filtered through an “I”. And a third-person narrative whose narrator is not explicitly present began to seem to me, as I recount in *In the Margins*, very unconvincing. No matter how love for others and language as an act of love try continuously, insistently, desperately to get outside the margins of the suffocating first-person singular, we remain bodies organically enclosed in our isolation. Once I recognised this, I was convinced that the other can be truthfully described only through an “I” that is colliding and in the collision unravels. And so far, anyway, I haven’t left that battered first person. For me, telling stories is colliding with a passerby – I quote Baudelaire – but refusing to pass by.

I have nothing against entertainment, if it allows me to remain Nobody and continue to be only text

Here I will return to your response – which I will have my friend read – and in particular to the Dickinson poem. I love that poem, and I understand in what sense you use the lines. We who write – you say – are no different from ordinary people, with our limited experience as individuals, our historical and cultural roots. And when we start work we get lost in the alphabet, to the point where we coincide with our own text. But – as you stress – that text is and remains highly ambitious, even though we’re not possessed by a demon, even though we’re not oracles, even though we don’t feel we’re Somebody and often don’t even have a desire to become Somebody. Rather – and here it’s I who insist – it’s our own ambitious writing that requires us to set aside the biographically defined “I”. Nobody – Dickinson’s Nobody, who is absolutely different from Odysseus’ clever Nobody – is (I’ll now say what I think) the true name, perhaps, of any woman who writes, since she writes from within an essentially male tradition. We try to use the specificity of writing as best we can (you’ve defined it effectively). We dip into the resources stored in the age-old warehouse of literature. We lower the bucket into our very ordinary brain and pull up words and memory. But they hardly belong to us. Thus, if we’re honest, we’ll go painfully beyond the margins to collide with the other, and beyond the margins search, with outsize ambition, time and again, for our names. But we’re not interested in having a name, in making a name for ourselves; we’re interested in giving a name, in having our writing become truly ours.



The friend I mentioned says: go ahead, at most you'll contribute to the entertainment industry. I have nothing against entertainment, if it allows me to remain Nobody and continue to be only text. I like Dickinson's frogs: they are the other, others, and their doings fascinate me. My writing wants to collide with them, dig into them, disrupt them. What's wrong with rewriting their June choruses from beginning to end? We women are Nobody, but our writing is very ambitious, like – and even more than – Dante's: he was enormously ambitious and wanted to lose himself in everything and everyone, in order to reach the depths: not coincidentally did he invent verbs of dissolving margins like *inleiare*, *inluiare*, *intuare*, *immiare* (entering her, entering him, entering you, entering me). Like you, dear Elizabeth, I am for true modesty and true generous ambition. I wish that all women who want to write had a common practice of disruptive writing, which tries to impart a tremor to all forms, and describes that tremor, the chaos it causes, the compositions it decomposes, and the effort of totally redrawing the margins of History and of all stories.

Thank you, hugs, and I hope we'll have other occasions for conversation.

In the Margins: On the Pleasures of Reading and Writing by Elena Ferrante is published by Europa Editions (£12.99) on 17 March. To support the

Guardian and Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](https://www.guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply.

Oh William! by Elizabeth Strout is out in Penguin paperback (£14.99) on 5 May. To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](https://www.guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply.

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## Sri Lanka

# ‘When I surf I feel so strong’: Sri Lankan women’s quiet surfing revolution

Women and girls have challenged conservative attitudes in the hallowed surf spot of Arugam Bay



Shamali Sanjaya (centre) with members of the Arugam Bay Girls Surf Club.  
Photograph: Max Gifted



[Hannah Ellis-Petersen in Arugam Bay](#)

Sat 5 Mar 2022 00.00 EST

Growing up in a small fishing village along the east coast of [Sri Lanka](#), Shamali Sanjaya would often sit on the beach and look out at the boisterous waves. She would watch in envy as others, including her father and brother, grabbed surfboards, paddled out into the sea and then rode those waves smoothly back to shore. “I longed for it in my heart,” she said.

But as a local woman, surfing was strictly out of bounds for her. In Sri Lanka’s conservative society, the place for women was at the home and it was only the men, or female tourists, who were allowed to ride the hallowed waves in Arugam Bay, considered Sri Lanka’s best surf spot.

Yet now, as a 34-year-old mother of two and with another baby on the way, Sanjaya is at the forefront of a quiet female surfing revolution that has swept not just her village but the whole country. In 2018, she helped set up Sri Lanka’s first all-female surf club in Arugam Bay and in 2020 competed in Sri Lanka’s first women-only category in a national surfing competition. At four months pregnant, she’s still hitting the waves several times a week, and plans to compete again after her baby is born.



Shamali Sanjaya helped set up Sri Lanka's first all-female surf club in Arugam Bay in 2018. Photograph: Max Gifted

It began in 2011 with a knock from a neighbour. Tiffany Carothers, a surfing enthusiast and mother of two who had just moved in next door from her native California, asked Sanjaya if she wanted to come surfing. It didn't matter that she'd only tried it once before, Carothers assured her, they'd lend her a board and give her some lessons.

Once she had a taste for the waves, Sanjaya could not be stopped. She proved to be a natural, taking after her father, who had once taught surfing, and her brother, who is a national surf champion.

"When I surf, it is such a happy feeling for me," she said. "I am filled with this energy, I feel so strong. Life is full of all these headaches and problems, but as soon as I get into the water, I forget about it all."

Yet she faced fierce disapproval, particularly from her brother. Their parents had died when she was seven and he was protective of his sisters, believing that their place was inside the home.

"My brother told me that it is not our culture for women to be surfing, that I should stay inside and do the cooking and cleaning," said Sanjaya. Known for being headstrong, she decided to ignore him and would instead co-

ordinate secret surf rendezvous, rushing to the beach at lunchtimes when her brother was eating or going out at the crack of dawn.



More local girls started to join the surfers after an event teaching them how to surf in 2015. Photograph: Max Gifted

In 2015, after interest from other women in the village, Carothers decided to set up an event to teach more local girls in Arugam Bay how to surf. She and Sanjaya went house to house, talking to women and their families to persuade them to come along.

Initially many parents were reluctant, fearful about safety and that surfing meant partying, drugs and alcohol, or that, in a society that still subscribes to outdated views of light skin equating to beauty, being out in the sun would darken their daughters' skin. "We told them we never do anything that disrespects our culture," said Sanjaya. "We don't wear bikinis, we don't drink, it is just about getting into the waves."

The first event proved so popular that they decided to make it a weekly gathering. But as gossip and local disapproval began to swirl, Carothers was pulled in by the Sri Lanka tourist board. "They accused me of trying to change the culture, that girls in Sri Lanka don't surf and if I wanted to help their families I should give them sewing machines," she said. "They

threatened to kick my family out of the country if they saw me teaching surf lessons to girls.”



The Arugam Bay Girls Surf Club has about a dozen core members, aged from 13 to 43. Photograph: Max Gifted

The police also began questioning the members, asking whether Carothers was giving them alcohol and drugs, and over half the girls stopped attending. But rather than stopping altogether, the remaining women took their club underground and would meet secretly on the beach and go on clandestine surf trips to other parts of the island.

Finally in 2017, after the [Surfing](#) Federation of Sri Lanka was set up, there was a pathway for their own official surf club and in August 2018 Arugam Bay Girls Surf Club was born.

They now have about a dozen core members, ranging from ages 13 to 43. Though they have broken through many of the local taboos, many of the women still face a backlash from their families and communities. Nandini Kaneshlingam, a 43-year-old mother of four whose husband killed himself in 2011, said she suffered so much stigma over being a mother and widow in her 40s on a surfboard that she almost quit the club several times.



Nandini Kaneshlingam says after her husband died ‘surfing made me feel happy again’. Photograph: Max Gifted

But having persisted at the insistence of the other women, Kaneshlingam said that surfing had given her a new lease of life. “It was my children who came and pushed me on to waves,” she said. “After my husband died I was very sad and things were very difficult, but with surfing, it made me feel happy again.”

Ammu Anadarasa, 14, one of the club’s youngest members, said she had been mercilessly teased at school. “My friends at school used to fight with me about it, they’d say ‘Why are you doing surfing?’ and call me a boy,” she said. But when she showed her friends photos in a local newspaper of her surfing, they were impressed. “Now they know I am a good surfer,” she said. “I just wish more girls would do surfing.”

Most of the women said they had learned to brush off the criticism, and had seen their husbands, family members and communities won over. Mona Nadya Pulanthiram, 35, a mother of two, had been terrified of the sea after her mother died in the 2004 tsunami that devastated Sri Lanka. But after giving birth to her second child, friends persuaded her to give surfing a try,

and she was amazed to feel her fear gradually disappear. Now she's regularly out chasing the big waves, sometimes with her daughter in tow.

"People are always questioning my husband, asking why I don't just stay at home and be a quiet, nice mum," she said. "To those people I say: I am already a mum, surfing does not change that. When I am in the ocean, I don't think about anything except catching the perfect wave."

For Sanjaya, her greatest triumph was winning her brother's approval. At Main Point, where waves are often two metres high, the pair can often be spotted out surfing together.

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## 2022.03.05 - Coronavirus

- [UK: Scotland's Covid cases rise, while England and Northern Ireland show falls](#)

## Scotland

# Scotland's Covid cases rise, while England and N Ireland show falls

Data comes as UK's scientific advisers to no longer meet on regular basis to discuss pandemic

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Celtic fans show their Covid passes before a match in Glasgow. About one in 19 people in Scotland had Covid in the week ending 26 February. Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

*[Nicola Davis](#) and [Hannah Devlin](#) Science Correspondents*

Fri 4 Mar 2022 11.06 EST

Covid infection levels are rising in [Scotland](#), figures suggest, as it was confirmed that the UK's scientific advisers no longer expect to meet

regularly to discuss Covid.

About one in 19 people in Scotland had Covid in the week ending 26 February, [according to figures from the Office for National Statistics](#) based on swabs from randomly selected households.

By contrast, infection levels have continued to fall in England and Northern Ireland, with the trend unclear in Wales. About one in 30 people in England are estimated to have had Covid in the week ending 26 February.

With infection levels still high across the UK, it was confirmed that the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) is not expecting to meet on Covid regularly though it will stand ready if required.

Friday's ONS data reveals that the [BA.2 Omicron variant](#) – a “close cousin” of the original BA.1 variant of Omicron but described as “stealth” as it is harder to track – is on the rise in all UK countries except Northern Ireland. The BA.1 variant of Omicron is in decline in all countries except Scotland.

Infection levels in [Scotland](#) peaked most recently in early January when about one in 18 people had Covid, with levels falling to one in 30 by the middle of the month. Since then they have been rising.

The increase appears to be in those around the ages of 30 and 60, with the trend uncertain for children and younger adults.

An increase has also been seen in data for confirmed Covid patients in hospital in Scotland: after reaching a peak of 1,571 on 19 January, the figure fell, hitting 868 on 13 February. Since then it has risen to 1,272 Covid patients in hospital in Scotland on 3 March.

The uptick has not been reflected in hospital admissions data. However, one expert suggested that may be linked to a data problem.

Prof Christina Pagel, director of UCL's Clinical Operational Research Unit and a member of the Independent Sage group, said it was unclear what was behind the trend in Scotland.

“I think the situation in Scotland is quite concerning – they are clearly an outlier in UK with rising cases – by ONS and their dashboard – and rising people in hospital,” she said, adding the decline in the number of people with Covid on their death certificate had also stalled.

Pagel suggested there are a number of possible explanations for the trend, including that there may be more people in Scotland who have not previously been infected than in England, meaning BA.2 can spread more easily. Less likely, she said, was that a new subvariant of Omicron was starting to spread.

Pagel said another possibility is that a combination of factors such as the waning of protection from boosters, an increase in mixing in the wake of relaxed mitigations, and a rise in BA.2 might be behind the trend.

Prof Paul Hunter, of the University of East Anglia, said there were also some early indications in case data for England that Covid could be on the rise, adding that was more likely due to the increase in the more transmissible BA.2 variant .

That does not mean Covid measures should return, he said. “Ultimately infections would then shoot up later in the year when vaccine effectiveness has fallen even more,” he said. “But it is another reminder, if one were needed, that we are not out of the woods yet and those people who are more vulnerable to severe disease do need to continue to do things like wear face coverings when in indoor crowded environments and of course go for a booster if and when called.”

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## 2022.03.05 - Opinion

- Just when No 10 wants to be taken seriously, it creates Sir Gavin Williamson
- Dear Nadhim Zahawi, did you even glance at existing political impartiality law?
- China has little to gain but much to lose as Russia's ally
- We at Stop the War condemn the invasion of Ukraine, and warmongers on all sides

Opinion**Gavin Williamson**

## **Just when No 10 wants to be taken seriously, it creates Sir Gavin Williamson**

[Marina Hyde](#)



It's hard to believe Boris Johnson will really crack down on Putin's cronies, when he's just knighted one of his own



Gavin Williamson leaving 10 Downing Street in February 2020.  
Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Fri 4 Mar 2022 09.23 EST

To pick this precise moment to give Gavin Williamson a [knighthood](#) reveals much about Boris Johnson. Why doesn't the prime minister just give Gavin a gas field, or a bank, and make him honorary president of British Fencing? No 10 probably felt yesterday was a good day to bury bad news. Instead, there was plenty of fury at the revelation that yet another useless person has been deemed sufficiently useful to Johnson to receive an honour. Sir Gavin joins [Lord Lebedev](#) and [far too many others](#). Say hello to the wallygarchy.

Given the ever more horrifying events in Ukraine, this local reward for failure can obviously be regarded as a trifle. On the one hand, it doesn't exactly matter if Gavin Williamson is made a knight of some corner of an [irradiated Europe](#). On the other, it's telling that exactly at the moment the occupants of Downing Street are trying to reach for moral stature, they remind you just how small they really are.

One major lesson of the horrors of the past eight days is that we are in a new era. That new era, for those of us with the immeasurable luxury of not being

bombed into it, should involve a taking of stock and a moral reset. Values, standards and principles in liberal democracies matter. Some of ours have been allowed to become rather tattered. For instance, we can and must agree that public service is not merely the gateway to cronyism. We can and must agree that political parties being funded by people whose sources of wealth are shadowy is a dangerous and compromising situation that needs urgent remedy. We can and must consider what it means that we have allowed London to become the global capital of choice for laundering the illicit wealth foreign nationals have siphoned out of their own countries. In short, we can and must be better than we have been in many ways, and fast.

Yet knighting Gavin Williamson in the middle of all this suggests we have a way to go. I'm sure some galaxy brain will be on to explain how I'm oversimplifying things, but it does feel like it should have been so much simpler to NOT knight Gavin Williamson. How hard can NOT honouring the worst secretary of state in recent memory really be? It is suspiciously unclear what the man sacked as both [defence](#) and [education](#) secretary is being honoured for. Services to making Russia [go away and shut up](#)? Leaking from a top-level National Security Council meeting and consequently undermining the trust of the intelligence services (denied)? Presiding over an epochal failure of British children, from which significant numbers will never recover educationally or in terms of life chances?

Obviously, we know that the Johnson administration never particularly cared about the schoolchildren – Williamson was kept in post despite his catastrophic failings during the first lockdown and the exams fiasco that inevitably unfolded that summer. In the end, everything about the government's approach to an entire generation of children can be summarised by the fact that they reopened the pubs before they reopened all the schools. Yet Gavin could find focus when he wanted to. When Christian Wakeford crossed the floor to join Labour earlier this year, the Bury South MP claimed that Williamson had threatened to [cancel a new school](#) in his constituency if he did not vote against extending free school meals into the holidays for the poorest children – a conversation Williamson apparently does not remember having.

It's hard to believe a government that knows all this and still honours Williamson will do the right thing in other areas. Will they clean up the

oligarchs to whom they have hitherto shown such sublime indifference or active encouragement, or will they just say that's what they're going to do?

They do, after all, say a lot of things. Take the culture secretary. The last time I saw Nadine Dorries cry at work she was sobbing because Boris Johnson had pulled out of his post-referendum leadership bid. Yet here she was on Thursday, turning on the waterworks at the dispatch box, offering the BBC "heartfelt thanks and admiration" for its reporting. Oh Nadine. NOW you're a fan, is it? Because just weeks ago you were issuing tinpot threats on your Twitter about the BBC as we've known it being over. Weirdly, I don't see Nadine's precious Netflix dodging the bombs in a Kyiv basement in order to bring the world the news. (I should say that the Beeb is in Kyiv alongside many exceptional journalists from other UK broadcasters – a reminder that the BBC's unique funding model has always elevated our whole market. Rivals cannot compete for funding, so have traditionally competed on quality. And if you don't believe it, go and watch a range of American broadcast news for an evening.)

Anyway, amazing that it's taken actual war in Europe to make the actual culture secretary realise that maybe – just maybe! – the enemy is a station like Russia Today and not the BBC. Like I said, *maybe* Nadine has realised that. Notwithstanding her tears, I don't buy it myself. The one thing you can be absolutely sure of is that this government will be trying to cripple the BBC again in a few months, because at that point that particular position will suit them better once again. The Johnson administration doesn't do immutable principles. They only do expedience. In fact, it's occasionally hard not to see in Dorries a watered-down version of higher skilled monsters such as Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, who yesterday claimed the BBC was being used to undermine Russia's internal politics and security. She should speak to Nadine. I keep hearing from her and half the rest of the cabinet that the BBC undermines the UK's internal politics. I can never remember exactly why – I think it's something to do with talent salaries or running stories about the government that they don't like.

Either way, the government now seems to be engaged in a number of hasty pivots. If these are genuine, then good. The time for a "let's not, and say we

did” approach has passed. But on the form book, promises to make the British political family completely legitimate are unconvincing. This week the prime minister has managed to knight one of his cronies and not do very much about any of Putin’s.

Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist

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## Letter from a curious parentSchools

# **Dear Nadhim Zahawi, did you even glance at existing political impartiality law?**

[Michael Rosen](#)



Your hastily bashed out document ignores what schools have been doing for years under your predecessors' guidelines



Boris Johnson interacts with primary school children. Some students at a Nottingham school were asked to express their views about the prime minister. Photograph: Steve Parsons/AFP/Getty Images

Sat 5 Mar 2022 03.15 EST

I see that you've waded into the area of impartiality in teaching, and your reason for this seems to be that some students are not fans of your boss, Boris Johnson. As [reported by the BBC](#): "The education secretary says schools must not tackle political issues in a 'partisan' way after pupils were asked to write a letter that criticised the prime minister during a lesson."

Less than a fortnight later, you published new guidelines on "[political impartiality in schools](#)".

I thought, wow, that is speedy working. This must be really urgent ... there must be some kind of giant hole in the guidance over at [gov.uk](#) where this matter has never been tackled before.

I imagined you striding into one of the DfE offices, grabbing a group of fresh-faced Oxbridge graduates, snapping your fingers and saying: "There are kids in a Nottingham school complaining about Boris and the No 10

parties – which were of course totally within the guidelines at the time. I want you, you and you to tackle this. It's all part of our pushback against the woke agenda.” (Maybe you didn't say that last bit and you just thought it.)

Then, in my imagination, one of them, their head full of seminars on logic and ideology, pipes up with: “But won't this document itself be partial because it's coming as a response to something partial?”

“Of course not,” you snort. “Get on with it.”

For all the years I've been observing the behaviour and actions of education secretaries, I have to confess that I am still often bewildered by what your job is for. Are you really employed by us to commission guidelines like this? I only ask, because they seem to have been produced without reference to what schools have already been doing under guidelines produced by your predecessors for many years.

I'm not suggesting that this is easy territory to navigate, and it never has been. When I was about 15 – that would be some 60 years ago – I remember my father, a secondary school teacher, was always keen to know what homework I had been set, and would look over my shoulder.

One time, he spotted that I was beavering away trying to explain a heading that I had been set: “Why Chartism failed”. He couldn't stop himself. He burst out: “Failed? Did Chartism fail? Haven't we got elections and trade unions? Didn't the Chartist want that?”

If I had been asked to answer the question “Did Chartism fail?” there might have been room for the points that my father made but, no. This was my first lesson in discovering that the things we call “topics” or “subjects” can be contentious in how they are framed. We might say metaphorically, if something is not on the table, you can't eat it.

Even so, no matter how difficult this matter is, you thought your time would be well spent wading in there. Out of interest, did you glance at the legislation and guidelines already in place? Or were you more concerned to make a splash in the anti-woke press than to sit in your office Googling what was already in your own departmental files?

If you had, you might have found, for example, that the Education Act of 1996 forbids the promotion of “partisan political views in the teaching of any subject in the school” (Section 406) and requires that when political issues are discussed, pupils are “offered a balanced presentation of opposing views” (Section 407). Then again, Teachers’ Standards (DfE, 2011) states that teachers must ensure that “personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils’ vulnerability or might lead them to break the law”.

Meanwhile, young people of all ages are watching TV, listening to the radio and talking with their parents – just as I did all those years ago. Terrible scenes of death, destruction and mass flight are in their living rooms right now.

And then there are issues that young people care deeply about and deserve to discuss. Last summer, the England football manager, in consultation with his players, made the decision that the players would “take the knee” to demonstrate support for the Black Lives Matter movement. The behaviour of the Metropolitan police towards women has come under immense scrutiny.

Depending on the age of school student, you acknowledge that there are times in the school week when schools can provide a safe environment for these kinds of topics to be talked about. You said that “no subject is off-limits in the classroom”, as long as it is treated with “sensitivity” and without “promoting contested theories as fact”.

I know this all gets very philosophical, but aren’t all facts contested by someone somewhere? I don’t think this matter can be solved with a document hastily bashed out in the wake of what you perceive to be the terrible business of children criticising our great leader.

When you feel the itch to demand that schools do something, why don’t you try working with groups of teachers on it? Not just hand-picked ones, but teachers who offer a range of views, some of which you might disagree with. A bit like a classroom, debating a topic. Just an idea.

**Yours, Michael Rosen**

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## OpinionChina

# China has little to gain but much to lose as Russia's ally

[George Magnus](#)

The uneasy friendship and ties that bind China and Russia counter long-standing issues of mistrust over the years



Russia's President Vladimir Putin and President Xi Jinping of China look to each other as economic and political allies. Photograph: Alexei Druzhinin/AP

Fri 4 Mar 2022 12.37 EST

In just a few days, Russia's invasion of [Ukraine](#) has upended decades of international relations thinking and practices. Nothing will be the same as before. Even the 5,000-word statement on "international relations in a new era" issued by China and Russia just a month ago in Beijing – to make the world safe for autocracy – has been overtaken by events. In this ugly

Russian quagmire, China's role and behaviour merit close attention, not least as we wonder whether Ukraine today may be Taiwan tomorrow.

China and [Russia](#) have been getting closer for some time. The binds are visible in bilateral trade, which has more than doubled since 2015 to almost \$150bn. China is Russia's biggest trade partner. While Russia is almost a rounding error in China's global exports, the two countries collaborate in military exercises, regional security arrangements and technology trade. These binds go some way to counter other differences and long-standing sources of mistrust, for example over Russian far east and central Asia. Yet, the biggest bind of all is geopolitics.

Headed by control-obsessed dictators pledged to remain in power and protect their elites, they have both been gifted political opportunities created by, for example, the long tail of the 2008 "western" financial crisis, Brexit and European political weakness, Donald Trump, and Covid management issues in many democracies. They are joined at the hip in their pursuit of an anti-US and anti-western agenda in which they want to reshape the world order, including by force.

Putin's awkward and brutal invasion of Ukraine doesn't change any of this but it has changed the Sino-Russian relationship consummated at the Olympics on 4 February, and caused China consternation. Considerable speculation focuses on what [Xi Jinping](#) knew. It is hard to believe Xi was not forewarned about something, especially as the US tried to brief him with intelligence only to be rebuffed. We also know Russian troops were subsequently moved from the far east to Ukraine, and China is thought to have bought back previously released oil into its Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

Whatever the reality, [China](#) is deemed to have been complicit, at least by supporting Russia and backing it since, leaving it uncomfortably on a spiky fence.

05:10

Why are there fears China and Taiwan could go to war? – video

Xi won't back away from Putin because to do so would lead to much embarrassment and humiliation at home – a non-starter, especially in this key year ending with the 20th Party Congress. Yet, standing by Putin, and supporting overtly the weak Russian economy associates China firmly with a pariah state and erodes such trust and credibility in China's statecraft. China's list of friends globally isn't that big or impressive anyway.

With strong leverage over Russia now, China can help its beleaguered neighbour, which, with its main banks excluded from the global financial system, its foreign exchange reserves frozen, and firms and persons subject to sanctions and asset freezes, has become a vassal state of China. It can buy much more energy and resources, and subject to ubiquitous sanctions laws, make loans, provide funds via currency swap agreements, trade in yuan, and supply semiconductors and other technology goods.

Yet, China will have to be careful to calibrate an image which isn't overly accommodating, and reminds the world both that it can be an agent for important public goods, such as peace-broking in Ukraine, and that it wants the global system to remain relatively open.

Remember that, unlike Russia, China's ambitions depend on a relatively open world economy in trade and technology, and on global and regional institutions which it would like to re-shape to suit its own interests. This is all at risk now if democracy-supporting nations choose to push a Russia-supporting China further away – or if China doubles down to insulate itself. China was certainly shocked how the EU, in particular, and the US came together purposefully and forcefully to freeze Russia out of the system. China's continuing dependency on key western technologies and markets remains, despite acts of decoupling and self-reliance. It would certainly not want to risk being in the cross-hairs of a Russia-type financial war over, for example, Taiwan.

Beijing regards Taiwan as an inalienable part of China, and so its recent proclamation of support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine and others should not be taken at face value. China has never ruled out taking Taiwan by force, but Russia's invasion of Ukraine, if anything, makes comparable Chinese action over Taiwan less, rather than more, likely.

From a rational standpoint at least, China will surely note that in war, best laid plans do go awry, resistance by people desperate for their country is a deserving cliche, and the US Pacific fleet and other Quad forces are close. It will be strongly aware, moreover, that “western” and other global economic and financial pushback is anything but a spent force and potentially highly effective. If Russia, as basically a commodity producer, is so sensitive to financial war, then China, as an economic colossus with strong dependencies, is at even bigger risk. Note also that Japan has revived a debate about taking US nuclear weapons, and ended the policy of ambiguity over Taiwan’s political status.

China’s new Russia relationship remains but it has changed radically. It now has high leverage over Russia but, by close association, little to gain globally and much to lose. Xi has no good options, and difficult choices to make as he tries to walk the line between supporting Russia and rebuilding friendly relations with the west. We need to remain on guard against thinking China’s totalitarian leader will be different from what Russia’s always was.

*George Magnus is research associate at Oxford University’s China Centre, and at SOAS*

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## OpinionUkraine

# We at Stop the War condemn the invasion of Ukraine, and warmongers on all sides

[Lindsey German](#)

The anti-war movement is no supporter of Putin. But we can, at the same time, criticise our government's dreadful war record

- Lindsey German is convenor of the Stop the War coalition



'The hypocrisies of the war supporters are only possible if we forget the context and history of modern wars. Ukraine did not come out of a clear blue sky.' Photograph: Javier Campos/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Fri 4 Mar 2022 12.54 EST

Not since the immediate run-up to the Iraq war in 2003 has there been such a disinformation blitz about the anti-war movement. In the overheated atmosphere today we are accused of apologising for Putin's brutal invasion and of being "fifth columnists" and "traitors". In 2003 we were "friends of the Taliban" or "allies of Saddam". It wasn't true then and it's not true now.

What is true is that there seems to be a permanent glitch in the matrix of the minds of war enthusiasts that prevents them from understanding that it is possible to oppose the policy of your own government and still oppose the actions of other governments. Our critics want to make it either/or. But it's not. Unlike many of our detractors, we are consistent in opposing the misery, death, displacement and disruption that affects any country consumed by war.

We feel horror and sickness when we see Putin's invasion, his attacks on civilian populations and the [shelling of a nuclear power station](#). We have welcomed, supported and publicised the actions of [anti-war protesters in Russia](#). We wish our critics were as consistent, but we wait without expectation for the praise showered on anti-war protesters to come our way. We want to welcome the refugees queueing at the Polish borders and think that our government should do much more to let them into one of the richest countries in the world. And again we hope our critics will be as welcoming to refugees fleeing western wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen and Libya.

The hypocrisies of the war supporters are only possible if we forget the context and history of modern wars. Ukraine did not come out of a clear blue sky. We cannot accept a narrative that ignores context and history and simply puts this invasion down to Putin's designation as the latest "new Hitler" or to [his mental state](#). To wilfully ignore the past, including the recent past, is a disservice to all those who want to end this war.

The roots of this conflict lie in what has happened since the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The [Warsaw Pact was dissolved](#), whereas its western opposite, Nato, was not. Despite assurances to the contrary, [Nato expanded](#) ever closer towards the Russian border, incorporating 14 new member states, mainly in eastern Europe. It has also expanded into "out of area operations", including central involvement in

Afghanistan and Libya. It now plans further expansion into the Indo-Pacific as part of an increased military presence against China.

It is not repeating Kremlin propaganda to point out these facts. And the anti-war movement is far from alone in doing this. George Kennan, the doyen of US foreign policy, [has said](#) the same. So did [William Burns](#) in 2008. He is now head of the CIA.

This is not the first war in [Europe](#) since 1945. That was in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, culminating with the Nato bombing of Serbia in 1999. This marked a key turning point in relations with Russia. The next Nato operation was Afghanistan in 2001, initially supported by Russia, as was the bombing of Libya in 2011. These, plus the war in Iraq in 2003, have shaped the present.

The features now so widely and correctly condemned in Russia's invasion of Ukraine – from cluster bombs to targeting of civilians to besieging cities – have all been part of western wars, but with very little comment or opposition from the British political class. There was no referral to the international criminal court for the US following its [use of depleted uranium](#) in the Iraqi city of Falluja; no sanctions when Trump ordered the dropping of the “[mother of all bombs](#)” on Afghanistan; no outcry at Britain's continuing support for Saudi Arabia's brutal bombing of Yemen.

The anti-war movement has a better record of consistency in opposing wars than those who applaud and justify our own government's wars while decrying the same behaviour by Putin.

If the first casualty of war is truth, then the second must be the increasingly intolerant, repressive and anti-Russian sentiments across sections of British society. Keir Starmer's [threat to remove the whip](#) from 11 MPs if they criticised Nato is an astonishing piece of thought policing, and something that even Tony Blair never attempted to do over Afghanistan or Iraq. Are we seriously saying that there can be no criticism of our government's foreign policy or of its dreadful record of wars over the past 20 years, culminating in the defeat last year in Afghanistan?

In some ways even more chilling are the reports of [Russian films being removed](#) from festivals, of Russian cats being [banned from shows](#), and of the proposed removal of the [statue in Manchester of Friedrich Engels](#) (a German), who always opposed Russia as a Tsarist autocracy and whose political beliefs are roundly denounced by Putin.

Talk of no-fly zones has so far been rejected, but we should be aware that any such move would be a declaration of war on [Russia](#) by Nato, with terrible consequences. I have no problem with condemning imperialism of any sort. I regard Russia as an imperialist power, although considerably lesser economically and militarily than its opponents.

The system of imperialism leads to economic rivalry, which turns into military competition. We have seen a [huge increase in military spending](#) throughout the world in the past decades. This war is leading to calls for even more: Germany announced this week it will double its spending, and there is a growing militarisation across Europe.

The attacks on the anti-war movement will continue. We will continue to [campaign against this war](#) in Ukraine – but we will take no lessons from the warmongers on any side.

- Lindsey German is convenor of the Stop the War coalition
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## 2022.03.05 - Around the world

- [Australia Fury among NSW northern rivers locals ‘forgotten’ by authorities](#)
- [Floods How Murwillumbah turned into shell-shocked island](#)
- [‘Heartbreaking’ Australia’s east coast reels from floods](#)
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## New South Wales

# ‘Catastrophic failure’: fury among NSW northern rivers locals ‘forgotten’ by authorities

As the scale of the devastation around Mullumbimby emerges, locals are relying on each other in the absence of government help

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Residents in New South Wales’ northern rivers are grappling with flood clean-up while feeling left behind by state and federal governments. Photograph: Natalie Grano/The Guardian

*[Christopher Knaus](#) and [Susan Chenery](#)*

Fri 4 Mar 2022 14.00 EST

In the small town of Ocean Shores, not far from Mullumbimby, Rosie Wild is grappling with the scale of all that she has lost.

Every room of her home has been ruined by the floods. Her furniture sits in piles out the front of her house, rendered useless by the damage, as does her fridge and other white goods.

Her walls and wooden floors still show no sign of drying out.

In the daytime, between the clean-up and her calls to the insurance company, there's enough to keep Wild's mind busy.



Flooding at Rose Wild's home in Ocean Shores, near Mullumimby.  
Photograph: Supplied

But in the evenings, when the distractions disappear, her mind has been wandering.

"It's all a bit devastating and personally, in the day, I'm just being strong and just going and doing what I need to do," she said.

"But in the evenings, it just dawns on you. It's such a loss."

The scale of the devastation in the areas around Mullumbimby is [quickly becoming apparent](#).

It's another disaster site in what are [now being described as the worst floods in living memory](#).

The death toll rose to 16 on Friday, including six in NSW, after the body of a man in his 40s was found south of Murwillumbah, just north of Mullumbimby. Four more people have died in flood-ravaged Lismore and the estimated cost of claims across Queensland and NSW is now just over \$1bn.

For Wild, as she grapples with what comes next, the \$1,000 disaster payment offered by the federal government seems grossly inadequate.



Every room in Wild's home was damaged by the flood waters. Photograph: Supplied

“At the end of the day, it’s very, very disappointing,” she said. “After I’d done my entire clean-up, I went back to my partner’s house, and worked out that all I was going to get is \$1,000 … I’ll probably have to go out and get another loan.”

The coordination of the response has also been lacking, she said, leaving locals to rely on one another.

It's a frequent complaint in the area. There's general goodwill towards the state emergency service and Australian Defence Force who are working in the region, tirelessly, to help.

But many who spoke to Guardian Australia are also clear on one thing: the state and federal government response in the area has been insufficient.

Locals have banded together and stepped in to fill gaps in the response, organising rescues, food and fuel drops, and beginning the arduous task of cleaning up.

Megan Whitaker, a resident of Lennox Head for 17 years, described the government response as a "catastrophic failure".

It's an opinion born of her own experience during the floods. Whitaker was trapped in Melbourne as the waters peaked, but received a desperate call from a friend, who was trapped with her husband on Tamar street in Ballina.

Her friend's husband was passing in and out of consciousness.

Fearing for their safety, Whitaker called emergency services and urged them to rescue the pair.

The emergency services, she said, left her with little certainty as to whether they could help in time.

She turned to local Facebook community groups, where she found a woman whose father lived in Tamar street. The father, a local surf lifesaver, pledged to take a dinghy to get to the pair.

"They managed to, after a number of hours, evacuate the husband, who needed medical attention," Whittaker said. "But they didn't have enough room to evacuate my friend and her dog. So I had to repeat the whole process about five or six hours later, when her battery was running low and

the waters were potentially going to peak again. I had to once again call the SES, get through to NSW, post on a Facebook page.”

