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[Budget 2021](#)

UK budget to extend furlough until end of September

Rishi Sunak will also announce help for an additional 600,000 of the newly self-employed on Wednesday

[Larry Elliott](#) and [Jessica Elgot](#)

Tue 2 Mar 2021 17.00 EST Last modified on Wed 3 Mar 2021 00.11 EST



Rishi Sunak walks from the Treasury to No 11 Downing Street, London, the day before delivering his budget. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Rishi Sunak will announce on Wednesday that the Treasury is extending its furlough scheme until the end of September [in an attempt to safeguard jobs](#) as a fragile economy emerges from the Covid-19 emergency.

In an unexpected move, the chancellor will say that workers will continue to be guaranteed 80% of their salary for a further three months after the

government envisages all restrictions on activity will be removed in June.

Sunak will also seek [to fend off accusations](#) that too many people have slipped through the government's salary safety net by saying that an additional 600,000 of the newly self-employed will now be eligible for state financial help.

Labour said the extension should have been announced months earlier – rather than allowing struggling business owners to suffer uncertainty – and that it showed the chancellor was only focused on his “moment in the sun”.

Before his second budget – but the 15th crisis-related announcement in a year when pandemic-related spending has already reached £280bn – Sunak will say that the priority is to see the economy emerge from its third lockdown without triggering mass unemployment and a wave of business failures.

In recent days, there had been hints from the Treasury that the [furlough would be extended](#) until the end of June, but Tuesday night's surprise move will provide continuing support for sectors – such as hospitality and retailing – where recovery could prove slow and patchy.

“Our Covid support schemes have been a lifeline to millions, protecting jobs and incomes across the UK,” the chancellor said last night.

“There's now light at the end of the tunnel with a roadmap for reopening, so it's only right that we continue to help business and individuals through the challenging months ahead – and beyond.”

[Sunak spending](#)

Under the new plan, employers will be expected to pay for 10% of a furloughed worker's wages in July, rising to 20% in August and September. Sunak said firms were being asked to make a “small contribution” to the hours not worked by their staff but employees will continue to receive 80% of their wages up to a £2,500 limit until September.

In addition, cash grants under the self-employment income support scheme (SEISS) will now be available to those who became self-employed during

2019-20.

When the self-employment scheme was launched it was based on tax returns for 2018-2019, the most recent year for which data was available. The Treasury said that had resulted in many people failing to qualify.

Business groups said the extension would be a relief to many. Rain Newton-Smith, the chief economist of the CBI, said: “Extending the scheme will keep millions more in work and give businesses the chance to catch their breath as we carefully exit lockdown.”

But the shadow chief secretary to the Treasury, Bridget Phillipson, said assurances should have been given many months ago – not used as a PR stunt for the budget.

“Businesses and workers have been pleading with the chancellor to give them certainty – but they have had to wait because he said it wouldn’t be appropriate until the budget,” she said. “Announcing it the night before shows the focus is on [Rishi Sunak](#) getting his moment in the sun rather than protecting jobs and livelihoods.”

In addition to the furlough and the SEISS, Sunak is expected to announce:

- An extension of the £20 a week boost to universal credit.
- Extra measures to support the long-term unemployed through the Kickstart scheme for the under 25s and the Restart scheme for older workers.
- An extension to the stamp duty holiday for properties under £500,000.

Sunak will say: “We’re using the full measure of our fiscal firepower to protect the jobs and livelihoods of the British people”.

But the chancellor also made it clear last night that he would take measures to repair the damage caused to the public finances by the pandemic once the immediate threat was over and the economy was recovering. Sunak has been strongly rumoured to be preparing for a rise in corporation tax from 19%.

The Treasury will announce a series of tax consultations on 23 March, which some have described as a ploy to allow the chancellor to announce the “good news” about extensions of support on budget day while delaying decisions on tax rises until later in the year.

A number of senior Tories have said moderate tax rises are inevitable – with some warning they must come along with spending cuts – a narrative seized on by Labour.

Two former cabinet ministers sounded warnings about rises in corporation tax. The former chancellor Philip Hammond warned Sunak not to impose a sharp immediate rise in corporation tax – a move Labour has also said it would oppose – but said a longer-term “sensible, proportional” rise would be better.

David Gauke, a former justice secretary and chief secretary to the Treasury, said Sunak should raise income tax, rather than corporation tax. “The chancellor is right to think that taxes will – eventually – have to go up. But if he relies heavily on corporation tax, he will unnecessarily make the UK a less attractive and dynamic place in which to invest,” he told the Evening Standard.

Nicky Morgan, a former Conservative chair of the Treasury select committee, said she expected decisions on balancing the books to be deferred until the autumn when the Treasury could assess the state of the recovery in a new budget.

“It’s counter-intuitive for the Treasury to wait but when you look at how the OBR [Office for Budget Responsibility] forecasts are moving, it’s not possible to make decisions yet about what the balance can be between tax rises, economic growth and reprioritising spending,” she said.

“Undoubtedly there are people on the government benches who think the tax burden is already too high. But a lot of MPs are hearing from their constituents that they understand there are bills to be paid. The argument will be where that falls, whether it’s incomes rising slower or taxes rising – rather than whether they should come at all.”

[In a trail of his Commons appearance today](#), the Treasury said the budget would have three themes: “Support, honesty and building the UK’s future economy.”

The chancellor is expected to say: “First, we will continue doing whatever it takes to support the British people and businesses through this moment of crisis.

“Second, once we are on the way to recovery, we will need to begin fixing the public finances – and I want to be honest today about our plans to do that. And, third, in today’s budget we begin the work of building our future economy.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/02/uk-budget-to-extend-furlough-until-end-of-september>

Budget 2021

From forecasts to furlough: what to expect in the budget

Rishi Sunak is expected to lay foundations for post-Covid recovery and address the impact of the pandemic



The government will also announce a £150m fund for communities to buy pubs in their areas. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

The government will also announce a £150m fund for communities to buy pubs in their areas. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

[Richard Partington](#) *Economics correspondent*

[@RJPartington](#)

Wed 3 Mar 2021 01.00 EST

Rishi Sunak will use the budget on Wednesday to set out further government support before lockdown ends, alongside steps to reboot Britain's economy from the [worst recession in 300 years](#).

The chancellor is expected to extend spending measures, tax breaks and government grants to help soften the blow from Covid-19 for businesses and their workers before restrictions are eased in-line with the government's roadmap over the coming months. Sunak will also aim to lay the foundations for a post-Covid recovery, while addressing the impact of the pandemic on the public finances.

Economy

Forecasts Gross domestic product (GDP) shrank by 9.9% in 2020 – the worst performance since 1709 – and the economy remains under pressure. However, official forecasts due on Wednesday from the [Office for Budget Responsibility](#) could paint a rosier picture, as progress administering the vaccine paves the way for a swift recovery later this year.

Public finances The budget is expected to pave the way for higher taxes or spending cuts in future as government borrowing hits a peacetime record this year. The budget deficit – the gap between spending and income – is expected to come in at about £370bn for the 2020-21 financial year.

Business support

Grants The chancellor will offer [£5bn in government grants](#) to businesses in retail, hospitality, accommodation, leisure and personal care. Grants of up to £18,000 each for 700,000 firms will be made available to prevent mass bankruptcies during the latest lockdown.

Rates relief An extension in the temporary 100% tax cut for hospitality, retail and leisure is expected. A fundamental review is rumoured to have been delayed until the autumn, possibly to allow time for an online sales tax to be developed.

Hospitality sector VAT Already extended once, the [temporary reduction](#) from 20% to 5% is likely to be extended to the summer, possibly for three months beyond the current 31 March cutoff. A delay could add £800m to the estimated £3.3bn cost so far.

Support for workers

Furlough extension Sunak will announce an extension until the end of September to support the economic recovery from Covid. Employees will continue to receive 80% of their wages until the scheme ends, but firms will be asked to contribute 10% in July and 20% in August and September as the scheme is gradually phased out.

Self-employed Grants of up to £7,500 will be available from next month for three months, including an expansion in the scheme to allow those who started working for themselves in the 2019-20 financial year to make claims.

Benefits

Universal credit The temporary £20 per week uplift in universal credit benefits is earmarked for a six-month extension. Due to be cut at the end of March, charities warn that a limited extension is insufficient for tackling rising poverty.

Housing

Stamp duty A three-month extension until the end of June is expected at a cost of about £1bn to the exchequer. It is designed to avoid a cliff-edge in the property market in March before the economy has recovered.

The government will also launch a scheme to bring back 95% mortgages, which are mainly used by first-time buyers and in short supply due to the pandemic.

Taxation

Corporation tax A gradual increase has been widely touted, reversing cuts instigated by George Osborne to the current rate of 19%. Among the lowest rates in the wealthy world, it is expected to be raised by anywhere up to 25%. With the US planning a rise from 21% to 28%, the UK would remain the lowest in the G7. Each percentage point rise would provide an extra £3bn in annual receipts.

Income tax Although the Tories promised not to raise income tax, national insurance or VAT before the 2019 election, Sunak is expected to freeze the threshold for the 20% basic rate of income tax at £12,500 and £50,000 level for the 40% rate for three years. It would bring 1.6 million people into a higher bracket by 2024, raising about £11bn.

Pension tax A restriction on the amount wealthier people can put into their pensions to £1m over their lifetime could save £250m in tax relief. About 1.2 million people are projected to exceed the threshold by the time they start drawing on their private or occupational pension.

Environment

Green bonds Sunak will unveil what is expected to be the world's first government green bond. Offered through NS&I it will allow savers to invest in a product that will contribute towards green projects.

Electric cars The budget is expected to roll out further measures to bring down carbon emissions, including a more extensive electric vehicle-charging network. However, fuel duty is set to be frozen.

Arts and sport

Arts and culture Funding worth £410m will be earmarked, including support for museums, theatres and galleries.

Sport Sunak will announce £300m of funding for sport to help the sector through lockdown and into the summer, including for cricket. Funding of £2.8m for a UK and Ireland bid for the 2030 World Cup will also come alongside £25m for grassroots football.

Other

Freeports More than 30 bids were received for 10 freeports – areas with lower tax or customs requirements – to be created around the UK. Sunak is expected to announce the winners in the budget. The chancellor could also

reveal a location for the Treasury's new economic campus – with Darlington thought to be among frontrunners.

National infrastructure bank Plans for a launch this spring will include £12bn of capital funding and £10bn of state guarantees in the budget. The government will also invest £375m more into its Future Fund for fast-growing high-tech companies.

Vaccine rollout A further £1.65bn will be made available to help meet the government's target for every adult to be offered a Covid jab by the end of July.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/03/from-forecasts-to-furlough-what-to-expect-in-the-budget>

Business

Sunak to reform stock market to shore up City of London's position

Changes come amid fears that London will be overtaken by Amsterdam, New York and Hong Kong as a financial hub



Amount of shares a company must sell to the public to be cut, as part of more than a dozen reforms led by Lord Jonathan Hill. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

Amount of shares a company must sell to the public to be cut, as part of more than a dozen reforms led by Lord Jonathan Hill. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

[Richard Partington](#) *Economics correspondent*
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Tue 2 Mar 2021 17.30 EST

Rishi Sunak will pave the way for sweeping reforms of the stock market to attract more fast-growing companies to list in the UK, amid the growing risk to London's status as a leading financial centre after Brexit.