Her friend eventually got out and Whitaker has spent the days since acting as a conduit for communications between flood-affected residents and emergency services.

It’s not something that should be left up to her, she said.

“This has been a catastrophic failure of government to provide the services we pay for as taxpayers,” she said. “The impact of this is going to be so far reaching and for so long. I’m just so angry.”

Speaking on Friday, the NSW premier, Dominic Perrottet, said some mistakes are likely to be made during the response, but that it was too early to ascribe blame.

Perrotet said the government was “completely focused” on getting responders into flood hit areas but it could only be done where safe.

“Our focus right now is not on playing the blame game,” he said.

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Other locals, like Celeste and Mark Mayne, feel completely forgotten.

The pair live on Bishops Creek road near Nimbin and Lismore, and were forced to flee when a landslide came perilously close to their home.

They sheltered at a neighbour’s while the flood waters receded, and then walked 4km, climbing through roads and washed away creeks to be met by their neighbour’s sister to drive to Nimbin for supplies.

On Thursday, Mark helped an elderly neighbour get to hospital, using his 4WD.

“It’s exhausting,” Celeste said. “I’m so stressed, PTSD, whenever it rains I’m in fear of landslides, the sound of thunder is terrifying as it sounds like a landslide.

“Yes, we do feel forgotten.”

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## Australia weather

# How the floods turned Murwillumbah into a shell-shocked island struggling for ‘basic survival’

It will take months for the full scale of this disaster to unfold, to understand how many people have been displaced, how many homes destroyed

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It took years for Murwillumbah to recover from the 2017 flood. This one was worse. Photograph: Jay Penfold/The Guardian

*[Susan Chenery](#)*

Fri 4 Mar 2022 14.00 EST

When I looked out my window in the early hours of Monday morning and saw my neighbour wading through water I was entering an alternative reality. The kind of parallel universe you might not come back from.

“There is a storm about to arrive,” said the man in the IGA, “unlike anything we have seen so far”. And we had been seeing storms most days since last September.

It wasn’t a malignant storm, full of malicious wind of the kind that tore a chunk off my roof in December. It was quite polite really, but insistent, there was just so much water coming down. And still it kept coming and coming. For all its lack of ferocity this storm would cause the biggest flood in local recorded history.

By mid-morning my street was a river, and the town of Murwillumbah was underwater. Sitting in the wide flat Tweed Valley in northern [New South Wales](#), surrounded by mountain ranges, it is a spectacularly pretty place. Through the town runs the usually benign, sometimes glassily still Tweed River. But on Sunday night the river was rising and surging.



Piles of damaged goods now take up front yards. Photograph: Jay Penfold  
Photography/The Guardian

Mark Hamilton-Browne opened his front door at midnight only to find “the whole street was about three foot deep and it was flowing over the bonnet and windscreen of my car. Two hours earlier there was nothing there.” He managed to attract the attention of an SES boat. Getting to the boat, he says, “I was up to my stomach, almost up to my chest”. Wet and shocked, he was taken to the evacuation centre at the Tafe. “There were probably 300 people there and 30 or more dogs. And some dogs barked all night. People were wired on adrenaline, anxiety, fear and stress and everyone was talking really loud. It was just a cacophony of upset people. I didn’t sleep at all.” In the days to follow more than 600 people would be brought to the evacuation centre at nearly Kingscliff. “Hearing the stories is just tragic,” says the federal member for Richmond, Justine Elliot.

Through the night came the distress calls: 30 dogs, three cats and two goats at the pound in rising water (rescued by boat), 44 patients with no running water in aged care, disabled person with a dog and a cat in Charles Street, helicopter needed for four adults and four children, families trapped all along Tweed Valley Way, a pregnant woman trapped in a ceiling. On and on it went. Locals in boats and on jetskis helping them to safety.

During the night Hamilton-Browne’s house was completely destroyed. Water smashed through the front windows and took the door off. The force of the water moved the furniture and tipped over the fridge. Books turned to mush. He has lost everything. In the days that followed, “the reality of it sunk in, the shock turned into despair and grief. I am pretty distraught.”

It is the same story in street after street, house after house, as people return to ruined homes that were above the flood line and had never flooded before.

For kilometres along Tweed Valley Way there is utter devastation. Heading into the nearby town of Condong it is apocalyptic in the mud. A disaster on a massive scale.

Murwillumbah is still scarred from the 2017 flood that was supposed to be an unprecedented once-in-a-century event. It would, people believed, never happen again in their lifetime.

In that flood the heavy rain that followed Cyclone Debbie had turned the river into a tsunami. “We heard a roar, a weird noise that sounded like traffic. It just got louder and louder and a wall of water hit our house” said Trace Henderson at the time. She ended up with “trees in our lounge room, other people’s belongings, cushions, a microwave. A couch in the garden, pallets of wood.” At least 300 people were left displaced, homeless. It took years to recover.



Some people have lost their business in town as well as their home.  
Photograph: Jay Penfold/The Guardian

This week’s storm was worse. “It was much faster and much higher,” says local councillor Meredith Dennis, “and it is not draining away as fast as it normally would. There is just all this stinking mud. The damage to the infrastructure this time is so much worse – whole bridges have completely gone. There are lots of landslides and road damage that won’t be fixed for months and months.”

From Monday on, Murwillumbah has been an island. All roads in and out are flooded and closed. No supply trucks can come in. When Optus and the NBN tower go down we enter a kind of twilight zone, isolated, in another world that seems to be moving in slow motion, unable to communicate. Anxiety peaks for those with homes and families out in the hills that they

can't reach, a need to access disaster grants in order to eat. Like so many, Angela James, a disability carer looking after her patients in town, doesn't know what has happened to her husband, son or elderly parents in the village of Pumpenbil, just that they will be flooded in. Says mayor Chris Cherry: "We still don't know the extent of the damage in villages and isolated places that you just can't get to." Those who have lost everything for a second time are, she says, "just broken".

All five petrol stations have gone under. I am rationing the small amount I have and just walking everywhere in the rain. The things that concerned me last week seem ridiculously redundant now. Now it is basic survival.

As shell-shocked people wander around town carrying backpacks with all they have left, their homes gone, living out of suitcases in their cars, with nowhere to go, shops and restaurant owners grimly sweep out their destroyed premises, throwing everything into the street. Sewage has backed up in the gelato shop, there is a stench of rotten fish from the Japanese restaurant, mould and mud are taking hold. In the arts centre, which has been under waist-high water for days, paintings by Arna Baartz are sitting in a skip, the irreplaceable work of other artists lumped into the middle of the room.



Locals sift through the precious things that they worked so hard to get to see what can be salvaged. Photograph: Jay Penfold Photography/The Guardian

A tree and landslide has swept through the palliative care op-shop. Now everything is out in the street being given away to those who have lost everything. Elaine who works there broke her wrist during evacuation but can't get to Tweed hospital to get it set. The painkillers are not working.

When the NBN went, so did card payments, now it is cash only. All the ATMs went under except one where there are long queues. The only food shop left operating is a small IGA, which is rapidly running out of supplies. It is starting to feel like a subtropical Soviet Russia – queuing for an hour and a half for a loaf of bread only to find there is none left. By Wednesday, the shelves are nearly bare.

“If I can’t have bread or milk,” says a woman in the Imperial pub, “I might as well have wine.”

In Australia we take so many things for granted. When it resumes raining there is the realisation that if the waters don’t recede and the roads don’t open, and supply trucks come through, we could run out of food. The water treatment plant is still not up and running, it’s boiled and bottled water now.

There is exhaustion borne of lack of sleep, of not knowing where to start when they go back to houses without water or electricity. Sifting through all the precious things that they worked so hard to get to see what can be salvaged. Trying to find the energy to start again from nothing. Flood insurance is beyond the financial reach of most people. There are piles of belongings that are debris now along nearly every road. Some people have lost their business in town as well as their homes.



Piles of damaged goods in front of a damaged home. Photograph: Jay Penfold Photography/The Guardian

It will take months for the full scale of this disaster to unfold, to understand how many people have been displaced, how many homes destroyed. On Friday afternoon, the military was due to be deployed to assist.

Elliott says: “We need to get provisions to people, food, water, shelter. And in the long term we need a lot of financial support for the recovery. It is going to have a huge long-term impact.”

It feels like something has changed and shifted. When we return to normal that it won’t be the same again.

The country community of Murwillumbah pulled together magnificently in 2017. And they are doing it again; donating food, clothes, forming groups to clean houses, volunteering. The offers of help just keeping coming and coming. Because what remains in this shattered community when so much is lost, is love.

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Lismore residents in northern NSW evacuate from the worst floods in the regional city's history. Photograph: Jason O'Brien/AAP

## 'Heartbreaking': Australia's east coast reels from worst floods in living memory

Lismore residents in northern NSW evacuate from the worst floods in the regional city's history. Photograph: Jason O'Brien/AAP

Queensland and NSW bear the brunt of catastrophic weather conditions that have claimed 16 lives

by [Caitlin Cassidy](#)

Fri 4 Mar 2022 01.28 EST

When Jenni Metcalfe returned to her Brisbane home to survey the damage as the nearby river peaked, water had already risen [a metre up the back wall](#). There was nothing she could do. "I sat in the gutter and watched it and cried," she said.

The east coast of Australia has been battered by more than a week of torrential rain, as communities begin to survey the wreckage of fatal flash flooding that has left townships looking like war zones.

South-east Queensland and the north coast of New South Wales have borne the brunt of the [“one in-1,000 year”](#) catastrophic weather conditions, which have claimed at least 17 lives.

Residents in the regional city of Lismore in north-eastern NSW are still reeling from the worst flooding in its history, which sent huge areas of the regional city [underwater](#) with the cleanup likely to last months, if not years.



The floods were much worse than expected in Brisbane, Queensland, where up to 15,000 properties were estimated to be damaged. Photograph: Bradley Kanaris/Getty Images



Jenni Metcalfe cleans out her West End home, which had about one metre of water through it on Monday morning at high tide. Photograph: Ben Smee/The Guardian

More than 700mm of rain fell in just 30 hours during the worst of the floods on Monday, forcing 43,000 residents to scramble onto their rooftops and wait to be rescued by emergency services crews.

Four of the dead were in Lismore, people who were trapped in flooded homes or swept away while trying to escape. A number of the city's residents remained missing.

Among the devastation have been stories of heroism and kinship.

World championship surfers Mick Fanning and Joel Parkinson spent Tuesday ferrying stranded residents and distributing supplies on their jet skis at badly hit Tumbulgum on the north coast of NSW.

Emergency services volunteers saved dozens of elderly trapped in their homes and facilities, using boogie boards and dinghies to pull residents through windows and ferry them to safety.



Volunteers from the State Emergency Service rescue a llama from a flooded farmhouse in western Sydney. Photograph: Muhammad Farooq/AFP/Getty Images



Cattle look on near an overflowing Richmond river on the outskirts of Lismore. Photograph: Saeed Khan/AFP/Getty Images

Others spent hours locating and mustering [hundreds of livestock](#) that were swept away in flood waters causing devastating losses for farmers already

hit by drought and past flooding events. If lucky, the occasional cow turned up on beaches or rooftops.

As the cleanup in Lismore began on Thursday, a harsh sun strengthened the stench of mud and sewage on the main street as business owners returned to their ruined shops where flood waters had crept up to the ceiling.



Bec First and Belinda Meaker with their dog return to check on their flooded home in Ballina. Photograph: Natalie Grono/The Guardian

Mark Bailey was one of them, forced to wade through a pile of ruined goods and furniture he estimated was worth \$5m amassed at the front of his [collectibles store, The Penny Man](#).

“Everything in there’s fucked,” he told Guardian Australia, holding an album of vintage East German stamps that were dripping brown and unsalvageable.

“I’m not mad at anyone in particular, every shop has a different story along here,” he said. “We won’t be reopening here, and I would be surprised if half of the street ever does.”



Mark Bailey from Lismore's The Penny Man says \$5m worth of the store's collectibles are ruined. Photograph: Elias Visontay/The Guardian

Many businesses that went underwater, including Bailey's, were uninsurable given their proximity to riverbanks and flood-prone areas.

The cleanup had barely begun in large parts of south-east [Queensland](#) when residents were again forced to take cover due to more storms.

The “rain bomb” that battered the capital city of Brisbane and surrounds until Monday killed 10 people and damaged more than 17,000 homes and businesses. Some 739mm of rain fell in [just four days](#) – nearly 75% of the annual average.



John Lawrence with children Harlow and Aria inspect a flooded road near their home in Dungay, northern NSW. Photograph: Dan Peled/Getty Images



The remnants of Drift restaurant in Brisbane. Photograph: Jono Searle/AAP

On Friday, all schools in south-east Queensland closed except for children of essential workers in anticipation of further “extremely unstable” storms.

That the floods hit the same week the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) released its latest report on the climate crisis, warning extreme

weather events including floods were wreaking increasing damage, did not go unnoticed.

The Queensland premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, warned Queenslanders were living through “unprecedented times”, a sentiment echoed by the NSW premier, Dominic Perrottet.

“I’ve lived in Brisbane essentially all my life and I haven’t seen storms and floods like this all being thrown at us at once,” she said.

While flood waters in some parts of the country begin to recede, many Australians brace for another wave of water as the storm regroups and moves south towards Sydney. A sense of frustration and fatigue has set in.

Some, like property owners in the lowlands of Richmond, north-west of Sydney, are still rebuilding from the last catastrophic floods that struck in March 2021. Many have yet to received promised government assistance.



Debris collects on Windsor bridge due to flood waters. Photograph: Blake Sharp-Wiggins/The Guardian

Pharmacist Skye Swift, who made headlines when Fanning ferried her to her chemist shop to distribute essential medicines to her community, is

exhausted reflecting on the road to come.

Telecommunications outages were hampering the recovery effort, and supermarkets were grappling with potential weeks-long shortages of fresh produce amid a burgeoning supply crisis.

Swift told Guardian Australia the good news stories, the solidarity, was “beautiful, but not enough at the end of the day”.

“We’ve now got weeks and months of rebuilding,” she said. “And how do you rebuild when you don’t have any money, a job?

“It’s the aftermath that gets missed, that’s the heartbreak part … it’s going to be a long road.”

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## Before and after aerial pictures show how floods swept through Queensland and NSW towns



Lismore in northern NSW before and after the flood. Photographs: NearMap

High-resolution images shot from a camera system mounted on planes focus in on the devastation

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*[Donna Lu](#)  
[@donnaadlu](#)*

Thu 3 Mar 2022 21.46 EST

Newly released aerial images show the [extent of the flooding](#) that has devastated parts of Queensland and New South Wales in the past week.

Torrential rain and flood waters have impacted communities along the east coast, from Maryborough in [Queensland](#) to Grafton in NSW.

Across south-east Queensland, at least 33 areas were inundated by more than 1m of rainfall between 23 and 28 February. In [Brisbane](#) 792.8mm fell over the six days to 9am on 28 February, flooding an estimated 15,000 homes across the city.

Thousands were told to evacuate as flood waters then surged in the northern rivers district of NSW, laying waste to towns and [washing away cattle](#). The low-lying city of [Lismore](#) experienced its [worst flooding](#) since modern records began.

Striking new high-resolution pictures, taken before and after the flooding by an aerial camera system attached to planes, reveal some of the extensive damage.

## **Albion, Queensland**

Images show the suburb of Albion, in Brisbane's inner north-east, on 24 January and 2 March. The suburb is bounded by Breakfast Creek, a tributary of the Brisbane River. The multi-lane road shown is Sandgate Road, a major thoroughfare.



## Oxley, Queensland

Oxley, in Brisbane's south-west, was also badly affected by the 2011 flood. These shots show it on 9 February and 2 March.



## Beenleigh, Queensland

An inundated carpark in Beenleigh, south of Brisbane.



## Lismore, NSW

Lismore is built on the banks of the Wilsons River, which peaked at 14.4m on 28 February. The Lismore Memorial Baths were inundated.



## **Girards Hill, NSW**

The lower image shows flooded houses in Girards Hill, a suburb of Lismore. The city is susceptible to floods, notably in 2017, 1974, and 1954. “In Lismore we have experienced floods forever,” resident and incoming NSW Greens upper house member [Sue Higginson](#) has written. “This is an emergency – a climate emergency.”



## **Southgate, NSW**

On 28 February, an evacuation alert was issued for residents in low-lying areas of Southgate, on the Clarence River north-east of Grafton. The region was also hit by flooding in 2021.



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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/04/before-and-after-aerial-pictures-show-how-floods-swept-through-queensland-and-nsw-towns>

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# Headlines

- [Sarah Everard Murder has made UK reckon with male violence, say charities one year later](#)
- ['We miss her all the time' Sarah Everard's family pay tribute on first anniversary of her murder](#)
- [Wayne Couzens Met made errors over prior indecent exposure claims, report to say](#)

## Sarah Everard

# Sarah Everard murder sparked UK reckoning with male violence, say charities

Despite policy changes since 33-year-old's death, charities still believe risks to women and girls have risen



A demonstration against the Met police's heavy-handed response at the vigil for Sarah Everard, murdered a year ago by a serving police officer.  
Photograph: SOPA Images/LightRocket/Getty Images

*[Alexandra Topping](#)*

Thu 3 Mar 2022 01.00 EST

Sarah Everard's murder a year ago sparked a nationwide reckoning and revolutionised how the British public understand male violence against women, according to research.

The first major survey of women's groups in the UK since the 33-year-old's death also reveals the majority of charities believe the risk to women and girls has increased over the last year.

The survey by Rosa, a grant-making charity for 320 frontline women's organisations, found 89% thought there had been a shift in public awareness over the last 12 months.

"There has been a revolution of understanding, and the scales have fallen from people's eyes," said Rebecca Gill, executive director at Rosa. "I think there has also been a recognition of how normalised fear is for women. It is a fear we live with, and that we learn very young, and we carry it with us until we are old."

Everard's murder by serving police officer [Wayne Couzens](#) as she walked home in south London last March sparked a national debate that continues to reverberate throughout the UK. Public fury and dismay further escalated when details of the murder emerged at Couzens' trial.

Meanwhile, [two Met police constables were jailed](#) after taking and sharing photos of murdered sisters Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman, and last week a man [pledged guilty to the murder of Sabina Nessa](#) as her community [remembered a kind and loving schoolteacher](#).

As well as raising public consciousness – more than 180,000 people contributed to the government's call for evidence on its violence against women and girls strategy in the weeks after Everard's death – the high-profile murders have led to significant policy shifts.

Earlier this week, the government announced a major [communications campaign against abuse](#), and put [tackling VAWG on the same footing as terrorism](#) following calls from the sector and the Victims' Commissioner, Vera Baird. The police have appointed a new [national lead for violence against women](#) and are piloting a [more aggressive approach](#) to suspected perpetrators of sexual crimes.

A new [Stand With Us](#) fund launched by Rosa will open in the next few months and fund organisations in the “vital work” of tackling violence against women, said Gill. The fund, which stands at more than half a million pounds, was set up initially by Reclaim These Streets to cover legal costs after the [Metropolitan police threatened individual members with fines](#) of up to £10,000 for organising a peaceful vigil to honour Everard.

Ludo Orlando, a co-founder of Reclaim These Streets who sits on the advisory panel for the fund, said it proved people cared. “This money hasn’t come from a few big donors but thousands of small donations from people who want to make a difference to the lives of women and girls,” she said.

Asked if it was a fitting tribute to the memory of Everard, Gill said the women’s sector was wary of intruding on to the private grief of families still mourning their loved ones. She said: “I wouldn’t make that claim, but it is a fitting tribute to a moment, when there was a feeling that something must be done.”

Rosa said the funding could not come soon enough, with more than three-quarters of the organisations surveyed saying the risk of violence faced by the women and girls they work with increased in the last year. This could be part explained by women’s increasing economic vulnerability as a result of the pandemic and a growing crisis in mental health, said Gill.

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## Sarah Everard

# Sarah Everard's family pay tribute on first anniversary of her murder

‘We miss her all the time,’ say relatives of woman killed by serving Met police officer Wayne Couzens



Sarah Everard was raped and killed by the serving Met officer Wayne Couzens as she walked home in south London on 3 March last year.  
Photograph: Family/CPS/PA

*[Amelia Hill](#)*

*[@byameliahill](#)*

Thu 3 Mar 2022 04.57 EST

The family of [Sarah Everard](#) have paid tribute to her on the first anniversary of her murder by a police officer, saying she was “wonderful and we miss her all the time” and that they “live with the sadness of our loss”.

Everard, 33 was abducted, raped and killed by serving Met officer Wayne Couzens as she walked home in south [London](#) on 3 March last year.

In a statement released through the [Metropolitan police](#), they said they had been “overwhelmed” by the public’s support. “It is a year since Sarah died and we remember her today, as every day, with all our love,” they said.

“Our lives have changed for ever and we live with the sadness of our loss. Sarah was wonderful and we miss her all the time. Over the past year we have been overwhelmed with the kindness shown to us, not just by family and friends, but by the wider public.

“We are immensely grateful to everyone for their support, it has meant such a lot to us and has comforted us through this terrible time,” they added.

“Sadly, Sarah is not the only woman to have lost her life recently in violent circumstances and we would like to extend our deepest sympathy to other families who are also grieving.”

Couzens was handed a whole-life term in September for the murder. His crime also triggered a non-statutory inquiry – led by Dame Elish Angiolini – into how he was able to work as a police officer for three different forces despite concerns about his behaviour.

Following this, there are plans for a second part that would look at wider issues in policing.

The Met has also commissioned its own review of the culture and standards at the force, including Couzens’ former unit – the parliamentary and diplomatic protection command.

On Thursday evening, a walk will take place in south-west London, which organisers the Urban Angels said was in memory of “victims of gendered violence”.

The event will begin at Clapham North underground station at 7pm and will finish at the Clapham Common bandstand, near where Everard went missing and the location of a socially distanced vigil held in her memory last year.

Marking the anniversary of Everard's murder, Boris Johnson has said it was "unacceptable" that so many women and girls still faced violence and perpetrators must be held to account. He said in a statement: "Like everyone else, my heart goes out to the family and friends of [Sarah Everard](#) today.

"The circumstances of her death were truly horrifying and I cannot imagine the pain they have suffered over this past year.

"It is unacceptable that so many women and girls still fear and face violence and abuse, and perpetrators must be held to account for their actions. Everyone deserves to feel safe on our streets."

In a statement, the Met said: "Our thoughts are with Sarah Everard's family and loved ones. One year on we remain deeply disgusted and shamed that a Met police officer was responsible for Sarah's appalling murder."

The London mayor, Sadiq Khan, said: "I am clear: we cannot simply respond to male violence against women and girls – we must prevent it." He pledged to "continue to do everything within my power to ensure that ending violence against women and girls is treated with the utmost urgency, both by our police and society as a whole."

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## Metropolitan police

# Met made errors over Couzens exposure claims, report to say

IOPC has been investigating how force handled claims made days before Sarah Everard's murder



Wayne Couzens was given a whole-life prison term for the rape and murder of Sarah Everard. Photograph: PA

*[Vikram Dodd](#) Police and crime correspondent*

Thu 3 Mar 2022 01.00 EST

The [Metropolitan police](#) made errors after receiving claims that Wayne Couzens had indecently exposed himself days before he attacked Sarah Everard, an official report is expected to find.

Exactly one year ago Couzens, then a serving firearms officer in the Metropolitan police, kidnapped Everard, 33, off a south [London](#) street as she

walked home.

He later raped and murdered her, and he was convicted and jailed for a whole-life term, with the judge equating the seriousness of his crimes to terrorism because he had used police powers and equipment to carry out his attack.

Couzens struck on 3 March 2021, having gone “[hunting](#)” for a woman to attack, his trial heard. The details of his premeditated crimes rocked Britain’s biggest police force.

The Independent Office for [Police](#) Conduct launched an investigation into how the Met handled a report it received from a member of the public on 28 February 2021 alleging that a man had exposed himself at a McDonald’s in south London.

A second report also alleged a man had exposed himself. Details of a car were passed to police. If officers had checked the licence plate, it would have shown the car belonged to Couzens.

What checks were made or progressed – which officers can do from their desk with the Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency – is part of the investigation. Such checks are regarded in policing as basic.

Two Met officers have been formally notified they are under investigation for potential disciplinary offences. One is severe enough to be treated as suspected gross misconduct, the most serious kind of offence under the police disciplinary system. Initially both officers faced allegations of misconduct, which the other officer continues to be investigated for.

A decision on whether the officers will face disciplinary charges and a hearing is expected imminently.

The IOPC investigation is examining whether policies and procedures were followed, and its report on the Met was completed several weeks ago.

The Met is not the only force facing claims it missed a chance to identify Couzens as a potential threat to women before he committed the murder.

The IOPC is also investigating Kent police over an incident six years before he attacked Everard. In June 2015, Kent police received a report that a man had been spotted in Dover in a car naked from the waist down.

One Kent officer is under investigation for alleged misconduct and the IOPC findings are nearing completion.

It is believed there may have been enough information recorded in the Kent police system to have identified the semi-naked man as being Couzens, who was then an officer at the time with the Civil Nuclear constabulary.

CNC says it was never told about the incident, and in 2018 Couzens joined the Met and passed its vetting procedures.

He staged a false arrest of Everard as she returned from a friend's house during a period of coronavirus lockdown measures. He used his police warrant card and handcuffs to lure Everard off the street before strangling her with his police belt and burning her body.

Everard's remains were recovered from woodland near Ashford in Kent, about 20 miles west of Couzens' home in Deal, a week after she disappeared. A postmortem showed she died from compression of the neck.

Two inquiries are under way into the Couzens scandal, one ordered by the home secretary and the other by the Met commissioner.

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## 2022.03.03 - Spotlight

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Photograph: REB/Getty/Image Source

[The long read](#)

## **The long, disorienting search to diagnose my mystery illness**

Photograph: REB/Getty/Image Source

I sought knowledge of my malfunctioning body wherever I could. But every test just left me deeper in the dark

by [Will Rees](#)

Thu 3 Mar 2022 01.00 EST

Some time ago while riding the tube, I came across an advertisement that stood out among the familiar roster of ads for nutritional supplements and blended Tennessee whiskey. This was in the days before the pandemic emptied rail carriages and transformed indoor public spaces into chambers of contagion. Unfolding across several posters, it went like this: “Explore

risks that may be common in your family tree.” “See how DNA affects your health.” “Put your worries to test.”

The advertisement was clearly suggesting that the knowledge it sold would be beneficial to the customer, although why and in what ways were questions on which it demurred: not “mitigate” or “minimise” but “explore risks”. The claim seemed to be that knowing about one’s genetic predispositions to disease would be inherently good. Knowledge itself would be improving.

Yes, I thought. I could see myself doing that, in the spirit of exploration.

A few years earlier, my aunt died. It was very sudden, no one saw it coming. She was young – 44 – and not manifestly in ill health. One evening she went to bed, and the following morning she was carried downstairs. In the desultory, strange days that followed, we were of the understanding that she had suffered a cerebral event – an aneurysm or a stroke. Afterwards, this was corrected. No, it had in fact been her heart that malfunctioned.

For years afterwards I could never remember whether it was my aunt’s brain or her heart which was defective, and even now I am uncertain. I only remember that there was some initial confusion, now long since resolved, but which is the correct explanation and which is the false I continue to forget. I’ve asked my mother countless times to clarify matters, but – and not for any lack of interest on my part or clarity on hers – I do not seem capable of retaining the knowledge. My ignorance on the matter persists in spite, or perhaps because, of the possibility of a genetic link.

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Throughout my early 20s, I spent a lot of time seeking to acquire knowledge about my body. It was unwell, this much was certain, and the question of how was one to which I applied myself studiously. Of course, I had theories. Looking back, these tended to change quite frequently. My research required me to enlist the help of doctors. Above all, I sought a scan that would light up every region of my body; that would reveal, clearly and distinctly, what was the matter with it. It is a long story; it went on for some time. Then something happened. One evening I fell sick. I had a fever, I didn’t sleep. Nevertheless, the following morning I felt fine, and went to work. But that

evening the fever came back, this time worse. This cycle continued for a week or two.

At the time, I was an outreach worker. This was in 2012, or possibly 2013, relatively early in the days of austerity. It was January. The work involved traipsing the streets of north London to inform its elderly inhabitants of which services remained. I was working under the aegis of a new charity whose main funders were the councils in which it operated. I was paid handsomely for this work, but by the hour. What was more, it was seasonal; once temperatures reached double digits, this brief and surprisingly lucrative employment would cease.

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I quickly adapted my routine to these new realities. I'd get up, without having slept, and put my bed sheets in the washing machine (time delay: seven hours). Then I'd cycle across the river. I'd walk around the council estates of north London, which were now mostly privatised, and knock on some doors. Then I'd cycle back to Camberwell, move my bed sheets from the washing machine to the dryer, eat dinner, wash up, read something and reinstall the freshly laundered sheets. Then I'd fix myself a drink and sit in bed and wait until, just after 11pm and always before 11.20, the fever began to gather. This proved to be surprisingly sustainable, until one day I collapsed on the stairs.

I took a morning off work to visit my GP. It was an expensive visit from the perspective of earnings potential. As usual, Dr C was patrician and inscrutable. His body had been trained over many years to give nothing away. He nodded as I explained what had happened, and then, as if dismissing everything I'd just said, he said, "OK, let's have a look at you". He placed a stethoscope on my back in order to listen to my lungs, placing his other hand against my chest to steady himself. His grip tightened, signifying something. He cleared his throat and composed himself. "Did you have any plans today, Mr Rees?"

He instructed me to go to A&E. They would X-ray me today; it would have to be today. I agreed to go straight there. After I left his office, Dr C

followed me out into the stairwell and called out, “You will go straight there, won’t you?”

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At the hospital I explained all this to the triage nurse. I was careful to leave nothing out, but also to make no embellishments. She nodded sympathetically and drank in every detail: his tightening grip, the atmosphere that hung about the room. His haunted tone as he called out to me across the waiting room. When my narrative was over she handed me a piece of paper and asked me to hand it in at reception. The paper read: “Feels unwell.”

Later that day, I had an X-ray. True enough, there was a “mass” in my lungs. Certainly, it was of some concern. But it was impossible to say what the mass was (“an X-ray machine is not a precise instrument, young man”). A long period of waiting followed, interrupted by the women who occasionally appeared to take samples of my blood. I regretted having brought nothing to read.

For many hours I sat there, bookless and bored, until a junior doctor appeared to tell me how things stood. The results that had come back were normal. Others would take longer. It was possible that I had a virus of some sort. That would explain the chest X-ray: it would be a lymph node, that was all. On the other hand, there were reasons to doubt it. My white cell count was normal. One would expect it to be raised. This did suggest that something more sinister might be going on, but it was too soon to be jumping to conclusions. I wasn’t to worry. I was to go now, get some rest. I was to come back tomorrow, when I would report to the Medical Assessment Centre.



Photograph: Stockimo/Alamy

Honestly, this was not unwelcome. In general, the parameters of any medical investigation are determined by the story that one tells about oneself. When one leaves a doctor's office having been told, after a brief examination, not to worry, the feeling tends to be reassuring only in the short term. Before long, doubts set in. What if one has failed to give the really essential piece of information? What if the small detail which in the blur of the encounter slipped one's mind, or which one deliberately withheld, what if this detail were the truly important thing, the stray thread which would have enabled the doctor to unweave the veil of health and reveal the sick body beneath? Such, at least, tended to be my experience. There is always more one can say, and if the patient fails to say the correct thing then any reassuring words uttered by the doctor will be worse than null; they will be a lure. And yet giving a good account of oneself, an account that will convince a doctor that one is worthy of their time, a reliable witness to one's own body, is also about knowing what not to say. More really isn't always more. It is a writer's problem: what to put in, leave out. But the stakes are different.

The Medical Assessment Centre promised deliverance from the usual cycle of relief and regret. It promised that medicine's investigations into my body would no longer depend upon my skill as a narrator. At the Medical Assessment Centre I would be reduced to a mute object of medical

knowledge, anonymous and transparent like an anatomical drawing. The thought delighted me.

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When I arrived the next morning at the Medical Assessment Centre, the receptionist, whom I had never met, knew my name. Actually, everyone there seemed to know me. Over the course of that morning people of various professions made reference to my “case”.

I changed into a hospital gown. A nurse came to take some blood and, to my surprise, left a cannula in my arm. “Oh?” I said. “Don’t worry, Mr Rees,” she said meaningfully. “For your procedure.” A few minutes later a hospital porter arrived with a wheelchair. “All right, Mr Rees, hop in.” It dawned on me that I might actually be a patient. It was an unlovely realisation that felt nothing at all like vindication. I declined, politely I believe, and said I was perfectly well enough to walk. The porter appeared hurt. He mumbled that he would have to check with the doctor. I nodded that he should do whatever he felt necessary as I gathered my belongings into my rucksack.

The porter returned, bearing no evident resentment, and as we made the short walk to the imaging unit he prattled cheerfully about this and that, the weather, his two young children, the extension he was building at his parents’ house. When we arrived, he withdrew quickly so that my delayed and oddly inflected “Goodbye” was addressed to his back as he receded through the double doors.

At the IU, I was injected with a coloured dye that made my arsehole dilate and I was passed several times through a noisy, large machine. It was the moment I’d been waiting for, my dream come true. Afterwards I was told (without the offer of a wheelchair) to retrace my steps to the Medical Assessment Centre. I sat around for an hour or two, time now completely lost to me, although its passing was tortuous, until the kindly, brusque Dr L appeared. “Look, it’s going to be a while. Go for a walk, get something to eat. OK?”

Dr L said he’d call me as soon as he had the results. Soon I was sitting in a dimly lit coffee shop holding a book, and after an hour, or some hours, I received the call from Dr L. His voice now sounded completely different,

grave, formal, although it was difficult to know what to make of this since he belonged to a class and a generation whose members still possessed a “phone voice”.

I sensed that my fate was now known – not yet to me, but to someone. The facts of the matter had come to light; it only remained for them to be conveyed to me. As I stepped out into the street I had a sudden rush of appreciation for ignorance, which I now realised could be something more than a mere deficit. Ignorance could have a reality of its own, it could be a state of plenitude and possibility. It was a state in which I’d have liked to abide a little longer, perhaps indefinitely.

I thought about walking in the opposite direction to the hospital, to the Thames, perhaps, or to the City. I thought about never returning, taking my chances.

Of course, I walked straight to the hospital. It wasn’t only that a will to knowledge turned out to be the stronger drive. The pleasures of not knowing are necessarily belated. One can always choose not to know. But ignorance, consciously chosen, is nothing at all like innocence. When I returned, Dr L greeted me at the door. He told me to follow him into a private room, his voice still grave. I sat on the bed, he on the lid of a metal bin marked “biowaste”. On the computer screen were the results of a CT scan: my body, illuminated. I was surprised to find myself not feeling very anxious. It was not a feeling of calm that came over me, however; only abandonment to the implacable logic of the situation.