In a development to coincide with the budget on Wednesday, the chancellor will publish the findings of a landmark review into UK listings rules to boost Britain's attractiveness as a place for firms to grow and be taken public.

Led by the former EU financial services commissioner, Lord Jonathan Hill, the overhaul could introduce the most significant reforms in the City of [London](#) in decades.

It comes amid concern at the heart of government that Britain risks losing out to international rivals such as Amsterdam, New York and Hong Kong when it comes to hosting stock market debuts for fast-growing technology firms, and as the chancellor and prime minister attempt to frame the country as a destination for global business after Brexit.

Commissioned by the chancellor last year to further enhance the UK's position as an international destination for share listings, the report proposes more than a dozen reforms that are designed to make it easier for innovative firms to list in the UK.

At present the most significant companies listed in London are either financial or more representative of the old economy of mining, energy and natural resources. The US technology giant Apple was worth more at one point last summer than the combined value of every company in the FTSE 100.

Amsterdam overtook London as [Europe's largest share trading centre](#) earlier this year, and as experts say the symbolic blow could be followed by the City losing jobs as well as more business owing to Brexit.

Lord Hill told the Guardian he believed the strength and depth of London's financial service industry meant it would be difficult for competing European cities to topple its status as the continent's leading hub for global finance. However, he said rule changes were still needed to maintain and increase competitiveness after Brexit.

“The worst thing for London to do is to sit here waiting to see what happens and hoping that Europe will give us equivalence and everything will come out all right in the wash.

“I’m not a Singapore-on-Thames man, but the opportunity to set rules and regulations more speedily, flexibly and proportionately in areas like sustainable finance and technology, I do think there is an opportunity there,” he said.

The review calls for a shake-up of listings rules to allow dual class share structures on the London Stock Exchange’s premium segment, which would give directors and company founders enhanced voting rights.

The changes would enable such listings to be eligible for inclusion in the blue-chip FTSE indices, which attract a wider pool of investors than the standard segment of the London exchange.

Other measures include cutting the amount of shares a company must sell to the public from 25% to 15%. Steps are also recommended to liberalise rules regarding special purpose acquisition companies, known as Spacs, which are “blank cheque” shell companies launched to raise money from investors first and then hunt for a business to buy later.

Such stock market listings have become one of the most prominent trends in global finance in the past year, with a host of Spacs floating in New York and London.

The rule changes are intended to persuade firms such as Cazoo, the UK-based online car platform, to consider a London listing. The firm, which could be valued as high as £5bn when it goes public, has been reportedly eyeing a merger with a New-York listed Spac as an alternative.

Faced with increasing competition from abroad, Hill also recommended that the chancellor produce an annual report to parliament each year on the competitive position of the City.

However, the plan to reform the listings rules could prompt concern that Britain is downgrading standards of corporate governance in favour of

chasing high-profile trophy listings – echoing the debate over the mooted \$2tn listing of the petrol group [Saudi Aramco](#).

Guardian business email sign-up

Hill said he had recommended safeguards to maintain investor protections, while arguing that it made no sense to have a theoretically perfect listing regime if, in practice, users increasingly choose other venues.

“The recommendations in this report are not about opening a gap between us and other global centres by proposing radical new departures to try to seize a competitive advantage. They are about closing a gap which has already opened up. All the recommendations are consistent with existing practices in other well-regulated financial centres in the USA, Asia and Europe,” he said.

Sunak said the report had delivered bold ideas to help enhance the UK’s reputation after Brexit. “The review has more than delivered and I’m keen we move quickly to consult on its recommendations, cementing the UK’s reputation at the front of global financial services,” he said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/mar/02/sunak-to-reform-stock-market-to-shore-up-city-of-londons-position>

Economic policy

The UK economy's coronavirus crisis in five charts

Analysis: the five key charts which underpin chancellor Rishi Sunak's budget plan



The near-deserted streets of the City of London, with the Bank of England building in the background. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

The UK economy is at a pivotal moment, as the chancellor gives his budget speech with businesses and workers under the most pressure since the pandemic struck a year ago.

Here are five key charts that will underpin Rishi Sunak's statement on Wednesday afternoon.

The UK economy

GDP chart

After gross domestic product (GDP) shrank by 9.9% in 2020 – the worst performance since 1709 – the economy remains under pressure at the start of 2021 as the toughest lockdown since the start of the pandemic bites. However, official forecasts due on Wednesday from the Office for Budget Responsibility could paint a rosier picture, as progress administering the vaccine paves the way for a swift recovery later this year.

The economy performed better than forecast in November as businesses learned to adapt, with GDP 7.8% below its pre-virus level at the end of 2020 compared with an estimate of 12%. The key remaining question is how long the economy will take to recover its pre-crisis peak, and the extent of any permanent damage. The OBR had previously pencilled in a 3% permanent hit from Covid by 2025.

UK public finances

[government borrowing](#)

Official figures put the budget deficit – the gap between spending and income – at £271bn for the first 10 months of the financial year. With just two months of the 2020-21 financial year left to tally, the final sum is expected to be below the £394bn OBR estimate made last November.

The national debt – the combined total of every deficit – has risen above £2tn, equivalent to more than 100% of GDP, and is expected to remain at about that level over the next five years.

Sunak has said he wants to use the budget to “level with people” about the strain the public finances are under, widely seen as paving the way for tax rises or a renewed austerity drive. In November, the OBR said £27bn worth of tax rises or spending cuts would be necessary for day-to-day spending and receipts to be brought back into balance, but given the vast uncertainty over the economic outlook this remains unclear.

Some economists say there may be no need for tax rises at all, while others warn efforts to cut the deficit too soon would worsen the situation by choking off growth.

UK unemployment

[unemployment chart](#)

Redundancies have risen at the fastest rate on record, driving up unemployment to 5.1% in the three months to the end of December – representing 1.74 million people. However, the impact on jobs has been cushioned by furlough and business support schemes, preventing a sharper increase to the 1980s levels forecast last spring.

On its last estimates, the OBR pencilled in a peak of [7.5% in the middle of 2021](#) – 2.6 million people – up from about 4% before the pandemic struck. However, the forecast was made before tougher coronavirus restrictions were introduced. Furlough has also been pushed back to the end of April, and further extensions could delay worse job losses.

Furlough

[furlough chart](#)

During the latest lockdown the number of furloughed workers in the UK has [risen by 700,000 to reach 4.7 million](#), with young adults, women and those in hospitality the most likely to be away from their jobs.

The figures suggest this lockdown is less severe than the first, when almost 9 million jobs were furloughed. More than 11 million jobs have been furloughed in total over the past year, at a cost of £54bn so far. Sunak is expected to announce an extension to the scheme until the end of September.

Inequality

[household savings](#)

British households saved record amounts during the pandemic, due to the collapse in spending on travel, retail and leisure. The chief economist of the Bank of England, Andy Haldane, said this meant families were poised “like

a coiled spring” to fuel a rapid return to economic growth with a multibillion-pound spending spree.

The UK’s [households savings ratio](#) – a snapshot of savings as a proportion of disposable income – hit a record high of 27% in June last year. Between March and November, excess savings were estimated at £125bn, according to the Bank. Sunak has also expressed optimism that encouraging consumers to spend could drive the recovery.

But this rise in average saving masks severe financial pain for lower-income households who are bearing the brunt of Covid job losses. It is mostly those in the top 40% saving money and it is unclear how much of that will be spent.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/mar/02/the-uk-economy-coronavirus-crisis-in-five-charts>

[Scottish politics](#)

Sturgeon to give evidence to Holyrood on Salmond inquiry amid calls to resign

First minister under pressure to answer multiple allegations that she misled parliament



Sturgeon will appear today before a Holyrood committee set up to investigate the Scottish government's internal inquiry in 2018 into sexual harassment complaints against Salmond. Photograph: Russell Cheyne/Reuters

Sturgeon will appear today before a Holyrood committee set up to investigate the Scottish government's internal inquiry in 2018 into sexual harassment complaints against Salmond. Photograph: Russell Cheyne/Reuters

[Libby Brooks](#) *Scotland correspondent*

Wed 3 Mar 2021 01.00 EST

Nicola Sturgeon is under intense pressure to answer multiple allegations that she misled parliament, levelled by her former mentor Alex Salmond, after previously secret legal advice and new witness evidence [led to calls for her resignation as first minister](#).

Sturgeon will give evidence on Wednesday morning to a cross-party committee set up to investigate the Scottish government's internal inquiry in 2018 into sexual harassment complaints against Salmond.

Scotland's first minister will face scrutiny about why her government continued its defence in the judicial review that Salmond launched in August 2018 to investigate its handling of the harassment claims, despite its own lawyers advising that it was likely to lose.

[Timeline: what we know so far about Sturgeon and the Salmond inquiry](#)
[Read more](#)

The confidential legal advice was finally released to the inquiry committee on Tuesday night, after repeated refusals by the Scottish government to publish it.

In a letter to a Holyrood committee, also put out on Tuesday evening, one of Salmond's lawyers, Duncan Hamilton, backed up the former first minister's claim that Sturgeon had offered to intervene in the initial investigation on Salmond's behalf in a private meeting at her home on 2 April 2018.

Hamilton also stated that one of Salmond's former aides, Geoff Aberdeen, had told him in early March 2018 that the name of a complainer against Salmond had been leaked to him. This account of events was reiterated by Kevin Pringle, formerly a special adviser when Salmond was first minister.

Both Hamilton and Pringle also endorsed Salmond's claim to the committee last Friday that a meeting had been arranged between Sturgeon and Aberdeen for 29 March 2018 in her Holyrood office, with the express purpose of setting up the meeting at her home four days later.

Sturgeon, who is expected to testify on oath from 9am, has repeatedly said she will relish the chance to address in detail the allegations made by her

former mentor.

The first minister has denied breaching the ministerial code and has also dismissed Salmond's claims that people close to her - including her husband Peter Murrell, the chief executive of the SNP - had plotted against him as untrue.

Last week she accused Salmond of "creating an alternative reality in which the organs of the state [were] all part of some wild conspiracy against him" in order to deflect questions about his own past conduct.

During her coronavirus briefing last Wednesday, Sturgeon referred to Salmond's trial in March 2020, which ended in his acquittal of 14 charges of sexual assault, including one attempted rape, involving 10 women. The motives of those women who accused him were now being "maligned [and] have been accused of being liars and conspiracists", she said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/mar/03/sturgeon-to-give-evidence-to-holyrood-on-salmond-inquiry-amid-calls-to-resign>

[Scottish politics](#)

Timeline: what we know so far about Sturgeon and the Salmond inquiry

Fresh publications have given more detail about how the row engulfing Scottish politics unfolded



First minister Nicola Sturgeon and former first minister minister Alex Salmond pictured together in happier times in 2014. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

First minister Nicola Sturgeon and former first minister minister Alex Salmond pictured together in happier times in 2014. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

[Libby Brooks](#) *Scotland correspondent*

Tue 2 Mar 2021 16.49 EST

Following a dramatic flurry of publications on Tuesday evening, more detail has emerged about when the Scottish government knew that its legal battle

with Alex Salmond was likely to fail, when [Nicola Sturgeon](#) first learned of the original sexual harassment allegations against her predecessor as first minister, and whether she initially offered to intervene in the inquiry on his behalf. Here's what we now know:

29 March 2018 Nicola Sturgeon meets Geoff Aberdein, Salmond's former chief of staff, in her Holyrood office. She has since described the meeting as "fleeting", saying she had forgotten about it. Salmond, Aberdein and now two other witnesses say the Scottish government's inquiry into sexual harassment allegations against Salmond was discussed, four days earlier than Sturgeon said she knew about them, and that the name of one of the complainers was revealed to Aberdein.