Dr L was going to cut to the chase. The scan showed what he had hoped it would not show, that all through my body my lymph nodes were enlarged. They were, in Dr L’s phrase, “standing to attention”, although he could not say why. What he was saying was, the image was clear enough. But he could not explain what it meant.

A disease was mentioned whose name had long been prominent in my daydreams and internet browsing history. Hearing its name said aloud (I think for the first time), this felt obscene and electrifying. Infection was mentioned, too, although it was with a tone of regret that Dr L reiterated that there was no elevation in my white cell count. It was of some concern that

the enlarged nodes were distributed evenly above and beneath my diaphragm. “That will make it late-stage,” I offered. “The ones that concern me are in your chest,” he said. “They’re very deep.”

That I liked Dr L was partly because he always spoke as though enlisting your assistance to some shared task. He started every sentence with an imperative “Look”, and ended it with a rhetorical “OK?”. These were obvious affectations, which did not make them less effective; his style made any response feel weirdly pedantic, and in an infantilised desire to prove myself to Dr L by matching his aloofness, I could almost forget that the item under discussion was my own body.

“Look, nothing is certain yet. There’s still a chance that this is just an infection. In which case, in a couple of weeks you’re going to forget all about it. Get on with your life. But in the meantime, we’re going to have to do a lot more tests. OK?” I nodded. “Look, I know all this is frightening. But I can promise that we’re going to get to the bottom of this. So, come back here tomorrow at nine and we’ll get started, OK?” I nodded.

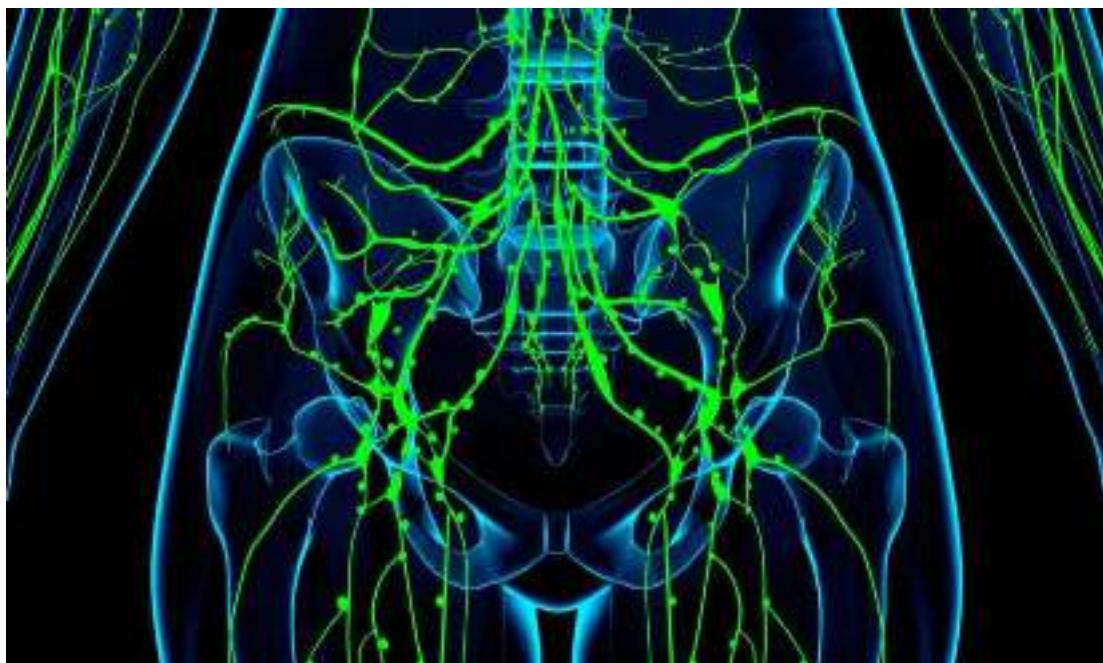
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What followed was a fortnight during which I reported each morning to the Medical Assessment Centre. Sometimes, I spent an entire day there, other times it was only a fleeting visit to deposit a little blood en route to north London, whose elderly population awaited news about what would survive the cuts to public expenditure that were reported to be “swingeing” (one of those words that, everywhere for a short time, one rarely hears afterwards).

Many tests were performed, and aside from ordinary pleasantries I was rarely required to speak. I simply handed myself over. That the fever had gone by this time was not considered a reason to desist; now, and for the very first time, medicine had taken an interest in my body that had nothing to do with my experience of it.

One day I had a fine-needle biopsy to determine whether the cells that had clumped into masses inside my right armpit were cancerous; it would take a week or more for the results to come back. The intervening period was colourless and strange, and the waiting rooms in which I often sat came to seem like a metaphor for life itself. On the other hand, I was learning a lot.

Partly by osmosis – I was spending so much time on the ward – and partly because of the hospital’s practice of copying patients in to all correspondence between its consultants and the patient’s GP. Due to a time lag of three or four days, these letters would always arrive a little out of sync with where things currently stood. This did not render them an irrelevance, however, since, addressed not to me but to my GP, they presented information about my case in a way that was completely unfamiliar.



A rendering of the lymphatic system. Photograph: Shubhangi Ganeshrao Kene/Getty Images/Science Photo Library RF

The feeling when reading these letters was similar to overhearing a conversation about one’s behaviour at a recent party. The deviation from one’s own memory need not be great for it to kill one on the spot. In these curt yet suggestive letters there would frequently be reference to things that had never been discussed with me (“ACE level elevated”; “liver function abnormalities”; “inconclusive”) while matters I’d considered settled days earlier were repeatedly thrown back into question. And so while the letters fizzed with information – information I would immediately augment with further information drawn from Google searches – I tended to come away from having read them feeling more, not less, in the dark.

In the third volume of the [Spheres trilogy](#) – a towering philosophical history of the west – the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk argues that modernity is underwritten by “explication”, a process by which previously unscrutinised background aspects of life are drawn into the foreground. As this occurs, what had passed for simple is revealed in all its previously unimagined complexity: for instance, air, previously the undifferentiated medium of existence, is shown to be a mixture of gases subject to countless fluctuations. On the one hand, this increases our technical mastery over the environment; on the other, it brings a sense of vulnerability. There are so many ways that something complicated can go wrong.

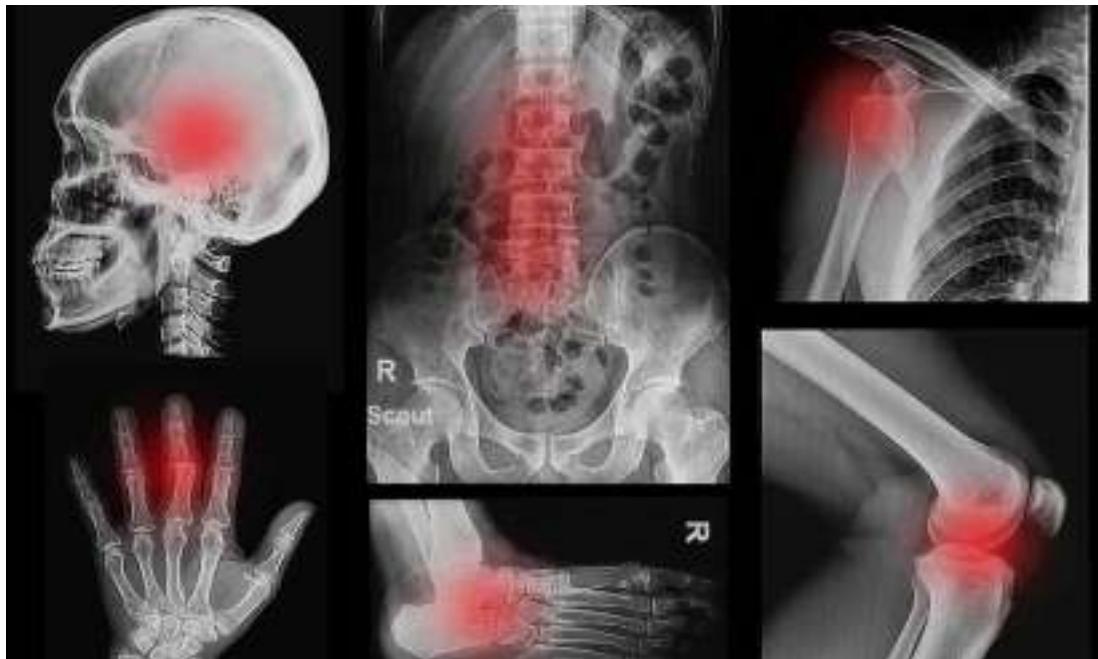
As the critic Steven Connor has noted, revelation is always haunted by a feeling of not knowing. As previously unexpected areas of complexity are revealed, thoughts and suspicions loom about what else remains to be brought to light. Where previously there had been nothing at all, now there are depths waiting to be plumbed.

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When, after a fortnight or so, it was revealed that I’d had glandular fever – this had initially been ruled out on the basis of an antibody test, but showed up on a subsequent test – I was delighted. It was like one of those criminal judgments in which the accused is given some trivial sentence and, having served this time awaiting trial, is free to go.

The feeling did not last, however. On the day the receptionist told me over the phone about the glandular fever result, I was due to report to the Medical Assessment Centre to get the result of the biopsy. I asked the receptionist if I should still make the appointment, now that we had an explanation. She asked me to hold the line while she discussed this with the consultant – a distant murmuring I could hear but not make out – and when she returned told me, emphatically, that I was indeed required to keep the appointment.

At the appointment, however, which so emphatically was necessary, and which I attended with a frank terror I had not experienced in the two weeks hitherto, the consultant said, after a long preamble about the marvels of the human immune system, that he was confident that the glandular fever result explained the abnormalities he’d found in my biopsy.



Photograph: Prakaymas vitchitchalao/Alamy

“So there were abnormalities in my biopsy?”

“No, no. Well, not once we take into account the glandular fever. I can tell you, I was happy to see that.”

“What about my ACE level?”

“What about it?”

“It’s elevated.”

“Oh, it is? Hmm.”

“And my liver function, it’s abnormal.”

“Well, in any case it’s nothing to worry about. You’re fine, Mr Rees.”

The consultant cheerfully handed me a form discharging me from the care of the Medical Assessment Centre. It was his way of asking me to leave.

I’d been an outpatient of the Medical Assessment Centre for a fortnight, or thereabouts. Now I was leaving, healthy. At home, letters continued to arrive

for several days.

The charity I worked for did not give its casualised staff sick pay, and so I did not rest, as was advised. Quite the opposite, since my recent absences had been expensive. Probably the work did me good. My period of employment ended in the spring.

My memories of the period that followed are more clotted, much harder to give an account of besides the vaguest outlines. It is when I came closer than I ever have to madness. After a brief period of respite, doubts set in. There were so many things that did not make sense. I'd kept much of the correspondence between the hospital and the GP, which, now thumbed and coffee-stained, was full of incongruous details. It seemed to me to provide a lengthy record of leads unpursued.

I started to resemble poor Miss Flite from Bleak House, making myself a continual presence at the GP surgery and at the hospital, always, of course, with "my documents". There were a good many things that I'd have liked to know, things I would have liked to clear up. A scan, I thought. That would do it. A scan that would light up every region of my body, revealing what was the matter with it. That would require me to enlist the help of doctors. It was a task to which I applied myself vigorously.

It was a dark time, which went on for many months, during which ordinary life, as it is wont, went on, too. And then at some point, without ever really concluding, that period of my life ended.

Now, I prefer not to know. I rarely visit doctors; my internet browsing history no longer resembles a diagnostic manual. It has been this way for some years. I don't know how this happened exactly. It was only possible, afterwards, to observe that I no longer paid any heed to my health. A few years ago I began writing about all this; the fact might be relevant. If I were to become sick now I'd probably be the last to realise. I don't know that this necessarily represents an advance, but certainly it has made life pleasanter.

A few weeks ago I noticed a lymph node the size of a conker in my right armpit, and then another. A few days later I visited the doctor, who

suggested sending me for an ultrasound. A few days after that, a text message arrived containing a link through which I could book the hospital appointment. The earliest one was four days later, but I could choose from the many available appointments, in various convenient locations, the one that suited me best.

I have not yet booked the appointment, although I have thought of doing so many times. The lymph nodes remain enlarged. I do not feel frightened, but I do continue to put it off. I have been busy, writing. It is only now, in the very final stages of editing this essay, that the thought occurs to me (it is a thought that makes me smile) that these two things – the appointment I haven't made, and the essay I have been writing – could be related.

*This article appears in the current issue of Granta*

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Elbow grease or ignoring grease? Photograph: Christopher Owens/The Guardian

## Vac to the future! Can robot mops and self-cleaning windows get us out of housework for ever?

Elbow grease or ignoring grease? Photograph: Christopher Owens/The Guardian

I despise chores – so I jumped at the chance to test the latest hi-tech solutions (and simple hacks) that promise to keep domestic drudgery to a minimum

by [Emma Beddington](#)

Thu 3 Mar 2022 01.00 EST

A prime candidate for secular canonisation – and a personal hero of mine – is [Frances Gabe](#). She was a visionary, a terrible neighbour (she antagonised hers with a succession of snarling great danes and a penchant for nude DIY) and the inventor of the self-cleaning home. Gabe, who died in 2016 at 101, transformed her Oregon bungalow into a “giant dishwasher”, with a system of sprinklers, air dryers and drains, plus self-cleaning sinks, bath and toilet. “Housework is a thankless, unending job,” Gabe said. “Who wants it? Nobody!”

I agree with Gabe – and with Lenin, who condemned housework as “barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying and crushing drudgery”. My own objections are mainly founded in sloth and a vague desire to stick it to the man, but for others housework can be difficult, or even impossible.



Ahead of her time ... Frances Gabe with a model of her self-cleaning home.  
Photograph: Tony Barnard/Los Angeles Times/Getty Images

“We’ve tied cleanliness to morality for so long that it’s difficult to see that there are reasons people may have a hard time keeping tidy besides being lazy,” says Rachel Hoffman, the author of [Unfuck Your Habitat: You’re Better Than Your Mess](#). “If someone has mental illness, disabilities, trauma

or chronic health issues, the usual suggestions of how to keep a clean home can be completely out of reach.”

Many can’t and plenty more don’t want to clean. But are we any closer to making Gabe’s utopia a reality? If not, can we make the perpetual grind less arduous? I tried to find out.

## Dust

Dust is inescapable: after all, it is mainly – or at least partly, depending on whom you ask – skin. “I don’t believe any amount of exfoliating in the shower is going to stop our clothes and bedding also exfoliating us,” says Kate de Selincourt, a writer on sustainability and health in buildings. Some household dust is worse, she notes: it can contain toxic flame retardants from fabric, weedkiller residue from city pavements, microplastics and other delights.

Could your home be less dusty? Possibly. [Mechanical ventilation heat recovery](#) (MVHR) might help. Designed as an environmentally friendly method of heating and ventilating homes, MVHR provides fresh air while conserving heat, but it also filters air on entry, stopping some exterior dirt from getting in. “Standard filters – G4 – can filter out larger particles such as insects, fine hair, flying seeds and other airborne debris,” says Chayley Collis of [the Green Building Store](#).



‘My objections to housework are mainly founded in sloth.’ Photograph: Christopher Owens/The Guardian

Users can choose a finer F7 filter, which also excludes smaller particles, including pollen. MVHR can eliminate some internally generated dust, too, since it is continuously extracting air. “For example, in a bathroom, when we shake a towel, dust is disturbed off the surfaces and often towel lint is released into the air. Some of this will be extracted by the MVHR system,” says Collis, although heavier particles just fall back to the floor.

How effectively an MVHR system – usually quoted at £1,500 to £3,000 for a “normal” home – limits dust depends on how airtight your home is: gaping windows or doors make it far less effective. For a more lo-tech approach, De Selincourt recommends a shoes-off policy and “plenty of doormats, ideally ones you can hose down”.

## Robots

It is 2022. Elon Musk can fly a car to Mars, or something. Can’t I just jab my phone and get a clean house? Almost. Robot vacuum cleaners are a reality – I have had a Roomba since 2006. It is an angry, battered, much-repaired little warhorse that roars around, banging into things at arbitrary times of the day and night, swallowing cables, being confounded by rug

tassels and demanding I deal with its “brush cage”. Despite this, I love it: it vacuums my floor with almost no intervention from me; the dream.

“We knew people wanted a cleaning robot, because they would tell us,” says Colin Angle, the CEO of the US company iRobot, which makes Roomba. “It was: ‘Good to meet you, Colin, when are you going to clean my floor?’ There was no genius required.”

Even so, Roomba was 12 years in the making. It uses technology developed for mine clearance to ensure coverage, and keeps costs (relatively) low with knowhow developed during a failed foray into robot toys. The engineers voted to call their creation the Cybersuck. Angle refused. “I get full credit for a moment of wisdom.”

Although the UK remains resistant (a distribution issue, according to Angle), Roomba is one of the rare appliances to achieve cultural artefact status. It has inspired a melancholy vacuum’s eyevie Twitter account ([@selfawareRoomba](#)) and appeared in [viral pet videos](#) and sitcoms (Parks and Recreation’s [DJ Roomba](#)), while the tale of the one that recently “escaped” from a [Cambridge Travelodge](#) moved even a Roomba-sceptic nation. I think it is because they feel oddly ... alive? Infuriating or endearing, it is impossible to remain indifferent to your tiny housemate.



Emma with her gang of cleaning gadgets. Photograph: Christopher Owens/The Guardian

“The personification is powerful,” says Angle. “Within two weeks, 90% of people have given their Roomba a name or use Roomba as if it were its name.” (Ours is Noo Noo, after the Teletubbies’ vacuum.) When he took calls for the helpline in the early days, customers would refuse to relinquish their defective robots for exchange, demanding first aid for their family member.

iRobot sends me its latest app-enabled robot butler, the j7+, to try. It is definitely better at cleaning and more discreet than my whirring anarchist: there is much less bumping into things, thanks to the new algorithms, and you can choose to let it use your phone’s GPS or speak to other smart devices to work out when everyone is out and start cleaning then. It is also needier: after each “mission”, you can give the robot feedback, with options including “It didn’t need my help” and “It respected my home”.

Noo Noo 2, as we call the sleek interloper, also shows me photographs of obstacles it has encountered (socks, shoes, bags), asking whether it should avoid them permanently or if they are temporary (it is always option one here, robot chum). The tech has evolved to recognise and steer clear of cables, earbuds and even – the nightmare scenario – dog poo. “We actually gathered thousands of pictures of dog poop and made physical and digital models of dog poop – all the glory of hi-tech wizardry,” says Angle. “We’re so confident, we actually guarantee against your Roomba hitting dog poop.”

The Roomba uses technology developed for mine clearance and from a foray into robot toys

Has the servile j7+ – quiet, respectful, responsive, learning – lost some of the original Roomba’s wild poetic soul? Maybe. Could I get used to it? Oh yes.

Robots can also mop: iRobot’s Braava uses the same technological bells and whistles as the vacuum, but it is quieter, slinking eerily around, clicking discreetly. My husband sets it up to follow the Roomba and it feels as if a

phalanx of household staff are doing our bidding – the closest we will ever come to feeling like tech billionaires.

Our floors are much cleaner, but the Braava is not fuss-free. Unless you use single-use versions (available, but hardly eco-friendly) you need to rinse the mop pad after use. It also sends plaintive messages asking me to fill its tank, but I don't care about floor cleanliness enough to respond often. If robots could compare notes, this one would be complaining to Noo Noo about the month it spent begging me to charge it daily, while sitting mere inches from its charging point. Let's hope they can't.

Domestic robots feel like the future, but they come at a serious price: £899 for the j7+; £699 for the Braava. An entry-level Roomba starts at £269. They don't have all the answers, either: like Daleks, they are defeated by stairs. I check Angle isn't working on a stair-cleaning vacuum. "I've made many robots that can climb stairs," he says. "You just don't want to pay for it."

## Hair

I receive a heartfelt plea to investigate the hair problem from a household of multiple dogs and long-haired women; I wish I had better news for them. [Oxo's drain protector](#) does come highly recommended if plughole hair is your bugbear, though. Personally, I am with the cleaning expert Aggie MacKenzie, who says: "I get quite excited by unblocking it, pulling it up and the whole great big ball coming up. Totally disgusting." If all cleaning were as grossly satisfying, I might do more.

Elsewhere, there is no magic bullet that does not involve buzzcuts for all, but MacKenzie is a fan of [Bissell stick vacuums](#) for hairy situations. "I promise you no hair gets caught in the brush; it's a miracle."

I wonder about matching upholstery to your pet's fur, but Louise Wicksteed of the interior design firm [Sims Hilditch](#) doesn't recommend this. "A Martindale 'rub count' [the rating system that assesses fabric durability] of more than 18,000 should stop it from becoming tatty and snagged by your pet's claws," she advises. "Get parcel tape, wrap it around your hand and just kind of dab your hand on the sofa," says MacKenzie. "It's quite

enjoyable.” And you could do it sitting down, I suggest, hopefully. “Kind of, yes.” She doesn’t sound convinced.

## Window grime

I hate cleaning windows – I can never eliminate every smear. Can technology help? Outside, yes. Self-cleaning glass exists – and you can install it at home. Pilkington produces Active, a coated glass. “The coating works in two ways,” says its UK marketing manager, Leo Pyrah. “It’s photocatalytic, so it takes UV energy from daylight and the coating reacts to break down and loosen organic dirt.”

The coating is also hydrophilic, which means it stops droplets forming when it rains, so “the water spreads out evenly”. It is 20% more expensive than normal glass and not something you can use indoors – yet. “We have been doing research on using UV lamps to activate the coating,” says Pyrah, but there is no imminent replacement for elbow grease, or, in my case, ignoring grease.

## Hiding

If cleaning is too much, can camouflage help? When it comes to hiding dirt, ditch minimalism: pattern is your friend. There is a reason those English country houses full of labradors go heavy on the chintz. The interior designer Irene Gunter of [Gunter & Co](#) says that needn’t mean over-the-top florals: you can get a forgiving effect with subtle variations in tone and texture.



Out with the old ... Emma with a traditional mop – and a robot version.  
Photograph: Christopher Owens/The Guardian

She also avoids painted walls – “a real pain in the butt” – as marks on even the most aspirational heritage emulsion are hard to remove cleanly. In heavy-use areas such as kitchens and hallways, she recommends easy-to-maintain, wipeable wood panelling or vinyl wallpapers.

Similarly, less-than-immaculate floors look better with texture. Wood is good, because it has “grain and life”. Avoid tiles that are “like a piece of paper, super flat,” Gunter suggests; pick something with a variety of shades, even of the same colour. “If you’ve got a bit of dust or a raisin lying on the floor, it doesn’t shout out at you.”

Darker isn’t necessarily better, according to Wicksteed: “A common misconception is that a dark floor colour will hide dirt more effectively; this is particularly true when using dark stone to disguise a pet’s muddy pawprints.” But dirt is often lighter-coloured and mud dries paler than people expect. She recommends lighter-coloured limestone, which is more forgiving at hiding “tell-tale signs of animals around the house”.

Match your grouting to your tiles, advises Gunter. If it needs to be pale, persuade your tiler to use harder-wearing epoxy grouting. “I don’t need to

worry that in six months' time I'm going to have to sit on the floor with a toothbrush," she says, conjuring a scenario as unlikely for me as unaided flight.

When all else fails, deploy the dimmers. "Lighting is about adding atmosphere and making it cosy, not about creating a sterile environment," says Gunter. Beware claims of "soft white" bulbs, she warns, and appealingly warm pictures, which could be Photoshopped. Check the box: "You need to make sure it's 2,700 Kelvin."

## Hacks

The self-cleaning home remains a distant dream, but there are ways to make housework feel less overwhelming. For Debora Robertson, the author of Declutter: The Get Real Guide to Creating Calm from Chaos, a clutter-free home is a simpler place to clean and live. "Paring back means you never have to clean, mend, polish or dust those things again."

Hoffman recommends "a mindset shift. Stop thinking of cleaning as a huge undertaking and start thinking of it as a series of small, ongoing tasks you can mould and fit around your life. You can clean a room in one- to five-minute intervals, repeated over time." She is also an advocate for asking for help – from friends or family if professional help isn't feasible. "There's a really interesting phenomenon where people have trouble keeping their own messes tidy, but can help someone else with theirs."



There is nothing like opening the windows to freshen a room. Photograph: Christopher Owens/The Guardian

What makes the biggest difference for the least effort? Robertson is “obsessed” with airing rooms. “It’s the quickest improvement you can make. Throw windows open for at least 10 minutes every day and it’s instantly fresher.” Hammond finds clearing flat surfaces – tables, shelves, desks – disproportionately helpful. “It can make a huge visual difference.” Another easy win is making the bed: “Beds take up a lot of real estate in a room, so a neat bed can make everything else feel tidier, even if it’s not.”

My favourite advice, though, is MacKenzie’s. “Don’t move around the house at all. Every time you move, you’re shedding dead skin cells and hair. Just stand still in one place.” Finally, cleaning advice I am confident I can follow.

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[Bike blog](#)[Cycling](#)

## The man challenging anti-cycling trolls to change their ways

Andrew Tierney is part of a new breed of cycling activists tackling a rise in online abuse head-on



A cyclist – not Tierney – wearing a helmet camera. Tierney's takedowns include contacting those spouting hate against cyclists online. Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Alamy

*[Carlton Reid](#)*

Thu 3 Mar 2022 02.00 EST

“If someone deletes their comment, that’s success for me,” says Andrew Tierney. “Hopefully, that person will think about what they’re saying in the future.”

Tierney, who [goes by the name @cybergibbons](#) online, is part of a new breed of cycling activists. After noticing an increase in the amount of abuse and violent threats on social media directed at people who ride bikes, Tierney decided to take action. He started calling out the posters online, with the result that many deleted their comments or even their accounts.

“If someone says something racist [online], on the whole, people will challenge those views,” he says. “It should be the same for threats made against cyclists; challenge those who make these statements.”

There has been a noticeable increase in virtual threats against cyclists since the [Highway Code changes and clarifications](#) have been in the news, Tierney believes, and he has started responding to the most serious ones.

“It was on TikTok that I suddenly thought: ‘Wow, people think it’s socially acceptable to make [comments about harming cyclists]’,” he says. “A user made a comment about harming cyclists if they saw them adhering to one of the new Highway Code rules, and it got lots of likes.”

Getting such a post taken down can be difficult and slow when reported via the tech platforms, but can be easy and swift when contacting the user directly, Tierney says.

He was shocked to discover that many of those making hateful comments use their real names. “You click on their profile picture, and it’s their normal account; there’s no hiding involved,” he says.

“There can be videos of them with their kids, yet they’re making a statement that they want to go out and harm someone, and they think that this is completely acceptable because it’s a comment about cyclists. That genuinely shocked me.”

Tierney has nearly 38,000 followers on Twitter and is a recent returnee to cycling. “I got into cycling again during lockdown. I realised how cycling had changed; it’s now a lot more popular than I remembered from my university days.

“By and large, the cyclists I see on the roads follow the Highway Code, taking the lane where it’s appropriate, for instance. But a lot of drivers seem to take issue with cyclists doing that.

“I started noticing people casually posting on social media that they would run over cyclists next time they see any ‘hogging the road’, even when cyclists taking the lane are doing something that’s completely legal and always has been. That blew my mind.”

It's honestly brilliant how many people delete comments about running over cyclists when you tag their wife and mum.

— Cybergibbons (@cybergibbons) [February 13, 2022](#)

Tierney believes poisoning the online well can have real-world effects. “Someone stating on social media, ‘Let’s run over cyclists’ can make other people think it’s acceptable to intimidate cyclists in real life,” he says.

“Some of the hate comments are supposed to be jokes, probably done for likes. But even if it is just a joke to the poster, people reading those comments might be encouraged to harm cyclists in real life.”

He wonders how many close overtakes – so-called punishment passes – are happening soon after reading online comments raging against people riding bikes.

“Many of the most aggressive motorists might have been radicalised online. The belief that [motorists] have more right to be on the road than cyclists isn’t hard to find.”

Many of those posting threat-to-life comments are professional drivers, says Tierney. “They post pictures of their truck or put their employer in their profile. It’s shocking that someone who drives for a living jokes about killing cyclists and does so publicly.”

Tierney’s takedowns involve contacting those spouting the hate, including sending messages to professional drivers. “I remind them that they’re representing their company,” he says.

Offensive posts are often deleted after that contact, but if not, Tierney contacts the companies concerned. “Businesses should be made aware that their employees are threatening to harm people,” he says.

He has no way of knowing if his emails to employers get results because the typical response is that the company is dealing with the complaint internally. Still, comment deletions are normal, and so are full account wipes, or the accounts are subsequently made private.

“People seem to be surprised when you contact them after they’ve made some hateful comment, but I tell them I’m looking at things that have been said in public.”

I'm using four fake Facebook profiles and one real one to challenge people around cycling.

It's interesting how people respond to the different profiles.

Seems far more likely that the women get condescending responses.

— Cybergibbons (@cybergibbons) [February 9, 2022](#)

Tierney says he does not identify or dox people. “There’s been a few accounts where I’ve posted screenshots of the comments made, but I don’t dox; I don’t include the account holder’s real name if they don’t use it online; I don’t think pile-ons help. I don’t harass these people, or want them to be harassed by others,” he says.

“I don’t want to suppress people for having a different opinion; I’ve only contacted people who’ve made direct threats to harm. I’ve gone on social media and found people who are saying: ‘I’m gonna keep a tally of how many cyclists I’ve run over this year.’ I filter down to people making the most serious comments and then ask them whether they really mean what they wrote. This has caused a lot of people to delete comments and caused others to delete their accounts.”

No, I don't accept that it's a joke. It's not a joke to me.

Cyclists die at the hands of drivers who can't control their emotions.

It might be a joke to you, but each time someone reads a comment like that, they think it's normal. It's totally unacceptable.

— Cybergibbons (@cybergibbons) [February 8, 2022](#)

Tierney says many of the most egregious abusers are easy to find making similar comments across multiple platforms.

“It’s common to find that someone will be on Twitter, on Instagram, on TikTok, and on Facebook, using the same [social media] handle and making the same kind of hateful comments. It would be great if everybody challenged these comments when they see them,” Tierney suggests, but he admits this is not for the fainthearted – few of the replies he receives are timorous.

“There is a hardcore who feel like they’re entitled to say they’re going to harm and scare cyclists. I think what I do is a fairly effective way of challenging these people.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/bike-blog/2022/mar/03/anti-cycling-trolls-andrew-tierney-online-abuse>

## Neighbours

# Neighbours: the 10 best memories, from Scott and Charlene to Madge's ghost

With the Aussie soap finally confirmed to end, we celebrate the best moments from 37 years on Ramsay Street – including plenty of twists, weddings and a tornado

- [Beloved Australian soap Neighbours to come to an end after 37 years on air](#)
- [Get our weekend culture and lifestyle email](#) and [listen to our podcast](#)



The reason why there are so many Kylies in Australia: Scott and Charlene's wedding in 1987. Photograph: Channel 5

*[Sam Strutt](#)*

Thu 3 Mar 2022 01.05 EST

Once upon a time, Neighbours had good friends. But with producers Fremantle failing to find a new UK backer to save the Aussie soap, [Neighbours is set to end in June after a groundbreaking 37-year run.](#)

First airing on the Seven Network in 1985, it was taken over by Channel 10 just four months after launch and was transformed into water cooler fodder and a Logies award generating machine. At its peak, more than one million Australians tuned in each night to catch up on the exploits of these “typical” Aussie families living in a cul-de-sac in suburban Melbourne.

Then the Brits jumped on board. Ratings soared. One of its most popular storylines, the wedding of Scott (Jason Donovan) and Charlene (Kylie Minogue) attracted almost 20 million viewers in the UK.

But Ramsay Street’s lights began to dim in the 2000s. Home and Away took a chunk of its audience and, by the beginning of 2010, ratings plummeted. It moved to the UK’s “budget” Channel 5 in 2008, and three years later in Australia, the Ten network moved it from a slot after the nightly news on its main channel, to one of the broadcaster’s secondary channels. But even when it was announced that it was facing cancellation when Channel 5 pulled out, [Neighbours](#) was still pulling in 1.5 million viewers across the channel’s two daily screenings in the UK.

Let’s take a walk down Ramsay Street and look at the 10 memories and moments that made Neighbours great.

## **1. Scott and Charlene’s wedding (1987)**

The real “royal wedding”. It sent baby’s breath stocks soaring and was viewed by an audience of 19.6 million in the UK. Kylie’s career was officially launched and a homegrown superstar was born. And a generation of Australians and Britons are now called Kylie and Charlene.

## **2. When Harold was swept out to sea (1991)**

Poor Harold did a Harold Holt. Was he really dead? Nah, of course not. He just had amnesia after being picked up by a random boat. In reality, it was contract negotiations that caused actor Ian Smith's departure. He returned and left Ramsay Street many times over the years – in 1996, 2008, 2011 and 2015.

### **3. The death of Helen Daniels (1997)**

Mother of Neighbours, Helen was one of the original Ramsay Street characters. There wasn't a dry eye in the house when the Erinsborough matriarch died in her sleep on her sofa after watching a 10-year-old video of the wedding of her grandson Scott and Charlene. For the first time, no credits were shown at the end, given the character's importance to the show.



Lou Carpenter (Tom Oliver), Madge Bishop (Anne Charleston) and Harold Bishop (Ian Smith). Photograph: Channel 5

### **4. When Madge died – with Harold by her side (2001)**

Madge was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and contracted septicaemia shortly afterwards. She died, in bed, with her true love Harold by her side. The end. Of course not. She came back to Ramsay Street as a ghost to guide Harold through tough times. Harold eventually moved to Port Douglas (almost every character written out of Neighbours moved to Queensland). Her ghost didn't go with him.

## **5. Toadie and Dee make it to the altar and then she dies (2003)**

The beauty and the beast. Toadfish married the angelic Dee. Happy ending? Of course not. The union ended in tragedy when Toadie accidentally drove their car off a cliff and into the sea on the way to the reception. Of course Dee's body was not found and Toadie was forced to accept that she had died. So it is hardly surprising that Dee came back, or that she had an evil doppelganger called Andrea, who threw Dee over a cliff in Byron Bay. (No, that's not even the end of Dee either – she eventually moved to Alaska.)



Karl Kennedy (Alan Fletcher) and Izzy Hoyland (Natalie Bassingthwaite).  
Photograph: Fremantle/Shutterstock

## **6. Karl and Izzy's affair (2004)**

Dr Karl just couldn't keep it in his pants. Just a few years after his tempestuous affair with young Sarah, he was back at it with "homewrecker" Izzy, played by pop chanteuse Natalie Bassingthwaighe. And his poor wife, Susan, was left to pick up the pieces, yet again. There was a pregnancy, paternity doubts, and a miscarriage. Classic soap fodder.