2 April Sturgeon meets Salmond at her home. She originally told Holyrood and the media that this was when she first learned that he faced allegations of sexual misconduct. Salmond has alleged that Sturgeon left him "in no doubt" at that meeting that she was going to intervene in the complaints process, while Sturgeon had denied this. Salmond's lawyer Duncan Hamilton has now repeated Salmond's version of events to a Holyrood committee.

6 June Sturgeon has said that this is when she first told Leslie Evans, the permanent secretary, that she knew about the internal inquiry into the harassment claims and had been discussing it with Salmond.

29 August Salmond formally begins his judicial review of the Scottish government's handling of sexual misconduct complaints against him.

31 October Roddy Dunlop QC, then senior counsel for the Scottish government, warns them that the revelation that a senior official had previously met and briefed the two complainers was "extremely concerning".

6 December Evans is warned by Dunlop that Salmond's legal challenge would "more likely than not succeed", because of this conflict of interest involving the investigating officer.

31 December Evans decides to concede the judicial review.

8 January 2019 The court of session declares the inquiry unlawful on procedural grounds and “tainted with apparent bias”. Salmond is awarded £512,000 in legal costs.

24 January 2019 Salmond is charged with 14 sexual assault offences, including one of attempted rape.

23 March 2020 He is acquitted on all charges at the high court in Edinburgh.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/mar/02/timeline-what-we-know-so-far-about-sturgeon-and-the-salmond-inquiry>.

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Scotland

What questions will Nicola Sturgeon be asked on Wednesday?

Scotland's first minister will give evidence on oath to the committee investigating the Alex Salmond inquiry



Scotland's then first minister Alex Salmond and deputy first minister Nicola Sturgeon at the SNP's 2014 spring conference. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Scotland's then first minister Alex Salmond and deputy first minister Nicola Sturgeon at the SNP's 2014 spring conference. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

[Severin Carrell](#) *Scotland editor*

[@severincarrell](#)

Tue 2 Mar 2021 12.43 EST

On Wednesday, [Scotland's first minister, Nicola Sturgeon](#), is due to give evidence under oath to a committee of Holyrood MSPs investigating [the Scottish government's botched inquiry](#) into [complaints against Alex Salmond](#).

Here are some of the questions she is likely to face:

When did she first learn of concerns about Alex Salmond's alleged behaviour?

Nicola Sturgeon has been accused of misleading parliament about what she knew and when, a potential breach of the ministerial code. She originally told Holyrood and the media she first learned Salmond faced allegations of sexual misconduct directly from him, when they met at her home on 2 April 2018.

In August 2018, the day after news leaked that two internal complaints against him had been upheld, she told the BBC: "I heard about the fact of the investigation initially from [Alex Salmond](#) himself in April." She added: "I have had no prior knowledge of complaints having been made."

The day Salmond won his judicial review on 8 January 2019, the first minister told Holyrood: "I was informed about the investigation, yes, by Alex Salmond." She repeated that in parliament on 10 January.

Sturgeon has also admitted she knew in November 2018 that Sky News had made inquiries about alleged incidents involving Salmond at Edinburgh airport. She spoke to Salmond about it and he denied any incident took place. That month she agreed her government's new policy on sexual harassment should include historic complaints involving former ministers.

Scrutiny over who knew what and when heightened in October 2020, when she admitted in evidence to the Holyrood inquiry she had met Geoff Aberdeen, Salmond's former chief of staff, in her Holyrood office on 29 March 2018.

"I think it did cover the suggestion that the matter might relate to allegations of a sexual nature," she said.

[The feud between Sturgeon and Salmond could derail Scottish independence](#)
[| Martin Kettle](#)
[Read more](#)

Aberdein alleges the inquiry was discussed at that meeting – four days earlier than she claimed. He also alleges a complainer was named to him by someone in her office.

Why did she agree to meet Salmond and to continue talking to him?

Sturgeon told parliament on 8 January 2019 she spoke to Salmond about the case five times during 2018: in person at her home on 2 April, by phone on 23 April, in person at SNP conference on 7 June, at her home on 14 July and lastly by phone on 18 July. She also exchanged WhatsApp messages with him.

She told parliament she did so as SNP leader, suggesting later in evidence she thought he might be about to resign from the party. Her husband, Peter Murrell, the chief executive of the SNP, told MSPs they met in her role as first minister. Murrell was not told why they were meeting on 2 April. If it was party business of that significance, why was he excluded?

Salmond alleges Sturgeon knew when she met Aberdein on 29 March the inquiry was under way, and they organised the 2 April meeting that day. Aberdein alleges the name of a complainer was leaked to him before 29 March. Salmond also turned up at Sturgeon's house with his lawyer, Duncan Hamilton, a respected advocate. If it was SNP business and about his resignation, why would he take a lawyer?

Did she offer to intervene on Salmond's behalf at the first meeting?

The first minister had consistently stated in parliament and to the media she made no offer or attempt to intervene in the government inquiry, as she knew that was inappropriate.

Salmond alleged last week Sturgeon *did* offer to put forward his concerns to officials on 2 April, although she later retracted that offer.

If Sturgeon knew it was wrong to intervene or offer to help Salmond, why then did she agree to meet him at all? If she made no offer to intervene, why discuss it with him five times and exchange a number of WhatsApp messages?

Why did Sturgeon take so long to inform the civil service?

Sturgeon said she first told Leslie Evans, the permanent secretary, she knew about the internal inquiry and had been discussing it with Salmond on 6 June – roughly 11 weeks after meeting Salmond and 12 weeks after meeting Aberdeen.

This raises a number of further questions: doesn't that mean Sturgeon realised it was government business? If it was, why did she continue to meet Salmond and discuss it with him without civil service involvement and minutes being taken?

What did Evans say to her? Did Evans authorise her to continue discussing it with Salmond? Did she tell Evans she had also met Aberdeen?

Did she go against legal advice to abandon the case against Salmond? If so, why?

In October 2018 it emerged the senior civil servant who had investigated Salmond had had prior contact with both complainers – while they were deciding whether to formally complain and before the government harassment policy had been signed.

The Scottish government released its private legal advice on Tuesday showing the government's external counsel, Roddy Dunlop QC, had warned this seriously damaged the government's case and could be unlawful. Salmond claims Sturgeon was told this in November yet the government refused to concede defeat.

Dunlop then allegedly threatened to resign, and it took until late December before Evans agreed to concede. Opposition MSPs said that delay greatly increased the legal costs, which exceed £600,000. Salmond says that delay was a breach of the ministerial code. Did Sturgeon agree to continue fighting the case, despite Dunlop's warnings? If so, why?

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/02/what-questions-will-nicola-sturgeon-be-asked-on-wednesday>.

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[HS2](#)

HS2 to 'rewild' 127 hectares around its 10-mile Chilterns tunnel

Area to be seeded with 70 grass and flower species and planted with native trees to create wood pasture



Architect's impression of how the HS2 rail tunnel will be integrated with the Colne Valley Western Slopes. Photograph: Courtesy of Grimshaw Architects

A “rewilding” of arable fields by [HS2](#) will create 127 hectares (314 acres) of wood pasture, wetlands and flower-rich grassland using chalk taken from tunnelling under the Chilterns.

The new wildlife haven will be founded upon all 3m tonnes of chalk that are to be excavated from the [high-speed railway](#)'s 10-mile Chilterns tunnel, with [construction](#) starting in May.

The Colne Valley Western Slopes will be seeded with 70 grass and flower species and planted with 32 species of native trees and shrubs including

Chiltern specialities [juniper](#), box, wayfaring tree and hornbeam.

.

Alongside two miles of new hedges on the site close to the M25 on the north-western edge of London will be nearly three miles of new footpaths, cycling and horse-riding routes. Some areas will be protected from people for wildlife such as ground-nesting birds.

Matt Hobbs, the lead ecologist from Jacobs, one of the HS2 contractors designing the site, said his team had been inspired by a visit to the [rewilded Knepp estate](#) in West Sussex.

“This is broadly a rewilding project,” he said, citing the creation of new wood pasture – a mosaic of scrub, meadow and grazed woodland – and fenced areas where natural regeneration of trees and scrub will take place. The scheme includes wildlife ponds which also provide water for livestock and cattle grids on the lane running through the site to enable free-roaming animals to undertake conservation grazing of the area in a similar way to rewilding projects.



Another architect's impression showing how the HS2 line and the surrounding pasture, wetland and grassland will appear. Photograph: Grimshaw Architects/Courtesy of Grimshaw Architects

“The Colne Valley Western Slopes is a unique opportunity to give something back for wildlife by creating a large new reserve dedicated to nature in the Colne Valley,” added Hobbs. “The design will deliver habitats that are the biggest and best possible, and those that will succeed and thrive over the long term with minimal human input.”

The Western Slopes will help HS2 meet its [carbon emissions reduction targets](#) by sequestering carbon and reducing construction road journeys. Concrete and limestone aggregate used in HS2’s construction will be recycled to add to the calcareous grassland, minimising HS2’s carbon footprint by reducing the removal of materials by truck.

Chalk and construction materials will be sculpted to replicate the area’s dry valleys and deliver a range of microclimates including hot, dry banks loved by reptiles and invertebrates. Species that are expected to rapidly colonise the site include grass snakes, slow worms and butterflies, such as the small blue and marbled white. Rarer butterflies such as the Adonis and chalkhill blue are also likely to eventually thrive on the chalk grassland.

Simon Railton, the landscape architecture lead from LDA Design, said he hoped the site would provide a “meaningful legacy and benefit” for wildlife and people.

“We aim to create a landscape which is both rich in biodiversity and a place for people to explore and connect with the natural environment,” he said. “Our design team is passionate about achieving an enduring environmental legacy for the project and playing our part in addressing some of the biggest issues of our time around climate change and biodiversity loss.”

HS2 has attracted huge opposition from [environmental activists](#) and charities such as the Woodland Trust for [destroying or directly affecting 32 ancient woodlands](#) along its first phase from London to Birmingham. [Environmentalists have criticised its commitment to “no net loss of biodiversity”](#) along the whole route when new road and housing developments are now asked to provide measurable improvements for wildlife.

According to HS2 Ltd, the Western Slopes will ensure that the high-speed line delivers a “net gain” in biodiversity in the Colne Valley. The site’s 90 hectares (222 acres) of calcareous grassland is a significant addition to the estimated 700 hectares (1,730 acres) of this scarce floral habitat within the adjacent [Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty](#).

Herts and Middlesex [Wildlife](#) Trust said it offered unpaid informal advice and expertise on the Colne Valley Western Slopes project to try to ensure the best outcome for nature.

Josh Kubale of Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust said: “This project is part of HS2’s requirement for no net loss of biodiversity and we are very keen to ensure that it delivers all the benefits it is required to do. While we’re pleased it will create new habitat for wildlife it can never make up for even a small part of the nature and wild places that have and will continue to be lost to HS2.

“The trust’s opinion of the HS2 project remains unchanged – we believe that the ecological cost is too high and the mitigation too small and we believe that the government should stop and re-think HS2.”