## **7. The Erinsborough tornado (2014)**

The freak weather event is a standard soapy plot: all that death and destruction nicely sets up a myriad of storylines revolving around desperate sexual encounters, proposals and missing characters. As the tornado approached Erinsborough, Paige and Mark gave in to their desires, Daniel proposed to Amber after they rescued Paul, and Susan performed an emergency tracheotomy. She may have been a school teacher but she was married to a doctor, so in soapland she's more than qualified. Lauren kissed Brad. A wombat was rescued. Someone was trapped in a portaloo.



David (Takaya Honda) and Aaron (Matt Wilson) tie the knot. Photograph: Network Ten

## **8. The first same-sex marriage on Aussie TV after the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Australia (2018)**

This was the most memorable Neighbours wedding since Scott and Charlene. Neighbours aired the first same-sex wedding to ever screen on Australian TV when David Tanaka (Takaya Honda) and Aaron Brennan (Matt Wilson) walked down the aisle. The historic episode also featured the prominent marriage equality campaigner Magda Szubanski as the couple's celebrant. Minogue and Donovan's duet Especially For You played during the wedding scene.

## **9. The 35th anniversary blockbuster week – with five weddings and three deaths (2020)**

When too much Neighbours is never enough. Neighbours celebrated its 35th anniversary in March 2020. The special week consisted of the five regular weekday episodes, as well as five extra episodes as part of a series titled Neighbours: Endgame. There were five weddings, three deaths, luggage bombs, tropical islands, someone trapped in a mineshaft, a body in a dinghy, a storm, a venomous snake – and much, much more.



Guy Pearce as Mike Young. Photograph: Fremantle/Rex

## 10. The ones who made it (1985-2022)

Despite its declining popularity in recent years, it cannot be forgotten that Neighbours launched the international careers of countless Australian stars, including [Kylie Minogue](#), Margot Robbie and Guy Pearce. Minogue is one of our most successful international exports. Robbie has been nominated twice for an Oscar. And Pearce has won a Screen Actors Guild award, an Emmy and been nominated for a Golden Globe. The kids did alright.

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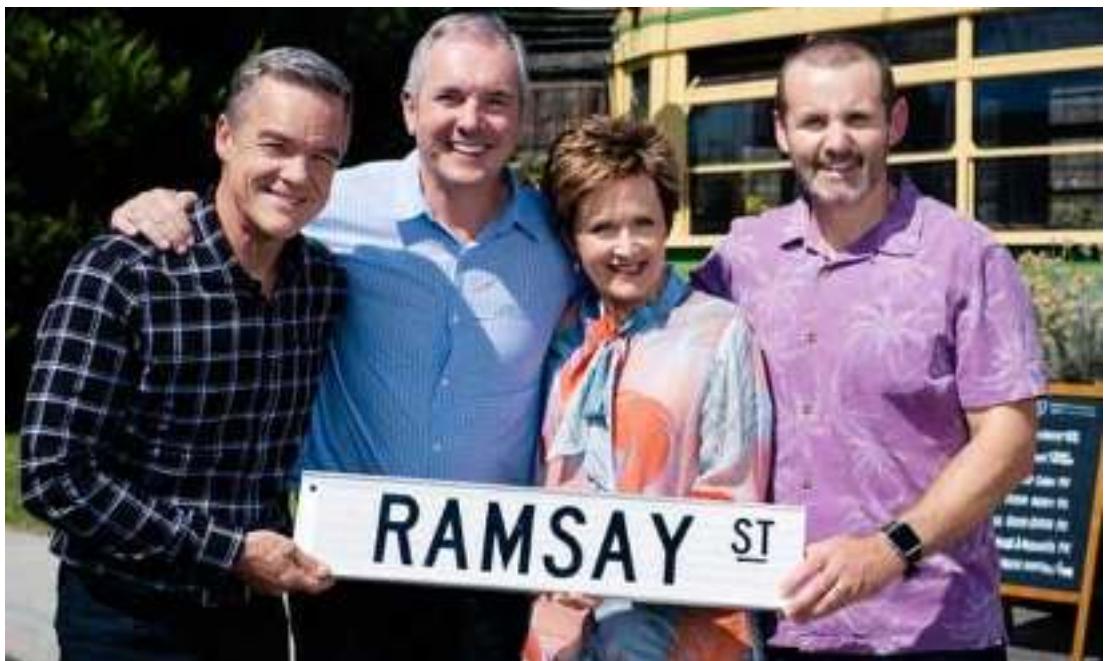
This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2022/mar/03/neighbours-the-10-best-memories-from-scott-and-charlene-to-madges-ghost>

## [Australia news](#)

# **Beloved Australian soap Neighbours to come to an end after 37 years on air**

The show where household names such as Margot Robbie and Kylie Minogue had their start will wrap for the last time in June

- [Neighbours: the 10 best memories, from Scott and Charlene to Madge's ghost](#)
- [Get our free news app; get our morning email briefing](#)



Neighbours is the longest-running drama series on Australian television, with 9,000 episodes broadcast, and has enjoyed widespread popularity in Britain. Photograph: Channel 5

*[Amanda Meade](#)*

Thu 3 Mar 2022 01.01 EST

The Australian soap [Neighbours](#) will shoot its final scene in June following a record 37-year run, after producers Fremantle failed to secure another UK broadcaster.

The series, which launched the international careers of countless stars including Kylie Minogue, Jason Donovan, Margot Robbie and Guy Pearce, is the longest-running drama series on [Australian television](#) and was so popular in Britain it has been bankrolled by Channel 5 since 2008.

Tonight, on [#Neighbours](#)  [#AusPace](#) [pic.twitter.com/cUIoDdYtW8](https://pic.twitter.com/cUIoDdYtW8)

— Neighbours (@neighbours) [March 2, 2022](#)

The sunny lives of the Ramsay Street characters still attract 1.5 million UK viewers a day.

“It is with sadness that after nearly 37 years and almost 9,000 episodes broadcast, we are confirming that Neighbours will cease production in June,” a Fremantle spokesperson said.

“Following the loss of a key broadcast partner in the UK, and despite a search for alternative funding, we currently have no option but to rest the show.”

The final blow for the Melbourne-based production comes a month after the UK’s [Channel 5 announced](#) it would no longer air the program.

I will NEVER forgive [@channel5\\_tv](#) for destroying the legend and institution that is [@neighbours](#)!!! We still have time to [#SaveNeighbours](#) so come on everyone, let's send those emails to [@ITV](#) and tweet until we can't tweet anymore!! [#neighbours](#)  [pic.twitter.com/jQ40itmw5q](https://pic.twitter.com/jQ40itmw5q)

— Richard James Porter  (@RichardJamesPo3) [February 28, 2022](#)

“Everyone at Neighbours has been overwhelmed by the love and support from the audience since the news came out,” Fremantle said. “The show has brought [a sunny slice of Australia](#) into the homes of millions of viewers around the world, launching the careers of dozens of household names along the way.

“But as this chapter of Ramsay Street comes to a close, we promise to do everything we can to give the show the send-off it deserves.”

The show has not been a ratings hit for the Ten network since it moved off the main channel to a secondary channel about a decade ago, but it has been a valuable publicity vehicle for the network and has trained hundreds of Australians in the craft of television.

“A much-loved stalwart of our program schedule for over 35 years, it has been a staple of Australian television drama, and Australian cultural exports,” a Ten spokesperson said.

“Ramsay Street, Erinsborough, is a cul-de-sac recognised all over the world and has been home to Scott and Charlene, Des and Daphne, Dr Karl and Susan, Dee and Toadie, Aaron and David and many, many more neighbours.

“Network 10 thanks the cast, crew, all the production team and Fremantle for bringing the perfect blend of soap and sunshine to audiences in Australia and around the world.

“We thank the Australian fans and audiences for their continued support of the series. Their encouragement particularly in the past few weeks has been incredible. It shows that our audience still want Australian scripted drama. We have listened to them and there are exciting new local projects in the pipeline, which is great for our audience and for the local industry.

“We are confident that the cast, crew and writers will bring their distinctive warmth, style and humour to the Neighbours set as they embark on filming the final episodes over the coming months.”

We are overwhelmed by the outpouring of love and support from our amazing viewers during this time. We have the best fans. We have

always been in this together and we love each and every one of you.  
[#Neighbours pic.twitter.com/19KKT3Ixvd](#)

— Neighbours (@neighbours) [February 8, 2022](#)

The show was known for its record of breaking down barriers, including introducing the [show's first trans character](#) in Mackenzie Hargraves – played by the Australian trans activist Georgie Stone – in 2019. In 2004 Neighbours aired a much-publicised “lesbian kiss” by the characters Lana Crawford and Sky Mangel.

Neighbours was first broadcast on the Seven network on 18 March 1985, but the network famously axed it before it went on to be a worldwide hit for Ten, which picked it up the following year.

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## 2022.03.03 - Coronavirus

- ['Lots of happy tears' Joy as New Zealand opens border after two years of isolation](#)
- ['Looking for gene variants' Scientists seek to solve mystery of why some people do not catch Covid](#)

## New Zealand

# ‘Lots of happy tears’: joy as New Zealand opens border after two years of isolation

Some reunions were also tempered by grief, as for many New Zealanders the reopening came too late

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Passengers and loved ones reunite at Auckland airport, two years after New Zealand shut its border at the beginning of the Covid pandemic. Photograph: David Rowland/AFP/Getty Images

*Tess McClure in Auckland and Eva Corlett in Wellington*

Wed 2 Mar 2022 23.59 EST

Tears, hugs, laughter and the shouts of children echoed through the arrivals halls of [New Zealand](#), as the country opened its borders and lifted isolation requirements.

“I’ve been waiting six months for this moment,” says Steve, 72, who was waiting for his fiancee, Karin, to arrive from Australia. “I’m over the moon,” he said. “I feel a bit shaky.”

Steve said he had cleaned their motor-home, complete with karaoke machine, from top to bottom, in preparation for taking a trip around New Zealand for the pair to see their friends and family. “We’ve been talking on the phone for five hours a day to keep our sanity that way,” says Steve. “It’s been very hard.”

For almost two years, New Zealand’s international airports’ arrival terminals have been shuttered ghost towns. Apart from a short-lived travel bubble with Australia, the country’s [borders have been closed](#), with those lucky enough to secure entry into the country whisked to government-managed isolation and quarantine facilities for a costly two weeks secluded in a hotel room.

Wednesday marked the end of that era for returning citizens, and for the first time since March 2020, flights on Thursday touched down full of New Zealanders without isolation or quarantine requirements.



Apart from a short-lived travel bubble with Australia, New Zealand's borders have been shut for almost two years. Photograph: David Rowland/AFP/Getty Images

For others, the joy of a reunion was tempered by grief. "I'm waiting for my brother and his new bride," said Tania Fitzhenry, breaking into tears. "We're trying to get back down to Huntly in time for him to see our dad."

The family has been waiting a long time for border restrictions to lift, so that her brother could return and say farewell to their very unwell father. "It feels like forever," she says. "I think Dad's been waiting all week. I hope to God, please hold on, he's just got to hold on a couple more hours. Up until last night we were saying, dad, it's OK to let go – but then [it became] Craig's close enough now, you've got to hold on."

New Zealand's initial staged border reopening plan, first announced in November, was derailed by the arrival of Omicron. The government resurrected its reopening plans in February, with the proviso that travellers still had to self-isolate for 10 days. This week, as the country's Covid [transmission rates soared](#) to some of the highest in the world and cases in the community far outnumbered those at the border, that requirement was dropped and the entry dates for New Zealanders around the world were pulled forward.

For some New Zealanders, it marks the end of a bitter, difficult journey. Many have found themselves separated from family, unable to farewell dying loved ones, missing family milestones, in breach of visa requirements or forced into illegal overstaying overseas.

“People in this group have waited so long for this,” Justine Kirby of Grounded Kiwis, a group advocating on behalf of New Zealanders stranded overseas, said in a statement.

“[There are] many for whom this has come too late. And it’s also deeply personal for me: I haven’t seen any family members for almost four years now,” she said. After the announcement, “I called Mum and, for the first time since early 2020, we started to make some travel plans together. Lots of happy tears.”

The border opened to New Zealanders and eligible travellers arriving from Australia on Monday and, on Friday, it opens to all other New Zealanders. Cabinet will consider reopening dates for tourists and other visitors in the coming months.

From Thursday, vaccinated travellers will no longer need to self-isolate but will still be required to undergo a Covid-19 test on arrival and on day five or six, prime minister Jacinda Ardern [announced on Monday](#). If the traveller tests positive for the virus, they will be required to self-isolate, in line with requirements for New Zealanders. Unvaccinated travellers will still have to stay in managed isolation.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/03/lots-of-happy-tears-joy-as-new-zealand-opens-border-after-two-years-of-isolation>

## Coronavirus

# Scientists seek to solve mystery of why some people do not catch Covid

Experts hope research can lead to development of drugs that stop people catching Covid or passing it on

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



Phoebe Garrett, who participated in the world's first Covid-19 challenge trial, did not develop symptoms or test positive. Photograph: Andy Hall/The Observer

*[Linda Geddes](#) Science correspondent*

Wed 2 Mar 2022 06.15 EST

Phoebe Garrett has attended university lectures without catching Covid; she even hosted a party where everyone subsequently tested positive except her. “I think I’ve knowingly been exposed about four times,” the 22-year-old from High Wycombe said.

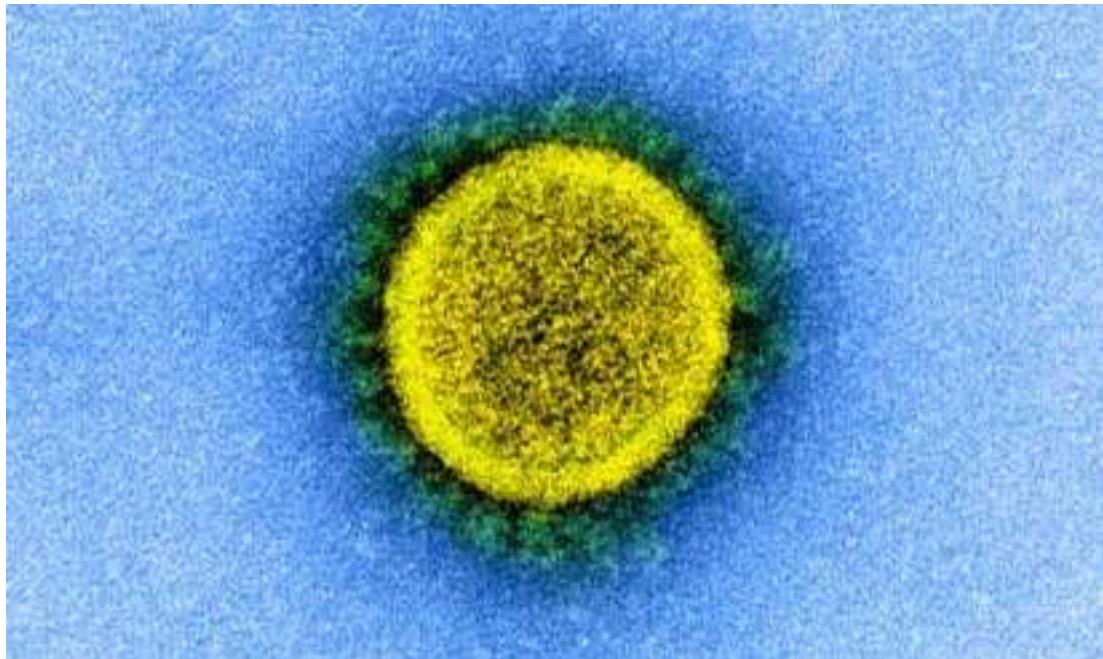
In March 2021, she participated in the world’s first Covid-19 challenge trial, which involved dripping live virus into her nose and pegging her nostrils shut for several hours, in a deliberate effort to infect her. Still her body resisted.

“We had multiple rounds of tests, and different methods of testing: throat swabs, nose swabs, other types of swabs that I’d never done before like nasal wicks – where you hold a swab in your nose for a minute – as well as blood tests, but I never developed symptoms, never tested positive,” Garrett said. “My mum has always said that our family never gets flu, and I’ve wondered if there’s maybe something behind that.”

Most people know someone who has stubbornly [resisted catching Covid](#), despite everyone around them falling sick. Precisely how they do this remains a mystery, but scientists are beginning to find some clues.

The hope is that identifying these mechanisms could lead to the development of drugs that not only protect people from catching Covid, but also prevent them from passing it on.

Garrett is not the only [challenge trial](#) participant to have avoided becoming infected. Of the 34 who were exposed to the virus, 16 failed to develop an infection (defined as two consecutive positive PCR tests) – although around half of them transiently tested positive for low levels of the virus, often several days after exposure.



Transmission electron microscope image of the Sars-CoV-2 virus.  
Photograph: Phanie/Alamy

Possibly, this was a reflection of the immune system rapidly shutting down an embryonic infection. “In our previous studies with other viruses, we have seen early immune responses in the nose that are associated with resisting infection,” said Prof Christopher Chiu at Imperial College London, who led the study. “Together, these findings imply that there is a struggle between the virus and host, which in our ‘uninfected’ participants results in prevention of infection taking off.”

Some of them also reported some mild symptoms, such as a stuffy nose, sore throat, tiredness, or headache – although, since these commonly occur in everyday life, they may have been unrelated to virus exposure.

“Either way, levels of the virus didn’t climb high enough to trigger detectable levels of antibodies, T cells or inflammatory factors in the blood that are usually associated with symptoms,” Chiu said.

Other [studies](#) also suggest it is possible to shake off Covid during the earliest stages of infection, before it establishes a proper foothold. For instance, during the first wave of the pandemic, Dr Leo Swadling at University College London and colleagues intensively monitored a group of healthcare

workers who were regularly exposed to infected patients, but who never tested positive or developed antibodies themselves. Blood tests revealed that around 15% of them had T cells reactive against Sars-CoV-2, plus other markers of viral infection.

Possibly, memory T-cells from previous coronavirus infections – ie those responsible for common colds – cross-reacted with the new coronavirus and protected them from Covid.

Understanding how frequently people abort nascent Covid infections in the era of Omicron is complicated because it requires intensive testing – for the virus, antibodies, T cells and other markers of infection – and because so many people have been vaccinated.

“It is likely vaccinated individuals are exposed to the virus, and block viral replication and detectable infection more commonly,” Swadling said.

There is also no commercially available test that can distinguish between immunity triggered by vaccination and the different variants – so unless a person has recently tested positive, it is almost impossible to know if they have been exposed to Omicron or not.

Seasonal coronaviruses may not be the only source of cross-protective immune responses. Prof Cecilia Söderberg-Nauclér, an immunologist at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, began investigating this possibility, after Sweden avoided being overwhelmed by cases during the pandemic’s first wave, despite its light-touch approach to restrictions. Mathematical modelling by her colleague, Marcus Carlsson at Lund University, suggested this pattern of infections could only be explained if a large proportion of people had some kind of protective immunity.

Her team scoured databases of protein sequences from existing viruses, hunting for small segments (peptides) resembling those from the new coronavirus, to which antibodies were likely to bind. When they identified a six-amino acid peptide in a protein from H1N1 influenza that matched a crucial part of the coronavirus spike protein, “I almost fell out of my chair,” Söderberg-Nauclér said.

They have since discovered antibodies to this peptide in up to 68% of blood donors from Stockholm. The [research](#), which has not yet been peer-reviewed, could suggest that immune responses triggered by H1N1 influenza – which was responsible for the 2009-10 [swine flu pandemic](#) – and possibly related subsequent strains, may equip people with partial, though not complete, protection against Covid-19. “It provides a cushion, but it won’t protect you if an infected person coughs in your face,” Söderberg-Nauclér said.

A small proportion of people may even be genetically resistant to Covid-19. In October, an international consortium of researchers launched a [global hunt](#) to find some of them, in the hope of identifying protective genes.

“We are not looking for common gene variants that provide modest protection against infection, what we are looking for is potentially very rare gene variants that completely protect someone against infection,” said Prof András Spaan at the Rockefeller University in New York, who is leading the research.

They are particularly interested in people who shared a home and bed with an infected person, and avoided infection themselves. “For instance, the other day I was talking to an elderly lady from the Netherlands, who took care of her husband during the first wave. The husband was eventually admitted to the ICU, but she spent the week before taking care of him, sharing the same room, and without access to face masks,” said Spaan. “We cannot explain why she did not get infected.”

Such resistance is known to exist for other diseases, including HIV, [malaria](#), and [norovirus](#). In these cases, a genetic defect means some people lack a receptor used by the pathogen to enter cells, so they cannot be infected. “It could well be that, in some individuals, there is such a defect in a receptor used by Sars-CoV-2,” Spaan said.

Identifying such genes could lead to the development of new treatments for Covid-19, in the same way that the identification of [CCR5 receptor](#) defects in HIV-resistant people has led to [new ways of treating HIV](#).

Spaan thinks it is unlikely that the majority of those who have avoided Covid are genetically resistant, even if they have some partial immune protection. This means there is no guarantee they will not eventually become infected – as Garrett found out in late January. Having dodged the virus for almost two years, she was shocked when a routine lateral flow test produced an ominous second red line. Shortly afterwards, she developed mild Covid symptoms, but has since recovered.

The irony is that, having avoided catching Covid from close family, friends and in a specialist medical laboratory, it was probably a relative stranger who infected her. “I have no idea where I got it from; it could have been someone in my local choir, or maybe from the gym,” she said.

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## 2022.03.03 - Opinion

- [A year after Sarah Everard's murder, we're talking directly to men. But it's not enough](#)
- [Nick Clegg has the power now to right Facebook's wrongs. This is how he should do it](#)
- [As Russia struggles in Ukraine, will Putin break the nuclear taboo?](#)
- [Putin's invasion of Ukraine suggests the 'peace dividend' is fading](#)

## Opinion

# A year after Sarah Everard's murder, we're talking directly to men. But it's not enough

[Sandra Laville](#)



The government's multimillion-pound ad campaign seems to tiptoe around the violence, harassment and abuse women face



Vigil for Sarah Everard on Clapham Common, London, 13 March 2021.  
‘The government has refused to make misogyny a hate crime.’ Photograph:  
Victoria Jones/PA

Thu 3 Mar 2022 01.00 EST

In the run-up to the grim one-year anniversary today of the abduction and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving Metropolitan police officer, the government has released an advertising campaign to challenge the perpetrators of violence against women.

The shift in focus to men who attack women is welcome. In the aftermath of Sarah’s killing, women and girls were told to change their behaviour to keep themselves safe – from hailing down a bus to walking more assertively.

It has taken years for this change in perspective, years in which female victims have not been listened to, or have been blamed for the violence perpetuated against them; the female victims, for instance, of the serial rapist John Worboys, who were dismissed and reportedly laughed at by Met officers, a failure which meant he went on to attack more women.

So, when finally the authorities turn their gaze away from the girls and women who are the victims to the boys and men who carry out the violence, harassment and abuse, are we wrong to have expected the change in policy to be a little more direct?

Instead, [Enough](#), a multimillion-pound campaign on radio, social media, TV and billboards, seems to tiptoe around the issue. Three posters contain images of young men attempting to challenge toxic behaviour among their peers, from street harassment to revenge porn and cyber stalking – but only just. The rest feature concerned couples or lone women gently speaking out if they see a girl touched up in a bar or a neighbour having a row with her partner.

Given the [epidemic proportions](#) of violence against women and girls, this campaign could, and should, have been harder hitting. In the months since Sarah was kidnapped, raped and murdered, another 125 women and girls have been killed at the hands of male perpetrators, according to the [Femicide Census](#), collated by Karen Ingala Smith. These include [Sabina Nessa](#), a 28-year-old teacher who was walking through a park to meet a friend in Kidbrooke, south London, and other less well-known cases of female victims of domestic violence who were killed by men they knew.

The behaviour of the Met during the last year has done little to close the gulf in trust between the police force and women in particular; from the handling of a peaceful vigil for Sarah on Clapham Common to revelations about the behaviour of officers at the murder scene of Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman, and the [exposure of a culture](#) of unchecked and often violent misogyny within the force – which ultimately led to the [early departure](#) of the commissioner Cressida Dick.

In response to the outcry over the killing of Sarah, there was a flurry of announcements by the government and the Met promising to tackle the issue of violence against women and girls. Boris Johnson said: “We must do everything to ensure our streets are safe”, as a £23.5m fund for [Safer Streets](#) was created specifically to target women’s safety with money for street lighting and security.

But the government has refused to make misogyny a [hate crime](#) – a move that would categorise it alongside race, religion, disability, sexual orientation and transgender identification as a motivation for offences. Instead Priti Patel is to make violence against women a priority crime for police forces, alongside the likes of terrorism. It's astonishing that it has not been deemed that already.

But no amount of announcements, street lights or advertising campaigns will work unless trust is restored and the police do their job to pursue and catch the perpetrators of the violence and abuse, with the courts then bringing offenders to justice in a timely way.

The disgracefully low prosecution and conviction rates for rape offences have worsened in the 12 months since Sarah's death. That fact does not persuade women that their safety is a priority.

Last year had the lowest number of rape convictions on record, according to the [End Violence Against Women Coalition](#). The Office for National Statistics shows that there were [63,136 reported rape offences](#) in the year to September 2021, while only [1.3%](#) resulted in a suspect being charged.

In what was an unprecedented response to a [call for evidence](#) from the home secretary, 180,000 women and girls described the sexual harassment, violence and abuse they had suffered in their lives. Many said it was the presence of myths and stereotypes related to violence against women and girls that had dissuaded them and other victims of rape to come forward to the police.

Of victims who had experienced rape since the age of 16, only 16% reported it to the police, with many women citing an increase in requests for personal digital information from their phones – targeting the victim not the perpetrator again – as a reason for their reluctance to come forward.

As the Home Office ad campaign starts to be seen across the country, there is another gaping hole in the approach – the need to tackle the underlying causes of violence against women and girls through education, by challenging the normalisation of pornography, by intervening early to address the attitudes of boys and young men and by pursuing a zero-

tolerance approach in schools to misogyny. One year after Sarah Everard's death, there is a need for more urgency if anything is to change.

- Sandra Laville is a Guardian correspondent
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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/03/sarah-everard-murder-government-ad-campaign-male-violence-abuse>

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## OpinionFacebook

# **Nick Clegg has the power now to right Facebook's wrongs. This is how he should do it**

[Frances Haugen](#)

The former UK politician must act to end the company's profit-driven cycle of tearing societies and democracies apart

- Frances Haugen is a Facebook whistleblower



'What will Nick Clegg do with his new position? If history is any guide, he's likely to continue to be one of Facebook's fiercest defenders.' Photograph: Dpa Picture Alliance/Alamy

Wed 2 Mar 2022 05.00 EST

Last month, Facebook – now renamed Meta – CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced the [promotion of Nick Clegg](#), the former UK deputy prime minister, to lead Meta on all policy and public relations matters globally.

What will Clegg do with his new position? If history is any guide, he's likely to continue to be one of Facebook's fiercest defenders, often using absurd, hypocritical arguments to uphold Meta's worst actions.

In 2020, Clegg [claimed](#) Facebook merely “holds up a mirror to society,” while ignoring that Meta designs its algorithm to reward the most extreme and polarising content. [My disclosures](#) to US Congress and the Securities and Exchange Commission confirmed that political parties across Europe – on the right and on the left – found Facebook algorithm changes in 2018 forced them into more extreme political positions. In democratic societies, one could say Facebook votes before we do. And in war zones and fragile societies with weak law and order, Facebook [can get people killed](#).

Then, in March 2021, Clegg subtly shifted his argument to say users and Facebook's algorithms coexist in a symbiotic relationship similar to “[taking two to tango](#)”. By acknowledging the algorithm's role in how Facebook operates, Clegg renewed a difficult question for the company: why are those algorithms hidden from the public?

My disclosures validated years of alarms raised by advocates – that the Facebook algorithm harms children, stokes division, and weakens our democracies.

And as we enter the “fog of war” with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we are seeing in real time how Russia is weaponising Facebook to spread its outrageous propaganda.

I'm an optimist by nature. I believe people such as [Nick Clegg](#) can choose to right these wrongs. And these five steps can make Facebook safer and more humane for its nearly 3 billion users worldwide.

## **1. Stop giving autocrats free rein to manipulate free societies**

In 2018, [Mark Zuckerberg promised](#) US Congress that Facebook would invest in identifying when Russia and other countries deployed influence networks to distort reality and amplify lies. Facebook has the technology to detect coordinated disinformation campaigns but radically understaffs the teams responsible for taking them down – giving free rein to bad actors on these platforms. It is unacceptable that Facebook’s solution to the weaponisation of its platforms is to [ask the targets of these campaigns](#) – such as the people of Ukraine – to lock down their own accounts when the real problem is Facebook’s unwillingness to invest adequately in securing its own platform.

## **2. Stop entering fragile societies without due diligence**

Facebook’s prioritisation of profit shows most in its rapid expansion in societies around the globe, often without thought to the consequences for people living in them. It does not scale its safety systems alongside this growth.

Consider Myanmar. Facebook admitted it had failed to stop horrific hate speech on its platform. The UN concluded Facebook played a “[determining role](#)” in fuelling genocide against the Rohingya ethnic group. Nonetheless, Facebook refuses to provide meaningful remedies to the Rohingya community for fuelling this violence.

Organisations such as Human Rights Watch [rightly advocate](#) that tech companies should conduct comprehensive assessments of how human rights may be harmed before they expand products into fragile parts of the world.

In western Europe and the US, we take for granted access to an open and independent internet. Facebook must stop choking the open web as it’s born by [bribing users to use Facebook over open alternatives](#). Otherwise, when Facebook falls short, people will have nowhere else to turn.

## **3. Truth and transparency – today**

I came forward because of a frightening truth: almost no one outside Facebook knows what happens inside Facebook. In 2020, [Mark Zuckerberg](#) claimed that Facebook's algorithm took down "94% of hate speech". But internal research from March 2021 showed the company catches a minuscule 3-5% of hate speech and only 0.6% of violence-inciting content.

Nick Clegg now can stop the lies. He must live up to his claims that [Facebook will make itself more transparent](#). Clegg can take a simple step today: open up the algorithms for researchers to properly assess the platform. Then, groups such as New York University's Cybersecurity for Democracy research centre, cut off from access to data by Facebook while analysing the spread of misinformation, could actually see how the algorithm works.

## 4. Design for safety, not censorship

Facebook's policy and PR playbook has centred public debate on false choices between censorship and freedom of expression. Its PR team touts billion-dollar investments in content moderation but ignores internal studies showing that potential product design choices, such as limiting the number of reshares, would have nearly the same impact as the third-party fact-checkers – without picking winners or losers in the marketplace of ideas.

## 5. Fix the real harms – in the real world

Last autumn, Facebook rebranded as [Meta](#) as part of a shift toward the "metaverse", a virtual reality company. It insults people harmed by Meta's current platforms that the company is pivoting huge resources to video games when its own internal research shows 13.5% of teenage girls in the UK said Instagram made thoughts of suicide or self-injury worse and 17% said the platform makes their eating issues worse. Fixing that should be the priority.

The issues we face in the two-dimensional world of Facebook won't miraculously disappear in the three-dimensional world of the metaverse, which already faces [complaints of groping and harassment](#). Clegg must

demand that Facebook fix today's problems before he creates tomorrow's monstrosity.

I never wanted to be a whistleblower, but I realised that without the light of day on these insidious practices, we would never get the social media we deserve – social media that promotes our wellbeing and protects our democracies.

Mr Clegg, this is your legacy-making moment. You have enormous power to do good in the world. It is my sincere hope that you take this moment to create the much-needed change we all deserve from the company that promises to bring us closer together – but is stuck in a profit-driven cycle of tearing us apart.

- Frances Haugen is a former Facebook product manager, whistleblower and an advocate for accountability and transparency in social media

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## OpinionRussia

# As Russia struggles in Ukraine, will Putin break the nuclear taboo?

[Kristin Ven Bruusgaard](#)

Russia knows how dangerous nuclear escalation is, but the president's statements give cause for concern



Vladimir Putin with defence minister Sergei Shoigu, second left, and chief of the general staff, Valery Gerasimov. Photograph: Alexei Nikolsky/AP

Wed 2 Mar 2022 07.27 EST

On Sunday, Vladimir Putin ordered his nuclear [deterrent forces](#) to be placed on a “special regime of combat duty”. The Russian defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, has [now clarified](#) what this meant: the increased manpower devoted to Russia’s strategic nuclear triad: land-based strategic nuclear rocket forces, sea-based nuclear deterrents in the northern and Pacific fleets and its fleet of long-range strategic bomber aircraft that can carry nuclear weapons.

This is not a big change in the state of Russia's nuclear arsenal, which remains on a certain level of readiness even during peacetime. US and UK officials have suggested that they have observed no change in Russia's force posture. This means, for example, that they have not observed the dispersal of land-based missiles, the loading of aircraft with nuclear warheads, or movement in the central storages where [Russia](#) keeps its sub-strategic nuclear warheads.

So why would Putin announce to the world that he has increased nuclear readiness?

The invasion of Ukraine has probably produced a more severe situation than the Russian leadership anticipated. The invasion is not going according to plan, while the [big western response](#) has employed the full range of available capabilities short of direct military assistance to Ukraine.

So Putin is seeking, as he has many times before, to influence the western calculus by repeating that a confrontation with Russia would entail a significant nuclear risk. He refers to the west's [aggressive rhetoric](#) towards Russia as justifying this action. To Moscow, the situation is now grave enough to gesture at its nuclear options.

It remains unlikely that Putin is seriously considering the suicidal act of using nuclear weapons against western countries. Still, there are some concerning developments that bring the possibility of limited nuclear use into play.

Prior to this conflict, Russia's nuclear threshold – a willingness to use nuclear weapons in a conflict – had seemingly remained relatively high. For the past 12 years, its military doctrine has stated that it would consider nuclear use only in situations that threaten the very existence of the state. Most analysts surmised that this would mean a conflict where Russian territory is under severe attack.

Russia does not need to use these weapons in [Ukraine](#) to produce the military outcome it seeks. We have still not seen the full Russian conventional force brought to bear. Russian military practice would still

qualify this as a local conflict. The role of nuclear weapons in such conflicts is to deter further escalation, in this case by preventing direct western support.

However, Russia's recent statements and behaviour are reason for concern. There is some uncertainty about what precisely it means when it talks about existential threats. Observers point to Putin's past statements that "[there could be no world without Russia](#)" as concerning.

The current situation may also cause Russia to revise its playbook. Its leaders had not foreseen that the west would unite with such a potent response. Western countries are applying a broad range of tools to apply maximum pressure. It could be that Russia perceives the economic, political and military pressure it is under as an existential threat. Western unity may also increase the Russian paranoia regarding an actual western intervention.

The other reason for concern is Putin's state of mind. His rhetoric is becoming more extreme by the day, and the spectacles of his cabinet meetings are disturbing. There is speculation about the effect Covid isolation had on his mind. His inner circle now only comprises hardliners, and the information he is provided with may be skewed.

We don't know if there is any real debate of policy options. Will Russian political or military advisers say no to Putin, or disagree with him? Will defence minister Shoigu and chief of the general staff Valery Gerasimov stall or endorse the idea of nuclear use? Fortunately, the Russian system is one where Putin is forced to consult them before issuing an order.

The most concerning scenario is one in which Putin is pressed into a corner, with no off-ramp, and the perception that he has nothing more to lose. In such circumstances, it could be possible to imagine a very limited Russian nuclear strike – the purpose of which would be to produce a disruption to the conflict, a reason for pause and potentially force an adversary into submission. In the past, Russian strategists have deliberated the possibility that nuclear weapons could be used in this way.

But Russian leaders cannot know whether they will get the expected result by crossing the nuclear threshold. There is no way they can predict how the world will respond if they break the “nuclear taboo” that has been in place since the second world war. They do know that the risks would be enormous, indeed, existential. They also worry about how nuclear escalation can be controlled. They know that nuclear war is the most dangerous scenario they could face.

In the past year, Putin has twice endorsed bi- and multilateral statements conveying that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought”. Let’s hope this lingers as he ponders his next move in Ukraine.

- Kristin Ven Bruusgaard is a Postdoctoral Fellow and Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Oslo where she works on Russian nuclear strategy.
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**Project Syndicate economistsEconomics**

## **Putin's invasion of Ukraine suggests the 'peace dividend' is fading**

**[Kenneth Rogoff](#)**

Russia's attack reminds western nations that they must leave sufficient finances to guard against external aggression

- [\*\*Ukraine Russia war: latest updates\*\*](#)



Photograph: Mikhail Svetlov/Getty Images

Thu 3 Mar 2022 02.00 EST

Russia's brutal invasion of [Ukraine](#) should be a wake-up call for western politicians, corporate leaders and economists who advocate a green and equitable future but lack any practical or strategic sense of how to get there. Regardless of what short-term tactics Europe and the US use in responding

to the current crisis, their long-run strategy needs to put energy security on a par with environmental sustainability, and funding essential military deterrence on a par with financing social priorities.

The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 in no small part because Russia's leaders, most of all President Boris Yeltsin and his economic advisers, recognised that the Soviet communist military-industrial complex could not afford to keep up with the west's superior economic might and technological prowess. Today, with Russia's economy [less than a twentieth](#) the combined size of the US and EU economies, the same strategy of vastly outspending Russia on defence should be much easier to execute. Unfortunately, there is a hesitancy in many western societies, particularly on the left, to admit that defence spending is sometimes a necessity, not a luxury.

For many decades, western living standards have been boosted by a massive "peace dividend". For example, [US defence spending fell](#) from 11.1% of GDP in 1967, during the Vietnam war, to 6.9% of GDP in 1989, the year the Berlin Wall fell, to just over [3.5%](#) of GDP today. If US defence spending as a share of GDP was still at the Vietnam-era level, defence outlays in 2021 would have been \$1.5tn (£1.1tn) higher – more than the government spent on [social security](#) last year, and almost [triple](#) government spending on non-defence consumption and investment. Even at the level of the late 1980s, defence spending would be more than \$600bn higher than today. The extra cost would have to be funded by higher taxes, greater borrowing or lower government spending in other areas.

Europe's defence spending has long been far lower than that of the US. Today, the UK and France [spend](#) just over 2% of their national income on defence, and Germany and Italy only about 1.5%. Moreover, national interests and domestic lobbying mean that European defence spending is highly inefficient, with the whole being considerably less than the sum of its parts. I am amazed by how many of my otherwise well-informed friends have been asking why Europe does not mount a stronger military response to Russia's attack on Ukraine and looming threats to the Baltic states. Part of the answer, of course, is Europe's dependence on Russian gas but the larger reason is its egregious lack of preparedness.

Thanks to the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, this may all change. The German chancellor Olaf Scholz's [announcement](#) on 27 February that Germany will increase its defence spending to more than 2% of GDP suggests that Europe may finally be getting its act together. But such commitments will have major fiscal implications – and, after the large pandemic-era fiscal stimulus, these may be difficult to digest. As Europe rethinks its fiscal rules, policymakers must consider how to make enough space to deal with unexpected large-scale military buildups.

Many seem to have forgotten that wartime spikes in expenditures were once a big driver of government spending volatility. In a war, not only do government expenditures and budget deficits typically increase sharply but interest rates sometimes go up as well. Nowadays, policymakers (along with many well-intentioned economists) have become convinced that big global economic shocks such as pandemics or financial crises will invariably drive down interest rates, and make large debts easier to finance. But in wartime, the need to front-load massive temporary expenditures can easily push up borrowing costs.

True, in today's complex world of drones, cyberwar, and automated battlefields, how governments spend their defence budgets matters greatly. Still, it is magical thinking to assume that every time defence budgets are cut, military planners will make up the difference with increased efficiency.

It would also help if the west could avoid further strategic energy-policy blunders of the sort that led us to this point. In particular, Germany, which relies on Russia for [more than half](#) of its gas needs, appears to have made a historic mistake in decommissioning all its nuclear power plants after the 2011 Fukushima disaster. By contrast, France, which meets [75%](#) of its energy needs through nuclear power, is significantly less vulnerable to Russian threats.

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In the US, the [cancellation](#) of the proposed Keystone XL oil pipeline may have been based on sound environmental logic. But now the timing seems awkward. Measures intended to protect the environment do little good if

they lead to strategic weakness that increases the possibility of conventional wars in Europe – leaving aside the large-scale radioactive pollution that would result if neutron bombs or tactical nuclear weapons were deployed.

Stiff Ukrainian resistance, swift and severe economic and financial sanctions, and domestic dissent could yet force Putin to recognise that his decision to invade Ukraine was a spectacular miscalculation. But even if the current crisis subsides, the horrific attack on Ukraine ought to remind even the most committed peace advocate that the world can be harsh and unpredictable.

Everyone hopes for lasting peace. But hard-headed analyses of how countries can achieve sustainable and equitable growth requires leaving fiscal space – including emergency borrowing capacity – for the costs of guarding against external aggression.

*Kenneth Rogoff is professor of economics and public policy at Harvard University and was the chief economist of the International Monetary Fund from 2001 to 2003*

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## 2022.03.03 - Around the world

- [Australia floods Almost 500,000 people across New South Wales under evacuation alerts](#)
- [Live Business: oil price tops \\$119 as wheat prices surge to 14-year high](#)
- [Kuwait Interpol arrest warrant allegedly targeting princess and partner ‘on political grounds’](#)
- [Sudan Teenagers detained and allegedly tortured must be released, says Amnesty](#)
- [Moscow Police detain children for laying flowers at Ukrainian embassy](#)

## Australia east coast floods 2022

# **NSW floods: Sydney and Illawarra dodge east coast low after 500,000 people faced evacuation across state**

Newcastle and Hunter region now in firing line and subject to severe weather warnings as clean-up begins further north

- [Follow our Australia news live blog for the latest flood updates](#)
- [Get our free news app; get our morning email briefing](#)



A car stuck in flood water on College Street, Richmond. Residents in low-lying areas are being warned to evacuate homes, with more flooding expected. Photograph: Blake Sharp-Wiggins/The Guardian

[Peter Hannam](#)

Thu 3 Mar 2022 01.10 EST

Sydney and the Illawarra region of [New South Wales](#) have avoided the worst effects of the devastating east coast low that instead eased and shifted west over Newcastle and the Hunter region.

Newcastle remains under a [severe weather warning](#) with falls of 60 to 100mm possible over six hours and the associated risk of flash flooding.

Major flooding also remained possible at Windsor on the Hawkesbury-Nepean River, thanks to heavy rains in the surrounding catchment areas. The major flooding at North Richmond may be close to its peak, the bureau said [in its most recent update](#) on Thursday afternoon.

Authorities had to prepare for the worst as Warragamba Dam west of [Sydney](#) started spilling on Wednesday, but rainfalls were less than expected.

The gauge at the dam itself collected 237mm in the 48 hours to 9am Thursday, but just 5mm up to Thursday 3pm, Ben Domensino, a senior meteorologist at Weatherzone, said.

The east coast low developed into three separate areas of circulation just off the coast.

“That means it’s not a strong and well-defined low pressure system, and this is weakening near the coast,” Domensino said.

The Hunter will see ongoing rain, but for Sydney and the Central Coast there should only be showers. Showers near Sydney “won’t be doing too much to raise river levels”, he said.

However, there was another upper-level low pressure system crossing south-eastern Australia this weekend.

“Some models are suggesting that will cause heavier rain to redevelop from Sunday over eastern NSW and into Monday, with the potential for another low pressure system forming near the coast early next week on Monday or Tuesday.”

Earlier on Thursday, about half a million people across NSW were under evacuation orders or warnings as the wild weather that battered parts of eastern Australia for a week bore down on the greater Sydney region.

Steph Cooke, NSW's emergency services minister, said the state had 76 evacuation orders in place on Thursday morning affecting 200,000 people, with a further 18 evacuation warnings covering about 300,000 residents.

“We have 500,000 people in our state right now who are either the subject of an evacuation warning or an evacuation,” Cooke said.

The evacuation orders covered areas of northern NSW and parts of the greater Sydney region and the Illawarra.

The Bureau of Meteorology issued multiple warnings [for rivers to flood](#) and [for severe weather](#) to affect a region of eastern NSW from near Taree, north of Newcastle, down almost to Moruya Heads on the south coast.

Flood warnings were in place for the Hawkesbury and Nepean rivers near Sydney, prompting many of the evacuations overnight, but also for the Wilsons, Richmond and Clarence rivers in northern NSW, where there have been record floods.

Warragamba Dam west of Sydney was spilling at a rate of 225 gigalitres a day with a predicted peak rate of 300-350GL a day – half the worst-case scenario.

That meant thousands of households and businesses could avoid damaging flooding from the Hawkesbury and Nepean rivers north-west of Sydney.



A cyclist rides through flood waters in Manly on Thursday. Photograph: Lee Hulsman/Getty Images

The BoM noted major flooding continued along the Hawkesbury and Lower Nepean rivers, however.

“River levels are continuing to rise at Windsor where major flooding may develop Thursday evening,” the bureau said. “Further heavy rainfall is forecast today and into Friday which may result in extended and possibly higher major flood peaks. River levels at North Richmond are expected to remain below those observed during the March 2021 event.”

The NSW State Emergency Services had received a total of 11,747 requests for help since the start of the floods crisis, with 1,462 calls coming since 3.30pm on Wednesday.

The Insurance Council of Australia said insurers have received 60,163 claims related to the ongoing flooding in south-east Queensland and NSW.

About 83% of total claims relate to property with the remainder for motor vehicles, the ICA said. “Based on previous flood events the current cost of claims is estimated to be about \$900m,” the council said on Thursday.

The heavy rain and potentially damaging winds and dangerous surf were the result of an east coast low that was located about 100km east of Newcastle at 6am on Thursday.



SES personnel and police watch the rising flood water on the Hawkesbury River in Windsor on Wednesday night. Photograph: Blake Sharp-Wiggins/The Guardian

[Sydney's forecast](#) had been revised lower to between 50mm and 90mm of rain from an earlier prediction of 100mm to 150mm on Thursday, as the low looks likely to cross the coast farther north. There remained the chance of a possibly severe thunderstorm.

Where thunderstorms form, there is the risk of locally intense rainfall, reaching as much as 200mm over six hours, leading to dangerous and life-threatening flash flooding, according to the bureau.

[Many schools](#) were closed across NSW and the SES was encouraging people in affected areas to avoid all non-essential travel.

Rainfall in the 24 hours from 9am Wednesday topped 100mm in areas of Sydney's south, west and north-west, while the central business district collected about 50mm.

Warragamba Dam spilling, with the government on Wednesday saying the worst case could see as much as 600 gigalitres a day flow over the wall. During the March 2021 floods, the spill rate got to 440-460GL.  
[pic.twitter.com/vnqiprJlwV](https://pic.twitter.com/vnqiprJlwV)

— Peter Hannam (@p\_hannam) [March 2, 2022](#)

The NSW deputy premier, Paul Toole, said on Wednesday the worst-case scenario was for Warragamba Dam to spill at 600GL a day. That would have been well above the 440GL to 460GL a day peak rate during the March 2021 floods.

The Warragamba spill will add to other flows coming into the Hawkesbury-Nepean River. At North Richmond, one area being evacuated, the flow is already above major flood levels. [@BOM\\_NSW](#) [@BOM\\_au](#) [pic.twitter.com/26TUWiggTl](https://pic.twitter.com/26TUWiggTl)

— Peter Hannam (@p\_hannam) [March 2, 2022](#)

The [@BOM\\_au](#) is forecasting the Hawkesbury-Nepean River to approach or exceed the March 2021 flood peaks. Here's how the river looks at Windsor as its rise is starting to level off.  
[pic.twitter.com/UGXWjcK5DM](https://pic.twitter.com/UGXWjcK5DM)

— Peter Hannam (@p\_hannam) [March 3, 2022](#)

The forecast offers little solace for many along the eastern seaboard, with more rain predicted for the coming week.

And over the next eight days, still lots of rain forecast, including over areas already flood hit. [@BOM\\_au](#) [pic.twitter.com/rhAh4i3yMh](https://pic.twitter.com/rhAh4i3yMh)

— Peter Hannam (@p\_hannam) [March 2, 2022](#)

Domensino said the slow-moving system had continually exceeded forecasts for rainfall.

“This heavy rain has all been fed by an atmospheric river that’s just been dragging moisture across the Coral Sea and the Tasman Sea and directing it towards the east coast,” Domensino said. Similar big flooding events around the world have followed such patterns.

“There is a climate change signal in atmospheric rivers, and that’s been one of the components of this event.”

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**Business live**

**Ukraine**

# London Stock Exchange suspends 27 Russian listings; wheat prices soar to 14-year high – as it happened

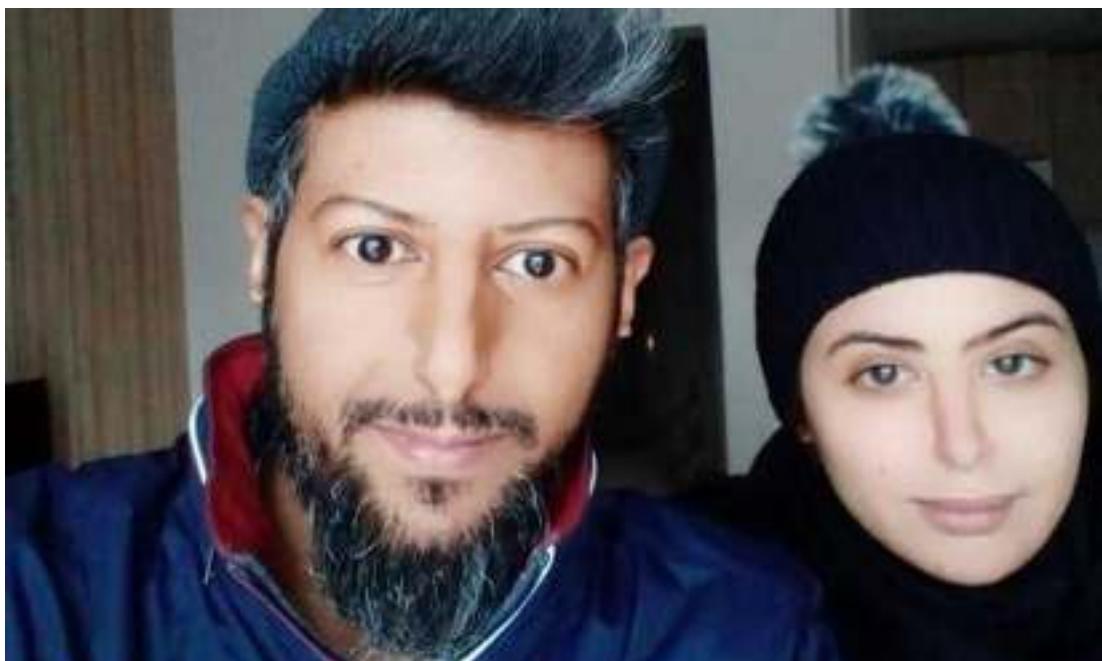
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## Rights and freedomKuwait

# **Interpol arrest warrant allegedly targeting Kuwaiti princess and partner ‘on political grounds’**

Dissident couple say their lives would be under threat if returned from Bosnia to Kuwait, as rights groups claim notice undermines refugee law



Mesaed al-Mesaileem and Sheikha Moneera Fahad al-Sabah. The couple have been publicly critical of the Kuwait state on social media. Photograph: Courtesy of Mesaed and Moneera

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Thu 3 Mar 2022 03.01 EST

A Kuwaiti princess seeking asylum in [Bosnia-Herzegovina](#) has claimed the Kuwaiti state is using an Interpol red notice to intimidate and harass her and force the extradition of her partner, a prominent dissident blogger, back to the country.

Sheikha Moneera Fahad al-Sabah and Mesaed al-Mesaileem, said they face torture and threats to their lives if they are returned to [Kuwait](#) due to their political activism.

Kuwait has secured an [Interpol](#) red notice for Mesaileem – which acts as an international arrest warrant – and which the couple's lawyer claims has likely been issued under false pretences.

“States with poor human rights records are increasingly requesting extradition on the basis of political grounds,” said Alexis Thiry, legal adviser at Mena Rights Group, a Switzerland-based NGO that is providing legal representation to Mesaileem.

“This is a very concerning development from a human rights perspective because such practice undermines the principle of non-refoulement, a rule of international customary law.”

Non-refoulement is the fundamental principle underpinning international refugee law, that maintains that a person requiring protection cannot be forcibly returned to a place where they will face harm.

The UN human rights council has said it is “deeply concerned” by the risk of Mesaileem’s extradition back to Kuwait.

Both Sabah and Mesaileem have been publicly critical of the Kuwait state on social media, with Sabah alleging corruption in Kuwait’s ruling family.

Sabah’s great uncle is Kuwait’s ruler, Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah, who came to power in September 2020. She is the granddaughter of Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah, the previous Kuwaiti emir.

Sabah told the Guardian she had received multiple threats to her safety from her family and other powerful figures in Kuwait.

“They’re going to kill me. They’ve raised some [legal] cases in Kuwait against me for assaulting the being of the royal family,” said Sabah, 35, who said she was imprisoned by her father for nearly a year.

“When I first started speaking about corruption, they accused me of being mentally ill, and said I need to be in an institute. So, I’m scared they will lock me up, take my phones away, not let me speak because I have a lot of secrets.”

The couple, who moved to Bosnia in 2020, have both surrendered their passports and been issued with yellow asylum seeker cards by the UN high commissioner for refugees.

However, their asylum claim has not been granted by the Bosnian government, leaving them in legal limbo with the threat that deportation could happen at any time.

The couple claim that men identifying themselves as Interpol officers raided their home in April 2020, saying they were acting on a red notice issued two years previously on charges relating to possession of weapons.

However, Mena Rights Group argues that the basis of the red notice is false, and that it is being used to bring Mesaileem back to Kuwait to face political charges.

Mesaileem has been sentenced multiple times in Kuwait on charges linked to freedom of expression, including using his mobile phone to organise demonstrations and insulting the emir on social media.

In total, Kuwaiti courts have sentenced Mesaileem in absentia to 87 years in prison for his political activities, according to a UN special procedures letter. He has already spent periods in detention, where he claims he was mistreated.

Concerns about abuses of Interpol notices by authoritarian regimes to snare dissidents have grown since Maj Gen Ahmed Naser al-Raisi, a leading security official from the United Arab Emirates, was [elected to its presidency in November](#).

Sabah and Mesaileem said they fear that pressure from the Kuwaiti state will see them deported and have called for Mesaileem to be removed from the Interpol red notice list.

When contacted for comment, an Interpol spokesperson said the decisions over arrests and extraditions are the responsibility of each of its member states' domestic authorities, known as National Central Bureaus (NCBs).

“Red notices are requests to law enforcement worldwide to locate and, in accordance with national laws, provisionally arrest a person pending extradition, surrender, or similar legal action,” the spokesperson said.

“Interpol’s General Secretariat cannot instruct NCBs on whether to arrest an individual or refrain from doing so, or whether to engage in extradition proceedings, etc. Such decisions are exclusively within the discretion of the competent national authorities of member countries.”

The Bosnian and Kuwaiti authorities were approached for comment.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/mar/03/interpol-arrest-warrant-allegedly-targeting-kuwaiti-princess-and-partner-on-political-grounds>

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## Global development

# Teenagers detained and allegedly tortured in Sudan must be released, says Amnesty

The pair, arrested in connection with the killing of a police officer during pro-democracy protests, are reportedly being denied visits and medical help



Security forces use tear gas and stun grenades to disperse protests demanding the restoration of civilian rule in Khartoum, Sudan, in January.  
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Zeinab Mohammed Salih](#) in Khartoum

Thu 3 Mar 2022 02.01 EST

Amnesty International has called for the release of two teenagers who have been detained and allegedly tortured in [Sudan](#) in connection with the killing of a police officer during pro-democracy protests in Khartoum.

Mohamed Adam, known as Tupac, 17, and Mohamed al-Fateh, 18, have been held without charge since 15 January.

Amnesty said: “There are credible concerns the youths were abducted and held without charge, in violation of their due process rights, and subjected to torture while in detention.”

It demanded the teenagers are released or charged and remanded by an independent court.

According to their lawyer, Rana Abdulghafar Abdulraheem, Tupac, who is a member of a group called Ghadiboun, which means “the angered people”, was taken from his hospital bed by police. He’d been injured by a teargas canister during [protests](#) in the capital.

Fateh was arrested in a mosque near where the demonstrations took place. It is understood he wasn't involved in the protests.

Abdulraheem said both teenagers had been tortured. The lawyer said she had seen cigarette burns on Fateh's head and he had not been allowed visitors. "I believe they didn't want us to see him because he was in bad shape," she said.

Tupac's mother, Nidal Sulieman, said her son had problems with his blood pressure but had not been allowed to see a doctor or to take medicine since his arrest.

Requests for the pair to be examined by doctors, allowed under Sudanese law, were rejected.

More than 80 people have been killed and hundreds injured in protests in response to the military coup in October 2021, which followed an uneasy two years as the country sought to transition to democratic rule. Hundreds of people and political activists have been detained.

One person was [reportedly killed on Monday](#) in Omdurman, the twin city of the capital Khartoum, when protesters advanced towards the presidential palace of the coup leader, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

The police did not respond to comment about the detentions.

The governing sovereign council has promised to investigate violence used against the protesters.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/mar/03/teenagers-detained-and-allegedly-tortured-in-sudan-must-be-released-says-amnesty>.

## Russia

# Moscow police detain children for laying flowers at Ukrainian embassy

Five children aged seven to 11 with peace signs held for hours while two women face trial on unspecified charges

- [Russia-Ukraine war: live news](#)

00:26

Moscow police detain children laying flowers at Ukrainian embassy – video

Nadeem Badshah

Wed 2 Mar 2022 18.43 EST

Police in Moscow detained two women and five children who wanted to lay flowers at the Ukrainian embassy.

Photographs of their detention showed the children holding a poster saying “No to War.”

The children, aged 7 to 11, were held with their mothers in a police van before being taken to a police station. They were released hours later, according to anthropologist Alexandra Arkhipova.

Arkhipova said that the two women detained were Ekaterina Zavizion and Olga Alter.

The anthropologist, who works at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, wrote on Facebook: “None of what’s happened is holding up in my head.”



Three children seated with a protest banner Photograph: Alexandra Arkhipova/Facebook

Video footage on social media apparently showed one of the women explaining to a crying girl from inside a cell that the “task is for fewer people to gather and say they’re against the war”.

Arkhipova said that police allegedly threatened to strip the women of custody over the five children. They face a trial and a fine on unspecified charges, Arkhipova added. She wrote: “The parents are in fear.”

Another sign held by one of the children featured a Russian flag followed by a plus sign and a Ukrainian flag, equalling a heart.

The OVD-Info website, which monitors protests and arrests across Russia, said that children up to the age of 14 cannot be legally held for more than three hours.

The Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, who shared images of the children, said it was another sign of the toll that Putin’s war against Ukraine is taking on children.

He wrote on Twitter: “Putin is at war with children. In Ukraine, where his missiles hit kindergartens and orphanages, and also in Russia. [These

children] spent this night behind bars in Moscow for their ‘NO TO WAR’ posters.

“This is how scared the man is.”

A 77-year-old artist and activist, Yelena Osipova, was also marched away by a group of police while she protested against the war in St Petersburg.

00:46

Russian pensioner 'who survived siege of Leningrad' arrested for protest against Ukraine war – video

Thousands of people in cities across Russia have been defying police threats and staging protests against the invasion of Ukraine. Authorities have a low tolerance for demonstrations and marches, and attending them can have serious consequences including fines, arrests and even imprisonment.

OVD-Info said that authorities have arrested more than 320 anti-war protesters across 33 Russian cities. A total of 6,840 people have been detained since Vladimir Putin, the Russian president, ordered the invasion of Ukraine last Thursday.

- This article was amended on 3 March 2022 to remove some personal information.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/02/moscow-police-arrest-children-for-laying-flowers-at-ukrainian-embassy>

# Headlines

- [Environment Impact of climate crisis much worse than predicted, says Alok Sharma](#)
- [IPCC What is the report – and what will it say?](#)
- [Australia Eastern states hit by major flooding after ‘rain bomb’ weather event](#)

## Climate crisis

# Impact of climate crisis much worse than predicted, says Alok Sharma

Minister who led Cop26 climate talks issues stark warning on eve of landmark report from IPCC

[IPCC issues ‘bleakest warning yet’ on impacts of climate breakdown](#)



Firefighters during the Windy fire in the Sequoia national park in September 2021. Photograph: Patrick T Fallon/AFP/Getty Images

*[Fiona Harvey](#) Environment correspondent*

Mon 28 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

The impacts of the climate crisis are proving much worse than predicted, and governments must act more urgently to adapt to them or face global disaster, the UK president of the UN climate talks has warned on the eve of a landmark new scientific assessment of the climate.

Alok Sharma, who led the [Cop26 climate summit](#) last year, said: “The changes in the climate we are seeing today are affecting us much sooner and are greater than we originally thought. The impacts on our daily lives will be increasingly severe and stark. We will be doing ourselves and our populations a huge disservice if we fail to [prepare now](#), based on the very clear science before us.”

In a report to be published on Monday, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is expected to show that droughts, floods and heatwaves will increase in frequency and intensity, with devastating consequences, and all parts of the globe will be affected.

Sharma also said climate talks must continue this year at international forums such as the G20, despite Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Russia is a member of the G20, after being ejected from the G8 over its annexation of Crimea. Sharma said he spoke to his Russian counterpart some weeks ago before the current escalation, but they have not spoken since.

More than seven years in the making, and drawing on the work of thousands of scientists, the latest report from the IPCC – the UN-convened body of the world’s leading climate scientists – is expected to show climate breakdown is pushing the world close to the brink of catastrophic change, and urgent work is needed to protect against drastic impacts that are now inevitable and in some cases already happening.

Speaking before the publication, Sharma told the Guardian: “Based on the science [of recent years], there is an expectation that the report will tell us that over the past decade, climate change impacts have been much greater than anticipated. Policymakers need to see this as another wake-up call to take action now.”

He added: “Countries need to take action now. If we don’t take action now, the costs will be much higher, and the impacts higher, in future years.”

Sharma pointed out that at Cop26 governments of rich countries agreed to double their aid to the poor world for [adaptation to climate change](#) by 2025. “We made more progress than previous Cops,” he said. Rich countries must

also protect themselves, he added. “The UK is spending £5bn on the impacts of flooding, and preparing our national adaptation plan.”

Some of the IPCC’s findings are likely to be politically controversial. One of the biggest bones of contention at Glasgow was over “loss and damage”, referring to the worst impacts of the crisis, which cannot be adapted to – such as villages being swept away by hurricanes, or land lost to rising seas.

Poor countries want the rich world to recognise the loss and damage they suffer, and provide funding accordingly. But rich countries, already falling behind on a longstanding pledge to provide \$100bn (£75bn) a year to help poor nations cut emissions and adapt to climate impacts, have been slow to agree to any additional finance.

Some developing countries and civil society groups are calling for action this year, ahead of Cop27. Sharma dampened those hopes, pointing to an agreement at Cop26 to set up a four-year programme examining loss and damage called the “Glasgow dialogue”. He said: “Countries have been asked to make formal submissions on all this ... We have to see how those discussions go, where that dialogue takes us.”

Monday’s IPCC publication is the second of four parts of the “sixth assessment report”, the latest in a series of comprehensive summaries of the world’s knowledge of the climate, stretching back to 1988. The first part, published last August, showed that climate change was unequivocally the result of human actions and was causing “unprecedented” and in some cases “irreversible” changes. A third part, to be published in April, will set out the means of dealing with the crisis, such as investing in renewable energy and novel technologies such as carbon capture, and this October a summary of all three parts will draw together the lessons for policymakers before the Cop27 summit.

As IPCC reports take between five and seven years to compile, the current assessment is likely to be the last while there is still time to stave off the worst ravages of climate breakdown. Emissions must halve by 2030, to stay within 1.5C, the IPCC has previously warned, but after the plunge caused by

the lockdowns global carbon dioxide emissions have bounced back and are set to rise strongly again this year.

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## Climate crisis

# What is the IPCC climate change report – and what does it say?

Key questions answered about the IPCC and its role as it issues a new report on climate crisis



Evacuation effort in a flooded area of Chennai, India, in November. The latest IPCC report will look at how the climate crisis is affecting people's lives. Photograph: Idrees Mohammed/EPA

*[Fiona Harvey](#) Environment correspondent*

Mon 28 Feb 2022 07.08 EST

## What is the IPCC?

The [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) is made up of the world's leading climate scientists, charged with publishing [regular comprehensive updates](#) of global knowledge on the climate crisis, intended to inform

government policymaking. Each “assessment report” takes about five to seven years to complete, involving hundreds of scientists reviewing the work of thousands more experts. The current report – being published in four parts, from August 2021 to October 2022 – is the sixth [since the body was set up in 1988.](#)

## What are the four parts?

The three working groups that make up the IPCC each publish their own reports. The first looks at the physical basis of climate science – that is, how the chemistry and physics of the atmosphere are changing and are likely to change in future, and [whether human influence is responsible](#). The second – the group producing the latest report – assesses the effects of climate change, such as extreme weather, droughts, floods and temperature rises, and how humanity can adapt to these.

The third group looks at ways of cutting emissions, and the fourth report is a synthesis, to be published in October, ahead of the [Cop27 UN climate summit](#), to be held in Egypt in November.

## What does the report say?

The warnings make for grim reading.

3.5 billion people are highly vulnerable to climate impacts and half the world’s population suffers severe water shortages at some point each year. One in three people are exposed to deadly heat stress, and this is projected to increase to 50% to 75% by the end of the century.

Half a million more people are at risk of serious flooding every year, and a billion living on coasts will be exposed by 2050. Rising temperatures and rainfall are increasing the spread of diseases in people, such as dengue fever, and in crops, livestock and wildlife.

Even if the world keeps heating below 1.6C by 2100 – and we are already at 1.1C – then 8% of today’s farmland will become climatically unsuitable, just

after the global population has peaked above 9 billion. Severe stunting could affect 1 million children in Africa alone. If global heating continues and little adaptation is put in place, 183 million more people are projected to go hungry by 2050.

The ability to produce food relies on the water, soils and pollination provided by a healthy natural world, and the report said protection of wild places and wildlife is fundamental to coping with the climate crisis. But animals and plants are being exposed to climatic conditions not experienced for tens of thousands of years. Half of the studied species have already been forced to move and many face extinction.

Maintaining the resilience of nature at a global scale depends on the conservation of 30% to 50% of Earth's land, freshwater and oceans, the IPCC report said. Today, less than 15% of land, 21% of freshwater and 8% of oceans are protected areas, and some regions, like the [Amazon, have switched from storing carbon](#) to emitting it.

## **What role do governments play?**

IPCC reports run to thousands of pages, incorporating data from years of research. But the key document that emerges at the end of the process is a distillation of all this knowledge known as the [summary for policymakers](#), which contains the key messages. It is pored over line by line by the lead scientific authors but also by representatives from governments, a process open to all states who want to contribute. Critics say this process waters down key messages; defenders say the scientists take a robust line and few significant changes are made.

## **Will governments try to water down this report?**

This second part of the report is likely to be the most politically sensitive, because it deals with the probable real world impact of the climate crisis, including issues such as the potential for food shortages. One of the most contentious issues is over how the world adapts to the climate crisis and the question of "loss and damage" – the impacts of the climate crisis that are too great for countries to adapt to.

This issue has dogged the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) climate negotiations for more than a decade, and at the [Cop26 climate summit in Glasgow](#) last year many countries were disappointed that rich nations failed to agree a programme to issue funding to poor countries for the loss and damage they sustain.

Concerns have already been raised by some campaigners that “loss and damage” has been changed to “losses and damages”, but analysts say this change is minor and does not change the substance of the findings. The substantive issue will be what the report says about adaptation and the global need to adapt to extreme weather that, as the first IPCC working group found in August, is becoming inevitable.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/feb/28/what-is-the-ipcc-climate-change-report-and-what-will-it-say>.

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## Flooding

# Eastern Australian states hit by major flooding after ‘rain bomb’ weather event

Eight dead and hundreds rescued from rooftops as rainfall exceeds annual averages in just a few days

- [NSW and Qld floods live updates – latest eastern Australia flood news](#)



The storm battering Australia’s east coast is again being described as ‘unprecedented’. Photograph: Patrick Hamilton/AFP/Getty Images

*[Ben Smee](#) and [Royce Kurnelovs](#)*

Mon 28 Feb 2022 03.28 EST

The flood broke through the levee before daybreak. By the time many residents of Lismore in northern [New South Wales](#) woke up on Monday, the

water had begun to lap at their doorsteps.

Those unable to flee climbed on to upper levels of their homes, then out on to their rooftops. Hundreds were rescued by boats and kayaks and jetskis; many others are still unaccounted for.

Artist Lucy Vader began calling for help on her social media page at about 7am. A few hours later as she waited for rescuers, she posted a video of herself sitting on the roof as the flood continued to rise.

“I’m on my roof, the water is still rising, my dog is stuck inside my house,” she said, the rain beating on to the tin roof.

Desperate call for help from [#Lismore](#) local Lucy Vader. Stuck on a roof at 36 Macaulay St. Her dog is inside her home. "I'm having to flex my back to stay on the roof and not slip off" She is one of hundreds desperately needing rescuing from floodwaters [@nbnnews](#) [@9NewsSyd](#) [pic.twitter.com/LXcCkFtFLb](https://pic.twitter.com/LXcCkFtFLb)

— Olivia Grace-Curran (@livgracecurran) [February 28, 2022](#)

The storm battering Australia’s east coast is again being described as “unprecedented”; the weather system sat over Brisbane, the country’s third-largest city, for more than three days. The rain has been fierce and has continued, unabated. In some parts of the city, more than 1.5 metres of rain – close to the average annual rainfall – has come down since Thursday.

Eight people have died, all in [Queensland](#), while police hold grave fears for at least three more who are missing.

On Sunday afternoon a 59-year-old man was killed while attempting to cross a flooded road on foot at Taigum, in Brisbane’s outer north. Police said witnesses had attempted to give the man CPR but he died at the scene.