HS2 says it is creating a “[green corridor](#)” along the route with [33km/sq of new woodland and wildlife habitats](#) and the planting of 7m new trees on the 109-mile [London to Birmingham stretch](#).

Asked whether the new site may win round HS2 sceptics, Hobbs said: “I hope that protesters and others who have a negative view of the project will look at this and at least respect what we’re trying to do and give us some credit for coming up with something that we are very passionate about.”

All the chalk removed from the twin tunnels under the Chilterns will be placed on the site over three years from this May. During the tunnel’s construction, HS2-contracted ecologists will conduct further laboratory and field trials of the best soil profiles for supporting biodiverse grassland.

Parts of the Western Slopes are likely to open to the public before the end of the decade. HS2 will initially manage the site but ownership and

management could eventually be transferred to local authorities or wildlife charities.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/03/hs2-to-rewild-127-hectares-around-its-10-mile-chilterns-tunnel>

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Bees

'Bee-killing' pesticide now will not be used on UK sugar beet fields

Government reversed a ban on a neonicotinoid earlier this year - but says chemical was not needed



The Wildlife Trusts had threatened to take the government to court unless it could prove it acted lawfully. Photograph: Odd Andersen/AP

The Wildlife Trusts had threatened to take the government to court unless it could prove it acted lawfully. Photograph: Odd Andersen/AP

[Mattha Busby](#)

Wed 3 Mar 2021 01.00 EST

A pesticide which reduces bee populations and was to be used in England's sugar beet fields this year will not be used after recent cold weather killed off virus-transmitting aphids.

The government broke an explicit pledge earlier this year when it reversed a ban on a product containing the neonicotinoid thiamethoxam, sanctioning its emergency outdoors use this year because of the threat posed by a virus after pressure from the National Farmers' Union and British Sugar.

The decision sparked an outcry and the threat of legal action against the government. But the environment secretary has now said the threshold for its use was not met after modelling indicated only 8% of the sugar beet crop was likely to be infected with the virus yellows disease this year.

While there is a growing awareness of the harmful role played by refined sugar in the development of long-term health problems, the homegrown industry in the UK remains highly profitable. But there is mounting concern over the effect of harmful pesticides on pollinators at a time of serious insect decline and local ecosystems, particularly as the chemicals can run into rivers, amid a lack of safeguards over their use.

Dr Doug Parr, chief scientist for Greenpeace UK, said the evidence of the risk neonicotinoids posed to pollinators was continuing to mount and that this should be the government's "last dalliance with these bee-killing chemicals".

"Agriculture is completely dependent on the support of ecosystems which agrichemicals are eroding, and maintaining our ability to feed ourselves requires the government to set an ambitious national pesticide reduction target and support farmers in switching to sustainable alternatives," he added.

The [Wildlife](#) Trusts had said it would push for a judicial review unless the government could "prove it has acted lawfully" over the U-turn on the ban in January. On Tuesday, it welcomed the announcement but warned "the threat of neonicotinoids has not gone away".

Environment (Defra) secretary, George Eustice, said: "The emergency authorisation required for a neonicotinoid in sugar beet is a great example of the precautionary approach in action.

“Authorisation was granted with strict conditions including only allowing application if the weather conditions over the winter led to a problem with aphids. In the event, that pest threshold was not passed so this seed treatment will not be used this year.”

Defra said it had attached strict conditions to the authorisation meaning that the pesticide could only be used if modelling forecast that the level of virus infection would reach 9% across the national crop.

Victoria Prentis, a Defra minister, told the BBC in January that the use of the pesticide “wasn’t ideal”, but she was “convinced it was appropriate”.

NFU sugar board chairman Michael Sly said: “Growers committed to only treat sugar beet seed with neonicotinoids this year if the risk to the crop was significant.”

Formally, EU members in 2018 banned most neonicotinoids for use on crops outdoors, to protect bees, but 10 countries then allowed emergency use.

When the UK pledged to back the EU ban on all outdoor uses of thiamethoxam, Michael Gove, then the environment secretary, said: “The weight of evidence now shows the risks neonicotinoids pose to our environment, particularly to the bees and other pollinators which play such a key part in our £100bn food industry, is greater than previously understood ... We cannot afford to put our pollinator populations at risk.”

A similar emergency application for England in 2018 was refused after government pesticide advisers said it would “cause unacceptable effects to bees in flowering crops and flowering plants in field margins”.

It added that it would harm “birds and mammals eating seedlings from treated seed and birds consuming pelleted seed” and risked “adversely impacting populations of aquatic insects”.

Studies show neonicotinoids harm pollinators and [aquatic life](#), and that they can contribute to serious [biodiversity decline](#). Research also suggests they weaken bees’ immune systems, harm the development of baby bees’ brains

and can leave them unable to fly. Another study has found honey samples being contaminated by neonicotinoids.

A paper recently published in Scientific Reports found “important sublethal effects of field-realistic exposure to a soil-applied neonicotinoid on bee behaviour and reproductive success.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/mar/03/bee-killing-pesticide-now-will-not-be-used-on-uk-sugar-beet-fields>

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Insects

Britain's moths decline by a third in 50 years, study finds

Drivers of decline likely to be habitat loss, intensive farming, climate change and light pollution



The stout dart moth. 'This decline is worrying because moths play a vital role in our ecosystems,' said Richard Fox, Butterfly Conservation. Photograph: Butterfly Conservation

The stout dart moth. 'This decline is worrying because moths play a vital role in our ecosystems,' said Richard Fox, Butterfly Conservation. Photograph: Butterfly Conservation

[Patrick Barkham](#)

[@patrick_barkham](#)

Wed 3 Mar 2021 01.00 EST

Moths in Britain have declined in abundance by a third over the past 50 years, according to [a study](#).