A man believed to be in his 50s is also presumed dead after his car was washed away in flood waters in the Currumbin Valley, near the NSW border,

early on Monday. Police said they believe the man's vehicle was driven about 30 metres along a flooded road. The vehicle has not been found.



Authorities estimate the flooding in Brisbane may have damaged about 15,000 properties. Photograph: Darren England/EPA

Having dumped on Brisbane, causing widespread flooding that authorities estimate may have caused damage to about 15,000 properties, the weather system finally moved south early on Sunday, giving the Queensland capital [a chance to take stock of the damage.](#)

As the rainfall shifted, so did the flood threat. Northern NSW river towns of Murwillumbah and Lismore are both under water with the NSW premier, Dominic Perrottet, warning worse is to come.

Lismore is a community that has become used to flooding. The last time the levee broke, in 2017, was during ex-tropical cyclone Debbie.

Locals in Lismore still talk about the 1954 flood. The rain started the same day a young Queen Elizabeth visited the town in northern NSW and the Wilsons River eventually peaked at 12.15 metres – a height that had not been exceeded in almost 70 years.

On Monday, the same river peaked more than 2 metres higher than ever before – at 14.46 metres. Videos show the town’s two-storey shopfronts inundated to their roofs.

This is Keen St in [#Lismore](#). The Wilson River is expected to peak at 14.4m this afternoon - more than TWO metres higher than 1974 peak (12.15 m) and February 1954 (12.27m) [@nbnnews](#) [@9NewsSyd](#) [pic.twitter.com/krAxZE5rYI](https://pic.twitter.com/krAxZE5rYI)

— Olivia Grace-Curran (@livgracecurran) [February 28, 2022](#)

Northern rivers local John Vanderstok, who joined a flotilla of private boats rescuing residents trapped in flooded homes across the town today, said authorities had been overwhelmed by the scale of the rescue operation.

“The emergency services are around but I’d say the locals outnumber them 20 to one, anyone who has a boat is just out there trying to save anyone they can. It’s just so sad, so terrible for the people trapped,” Vanderstok said.

“There would have been – hanging out windows, on roofs – hundreds. There are people everywhere and there are also a lot of boats. I reckon about 200 to 300 boats are there – even heading back, I passed another 15 boats heading in.”

Perrottet said the situation will likely deteriorate.

“The advice that we have received is that we would expect things to get worse over this period of time,” he said on Monday. More than 60,000 residents have been told to prepare to evacuate.

“Simply because your community has not flooded in the past does not mean that it will not flood over the course of this week. What we are seeing today is unprecedented.”

Heavy rain in Brisbane finally eased about midnight on Monday, removing some of the strain that had choked suburban floodways and dumped record volumes into dams.

Within hours of the rain stopping, suburban flooding caused by swollen creeks and Brisbane River tributaries largely subsided, and people were able to return to their homes to assess the damage.

“We left about 3pm yesterday, the water was up to here,” said Nirin Giri, pointing to a spot just below the front balcony of his home at Newmarket, in Brisbane’s inner north.



Locals in Lismore still talk about 1954, when the Wilsons River peaked at a height of 12.15 metres. On Monday, the same river peaked at 14.46 metres and is predicted to reach 16 metres on Monday night. Photograph: Jason O’Brien/AAP

The surrounding houses on Ashgrove Avenue, near the bridge over Enoggera Creek, all suffered significant damage. The water overturned a large garden shed in a neighbour’s yard.

“There’s mud right through [the house], you can see it has come right up along the wall there,” Giri said. “We are not alone, this has happened to everybody.”

At the same time as people in Brisbane’s suburbs were returning to their homes, the Brisbane River reached its peak, causing inundation of low-lying banks, including parts of the CBD, Southbank and West End.

Meteorologists say while several features in the atmosphere combined to deliver the extraordinary rain event over south-east Australia, climate change likely made the event worse.

“Given climate change is a background to all weather events, it’s hard to say that it does not play a role. We know the oceans are getting warmer and that puts more moisture in the atmosphere, and a warmer atmosphere can hold more moisture.”

The Australian Bureau of Meteorology has said that heavy rainfall events will get more intense as the world gets hotter.

While heavy rainfall has finally eased, concern remains about storms forecast for later in the week which might cause further chaos if river levels are still high.



“Anyone who has a boat is just out there trying to save anyone they can,” said northern rivers local John Vanderstok. Photograph: Jason O’Brien/AAP

Diana Eadie from the Bureau of Meteorology said those storms posed an additional risk. “That really intense rain is now shifting into north-east [New South Wales](#) and is easing for much of south-east Queensland,” she said. “That being said, the risk for significant flooding is still very real.

“We’re expecting more settled conditions today and continuing into tomorrow. From Wednesday onwards and the following five days, we see a return of the potential for severe thunderstorm activity with the risk of damaging winds, large hail and locally heavy falls.

“We’re not expecting widespread rain as we have seen in this event, but with any severe thunderstorm, there is the potential that we could see very intense rainfall rates in some localised areas.”

The Queensland premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, said there had been “a huge response effort”.

“It has been fast and it has been furious and it has had a big impact,” she said.

“I don’t know about everyone else, but last night it was like cyclonic conditions outside. The winds, the rain and ... we had two systems of thunderstorms merging last night as well during the course of the day. We didn’t know that was going to happen.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/feb/28/eastern-australian-states-hit-by-major-flooding-after-rain-bomb-weather-event>

## 2022.02.28 - Spotlight

- ['I have a lot of resentment' Patrisse Cullors on co-founding BLM, the backlash – and why the police must go](#)
- [Killing Eve review Sandra Oh and Jodie Comer struggle to keep the final series afloat](#)
- ['I'd throw Jack Daniel's at the crowd' How Bridget Everett went from waitress to superstar](#)
- [US Trump ignores Farage – and risks midterm elections farrago – with insistence on big lie](#)



Patrisse Cullors: 'I feel like I've been treated as the fall guy for a movement that is much bigger than me.' Photograph: Philip Cheung/The Guardian

[The G2 interview](#)

## **'I have a lot of resentment': Patrisse Cullors on co-founding Black Lives Matter, the backlash – and why the police must go**

Patrisse Cullors: 'I feel like I've been treated as the fall guy for a movement that is much bigger than me.' Photograph: Philip Cheung/The Guardian

It is 10 years since she helped launch possibly the biggest global protest movement in history. But then came controversy as huge sums of money flowed in. She describes how her childhood inspired her activism – and the hurt she has suffered

by [Nesrine Malik](#)

Mon 28 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

“You’re gonna make me cry,” Patrisse Cullors warns when I ask how she feels about being criticised by other Black people. Then the co-founder of Black Lives Matter (BLM) turns away from the webcam and starts to sob, hand to her mouth. “I’m crying because I was prepared for rightwing attacks. I wasn’t prepared for Black people to attack me. And I think that’s probably the hardest thing in this position, to lose your own people. The people that you love the most, the people that you do this work for. The human being feels betrayed, the leader feels like: ‘Yeah, welcome to Black leadership. This is the fucking hazing.’”

It’s almost 10 years since Cullors, 38, helped to launch what has been described as the largest global protest movement in history. In that time she has gone from local community organiser to international activism A-lister. But with celebrity has come controversy, including complaints about a lack of transparency about the huge sums of money that have flowed BLM’s way. She has also been called a hypocrite for amassing a property portfolio inconsistent with her beliefs as a self-described “trained Marxist.” She has called these attacks: “Not just a character assassination campaign, but a campaign to actually get me assassinated.”

She has had plenty of time to brood on all this since she stepped down as executive director of the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation (BLMGNF) last May. But she has also written a book, *An Abolitionist’s Handbook: 12 Steps to Changing Yourself and the World*. The central assumption is that the police cannot be reformed – they must be defunded, disarmed, disbanded and replaced by other systems of public safety.

“I’ve been an abolitionist for 20 years, even before I started identifying as an abolitionist,” Cullors says. “What I hadn’t seen was a more robust conversation about how we practise abolition. What does it mean when we say ending the police state, no more jails? What does that mean as an everyday practice? The values that are in that book. I practise them every day.”



Demonstration in Baltimore in 2015 over the death of Freddie Gray.  
Photograph: Andrew Burton/Getty Images

When we begin the first of our two chats on Zoom, it is early morning in her home town of LA, and she is cool and slightly formal, reluctant to turn on her camera. But she thaws quickly, chatting to me as she moves through the house she shares with her partner, the activist Janaya Khan, and her six-year-old son. The camera comes on, and she eases into herself, breaking off briefly to message a friend who is going through a bereavement, and joking with Khan about needing too much coffee to get through the day.

She is not a naturally guarded person. “I was one of the first people in my friends group to go to therapy,” she says. “I grew up with a father who was in 12-step AA. I’ve sat in those rooms and heard grown men cry. I’ve always seen vulnerability as the way towards transformation and healing, and that’s difficult because we don’t live in a world that cares for Black people’s vulnerability.”

Vulnerability defined her 90s childhood and drove her to activism. “Some of this is personality and some of this is nurturing,” she says. The third of four siblings, she was raised by a mother who was preoccupied by working and paying the bills. The man she thought of as her father “wasn’t there a lot and was a big headache for my mother,” she says.

She grew up feeling different from her siblings, then discovered that she was – her biological father was someone her mother had known during a brief separation from her siblings’ father. Cullors didn’t meet this man until she was 12. She never refers to the man she grew up with as her stepfather, but as “the father that raised me.” For all his faults, she says, “when it comes to his children, his words of affirmation are words that keep me going still. He never made me feel different or apart.”

Still, meeting her biological father explained a lot. Until then, she says, she felt “pretty much like an alien the whole time. I love my family and siblings, but I was nothing like them. They’re all introverts. I was rambunctious, loud, extrovert – wild hair and wild clothes.”



Cullors speaks at a Bernie Sanders 2020 presidential campaign rally in Los Angeles. Photograph: Michael Tullberg/Getty Images

Her difference was further accentuated by her sexuality. Cullors came out as queer at 16, and was promptly kicked out by her mother – a woman who, according to Cullors, “doesn’t believe in queerness and transness.” “We have very different accounts of what happened when I came out as queer,” Cullors says. “My account is that I was kicked out. Her account is: ‘I never kicked you out.’ I was pretty much houseless during my last two years of high school.” It wasn’t a straightforward falling-out, though. Cullors’ mother

still checked in on her “all the time.” “I was hurt but I have so much compassion for my mom because of everything she went through as a parent.”

Poverty and policing moulded the rest of her personality. “It felt like we were being hunted as kids,” she says. “I remember waking up in the middle of the night and hearing the helicopters and seeing them shining their light in our window.” The light was trained on her brother Monte and his friends hanging out outside.

“Everyone talks about the war on drugs; we don’t talk about the war on gangs,” she says, recalling a time in the 90s when disproportionate resources were mobilised towards inner-city gang policing. Helicopter policing is “fucking expensive,” she says, and a sign that the campaign was “essentially the federal government declaring a war on brown and Black children and calling them domestic terrorists. We were living in a literal war zone. That is the context that made me an abolitionist.”

Monte was arrested in 1999 at the age of 19, and spent six years in LA prisons, after which he emerged with stories of torture, beatings, starvation and bed-chaining. His family lost him within the prison complex, where he would be moved between jails without notification or explanation. When they asked to visit or speak to him, Cullors says, information about his whereabouts was withheld. “They would do this thing where they would beat the shit out of somebody, almost kill them, then they would hide them in the jails for months. So you couldn’t get a hold of your loved one, because they didn’t want any proof of what they did. My brother was tortured multiple times.”

Against this tumultuous backdrop, Cullors was labelled “gifted” at a young age, and sent to a school in a white, affluent area. Travelling between her poor, working-class life and her new school jolted Cullors into outrage. “In my adolescent brain I was like: ‘OK, I’m living in this neighbourhood, experiencing policing on a daily basis. And then I go to a completely different neighbourhood during the day for school with people who are living a completely different life – they have no understanding of the police state.’ I have access to all these resources. I’m also realising that you can live differently. People have access to grocery stores and green space and I

don't. I was like: 'This is unacceptable. It is unacceptable that I come home to police sirens and helicopter policing and that I go to school, where all these white kids are doing every drug under the sun and nothing is happening to them. Why not them, when they're actually the ones dealing the drugs?' I'm talking about massive amounts of drugs that I would not have had access to if it wasn't for white communities. That wasn't right."

In her early teens, she began to read the works of the civil rights [activist Audre Lorde](#) and autobiographies of Black Panther members, coming to the conclusion that there was a golden age of civic rights activism in the 60s and 70s that she missed out on. When she was 16, she went to a social justice camp run by the National Conference for Community and Justice. "It changed my life." Two hundred young people from across LA county were there, being taught about civil rights, identity and how to challenge racism and patriarchy. In the camp, she was introduced to the first civil rights organisation that she was a part of, the Bus Riders Union, a movement that challenges discriminatory policies affecting the overwhelmingly low-income African American, Latino and Asian users of public transport in Los Angeles county. That introduction was "the pivotal moment", she says.



BLM founders ... (from left) Alicia Garza, Cullors and Opal Tometi.  
Photograph: Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP

She ended up staying at the Bus Riders Union for 11 years. She learned how to take on the state, and began to leverage it for her first passion – fighting and reforming the police. It was in 2013, while she was transitioning to abolition work, that Cullors first tweeted the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, after George Zimmerman was [acquitted of murdering Trayvon Martin](#) in Florida. Then came her call to action, alongside fellow activists [Alicia Garza](#) and [Opal Tometi](#). At first, she says, “we didn’t feel like owners of it. We didn’t call ourselves co-founders of BLM until like a year later. The only reason we started to call ourselves co-founders is because it started to be co-opted. It started to be Black men using BLM as a way to tell their message, which was largely anti-woman or often anti-queer and trans. Or devoid of the conversation of feminism. And we were like: ‘We’ve gotta intervene.’”

By 2014, Black Lives Matter had local chapters across the US. “What we did, Alicia, Opal and I, is create infrastructure [so that we could have language and a framework](#) around why police violence, vigilante violence, incarceration, were the greatest dangers to our community. We created a language around queerness and transness as not the enemy to Black people. My specific role was bringing people together, going across the country and world to talk about the tactic of protest, the tactic of what we call ‘shutting shit down’, of lifting up Blackness and being OK with saying: ‘Black lives matter.’”

But BLM had grown too quickly. “At a certain point,” she says, “people wanted to start giving us money and we didn’t have a legal infrastructure and we weren’t sure we wanted one.” Then George Floyd died under the knee of a policeman in the summer of 2020, and donations skyrocketed. BLMGNF took in just over \$90m (£67m) that year.

Cullors and other BLM leaders have since come under intense scrutiny, with claims that too little of the money raised has reached those in need, while large sums have circulated around an opaque network of companies, some of them with links to Cullors.

She concedes today that her executive position did not match her skills. “I was trained,” she says, “to take a moment and help build a campaign around it.” The problems started afterwards. Not only is Cullors better at motivation than management, she is also prone to abstractions. “I’m really interested in

the best and possible ways we can access joy, healing, beauty and transformation,” she says, when I ask what drives her.

We run out of time just as Cullors is about to get into the difficulties of her time at the helm of BLM and agree to chat again the day after. When we speak the next morning, she seems wearier, more deflated than the day before.

She has been thinking about a recent article in New York magazine headlined: “[The BLM mystery: where did the money go?](#)”. It noted that in November 2020, 10 chapters of the BLMGNF had called for greater financial accountability, complaining that there was “no acceptable process of either public or internal transparency about the unknown millions of dollars donated to BLMGNF”. The article went on to imply that Cullors had turned her back on high-risk protest and activism in favour of collaborations with corporate sponsors, and of questionable transactions between her other organisations and BLM, none of which has been proven.

It did, however, concede: “The deals could have reasonable explanations.” As for Cullors’ property portfolio, the magazine said: “There is no evidence that Cullors used money sent to BLMGNF to purchase personal property.”

“I’ve worked multiple jobs across many organisations my entire life,” Cullors [previously stated](#). “I’m also a published author, writer, producer, professor, public speaker and performance artist … I work hard to provide for my family.”

Cullors had been “crying to a girlfriend” about the New York magazine story, she says now, before she starts crying with me too.

Attempts at greater transparency in the two years before she left BLM failed, she admits. “I think it’s because Black people in general have a hard time with money. It’s a trigger point for us.” She also thinks that they didn’t do “the best job of telling our story. A lot of that has to do with being socialised as a woman and just wanting to do the work, not bragging about what we’ve done, what we’ve accomplished. Which is, I want to say on record, a great error. I do want to make it really clear that millions of dollars were put back into the community.”



‘I do want to make it really clear that millions of dollars were put back into the community.’ Photograph: Philip Cheung/The Guardian

And she still thinks she can make a contribution, [as she focuses on police abolition](#). “I was thrust into a global spotlight, but at the end of the day [I’m a local community organiser](#). I can sustain local organising work. I think being the face of a global movement was turning me into something I didn’t want to be. I didn’t want to be a shark. I don’t have the emotional bandwidth.” She is also done with the internecine conflict between Black movements that she sees happening on social media. “If I were a young person watching, I’d be like: ‘Keep me away from that shit. That is drama and trauma. I have enough of that. Let me go be an influencer on TikTok.’”

Cullors seems constantly to be treading a fine line between humility and hurt, between letting go but also claiming what is due to her. “You’re catching me at a place of deep, deep self-reflection,” she says, “but I look forward to many more years ahead where I can look back with more fondness. I think right now I have a lot of hurt and resentment and I feel like I’ve been treated as the fall guy for a movement that is much bigger than me. And some will say: ‘Well you let yourself be Time 100, you let yourself be in the forefront and you’re about to be on the cover of the Guardian – kinda comes with the territory.’ True.”

But then comes a final plea: “We need to treat our leaders better.”

*Patrisse Cullors will launch An Abolitionist Handbook at [the WOW festival in London](#) on 11 March. It is published by Own It!, price £16.99. To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](#). Delivery charges may apply.*

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## Killing Eve review – Sandra Oh and Jodie Comer struggle to keep the final series afloat

It might be funny and sexy, but the spy thriller is out of new ideas. And now even the fabulous costumes are in short supply



Sandra Oh and Jodie Comer in *Killing Eve*, series four. Photograph: Anika Molnar/BBC America

[Jack Seale](#)

Mon 28 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

Whatever else is going right or wrong with a TV show, it helps if we know immediately which series we're watching. A shimmering brutalist landscape, "Russia" written in giant pastel letters, retro-reverb beehive pop

on the soundtrack and a woman in biking leathers breaking into a government building wielding a gun and silencer? This can only be [Killing Eve](#) (BBC iPlayer).

This is season four. If you didn't catch seasons one to three, what have you missed? Well, there's a diffident but determined intelligence agent called Eve (Sandra Oh), and a fearsome yet brittle assassin called Villanelle (Jodie Comer), and they're obsessed with each other because ... actually we've never fully established why. Anyway, since Eve began tracking Villanelle, what has happened is ... do you know, I'm not properly across that either? A criminal network called the Twelve keeps murdering beloved minor characters, and Eve plans to destroy it, but what the Twelve wants or why we might care has remained murky.

Killing Eve is funny, sexy and the source of numerous already brilliant actors' best work, but it has made no sense for some time. When Phoebe Waller-Bridge originally dramatised the Codename Villanelle novellas by Luke Jennings, she filled the first season with one-liners so mischievous, an aesthetic so enviable and a main antagonist so exciting that television drama has rarely created such an overwhelmingly attractive first impression. Nothing before or since has felt as icily fresh as Villanelle, modelling vicious couture in a series of prime continental locations, dispatching victims with imperious calm.

The problem was that Villanelle only worked as a mood, a vibe, a mythical beast. When season one climaxed with Eve – the MI5 desk jockey whose pursuit of the psychopathic Villanelle had awakened the carefree hedonist buried deep within her – stabbing her quarry in an outpouring of vengeance and lust, the only viable ending had been used up, but the show had become so intoxicating, it was bound to unwisely continue. But, not unlike Villanelle breezing out of a penthouse suite leaving bloody chaos behind her, Waller-Bridge sauntered off to work on other projects.

Since then, Killing Eve has been a fiery training ground for female writers, with each season asking a new showrunner to attempt the impossible task of keeping the story going. Season four boss Laura Neal has the hardest challenge of all, not just because of Killing Eve's generally diminishing

returns – by this point we’re peering at a photocopy of a photocopy of a photocopy – but because this is the final season.

A hint of where Neal is taking us comes in that first scene of the new run, when the armed biker we assumed was Villanelle removes her helmet to reveal that she is, in fact, Eve. Now free of the frustrating job and boring husband that used to tie her down by giving her something to live for, she is close to embodying the dark fantasy she used to covet from afar. She’s living in a hotel and enjoying a casual thing with a muscly colleague at the private security firm where she now works: he buys her burgers, sharpens her hand-to-hand combat skills, and cheerfully agrees to unfussy sex in a surveillance van, after a conversation about firing a weapon turns her on.

Sandra Oh remains fantastic as Eve, whose gradual journey from nerdy safety to delicious self-destruction has been the only thing about the post-Waller-Bridge years that has ever really worked. Comer, on the other hand, is struggling as Villanelle, lost in the nonsensical idea of this stone-cold monster trying to find redemption. Season four reinvents her as working in a church, lodging in the vestry and undergoing baptism as part of her latest scheme to convince Eve, for reasons unclear, that she’s no longer evil. Mild carnage ensues, but her co-opting of Christianity is, compared to Villanelle at her awesome best, cheap and easy iconoclasm. The dull British setting prevents Comer from wearing any fabulous outfits, which, in a show that once unashamedly prized being beautiful on the surface, is another pleasure lost.

The end of episode one hints at a solution to these issues that would certainly be ambitious, but looks more likely to come off as desperate. Before that, one of the series’ recurring motifs pops up yet again, when Eve and Villanelle share a confrontation that is not allowed to resolve anything: this time they are on either side of a fish tank, with Comer all in white. While the children of the 90s who make up the bulk of the audience might chuckle at the homage to Baz Luhrmann’s Romeo + Juliet, that sort of direct reference feels like something that the show in its pomp wouldn’t have resorted to. It’s still recognisably Killing Eve and it’s still kinda cool, but it’s out of new ideas.

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Interview

## **‘I’d rip open my shirt and throw Jack Daniel’s at the crowd’ – how Bridget Everett went from waitress to superstar**

[Zoe Williams](#)



Karaoke couldn't contain her ... Everett gives Florida a taste of her cabaret, inspired by her weekend wildness. Photograph: Kevin Mazur/Getty

She was going nowhere in smalltown Kansas – until she unleashed her voice and became a raucous, liquor-swilling cabaret colossus. Now she's the star of a hard-rocking, emotionally charged HBO drama



[@zoesqwilliams](https://twitter.com/zoesqwilliams)

Mon 28 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

‘It’s a little like *Sliding Doors*,’ says the actor and cabaret artist Bridget Everett, speaking from Manhattan, New York. She’s talking about her new dramedy [Somebody Somewhere](#), which is set in Manhattan, Kansas. ‘Basically, what life might be like if I had stayed in Kansas and never moved to New York and found my voice.’

I feel I ought to point out that *Somebody Somewhere* is nothing like *Sliding Doors*. Everett plays Sam, a subdued, laconic woman, sometimes depressed, sometimes just not feeling it. She has a quiet life and a gigantic voice, which she slowly comes around to unleashing in the drab community centres and church halls where thwarted, flamboyant people find one another. The drama doesn’t so much centre on Sam as move stealthily from one understated struggle to another: Sam and her sister’s grief at losing their other sister;

their mother's alcoholism, which, like bankruptcy, moves first slowly and then very fast.

It's poignant, haunting, and funny in ways that mean you sometimes don't laugh until two days later. To say the show was about disappointment would be too simple, and misleadingly bleak, but part of what makes it so unusual is the richness it finds in a life that drama might ordinarily overlook – that of a person, Everett says, who has “floated through life in their 20s, 30s, 40s and just given up”.

The HBO series is called “semi-autobiographical”, but “semi” doesn't exactly cover it. Everett, like her character, grew up in Manhattan, Kansas, and spent years waiting for a break. “I had a couple of failures early on and let that be the litmus test of what was possible for me. I slipped into a life of waiting tables and staring at walls – for 20 years. More. From maybe when I was 14 till I was in my 40s.”



‘I want to give myself a high five’ ... Everett as Sam in *Somebody, Somewhere*. Photograph: HBO/2019 HBO, Inc.

Everett is flattening the picture a bit: there was a bit more to those years. While she was “pretty settled, watching my friends succeed and just being their cheerleader, there was something inside me that really missed music,

missed singing. Once a week, we would go to a karaoke bar and I would go wilder and wilder and wilder. I'd start with a microphone and, by the end, I would be on the bar, ripping my shirt open, throwing Jack Daniel's at the crowd."

In one way, it didn't matter whether it was a karaoke bar or Madison Square Garden. "There's something about singing," she says. "I feel really plugged in and electrified. When I was little, my family – we didn't communicate well, but the one time we really experienced joy was around the holidays, when every day would be drinking and singing. My sister would pour me a glass of Blue Nun. And I would be so happy then. There's something I cling to about that."

I think you should sing what you know – and what I know is different kinds of tits

Everett wasn't wasted in karaoke – she just had a talent karaoke couldn't contain. So in the early 00s, a friend who ran a tiny theatre asked her to turn her weekend wildness into a cabaret act. It's a niche art: it's not comedy, it's not musical theatre, there's no such thing as "mainstream" cabaret. It wasn't a fast track to fame.

"Cabaret doesn't pay as well as some people might think," Everett says drily. "So I still had to hustle to keep the roof over my head and buy the occasional bottle of chardonnay." It was, however, a passport to something: "A lot of my stuff was rock, because I originally wanted to be a rock singer. I just had to figure out how to get the stage time. When I was encouraged to write an act, I stepped into my voice more. I have a bunch of songs about various parts of the anatomy. I think you should sing what you know – and what I know is different kinds of tits."



Raunchy turn ... Everett in *Patti Cake\$*. Photograph: J Park/20th Century Fox/Kobal/Rex/Shutterstock

So perhaps it was quite cult and subversive, and only just managed to keep the wolf from the door, but Everett's act by the late 00s was pretty established. She'd open for the comedian [Amy Schumer](#), and had piqued the interest of various film producers. In 2008, she featured as an incredibly drunk woman in the *Sex and the City* movie. "I thought, 'Oh my God, I'm in a movie now. My life is going to change.' But life just does not fucking work out that way. I was waiting tables for at least another 10 years."

Everett had to be dragged kicking and screaming into an audition for the 2017 US indie film [Patti Cake\\$](#), because by that time she had a reputation. "It takes an incredible amount of confidence and courage for me to get up on stage and give myself away. The shows are very personal. I talk about my body – there are a lot of tender moments. I'd worked hard to feel like I belonged there. I thought if I got to Sundance and stank the whole place up, that's going to rock my confidence."

Cabaret is, she says, "much more embraced in London and Sydney. But in New York, there's a whole cabaret counterculture – people doing things that are very subversive and wild." Maybe everybody in showbiz is the black sheep of their family, unless they're part of a dynasty. But Everett is drawn –

in *Somebody Somewhere* – to the question of what remains of family relationships; which part of the black sheep is still very attached to the other sheep.

The show isn't directly true to life in all its details: Everett is one of six, while Sam, her character, just has two sisters. They're similar but not identical, and the show is less raucous than the stage act. "If people knew what I was like when I'm not on stage," says Everett, "they'd think Sam made sense. I can be a little depressive. We constantly talked about how much to Bridget-ise Sam, how much to bring in the raunchy lyrics or the dirty side. Sam is not me but there are parts of me in her." There is one crucial parallel though: both Everett and her character have lost a sister. "Families work because everybody has their role. Lose one cog and the whole thing can fall apart."

In the drama, Sam and her sister Trisha try to overcome their differences: Trisha is uptight, judgmental, godly, homophobic; Sam is surly, avoidant, alienated. But they can't make it work without their late sister Holly. Instead, they have to change how they are. Everett has said she didn't want *Somebody Somewhere* to be one of those dramas where people grow. And, yes, it is a cliche when a character goes on a journey – but that's what a drama *is*. She modifies her position a bit: "It was important for me to not have Sam grow because of a romantic relationship. I feel like I've seen that 1,000 times. That's not been my experience and I just didn't want to do it."

*Somebody Somewhere* just had the green light for a second season and Everett has, I suggest, pulled off something impressive: she got her big break with a complicated, unconventional show at an age – 49 – when female performers are expected to step out of the limelight and rejoin the chorus. "When you put it that way, I want to give myself a high five," she says.

But Everett's just not that good at even the most fleeting self-congratulation. "I watch the show alone. I don't like to be around other people when I'm watching myself. The HBO label comes on, that static sound. I don't believe it's me. It's hard to grasp that I might have achieved something. It's hard to

sit with that. It's a midwestern thing – to keep your head down, keep working and hope for the best.”

Somebody Somewhere is on HBO Max in the US, Binge/Foxtel Now in Australia and begins on Sky [Comedy](#) in the UK in March.

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[Donald Trump](#)

## Trump ignores Farage – and risks midterm elections farrago – with insistence on big lie



Donald Trump speaks at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Orlando, Florida. Photograph: Chandan Khanna/AFP/Getty Images

Analysis: His British friend tried to help but the former president did not want to forget his voter fraud obsession and focus on the future. CPAC loved it but Republicans hoping to take Congress know they are courting disaster

*[David Smith](#) in Orlando, Florida*

*[@smithinamerica](#)*

Mon 28 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

The sagest advice given to [Donald Trump](#) all week came from a man who is neither a Republican nor an American.

Nigel Farage, the British politician, broadcaster and demagogue whose Brexit campaign coincided with Trump's rise to power, warned his old pal against endlessly fixating on the 2020 election.

"This message of a stolen election, if you think about it, is actually a negative backward looking message," Farage told the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Orlando, [Florida](#).

"There is a better, more positive message the Republican party needs to embrace and it's this: 'We are going state by state, vote by vote to make sure that America has the best, the cleanest, the fairest election system anywhere in the western world.'"

Urging an end to the "big lie" obsession is heresy at places like [CPAC](#), the Woodstock of the red meat right. Perhaps no pro-Trump Republican would dare breathe it to the former president, lest he slap them with a demeaning nickname, endorse a primary opponent or blackball them from his luxury Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida.

But Farage, as foreigner and fellow traveller, may have felt liberated to speak an inconvenient truth: that endlessly re-litigating the last election with false claims of voter fraud could prove a serious liability for [Republicans](#) in November's midterms.

This message of a stolen election, if you think about it, is actually a negative backward looking message,

## *Nigel Farage*

The former UK Independence party and Brexit party leader went on: “That negative anger must be turned into a positive. You’ve got to offer the voters of this country a shining city on the hill. You’ve got to give them a vision. People want dreams, people want hopes, and the deliverers of that message are you guys.”

The audience sounded receptive enough. And while some CPAC speakers did promulgate “the big lie” – Ohio Senate hopeful Josh Mandel declared, “I want to say it very clearly and very directly: I believe this election was stolen from Donald J Trump” – they generally gave greater emphasis to winning Congress in 2022 and, of course, Trump returning to the White House in 2024.

Jim Jordan, an Ohio congressman and close Trump ally, declared: “I believe President Trump is going to run again … I think if he runs, he’s going to win.”

But the [annual CPAC straw poll](#) testing who should get the Republican nomination raised more questions than answers. Of course Trump won with more votes than everyone else combined. But his 59% was not quite the overwhelming show of force he might have hoped for in what is usually the capital of Trumpistan.

There is now a clear alternative. [Ron DeSantis](#), the governor of Florida, finished second on 28%, well clear of Mike Pompeo, the former secretary of state, on 2%.

In a separate poll where Trump was removed from the equation, DeSantis won by a landslide 61%.

On the other hand, Florida is DeSantis’s home state, so he might expect to punch above his weight here. The governor gave a well received speech on Thursday that notably failed to mention Trump. But the audience for Trump’s address on Saturday was appreciably bigger and brimming with “Trump 2024” badges and caps.

Even those sporting DeSantis regalia were not quite ready to back him. David Duffy, 57, a retired insurance worker sporting a giant “DeSantisLand” flag, said: “We want to keep President Trump as our president. We believe he still is our president and, with DeSantis being 42 years old, we want to give him a little bit more time.”

Asked for her 2024 preference, Marnie Allen, wearing a “DeSantisLand” cap, said: “Trump, only because I owe him. I think we all owe him to make up for the disasters and because he’s going to go in with a vengeance this time and take care of our fourth level of government: career bureaucrats. He will go in this time and he will take a machete to them.”



Nigel Farage speaks in Orlando. Photograph: Chris duMond/REX/Shutterstock

The 51-year-old from Orlando, who works in higher education, felt compelled to add: “Not a real machete, of course, but a figurative machete.”

Unless something dramatic happens – a criminal indictment in New York, say – the nomination remains Trump’s to lose. On Saturday he dropped his strongest hint yet that he does intend to pursue it.

He clearly did not get Farage's memo. Trump told the audience: "The Rinos [Republicans In Name Only] and certain weak Republican politicians want to ignore election integrity also but we cannot ignore it. We have to fix it. Make no mistake, they [Democrats] will try to do it again in '22 and '24, and we cannot let them do that.

"And the way we [let them do that] is to come to a very powerful conclusion as to what happened in 2020. We stand down to stop talking about it, we stop making Americans aware of the cheating and corruption that went on. That's really saying, 'It's OK, you can do it again.' We can't let that happen."

The slapping sound you heard was a hundred Republican midterm candidates planting their hands on their foreheads. Trump is coming to a district near you, with a big lie to tell. It remains Democrats' best hope of a midterm miracle.

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## Will we get a single, variant-proof vaccine for Covid?

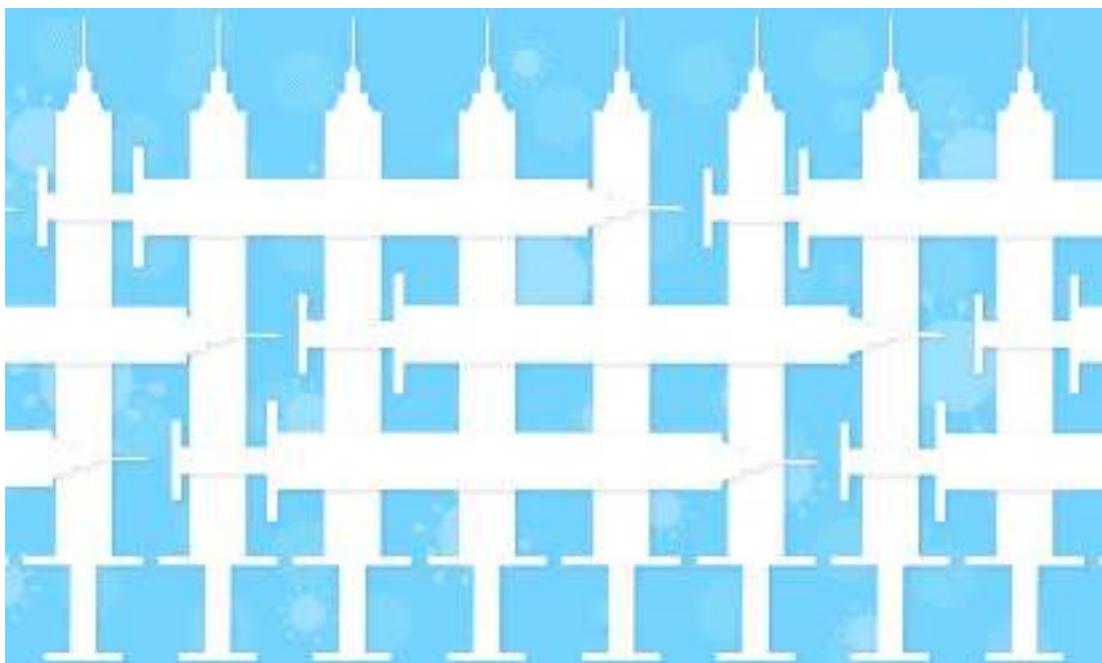


Illustration by Observer Design.

The goal of a universal vaccine would have seemed a fantasy only a few years ago. But not now...



[Philip Ball](#)

Sat 26 Feb 2022 12.00 EST

This week the government announced [additional vaccine booster jabs](#) for the over-75s and suggested a further shot is likely to be needed in the autumn. But imagine if the next Covid vaccine jab you have were the last you would ever need. That's a dream being actively pursued now by researchers, who feel it could be possible to make a "universal" vaccine against the Sars-CoV-2 virus that would work well not only against all existing variants but any that the virus could plausibly mutate into in the future.

Some are thinking even bigger. In January, Joe Biden's chief medical adviser, Anthony Fauci, and two other experts called for more research into "universal coronavirus vaccines" that would work not only against Sars-CoV-2 but against the many other coronaviruses in animal populations that have the potential to spill over into humans and cause future pandemics. "We need a research approach that can characterise the global 'coronaviral universe' in multiple species," Fauci and colleagues [wrote in the New England Journal of Medicine](#), "and apply this information in developing broadly protective 'universal' vaccines against all [coronaviruses]."

Is that just a fantasy? Not necessarily. After all, many considered it fanciful, when the pandemic began, that we'd have a vaccine against Covid-19 in less than a year. But experience has proved that “we as a research community can pull together and do remarkable things,” says Larry Corey, a virologist and vaccine expert at the University of Washington in Seattle.

The current vaccines were developed against the original “ancestral” variant of Sars-CoV-2. They still work remarkably well against the new variants in preventing severe disease – Corey says that even against Delta there seems to be about a 90-fold difference in the death rate between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. But the Omicron variant has caused alarm by its ability to transmit faster than the others and to infect vaccinated people. Although very few such individuals develop serious symptoms from Omicron, it can actively suppress the immune defences that vaccination (as well as natural infection) activate.



A woman receives a Covid jab in Bangkok, Thailand, last month. The country is battling a spike in Omicron cases. Photograph: Anusak Laowilas/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Variants acquire changes to the chemical structure of the viral proteins, through random mutations when the virus replicates, that give them some competitive advantage – improved transmissibility, say. Many of these

changes happen on the so-called spike protein, which sticks out of the virus shell and latches on to proteins in the membranes of human cells, creating a point of attachment and attack. Omicron has [an alarming number of such mutations](#), showing how much capacity Sars-CoV-2 has to spring surprises.

One answer is to adapt the vaccines to the variants. The mRNA vaccines made by Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna contain RNA molecules that act as templates for our cells to make harmless fragments of the spike protein. This is the vaccine's antigen, provoking the immune system to find antibody molecules that will recognise the viral protein and mobilise immune cells against it. Then if the actual virus gets into our bodies, our immune system is primed to identify and destroy it. Other vaccines, such as AstraZeneca's, use other methods to elicit the same immune priming. If the spike protein of a variant has a slightly different structure, in principle we can change the RNA molecule to one that encodes part of this new protein.

One option is to give the immune system many ways to spot, and suppress, the invader, in the hope that one will work

If, as widely expected, Sars-CoV-2 eventually becomes endemic in the population, constantly circulating at a low level like flu and cold viruses but with the potential to produce an epidemic outbreak, the vaccines could be tailored to whatever variants are currently in circulation. This is more or less what happens with flu: each season's flu vaccine is based on a best guess of what that season's strains are likely to be.

That's all very well – except that Omicron has shown how rapidly a significantly new variant of the coronavirus can appear and spread globally. Pfizer and Moderna are now working on a [vaccine tailored to Omicron](#). But even if this can be made and tested within a few months, that may be too late. So a universal vaccine that can protect against all variants could be preferable. “We need a vaccine that has potential to protect broadly and proactively against multiple coronavirus species and strains,” says Kayvon Modjarrad, who leads a team seeking to develop one at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Silver Spring, Maryland.

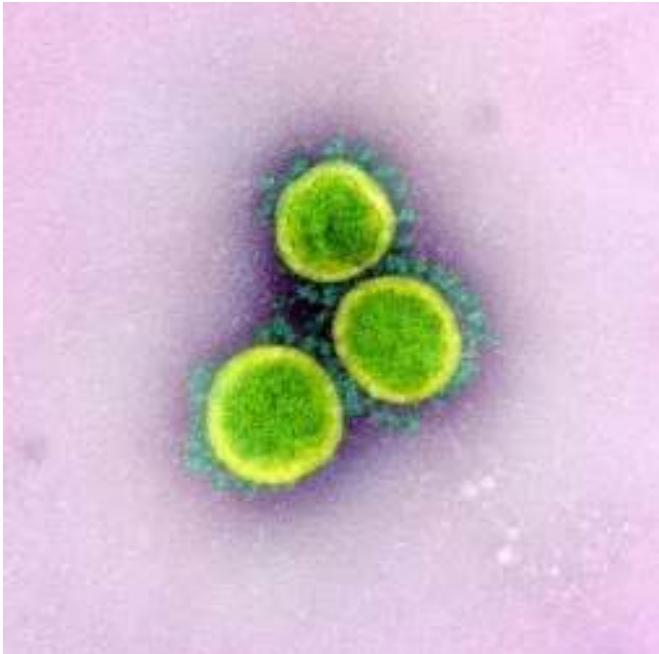
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At the moment we have no pan-variant vaccine for any endemic virus. Researchers have long dreamed of a universal vaccine that would make flu epidemics less lethal, and [there are now promising signs that it could be possible](#). The design principle for a universal Covid vaccine would follow similar lines.

One option might be to prime the immune system to recognise not just one bit of a viral protein, but lots of bits – not all of which are likely to change (or change significantly) at once in any new variant. We'd give the immune system many different ways to spot, and then suppress, the invader, in the hope that one will work. This might involve, for example, making an mRNA vaccine that contains many different RNA molecules, each encoding as a different protein fragment. Or a single particle in the vaccine could hold several different fragments.

Alternatively, you can look for parts of the virus that seem to be “conserved” across variants: proteins (or bits of them) that don't mutate much at all, presumably because such changes would be too detrimental to the virus. But how can you know what those will be, even for variants that haven't emerged yet? One way is to see if highly conserved protein regions exist already among a whole family of related coronaviruses. “If you can find things that are in common between Sars-CoV-2, Sars [the related respiratory virus that caused alarm in 2003], and a bunch of other animal coronaviruses, then the likelihood is that the next variant of Sars-CoV-2 will have them too,” says Skip Virgin, chief scientific officer of San Francisco-based Vir Biotechnology, which is working with GlaxoSmithKline on vaccine development – a collaboration that has already produced [the monoclonal antibody sotrovimab](#) for alleviating Covid symptoms.

At the moment, researchers are mostly striving for the relatively modest target of hitting just a subset of the coronavirus universe: typically, to stimulate an immune response against a part of the spike protein, called the receptor binding domain (RBD), shared by Sars, Sars-CoV-2 and closely related bat coronaviruses. The RBD is the part of the spike protein that latches on to the host cells. Although some of the variants have small mutations in their RBD, its chemical structure doesn't change much: create a strong immune response to the RBD and it should work against any virus in this family.



Sars-CoV-2 particles captured by a transmission electron micrograph.  
Photograph: Alamy

Modjarrad's team began [Phase I clinical trials](#) (looking just at the safety) of their pan-variant vaccine in April 2021. It uses a tiny nanoparticle called ferritin – a natural protein that stores iron atoms in the body – studded with many copies of the Sars-CoV-2 RBD.

It has been long known that many copies of an antigen in a single vaccine particle elicit a stronger immune response than a single copy does. The institute is cagey about releasing details of its progress until its clinical trial data has been published. In December, however, the [team published results](#) showing that their ferritin vaccine confers good protection in macaques not only against the ancestral form of Sars-CoV-2 but also against the Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta variants, and the original Sars virus.

Barton Haynes of the Duke University School of Medicine in North Carolina is taking a similar approach with RBD-studded ferritin-based nanoparticles. Last May he and his coworkers [reported a candidate vaccine](#) that protected macaques against Sars-CoV-2, Sars, and some Sars-like bat coronaviruses. Very recently they showed that it generates a [good immune response](#) against the Delta and Omicron variants too.

Haynes says they hope to start human clinical trials at the end of 2022. If they work out, he thinks that it might take a year or two before the vaccine is ready to use, depending on whether it's deemed different enough from those we have already to warrant another large-scale Phase III clinical trial before being approved.

These efforts might yield a vaccine resistant to all SARS-CoV-2 variants – but in principle such approaches might have an even wider scope, offering the universal coronavirus vaccines that Fauci and colleagues have called for. Haynes says that would probably entail finding the crucial RBDs for other families and adding those on to the particles too. That's the beauty of the nanoparticle approach: it can readily incorporate a variety of protein fragments into a so-called multivalent vaccine.

The first axiom of infectious disease is, never underestimate your pathogen. One wouldn't bet against this virus

*Larry Corey, virologist*

Finding the right protein fragments could mean combing through the thousands of coronaviruses [known to infect wild animals](#) such as bats, civet cats and raccoon dogs, as well as the four coronaviruses already endemic in human populations and which cause mild cold-like respiratory symptoms. It would be a huge task. But now we know the awful dangers such coronaviruses (which include those that caused outbreaks of Sars in 2003 and Mers in 2012) pose, the investment would be cheap compared with the economic and social harm it might prevent. Haynes hopes it might ultimately be possible for a single jab to protect against all coronaviruses for five to 10 years.

Of course, no one can be sure what the fiendishly ingenious Covid-19 virus has in store for the future. “The first axiom of infectious disease is, never underestimate your pathogen,” says Corey. “The rapidity with which we’ve got four major variants in two and a half years is unprecedented and surprising. One wouldn’t bet against this virus.”

But even viruses have limits. For example, despite Omicron’s extensive set of mutations, Vir’s sotrovimab still works against it. “Viruses can change

some things but have a really hard time changing others,” says Virgin. “There are some things a virus just can’t get away with changing.” If you can find them, you’re in business. “I am optimistic that we can generate a vaccine that will give truly broad protection,” he says.

Even the current vaccines still do well at preventing deaths, and we’re building up an arsenal of antivirals and other treatments too. What might be more important now, Corey says, is a vaccine that does better against all variants at blocking transmission. Even when death rates are reduced, “we are seeing the fabric of our lives, our travel, the things that make modern culture, be interfered with enormously,” he says. So we need second-generation vaccines that can prevent widespread infection – a goal that Corey says is widely regarded as tougher, and which would be hard to assess until they are rolled out.

It’s tempting to think that we need to solve this pandemic before preparing for the next one, says Virgin, but “there’s absolutely no reason that your pandemic response can’t prepare you for the next”. And after all, he adds, it’s easier to persuade governments to spend on solving an existing problem than on one that hasn’t happened yet.

“We really want to get to the point where we’re preventing the next pandemic, not responding to it,” says Neil King of the University of Washington in Seattle, who is [also developing](#) a universal nanoparticle-based coronavirus vaccine. “The only way to do that is through broadly protective vaccines.” How marvellous it would be if, in developing a variant-proof Covid vaccine, we end up with one that can avoid the next pandemic too.

This article was amended on 1 March 2022. An earlier version misnamed Vir Biotechnology as Vir Biotechnologies.

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## Hidden gems from the world of researchHealth

# Pandemic-driven early retirement isn't a silver lining when it's because of ill health

[Torsten Bell](#)

More over-50s took early retirement during the pandemic, new research shows, but for many it wasn't a lifestyle choice

[Coronavirus – latest updates](#)

[See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



The pandemic caused some people to become less materialistic, leading to a rise in the number of people taking early retirement. Photograph: Alistair Berg/Getty Images

Sun 27 Feb 2022 04.30 EST

One of the lasting legacies of this pandemic is that almost half-a-million workers are missing from the labour market. This increase in inactivity –

people neither working nor looking for work – is why our employment rate has not recovered, despite unemployment returning to pre-pandemic levels.

Early in the pandemic, it was young people dropping out of the labour market. But that was often for good reasons, such as to study, and they've returned since. The real, lasting story, however, is about older workers. Even as the economy reopened and vacancies hit record level, those aged over 50 have been dropping out of the labour force. Why?

New research investigated the idea that the pandemic might have made us more materialistic because lockdowns gave us lots of what is correlated with materialism: media consumption and loneliness. But it concludes the opposite has happened: we're placing less importance on money. The authors argue that this might be linked to falls in labour market participation: less wish for money equals less need for work. Maybe.

Survey data indicates early retirements are partly what is happening, which for those who can afford it shouldn't concern us. But the bigger driver of rising inactivity is a surge in long-term ill health, which matters to all of us. It means lower living standards for those retiring and a smaller economy for everyone. And history tells us when older workers leave work for any length of time they are unlikely to return. For some, the falls in labour market participation may be driven by pandemic silver linings as people reassess their lives or values, but for many the last thing dropping out of work may feel like is a choice.

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**The ObserverBusiness**

## Names of firms given huge Covid loans will be secret

Campaigners say transparency would aid fight against fraud, which is estimated to have amounted to £4.9bn



Lord Agnew resigned at the dispatch box in the Lords last month over what he described as a series of schoolboy errors in combating fraud. Photograph: PA

*[Jon Ungoed-Thomas](#)*

Sat 26 Feb 2022 15.36 EST

The names of thousands of companies which benefited from billions of pounds of Covid-19 loans schemes are to be kept confidential under new government rules to only publish state subsidies of £500,000 or more.

The higher threshold has been brought in after Brexit despite warnings that it may hamper the fight against fraudsters believed to have [plundered billions](#) from the schemes. The loan schemes have been called a “bonanza for fraudsters”.

Under the EU rules in force until the end of 2020, all pandemic business loans above €100,000 were required to be publicly disclosed with details of the recipients. The new £500,000 threshold for public disclosure of state aid, including pandemic loans, applies from 1 January 2021 and is set out in the government’s subsidy control bill which is going through parliament.

The disclosure rules mean the vast majority of businesses which claim loans will never be revealed. Only 3% of businesses which claimed support under the bounce back loan scheme, the biggest scheme, are expected to be named, according to the British Business Bank, the government-owned bank which delivered the support.

The treasury minister [Lord Agnew resigned](#) at the dispatch box in the Lords last month over what he described as a series of “schoolboy errors” in fighting fraud. He said the loans regime was more vulnerable to fraud because of a mix of “arrogance, indolence and ignorance.”

It has been estimated by the government that about [£4.9bn was lost in fraud](#) to the bounce back scheme which provided loans up to £50,000 to smaller businesses.

Ministers have not published figures for estimated fraud losses for two other schemes, the coronavirus large business interruption loan scheme and the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme. Loans worth nearly £80bn were distributed to businesses across the UK between 23 March 2020 and 31 March 2021.

The government faces a challenge under freedom of information laws by the campaign group Spotlight on Corruption which submitted a request last July for details of all the recipients of the loan schemes.

The British Business Bank refused to release those details, warning that identifying companies may have an adverse impact on trading. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) upheld the decision to refuse the information, but the campaign group is appealing.

George Havenhand, of Spotlight on Corruption, said: "Covid loans were a bonanza for fraudsters. Publishing those names would support the government's efforts to recoup the money lost to fraud and increase accountability for this national scandal."

The ICO's refusal decision in December 2021 said under a temporary EU framework all UK loans granted in 2020 were required to be publicly disclosed where they were above €100,000 (or above €10,000 for farming or fisheries).

From 1 January 2021 under the UK's post-Brexit regime, companies in England, Wales and Scotland are only required to disclose loans at or above £500,000. Loans in Northern Ireland remain under the EU reporting regime under article 10 of the Northern Ireland protocol.

The legal challenge has highlighted concerns that the transparency requirements of the new subsidy control bill are inadequate. EU state aid is typically disclosed at a threshold of €500,000, a threshold which was reduced for the pandemic loans.

Campaigners want ministers to introduce tougher rather than weaker transparency requirements for the UK outside the EU and are calling for all subsidies at a threshold of £500 to be disclosed. Peers have supported an amendment to the bill in the Lords to reduce it to this level.

Anna Powell-Smith, the director of the Centre for Public Data, a data transparency group campaigning for the lower threshold for disclosure, said: "The subsidy control bill reforms how the UK awards grants and loans to businesses after Brexit, but it also makes subsidies less transparent, for no clear reason.

“The law should require all subsidies over £500 to be published. This will help prevent cronyism and fraud and has support across the political spectrum.” Officials at the British Business Bank say the government’s higher reporting threshold for pandemic support will only affect loans over a three-month period because the three schemes closed on 31 March 2021.

A government spokesperson said: “Fraud is completely unacceptable and we’re taking action on multiple fronts to crack down on anyone who has sought to exploit our schemes and bring them to justice. Banks and enforcement bodies remain obliged to prevent and recover losses from fraud and do not rely on public databases to do so.”

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## 2022.02.28 - Opinion

- Muslims still bear the stigma of the ‘Trojan horse’ scandal. Maybe that’s what was intended
- Sunak must offer more support to counteract collateral damage of Russia sanctions
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- Vladimir Putin sits atop a crumbling pyramid of power

## Opinion

# Muslims still bear the stigma of the ‘Trojan horse’ scandal. Maybe that’s what was intended

[Nesrine Malik](#)

The events are historical, but it’s a mistake to believe they are behind us. The atmosphere that fed such lies is still here



Education secretary Michael Gove arrives at Downing Street in June 2014 to discuss the allegations with the then prime minister, David Cameron.  
Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Mon 28 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

If you were to poll a few hundred people, I wonder what they could tell you about the [Operation Trojan Horse](#) conspiracy story of 2014. I wonder how many would know one basic fact: that the furore originated from a single

letter that was found, early on, to be bogus. I fear that it would be a pitiful number.

I'm also pretty certain that even if you told those people that the main allegation – that there was an organised plot to take over schools in the UK and run them to strict Islamic principles – was debunked, they would still think: well, there's no smoke without fire. Maybe the smoke didn't come from this particular fire, but there is definitely another one elsewhere.

[A recent podcast](#) from the New York Times, The Trojan Horse Affair, illuminated how this works. The podcast spent years following the Trojan horse plot and revealed that the government's response to the letter – which included the suspensions of scores of teachers, an inquiry and changes to education and counter-terror policy – happened after the then education secretary, Michael Gove, who spearheaded the Trojan horse response, had apparently been [warned that the letter was fake](#), a letter that he went on to quote from and cite as evidence of a grave threat to Britain's schools.

The podcast has itself became a second act in the Trojan horse scandal, because its findings are still resolutely denied by the main players implicated, from Michael Gove to the media establishments that played their part. None has been moved to humility. Instead they point to different smoke, more fires, other concerns that were raised by whistleblowers about worrying practices in some schools. For those who have tried to counter misinformation about Muslims, this is a familiar disappointment – to take on wild untruths and then realise that even when they are exposed and even partially corrected, little changes.

The podcast is essentially about a state and media captured by prejudice, either unconsciously or knowingly, but it is tangentially about many other things. Each of these is a strand that, when joined with others, tells a story about a country in which the truth can be so easily buried through the fumblings and machinations of a whole cast of protagonists. Some are well meaning, but among them are credulous bureaucrats, jobs worth civil servants, motivated ideologues and a few useful idiots. In short, it is about structural racism – a bland, blame-diffusing term that comes to life during the podcast. Listening to The Trojan Horse Affair, I went from thinking not

how was this allowed to happen, but how was it ever not going to happen? The only way to describe the feeling is to say that it is the opposite of gaslighting – ungaslighting, if you will.

But despite the podcast’s huge popularity, it will still make little difference where it counts. Because other fires will be pointed to, and in their glare the inconvenient truths – or untruths – exposed by the podcast can be bleached out.

This highlights the fact that it is virtually impossible to go about setting the record straight when it comes to false stories about Muslims without running into the charge that in that process one is minimising real stories about Muslims. Perhaps, some say, there was no Trojan horse plot, but there were findings and whistleblower reports of casual homophobia, the teaching of creationism, and students being told that women could not refuse to have sex with their husbands. Doesn’t that justify everything?

Well, no. What we have are two completely different categorisations of events. One is a plot to take over schools, a deeply sinister trope that paints a community as a threat, seeps into legislation and has profound ramifications on social cohesion. The other – incidents of malpractice within schools – is a problem that should be specifically and forensically addressed, but should not be weaponised to feed into fears about Muslims as a whole. And it should go without saying that the state should not be involved in that conflation, justifying the muddying of those categories for its own ends. It should be a reliable, impartial arbiter.

The response to the Trojan horse letter was a disaster on several levels. It failed both whistleblowers with ostensibly legitimate concerns by not treating their complaints in a responsible, targeted manner, and British Muslims as a whole, who have to live – even now – with the stain and notoriety of an apparent “Muslim plot” to take over schools that has now passed into lore.

Raising concerns about your own Muslim community is a traumatising and difficult task; doing it in an atmosphere of Islamophobia makes it doubly fraught, because amid that toxicity, two impulses compete – the wish to prove Muslims are up to no good, and the equal and opposite desire to

defend Muslims comprehensively because they are always assumed by critics to be up to no good. The latter is an impulse to which I constantly have to be alert: the fear that admitting some allegations might be true effectively means conceding – in the eyes of a hostile world – to all the false ones as well. How is anyone expected to bring their fragility and their concerns to the public sphere when it is interested in only one thing: how to use these accounts to advance an anti-Muslim agenda?

The events once again under review are historical, but it's a mistake to believe they are behind us, for the atmosphere in which the Trojan horse conspiracy thrived and flourished, is much the same today. Our society is, if anything, even more receptive to disinformation about the villainy of Muslims. Since the Trojan horse story, there have been others about “no-go areas”, where those not of the faith dare not tread, and of sinister, proselytising Muslims adopting and Islamicising Christian children.

These lies stick, and they work, and they mean that concerns about Muslims behaving badly in schools will always be seen as an issue far graver than the dangerous irresponsibility of government officials making politically divisive hay with a fake letter.

That is the potency of Islamophobia, where the Muslim is always perceived as the most powerful, most coordinated threat. But in this case, in any fair analysis, surely the most malevolent force was a government that lied, mainstreamed a conspiracy theory that it knew to be false, based legislation on it, and probably ensured that a raft of problems that needed genuine attention didn't get it.

That is where there is both smoke and fire. If you cannot see that, it is because the fire is not burning you.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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**Economics viewpointRussia**

## **Sunak must offer more support to counteract collateral damage of sanctions**

[Richard Partington](#)



Inflation and higher energy bills could lead to sharpest fall in UK living standards since 1956



A food bank in Weymouth. The planned April benefits rate rise will be less than inflation. Photograph: Finnbarr Webster/Getty Images

Sun 27 Feb 2022 10.41 EST

These are challenging times. The reconstruction job from Covid-19 had barely begun when Russia invaded [Ukraine](#). Now the international consensus to build back better from the pandemic has been replaced by an urgent need to prevent the conflict from escalating.

With such high stakes, economic sanctions, not bombs, are the western weapon of choice, limiting Vladimir Putin's ability to muster guns and butter. But while there will be harsher consequences for Russia, made a pariah under the Putin regime, it is a battle not without economic collateral damage. European leaders will this week announce a strategy to [cut Europe's reliance on Russian energy](#) – a plan in the works before the first tank rolled into Ukraine, now given added urgency. With Russia accounting for 40% of EU gas imports – rising to 65% in Germany and 100% for some eastern European states – it is a prudent move. Yet it is a process likely to take years. In the meantime, the shock of war will drive up energy prices across the continent – adding to what was already the worst squeeze on living standards in decades.

In Britain the inflationary surge could lead to the [sharpest annual fall in living standards since at least 1956](#), the year of the Suez crisis. Not even the oil price shocks of the 1970s or the 2008 financial crisis come close, witnessed as the fallout from Covid holds back recovery from the worst recession in a century.

The fact that such a squeeze will result is damning. Inflation is forecast to peak close to 8% this year, but that is still less than half the rate seen four decades earlier, in 1975, when [it hit almost 23%](#). Instead, today's cost of living crisis is not only inflationary, but also stems from weaker rates of wage growth, made worse by harsh benefit cuts hitting the poorest in society.

The big difference in the 1970s was worker power, with higher rates of trade union membership enabling employees to demand higher wage settlements to deal with rising living costs. Despite the record postwar inflation rate, pay growth rocketed by 29% in 1975. It was two years later, in 1977, when wage growth of 11% was outpaced by inflation of 15%, that set the previous record for the worst year for growth in living standards since Suez.

At the [Bank of England](#), the concern is that a rerun of the 1970s would lead to a wage-price spiral, when workers demanding higher pay leads to companies raising their prices to accommodate a higher wage bill, in an unsustainable game of leapfrog. Such a process would hurt those with the least bargaining power, and is a [big fear today for the Bank's governor](#), Andrew Bailey.

Back then, central banks ramped up interest rates to eye-watering levels to spike inflation, alongside western governments embracing neoliberalism and global trade and tackling worker power. Such an option would lack credibility today.

The inflation shock of the 2020s comes with trade union membership and headline rates of income and corporation tax half what they were in the 1970s. Globalisation has peaked, public utilities are in private hands, while support is limited for slashing employment rights and product standards.

Central banks are particularly hamstrung, as changes to interest rates take time to fully feed through to the economy. As Ben Broadbent, the Bank's deputy governor, pointed out last week, getting ahead of our current energy-driven inflation shock would have required action in the summer of 2020.

Against this backdrop, it is unthinkable that the government's recent [package of energy support measures](#) will prove the last word in insulating households from the worst cost of living crisis since the mid-1950s.

However, Westminster sources suggest [Rishi Sunak](#) is not preparing any tax and spending changes to announce at next month's spring forecast statement. The chancellor is due only to deliver economic and fiscal forecasts from the [Office for Budget Responsibility](#) to meet legal requirements for a biannual update.

Sunak will probably give a narrative of recent progress and vision for the future; talking up the government's management of the economy as prudent in challenging times, with a promise made for lower taxes in future. The news is expected to be positive, with the OBR likely to update its forecasts for 2021-22 to show [public borrowing of about £20bn less than forecast](#) in October.

However, the chancellor will face growing demands to loosen the purse strings in response to the conflict in Ukraine and its knock-on consequences for UK households and businesses. Calls will come from left and right, with the [national insurance hike](#) planned for April and plans for fuel duty likely to animate his backbenchers.

There will be demands to bolster defence spending and calls to invest in diversifying the UK's energy supplies. While rightwing Conservatives will [push for an embrace of fracking](#) and domestic oil and gas, the climate emergency means that turning away from the green transition must be avoided.

The biggest short-term demand, however, will be on insulating households from a further rise in their energy bills.

Poverty campaigners argue that the benefits system is the best mechanism for helping those most in need. At present the government plans to uprate benefits by just 3.1% in April – less than half the forecast rate of inflation – in a real-terms cut for the poorest families in the country at a time when the UK's main out-of-work support is already the least generous in 30 years following a decade of cuts.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates that 400,000 people could be pulled into poverty by this real-terms cut. Still, rather than tackle this head on, the government last week bizarrely chose to make matters worse – announcing the end of pandemic support measures that will leave Britain with one of the most miserly sick-pay regimes in the western world.

With the dust still settling from Covid-19 and the government waging economic warfare against Russia, more needs to be done to prevent the worst hit to living standards for more than half a century.

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## OpinionRussia

# Our tolerance of Russian corruption in Britain fatally clouded our judgment

[Dominic Grieve](#)

Seduced by money, and then isolated by Brexit, the UK has foregone its chance to lead in the response to the Ukraine crisis

- [Russia-Ukraine war latest news: follow live updates](#)



Workers being decontaminated after the chemical weapons attack in 2018 against Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

Sun 27 Feb 2022 02.45 EST

Unless a miracle occurs, we are witnessing the destruction of Ukraine as a free and democratic state of 44 million citizens at the hands of a dictator.

Vladimir Putin refers to Ukraine as “a dagger pointed at the heart of Russia” not because of any military threat it has ever posed to his country, but because of the values its form of governance represents.

For the west, this is the biggest failure of statecraft and deterrence since 1939. No one in the UK government should be surprised at what has happened. I remember sitting round the table of the National Security Council in 2014 after Putin’s violent annexation of the Crimea, where we concluded that, in the light of this gross violation of international law, he would repeat such an action if given a chance.

Yet in the eight years that have followed, we have failed entirely to craft an adequate response to Putin. Neither the recent British programme to train and engage with the Ukrainian military, nor the empty last-minute ministerial rhetoric challenging the Russian leader’s threats, can conceal the truth: that we have allowed Putin to conclude that the destruction of Ukraine comes at an affordable price.

This failure is starkly illustrated by our attitude to Russian influence and corruption in the UK. The intelligence and security committee inquiry on Russia, whose open report the prime minister suppressed for nine months on an entirely bogus pretext, was presented with the clearest evidence that Russia saw no distinction between economic and state interests, and that it used elements of its diaspora in the UK to further its interests.

It may be too late to save Ukraine, but this should be a wake-up call. Russia has to be treated as the enemy state it is

Meanwhile, we tolerated their financial corruption, and encouraged the use of London as a centre to launder the proceeds.

This in turn renders the ethical standards of our own society and politics liable to being undermined by the attractions of Russian money, and creates dependencies which cloud judgments. And we witnessed campaigns of disinformation, cybercrime and the targeting and assassination of opponents, as well as numerous criminal acts against other European partners.

Yet our efforts to root out the corruption and sanction those with links to Putin have been woefully inadequate. In the light of what is now unfolding in Ukraine, they remain so, despite the recent announcements.

To this we have to add the consequences of Brexit. The key actors in the response to this European crisis are our former EU partners every bit as much as the US. Yet our behaviour over Brexit damaged our standing, and fomented doubts that we will observe our binding engagements with them.

We are no longer alongside them at the table, and have lost a leadership role in our near abroad. We were spectators to [the Minsk process of engagement](#) with Russia, led by France and Germany. We have made it harder for ourselves to persuade the EU states to exclude Russia from the Swift payment system. We have chosen to send warships and aircraft on a token visit to the Indo-Pacific when we scarcely have a credible deterrent in our own waters and airspace.

It may now be too late to save Ukraine. But these events should be a wake-up call for us. [Russia](#) has to be treated as the enemy state it is. We may have decided that we cannot resist its current aggression by force, but we must – as a start – remove its influence domestically as we rebuild our damaged relations with the neighbours who share our values.

That means freezing Russian assets in the UK and requiring any Russian citizen whose presence is not conducive to our public interest to leave.

It means isolating ourselves so far as possible from commercial contact or dependency on Russians, accepting the economic downside this will inevitably entail, and setting an example to others to do likewise.

This means working intensively with our allies before Putin's next act of aggression follows our failure to check him today.

*Dominic Grieve QC is former attorney general for England and Wales and former chair of the intelligence and security committee of parliament*

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## Opinion**Vladimir Putin**

# **Vladimir Putin sits atop a crumbling pyramid of power**

Vladimir Sorokin

Putin's end goal isn't Ukraine but western civilization – the hatred for which he lapped up in the black milk he drank from the KGB's teat



'For Putin, life itself has always been a special operation.' Photograph: Fabio Frustaci/ANSA/Zuma/Rex/Shutterstock

Sun 27 Feb 2022 02.14 EST

On 24 February, the armor of the “enlightened autocrat” that had housed [Vladimir Putin](#) for the previous 20 years cracked and fell to pieces. The world saw a monster – crazed in its desires and ruthless in its decisions. The monster had grown gradually, gaining strength from year to year, marinating in its own absolute authority, imperial aggression, hatred for western democracy, and malice fueled by the resentment engendered by the fall of

the USSR. Now, Europe will have to deal, not with the former Putin, but the new Putin who has cast aside his mask of “business partnership” and “peaceful collaboration”. There shall never again be peace with him. How and why has this come to pass?

In the final film of Peter Jackson’s The Lord of the Rings trilogy, when Frodo Baggins has to throw into the seething lava the cursed Ring of Power, the ring which has brought so much suffering and war to the inhabitants of Middle Earth, he suddenly decides to keep it for himself. And, by the will of the ring, his face suddenly begins to change, becoming evil and sinister. The Ring of Power had taken total possession of him. Even so, in Tolkien’s book, there’s a happy ending …

When Putin was put on the throne of Russian power by an ailing Boris Yeltsin in 1999, his face was rather sympathetic, attractive even – and his rhetoric was entirely sound. It seemed to many that the man ascending the heights of the Russian pyramid of power was an intelligent official devoid of pride and arrogance and a *modern individual* who understood that post-Soviet [Russia](#) had only one possible path into the future: democracy. He talked about democracy quite a bit in his interviews back then, promising the citizens of the Russian Federation continued reforms, free elections, freedom of speech, the observance of human rights by the authorities, cooperation with the west, and, most importantly, a constant rotation of those in power.

“I have no intention of holding on to this chair!” he said.



Vladimir Putin was put on the throne of Russian power by an ailing Boris Yeltsin in 1999. Photograph: AP

In Russia, as everyone knows, people still believe in the words and appearances woven by their rulers. And, back then, this man was “an individual pleasant in every respect”, as Nikolai Gogol wrote of his protagonist in *Dead Souls*: open to discussion, seeking to understand everyone, serious, but not devoid of humor or even the ability to make fun of himself.

Furthermore, certain politicians, intellectuals, and political theorists who are now fierce opponents of Putin and his system, supported him, some of them even passing through the doors of his campaign headquarters to help him win the coming elections. And he did. But the fatal Ring of Russian Power was already on his finger and doing its insidious work; an imperial monster began to take the place of this handsome, lively individual.

In Russia, power is a pyramid. This pyramid was built by Ivan the Terrible in the 16th century – an ambitious, brutal tsar overrun by paranoia and a great many other vices. With the help of his personal army – the *oprichnina* – he cruelly and bloodily divided the Russian state into power and people, friend and foe, and the gap between them became the deepest of moats. His friendship with the Golden Horde convinced him that the only way to rule

the hugeness of Russia was by becoming an occupier of this enormous zone. The occupying power had to be strong, cruel, unpredictable and incomprehensible to the people. The people should have no choice but to obey and worship it. And a single person sits at the peak of this dark pyramid, a single person possessing absolute power and a right to *all*.

Paradoxically, the principle of Russian power hasn't even remotely changed in the last five centuries. I consider this to be our country's main tragedy. Our medieval pyramid has stood tall for all that time, its surface changing, but never its fundamental form. And it's always been a single Russian ruler sitting at its peak: Pyotr I, Nicholas II, Stalin, Brezhnev, Andropov ... Today, Putin has been sitting at its peak for more than 20 years. Having broken his promise, he clutches on to his chair with all his might. The Pyramid of Power poisons the ruler with absolute authority. It shoots archaic, medieval vibrations into the ruler and his retinue, seeming to say: "you are the masters of a country whose integrity can only be maintained by violence and cruelty; be as opaque as I am, as cruel and unpredictable, everything is allowed to you, you must call forth shock and awe in your population, the people must not understand you, but they *must* fear you."

Judging by recent events, the idea of restoring the Russian Empire has entirely taken possession of Putin

Judging by recent events, the idea of restoring the Russian Empire has entirely taken possession of Putin.

Alas, Yeltsin, who came to power on the crest of the wave of perestroika, did not destroy the pyramid's medieval form; he simply refurbished its surface: instead of gloomy Soviet concrete, it became colorful and was covered over with billboards advertising western goods. The Pyramid of Power exacerbated Yeltsin's worst traits: he became rude, a bully and an alcoholic. His face turned into a heavy, motionless mask of impudent arrogance. Toward the end of his reign, Yeltsin unleashed a senseless war on to Chechnya when it decided to secede from the Russian Federation. The pyramid built by Ivan the Terrible had succeeded in awakening the imperialist even in Yeltsin, only a short-lived democrat; as a Russian tsar, he

sent tanks and bombers into Chechnya, dooming the Chechen people to death and suffering.

Yeltsin and the other creators of perestroika surrounding him not only didn't destroy the vicious Pyramid of Power, they didn't bury their Soviet past either – unlike the post-war Germans who buried the corpse of their nazism in the 1950s. The corpse of this monster, which had annihilated tens of millions of its own citizens and thrown its country back 70 years into the past, was propped up in a corner: it'll rot on its own, they thought. But it turned out not to be dead.

After coming to power, Putin began to change. And those who initially welcomed his reign gradually understood that these changes didn't bode well for Russia. The TV channel NTV was destroyed, other channels began to pass into the hands of Putin's comrades-in-arms, after which a regime of strict censorship came into effect; from that point forward, Putin was beyond criticism.



The flags of TVC Channel, Channel One and NTV Channel at the Ostankino TV Center. Photograph: Artyom Geodakyan/TASS

Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the head of the richest and most successful company in Russia, was arrested and imprisoned for 10 years. His company Yukos

was looted by Putin's friends. This "special operation" was designed to intimidate the other oligarchs. And it did: some of them left the country, but the rest swore allegiance to Putin, some of them even becoming his "coin purses".

The Pyramid of Power was vibrating and its vibrations stopped time. Like a huge iceberg, the country was floating through the past – first its Soviet past, then only its medieval past.

Putin declared that the collapse of the USSR was the greatest catastrophe of the 20th century. For all clear-headed Soviet people, its collapse had been a blessing; it was impossible to find a single family unscathed by the red wheel of Stalinist repressions. Millions were annihilated. Tens of millions were poisoned by the fumes of communism – an unattainable goal requiring moral and physical sacrifices by Soviet citizens. But Putin didn't manage to outgrow the KGB officer inside of him, the officer who'd been taught that the USSR was the greatest hope for the progress of mankind and that the west was an enemy capable only of corruption. Launching his time machine into the past, it was as if he were returning to his Soviet youth, during which he'd been so comfortable. He gradually forced all his subjects to return there as well.

The perversity of the Pyramid of Power lies in the fact that he who sits at its peak broadcasts his psychosomatic condition to the country's entire population

The perversity of the Pyramid of Power lies in the fact that he who sits at its peak broadcasts his psychosomatic condition to the country's entire population. The ideology of Putinism is quite eclectic; in it, respect for the Soviet lies side by side with feudal ethics, Lenin sharing a bed with Tsarist Russia and Russian Orthodox Christianity.

Putin's favorite philosopher is Ivan Ilyin – a monarchist, Russian nationalist, anti-Semite, and ideologist of the White movement who was expelled by Lenin from Soviet Russia in 1922 and ended his life in exile. When Hitler came to power in Germany, Ilyin congratulated him hotly for "bringing the Bolshevization of Germany to a halt.

“I categorically refuse to evaluate the events of the last three months in Germany from the perspective of German Jews ... The liberal-democratic hypnosis of non-resistance has been cast off ...” he wrote. However, when Hitler declared the Slavs to be a second-class race, Ilyin was offended and the Gestapo soon took him into custody for the criticisms he’d begun to level. He was then rescued by Sergei Rachmaninov, after which he left for Switzerland.

In his articles, Ilyin hoped that, after the fall of Bolshevism, Russia would have its own great *führer*, who would bring the country up from its knees. Indeed, “Russia rising from its knees” is the preferred slogan of Putin and of his Putinists. It was also taking his cue from Ilyin that he spoke contemptuously of a Ukrainian state “created by Lenin”. In fact, the independent [Ukraine](#) was not created by Lenin, but by the Central Rada in January 1918, immediately after the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly by Lenin. This state arose because of Lenin’s aggression, but not thanks to his efforts. Ilyin was convinced that if, after the Bolsheviks, the authorities in Russia were “[to become] anti-national and anti-state, obsequious toward foreigners, [to dismember] the country, [to become] patriotically unprincipled, not exclusively protecting the interests of the great Russian nation without any regard for whorish Lesser Russians [Ukrainians], to whom Lenin gave statehood, then the revolution [would] not end, but enter its new phase of perishing from western decadence.”

“Under Putin, Russia has gotten up from its knees!” his supporters often chant. Someone once joked: the country got up from its knees, but quickly got down onto all fours: corruption, authoritarianism, bureaucratic arbitrariness and poverty. Now we might add another: war.

A lot has happened in the last 20 years. The president of the Russian Federation’s face has turned into an impenetrable mask, radiating cruelty, anger, and discontent. His main instrument of communication has become lies – lies small and big, naively superficial and highly structured, lies he seems to believe himself and lies he doesn’t. Russians are already accustomed to their president’s lie-filled rhetoric. But, now, he’s also inured Europeans to those lies. Yet another head of a European country flies to the Kremlin so as to listen through their traditional portion of fantastical lies (now at an enormous, totally paranoid table), to nod their head, to say that

“the dialogue turned out to be fairly constructive” at a press conference, then to just fly away.

Angela Merkel admitted that, in her opinion, Putin lives in his own fantasy land. If that’s so, what’s the point of seriously engaging with such a ruler? He’s not a writer or an artist; he has to live in the real world and be responsible for every single one of his words. For 16 years, Merkel, who grew up in the GDR and should therefore understand Putin’s true nature, “has established a dialogue”. The results of that dialogue: the seizure of certain territories in Georgia, the annexation of Crimea, the capture of the DPR and LPR, and now a full-scale war with Ukraine. After the war with Georgia and the seizure of its territories, the “peacemaker” Obama offered Putin … a reset of their relations! Which is to say, c’mon, Vladimir, let’s forget all of that and start from scratch. The result of that “reset” was the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine.



Barack Obama meets with Vladimir Putin in Moscow on 7 July 2009.  
Photograph: Jim Young/Reuters

Putin’s inner monster wasn’t just brought up by our Pyramid of Power and the corrupt Russian elite, to whom Putin, like the tsar to the satraps, throws fat, juicy bits of corruption from his table.

It was also cultivated by the approval of irresponsible western politicians, cynical businessmen and corrupt journalists and political scientists.

“A strong and consistent ruler!” This bewitched them. “A new Russian tsar” was, for them, something like Russian vodka and caviar: invigorating!

During this period of time, I met many admirers of Putin in Germany, from taxi drivers to businessmen and professors. One aged participant in the student revolution of ’68 confessed:

“I really like your Putin!”

“And why exactly is that?”

“He’s strong. Tells the truth. And he’s against America. Not like the slugs we’ve got here.”

“And it doesn’t bother you that, in Russia, there’s monstrous corruption, there are practically no elections or independent courts, the opposition is being destroyed, the provinces are impoverished, Nemtsov was murdered, and TV’s become propaganda?”

“No. Those are your internal affairs. If Russians accept all of that and don’t protest, that must mean they like Putin.”

Ironclad logic. The experience of Germany in the 30s didn’t seem to have taught such Europeans anything.

But I hope most Europeans aren’t like that. That they know the difference between democracy and dictatorship – between war and peace. In his lie-filled address, Putin called the attack on Ukraine a “military special operation” against “Ukrainian aggressors”. Which is to say: the peace-loving Russia first annexed Crimea from the “Ukrainian junta”, then unleashed a hybrid war in eastern Ukraine, and is now attacking the whole country. Pretty much exactly like Stalin with Finland in 1939.

Now, one thing has become clear: with this war, Putin has crossed a line – a red line

For Putin, life itself has always been a special operation. From the black order of the KGB, he learned not only contempt for “normal” people, always a form of expendable matter for the Soviet Moloch-state, but also the Chekist’s main principle: not a single word of truth. Everything must be hidden away, classified. His personal life, relatives, habits – everything has always been hidden, overgrown with rumors and speculation.

Now, one thing has become clear: with this war, Putin has crossed a line – a red line. The mask is off, the armor of the “enlightened autocrat” has cracked. Now, all westerners who sympathize with the “strong Russian tsar” have to shut up and realize that a full-scale war is being unleashed in 21st century Europe. The aggressor is Putin’s Russia. It will bring nothing but death and destruction to Europe. This war was unleashed by a man corrupted by absolute power, who, in his madness, has decided to redraw the map of our world. If you listen to Putin’s speech announcing a “special operation”, America and Nato are mentioned more than Ukraine. Let us also recall his recent “ultimatum” to Nato. As such, his goal isn’t Ukraine, but western civilization, the hatred for which he lapped up in the black milk he drank from the KGB’s teat.

Who’s to blame? Us. Russians. And we’ll now have to bear this guilt until Putin’s regime collapses. For it surely will collapse and the attack on a free Ukraine is the beginning of the end.

Putinism is doomed because it’s an enemy of freedom and an enemy of democracy. People have finally understood this today. He attacked a free and democratic country precisely because it is a free and democratic country. But he’s the one who is doomed because the world of freedom and democracy is far bigger than his dark and gloomy lair. Doomed because what he wants is a new Middle Ages, corruption, lies and trampling on human freedoms. Because he *is* the past. And we must do everything in our power to make this monster remain there – in the past – for all time, together with his Pyramid of Power.

- Vladimir Sorokin has written numerous novels, plays, short stories and film scripts. His novels *Telluria* and *Their Four Hearts*, translated by Max Lawton, will be published this year

- This essay was translated by Max Lawton
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## 2022.02.28 - Around the world

- [Australia floods Eight dead, more missing and hundreds rescued as heavy rains batter east coast](#)
- [Queensland Warning up to 15,000 properties could be inundated as river reaches peak](#)
- ['Before they were our brothers. Now I want revenge' Tigray conflict engulfs neighbouring state](#)
- [Flight bans Russian airlines to be banned from most European airspace](#)

## [Australia weather](#)

# Floods in Queensland and NSW: what we know about areas affected, and what's likely to happen next

Eight people have died, more are missing and hundreds have been rescued as flooding hits Brisbane, Lismore, Murwillumbah and Grafton

- [NSW and Qld floods live updates – latest eastern Australia flood news](#)
- [Queensland floods: Brisbane residents brace for river's peak](#)
- [Get our free news app; get our morning email briefing](#)



Queensland and NSW floods: a man and his dog navigate flood waters in suburban Brisbane on 28 February, 2022. Photograph: Patrick Hamilton/AFP/Getty Images

*Conal Hanna*

Mon 28 Feb 2022 01.13 EST

A major flood event has impacted communities from Maryborough in Queensland to Grafton in [New South Wales](#), with Brisbane's CBD inundated and a record-breaking flood in Lismore.

Here's a summary of events so far, and what is forecast to come:

**Eight people have now died in the floods.** The bodies of a man in his 50s and his dog were found in a submerged car in the Currumbin valley on the [Gold Coast](#) on Monday. A 59-year-old man drowned on Brisbane's north side on Sunday afternoon after being swept away by flood waters while on foot. It was the third death in Brisbane after men were killed in Indooroopilly on Sunday morning and Stones Corner on Friday night. There have been two deaths in Gympie, one in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, and a State Emergency Service worker who died while trying to rescue a family at Coolana, west of Ipswich. Police are searching for two more missing men, and there are reports of a car being swept away at Yatala.

**More than 15,000 homes are estimated to have been flooded in [Brisbane](#).** The Brisbane River peaked at 3.85 metres on Monday morning, below the 4.46 metres experienced in 2011. However, the two flood events are very different and some suburbs experienced worse flooding this time around. More than 54,000 homes are without power.

**The rain has largely stopped in [Queensland](#).** However, major flood warnings remain for the Mary, Logan, Brisbane and Bremer rivers, and Warrill Creek.

**Flood-prone Lismore in NSW has had a record-breaking flood.** Thousands of residents required evacuating, with many rescued from their roofs after flood waters breached the levee before dawn. The entire CBD remains under water. The town recorded 181mm of rain in 30 minutes at one stage. At 3pm on Monday, the Wilsons River level was 14.37 metres and steady, more than two metres above the record flood level of February 1954 (12.27 metres).

**There were 15 evacuation orders current for NSW at 4pm Monday.** As well as Lismore, [evacuation orders were in place](#) in Murwillumbah,

Brunswick Heads, Billinudgel, Ocean Shores, Mullumbimby, Coraki and Southgate. The flood levee has been breached in Murwillumbah, and river levels there and in nearby Tumbulgum and Chinderah have already surpassed flood records from 2017 and 1974. Major flooding is occurring at Grafton, Ulmarra and Maclean, similar to the March 2021 event, with the BoM advising further rises are possible.

**The weather system is continuing to track south in NSW.** Further riverine flooding is expected for the Northern Rivers and Mid North Coast on Monday, and will extend further south to the Central Coast, Sydney, Illawarra and South Coast catchments Tuesday into Wednesday. Major flood warnings remain current for the Tweed, Wilsons, Richmond, Clarence, Orara and Bellinger rivers.

**Rainfall totals have been as high as 1.5 metres in a week.** “Some of the rainfall totals that we’ve seen over the course of this event have been approaching rainfall totals that we would normally expect over the course of a year,” said Bureau of Meteorology forecaster Diana Eden.

**Gympie also recorded its highest flood in a century.** The Mary River was receding on Monday, having reached its highest level [since 1898](#). Up to 3,600 homes could be affected.

**Nearly 1,000 schools are closed in south-east Queensland.** A work-from-home order has also been issued. Some schools in northern NSW were also advising they would be operating under minimal supervision on Monday due to the floods.

**Hundreds of roads are closed, including the M1 at the Tweed River.** Trains, buses and ferries have been suspended across much of south-east Queensland and other major highways have been cut by flood waters. However, the Bruce Highway north of Brisbane is set to reopen on Monday.

**Disaster assistance has been activated for 10 Queensland councils.** The funds will go to clean-up efforts in the Fraser Coast, Gold Coast, Gympie, Ipswich, Lockyer Valley, Logan, Noosa, North Burnett, Sunshine Coast and Toowoomba LGAs, and will be jointly funded by the federal and state

governments. Late on Saturday, the Insurance Council of Australia declared an insurance catastrophe. It is expected an announcement will be made about northern New South Wales regions in coming days.

**A disaster recovery payment of \$1000 for adults and \$400 for children is available** for those impacted by the floods, with 26 localities across Queensland and NSW becoming eligible to access the payment from Tuesday. A disaster recovery allowance to assist employees, small businesses and farmers who have lost income will also be provided to the 26 localities, as will payments for personal hardship and grants for local councils.

**Water was still being released from Brisbane's Wivenhoe Dam on Monday.** The dam was at 180% of its drinking water capacity on Monday, despite water being released since Sunday morning. It rose rapidly from 59% capacity on Thursday. About 2.2 million megalitres of water, the equivalent of four Sydney harbours, has flowed into the Wivenhoe and Somerset Dams in recent days. In 2011, releases from Wivenhoe contributed to flooding in Brisbane and Ipswich. Flood releases were also occurring from Somerset and North Pine dams, while 20 ungated dams were overflowing on Sunday morning.

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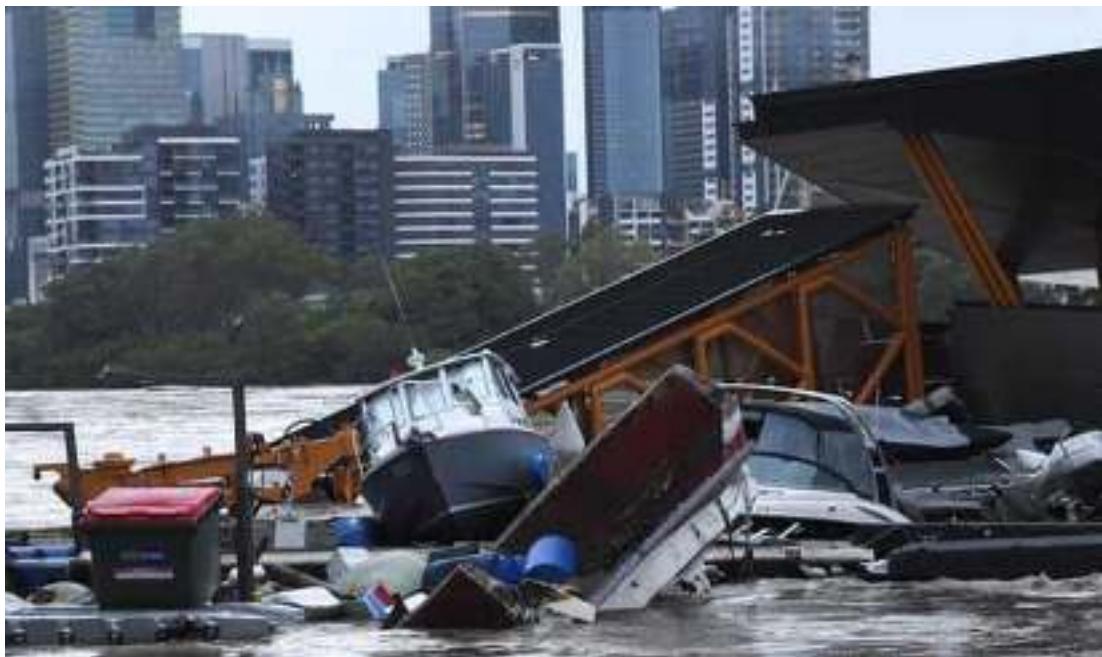
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## Brisbane

# Brisbane flood: warning up to 15,000 properties could be inundated as river reaches peak

Eight people have died and three are still missing after heavy rain battered south-east Queensland

- [NSW and Qld floods live updates – latest eastern Australia flood news](#)
- [Lismore flood: hundreds rescued and thousands evacuated as NSW city hit by worst flooding in history](#)
- [Queensland floods: clean-up begins for some Brisbane residents while others brace for river's peak](#)
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Boats and other debris washed into the Milton ferry terminal on the Brisbane River on Monday, where flood water is inundating homes. Photograph: Darren England/AAP

Ben Smee  
@BenSmee

Sun 27 Feb 2022 22.10 EST

Queensland authorities estimate up to 15,000 properties could be affected by flood waters as the Brisbane River reached its likely peak on Monday morning, inundating low-lying areas in the city's central business district.

Heavy rain lasting more than three days unabated in Brisbane eased at midnight on Monday, removing some of the strain that had choked suburban floodways and dumped unprecedented volumes into dams.

Eight people have now died in flood waters since last week and three are still missing.

On Sunday afternoon a 59-year-old man was swept away while attempting to cross a flooded road on foot at Taigum, in Brisbane's outer north. Police said witnesses had attempted to give the man CPR but he died at the scene.

A man believed to be in his 50s is also presumed dead after his car was washed away in flood waters in the Currumbin Valley early on Monday. Police said they believe the man's vehicle was driven about 30m along a flooded road. The vehicle has not been found.

The Brisbane River peaked at 3.85m on Monday morning, still well below the 4.56m peak of the 2011 flood.

An "unprecedented" volume of water, about 1,450 gigalites, entered Wivenhoe Dam in the past three days, taking its storage levels from under 60% to 183%.

By contrast, in 2011, less water entered Wivenhoe in more than six days.

Impressive work by @Seqwater Dam Operators, stabilising Wivenhoe Dam at 183% to 6:20am. Inflows will still be considerable and barriers to releasing more water to the flooded Brisbane River, great.

Unprecedented flood mitigation by Wivenhoe with 1450 GL net inflows over 3 days. [pic.twitter.com/nsJ7FXOH9s](https://pic.twitter.com/nsJ7FXOH9s)

— Stuart Khan (@stukhan) [February 27, 2022](#)

Some parts of Brisbane have received about a year's annual rainfall in just a few days. More than 1.5m of rain has been recorded at Mount Glorious this week. The average annual rainfall for the town, about 30km west of Brisbane, is about 1.6m.

It is not yet known exactly how many homes were affected by flood water but what is known is that, in many places, the impacts were very different to 2011.

Queensland's premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, told reporters modelling had estimated as many as 15,000 houses affected.

Brisbane's lord mayor, Adrian Schrinner, told ABC radio the city council's modelling for a 4m Brisbane River peak – higher than the observed peak on Monday morning – indicated that about 4,500 properties, including about 2,100 residential properties, would be flooded.

An additional 10,800 properties would be partially flood-affected, according to the council's modelling.

On Monday suburban flooding caused by swollen creeks and Brisbane River tributaries largely subsided and people were able to return to their homes to assess the damage.

But at the same time, the river peak caused inundation of low-lying banks, including the CBD, Southbank and West End. Extremely high tides are expected to continue, but abate gradually, for the rest of the week.

There remains some concern that while heavy rainfall has finally eased, storms are forecast for later in the week which might cause further chaos if river levels remain high in the meantime.

Diana Eadie from the Bureau of Meteorology said those storms posed an additional risk. “That really intense rain is now shifting into north-east [New South Wales](#) and is easing for much of south-east Queensland,” she said. “That being said, the risk for significant flooding is still very real.

“We’re expecting more settled conditions today and continuing into tomorrow. From Wednesday onwards and the following five days, we see a return of the potential for severe thunderstorm activity with the risk of damaging winds, large hail and locally heavy falls.

“We’re not expecting widespread rain as we have seen in this event, but with any severe thunderstorm, there is the potential that we could see very intense rainfall rates in some localised areas.”

Palaszczuk said there had been “a huge response effort”. “It has been fast and it has been furious and it has had a big impact,” she said.

“I don’t know about everyone else, but last night it was like cyclonic conditions outside. The winds, the rain and ... we had two systems of thunderstorms merging last night as well during the course of the day. We didn’t know that was going to happen.”

She added: “All these emergency services people have been on the frontline doing the best they possibly can.

“If it wasn’t for them, there would have been a lot more loss of life. We should be thanking them for everything they have been doing. I want people to understand how much rainfall has come into these catchments and across the entire south-east.”

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The police commissioner, Katarina Carroll, told reporters on Monday that in addition to the seven flood deaths, there were fears of additional fatalities

after reports of people missing in flood waters at Yatala, Goodna and Esk.

A man who fell from a vessel into Brisbane's Breakfast Creek two days ago also remains missing.

Social services groups are calling on governments to increase assistance payments for people affected by the floods.

Aimee McVeigh, the chief executive of the Queensland Council of Social Services, said: “\$1,000 per adult will not cut it, especially in the face of a record-breaking housing crisis ... Queenslanders have experienced devastating flooding in the past 48 hours.”

McVeigh added: “People in lower-lying areas are now facing the prospect of another brutal cleanup after another once-in-a-century flood. People in areas that have never experienced inundation are now reckoning with the fact that their homes are uninhabitable.

“Our community organisations also need access to additional emergency relief funds now. They are on the ground sourcing emergency accommodation, providing food and supply packages and crucial mental health supports.”

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## Global development

# ‘Before they were our brothers. Now I want revenge’: Tigray conflict engulfs neighbouring state

As government officials downplay the fighting in Afar, families are separated, children killed and young people ready to take up arms, while hopes of peace talks fade



Tahir Dersa suffered burns on two-thirds of his body. He was injured when shells landed on his home in Abala, northern Afar, in January. Photograph: The Guardian

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

*Reporter in Afdera*

Mon 28 Feb 2022 01.30 EST

When the bombs started to fall on Afar, people scattered. In the chaos and panic families were ripped apart. A young father lost two of his children, killed by ricocheting rocks. A grandmother had to leave behind her dying son-in-law, a bullet wound in his back; his wife still hasn't heard the news. A 28-year-old woman doesn't know if three of her five children are alive or dead.

All of them are nomadic people from Ethiopia's north-east Afar region, and survivors of the latest round of bloodshed in the country's [devastating civil war](#). In makeshift shelters that have sprung up around Afdera, a hardscrabble merchant town beside a [volcanic salt lake](#), they talk about homes destroyed by shelling and villages looted bare. Afar's authorities estimate that more than 300,000 people have fled the fighting since January.

The war's tremors were first felt in northern Afar in [late December](#), when volleys of gunfire and artillery shells flew across the border with Tigray, the rebel region fighting the central Ethiopian government. Both sides accused

the other of firing first. But in January, troops led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) mounted fully fledged [incursions](#) into multiple Afar districts. TPLF forces now occupy five of them.



A family forced to leave home after fighting in Abala, northern Afar, gather in the punishingly hot town of Afdera for safety. Photograph: The Guardian

Siraj Ali Laad, a 60-year-old camel herder with three wives and 15 children, says the first shells landed in his home town of Berhale in January. One of his wives is missing – he believes she was captured – and five of his children are “over there”, he says, gesturing in the direction he came from two weeks earlier. “Everyone was running to save their lives,” he says. His journey to Afdera took about 15 days; all he brought with him were the clothes he wore. In the punishing desert heat he depended on the goodwill of strangers to survive.

At a busy hospital in Semera, the Afar capital, patients have similar tales. Mahdina Usman has a chest injury and one of her five children has a fractured leg after a shell hit their roadside camp in late January, several days after they were forced from their home by the fighting. On another bed, a 13-year-old girl lies huddled on her own, hands covering her face. A doctor says her mother was killed in the attack.

In the paediatric ward are children ravaged by burns from the blasts that shook their villages. Nine-year-old Tahir Dersa's entire body and face are blistered; his older brother's leg is similarly scarred. Their father says they were playing when a shell hit the family home early one morning about a month ago. "It happened suddenly without any warning," he says. It took more than two weeks to reach the hospital for treatment.

Nuru Seid, a surgeon, explains that the first victims began arriving, almost daily, about six weeks ago. Most have blast injuries. Because the main roads are blocked by soldiers, it takes several days to reach the hospital, by which time many of the patients have already developed life-threatening complications. Some have had to cross through neighbouring Eritrea to the north to reach the hospital, which lacks critical medicines and intensive care facilities.



Afar's regional government estimates more than 300,000 have been displaced by fighting in the state. Photograph: The Guardian

This latest episode is not the first to draw Afar, [one of Ethiopia's poorest regions](#), into the conflict, which at first seemed distant. What began as [a war centred on Tigray](#) – in which the occupying federal army and its allies, [in particular troops from Eritrea](#), committed [alleged war crimes](#) – morphed last summer to include Tigray's neighbours, Afar and [Amhara](#).

The TPLF, which dominated Ethiopia's central government [before prime minister Abiy Ahmed took](#) office in 2018, says its forces [marched south and east](#) to break what the UN has called a “[de facto blockade](#)” of Tigray by Abiy’s government, which has left [millions hungry](#). The TPLF neared the capital, Addis Ababa, in December but retreated to Tigray in the face of [drone strikes](#) and [popular mobilisation](#). The TPLF [said](#) the move was to allow for a “decisive opening for peace” and to expedite the delivery of humanitarian aid. Since then, it has justified its incursions into northern Afar as retaliation against aggression at the state border, and also as a response to [alleged killings](#) of Tigrayans in the border town of Abala.

But the foray into Afar has perplexed some observers. “It’s a bit confusing to us,” says one western government official.

The TPLF has alleged that Eritrean forces, widely seen as likely spoilers of any [peace process](#), are active in Afar and fighting alongside Afar paramilitaries. But on 12 February, it released a [statement](#) saying fighting in the region had ceased.

Local people dispute this. “There is fighting ongoing on four fronts,” says Humed Ali Ibrahi, a militia commander in Afdera, who claims his forces are preparing a “strategic plan to liberate our land from the invaders”. He and others, including those leaving the conflict area, describe the incursions as punitive raids and complain they lack the arms to fight back. “We are defending ourselves with Kalashnikovs,” says Humed. “Nobody is supporting us.”

As long as there is one metre of Afar under [TPLF] control, there will not be peace

*Ali Holale, former rebel fighter*

Notably absent is Ethiopia’s federal army, which [fought alongside Afar forces](#) in southern parts of the region last year and still has a visible presence in parts of it. Ahmed Kaloyta Qasnum, a spokesperson for Afar’s regional government, says the Ethiopian air force has conducted some airstrikes in the north, but little else.

A spokesperson for the central government downplayed the conflict, saying TPLF forces had retreated. This sparked accusations that Abiy was ignoring Afar, treating it as a distraction from his government's bid to move on from the war and rebuild the country's image. Moussa Adem, an Afar opposition politician, says: “[federal] government officials keep saying there is no war in Afar. This is at the same time as the regional government is saying more than 300,000 have been displaced.”

Afar and Tigray are regions with long histories of intermarriage, migration and trade. Though some Afar politicians have sided with the TPLF against Abiy – [including a former regional president](#) – others are backing the Afar government, reinforcing a sense that this is becoming a war between two ethnic groups.



Ali Holale, a former rebel who last year commanded several thousand Afar militias and paramilitaries. Photograph: The Guardian

“We have a just cause, we didn’t deserve to be attacked,” says Ali Holale, a former rebel who last year commanded several thousand Afar militias and paramilitaries. “As long as there is one metre of Afar under their [TPLF] control, there will not be peace.”

Hostilities have also made the prospect of national peace talks seem more distant. “We believed that we were getting to a point where people were willing to talk with each other,” says a western official. “But it was at that moment [when the Afar conflict erupted] that the people who were willing to talk with each other started pulling back from that idea.”

In Afar, young men and women are angry at the bloodshed and say they want to take up arms. Usman Humo, whose children were killed last month, says all he needs is a gun. “Before this they [the TPLF] were our brothers,” he says. “Now I want revenge.”

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## Air transport

# Russian airlines to be banned from most European airspace

EU pledges block on overflying member states, taking total to nearly 30 countries that are closing airspace

- [Russia-Ukraine war latest news: follow live updates](#)



An Aeroflot plane in Colomiers near Toulouse, France. Because of the bans, Russia's passenger planes are being forced to take increasingly circuitous routes. Photograph: Régis Duvignau/Reuters

*[Joanna Partridge](#)*

Sun 27 Feb 2022 12.46 EST

Russian airlines are facing an almost complete blockade from flying west over Europe after they were barred from the airspace of nearly 30 countries

following the invasion of [Ukraine](#).

On Sunday evening the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, said the whole bloc would close its airspace to Russian aircraft.

Hours earlier, [Germany](#), Italy, France, Portugal, Spain, Norway and Finland had joined the long list of states across the continent that have imposed national bans on Russian aircraft flying overhead.

The UK, Ireland, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia had already taken the step to close their airspace to Russian planes, severely limiting Russia's options for flying west.

## [Map](#)

Lithuanian airspace usually provides Russia with the shortest flight to its [Kaliningrad exclave](#) – a small parcel of land next to the Baltic Sea between Lithuania and Poland – which has no common border with [Russia](#).

The route of flight SU2500, operated by the Russian national airline, Aeroflot, from Moscow to Madrid on Sunday morning illustrated the changes to flight routing already necessary before Sunday's wave of bans were announced.

The flight tracker website [FlightRadar24](#) showed the Airbus A321 jet flew north-west across Russia to the Baltic Sea, which it crossed to reach Germany's northern coast, before travelling across Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France and finally Spain.

01:33

'A watershed moment': EU shuts down airspace to Russia and finances weapons for Ukraine – video

FlightRadar24 showed that an Aeroflot flight travelling on Sunday from Moscow to Athens took a similar route before dipping south, skirting the

coast of [Italy](#) before finally reaching the Greek capital. A more much direct journey would have taken an aircraft over Ukraine and the Black Sea.

This is the ridiculous route an Aeroflot flight from Moscow to Madrid now has to take. Once the German ban comes into force it will be even worse. And that's an A321, spare parts for which can't be exported to Russia. I wouldn't want to fly on it. [pic.twitter.com/s5ttjFvWYk](https://pic.twitter.com/s5ttjFvWYk)

— Andy Netherwood (@AndyNetherwood) [February 27, 2022](#)

The airspace closures are redrawing the route map for Russian jets, [resulting in longer journeys](#), which use significantly more fuel and cost more for the airlines to operate, at a time when Moscow's invasion of Ukraine has pushed oil prices higher. The situation will become far more challenging for Russia now that the EU has closed its airspace, almost completely blocking most flightpaths to the west.

The German flag carrier, Lufthansa, had already cancelled all of its flights to Russia for the coming week.

Russia has banned all British aircraft from landing in the country in retaliation over Boris Johnson's decision to [ban Aeroflot from landing](#) in the UK.

“The immediate impact is on flights between Russia and other countries around [Europe](#), the bigger issue is whether Russian airspace is closed off,” said the aviation consultant John Strickland, of JLS Consulting. “This would have an impact on other countries’ airlines, from the UK and EU states, who would ordinarily use Russian airspace to fly to many destinations in Asia. That means more indirect routings and flying for significantly longer.”

He added: “We don’t know how long this might last for. Airline management teams will be racking their brains right now and thinking about contingency plans.”

The measures come just as international air travel is beginning to return following the pandemic, although there are fewer passenger flights between Europe and Asia, as many countries, such as China and Japan, remain

mostly closed to foreign visitors. However, the route changes are also expected to affect the transport of cargo.

Sections of international airspace have been closed off in recent years – including during the Gulf war and when US airspace was shut in the days following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 – but rarely have so many countries banned another from their airspace.

Parts of Ukrainian airspace were avoided by international airlines from July 2014, after [Malaysia Airlines MH17](#) from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur was shot down, leading to the deaths of all 298 people onboard. International investigators say the Boeing 777 was brought down by a [Russian-made missile](#) fired from territory in eastern Ukraine held by pro-Russia rebels, but Moscow has denied involvement.

If Russia decided to shut out international flights from its airspace, the move would have a significant impact on the country's finances. "Russia makes a lot of foreign exchange for charging for overflight rights, the use of airspace and navigation, and it is a substantial amount," Strickland said.

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