The declines of 39% in the abundance (relative representation in an ecosystem) of larger moth species over southern Britain and a 22% fall across northern Britain add to the picture of [calamitous declines in flying insects](#) in the industrialised world.

Among the most rapidly declining of Britain's 900 larger moth species are the [stout dart](#) (-81% over an average 10-year period), the [golden plusia](#) (-58%) and the garden dart (-54%).

“This decline is worrying because moths play a vital role in our ecosystems,” said Richard Fox of [Butterfly Conservation](#), which [produced the report](#) with Rothamsted Research and the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology. “They are pollinators of many plants, with some wildflowers, such as orchids, relying on visiting moths for reproduction. They also provide essential food for thousands of animal species, including bats and many familiar birds.”



A garden dart moth. Photograph: Butterfly Conservation

The report gathers millions of records from moths caught in light traps by the [Rothamsted Insect Survey](#) and the [National Moth Recording Scheme](#)

from 1968 to 2017. When the data was last analysed up to 2007, it revealed a 40% decline in southern Britain – south of Lancaster and York – but [no overall change to moth abundance in northern Britain](#).

Fox said the 22% decline in abundance now recorded in northern Britain over the 50-year-period was “a real concern”.

He said: “A whole bunch of moth species are spreading northwards in Britain, driven by climate change, and the north is the recipient of that benefit. But the fact that there is a significant decline in overall abundance in the north is very worrying.”

According to Fox the prime driver for the declines is likely to be habitat loss and more intensive agriculture, including chemical farming, but other important factors include climate change and, possibly, increased nitrogen deposition and [light pollution](#).

“No species will be totally immune from all these different factors,” he said. “Even moths living at the top of a Scottish mountain will be impacted by climate change and nitrogen deposition.”

Increasing levels of nitrogen deposited via rainfall due to car emissions and other pollutants are causing certain robust plants to crowd out more delicate plants and flowers on which specific moth caterpillars depend.

Dan Blumgart, moth ecologist at Rothamsted Insect Survey, said: “Comparing this latest State of Britain’s Larger Moths to the first edition in 2006, it is a disappointment that the situation has not improved. It is clear that a much bolder policy of habitat protection and restoration will be needed if British moths are to thrive well into the future.”



The golden plusia. Photograph: Butterfly Conservation

There are winners as well as losers. The Devon carpet moth has expended from south-west Britain to reach southern Scotland in 2013, its range shifting northwards by 9.9 miles (16km) a year in recent years. Its abundance has soared by 526% over 50 years.

The Jersey tiger moth is another species that was once confined to Devon but has spread rapidly over southern Britain, crossing the Bristol Channel into Wales in 2008. Its distribution across Britain has increased by 861% since 1990.

[UK scientists confirm arrival of brown marmorated stink bugs](#)

[Read more](#)

According to Fox, positive developments for moths include the hope that post-Brexit financial support for farmers will be based around “[public money for public goods](#)” which could incentivise more nature-friendly farming, and afforestation efforts as long as it is “the right tree in the right place”.

“Another hopeful sign is people’s interest in and awareness of moths and our scientific knowledge of the importance of moths – particularly in pollination

– has really grown since the last report,” said Fox. Suppliers of moth traps – which enable people to humanely identify-and-release moths in their garden – sold out during the spring lockdown last year, and local moth groups reported bumper sighting records being submitted to them.

“There are a lot of winners as well as a lot of losers among the larger moths,” added Fox. “This is more evidence that insects in general are declining but they are not about to go disappear altogether. Worrying insect decline rather than [insect apocalypse](#) is the way I would phrase it.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/mar/03/britain-moths-decline-by-third-50-years-study>.

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Wednesday briefing: Sturgeon replies over Salmond case

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/03/wednesday-briefing-sturgeon-replies-over-salmond-case>

Science policy

New UK science body could be used as ‘cover for cronyism’

Advanced Research & Innovation Agency will be exempt from existing procurement rules for ‘maximum flexibility’, says government



Kate Bingham of the UK Vaccine Taskforce, cited by business secretary Kwasi Kwarteng as a model for Aria. Photograph: Kirsty O'Connor/PA

Kate Bingham of the UK Vaccine Taskforce, cited by business secretary Kwasi Kwarteng as a model for Aria. Photograph: Kirsty O'Connor/PA

[Dan Sabbagh](#)

Tue 2 Mar 2021 15.24 EST

A new £800m government science and defence research agency will be exempt from existing procurement rules, prompting warnings from Labour that it could be used as “cover for cronyism”.

Originally the brainchild of Dominic Cummings, the Advanced Research & Innovation Agency (Aria) will be more lightly regulated than a normal government body.

A press notice released on Tuesday to accompany the publication of the bill needed to set up the body said it would imitate the long-established US agency Darpa, which operates “outside standard government contracting” procedures.

The Aria bill, the government release added, will “provide the agency with exemption from the existing public contract regulations, enabling Aria to procure vital services and equipment with maximum flexibility so that it can carry out groundbreaking research at speeds rivalling a private investment firm”.

Ed Miliband, the shadow business secretary, said: “‘Maximum flexibility’ sounds like an excuse for no competition. The government’s procurement has been riddled by conflicts of interests and lack of transparency. Ministers must not use Aria as cover for further cronyism.”

Kwasi Kwarteng, the business secretary, said Aria would be “equipped with all the tools and freedoms it needs to succeed” including placing scientists at the heart of decision-making and “stripping back red tape”.

He said it would aim to follow the “success of our Vaccine Taskforce”, the body responsible for buying coronavirus vaccines and developing the drug production supply chain.

Ministers have been repeatedly accused of presiding over the award of government contracts to friends and contacts since the start of the pandemic. A string of deals were handed out using emergency procedures because of the scale of the crisis.

Last year, a former publican and [friend of the health secretary, Matt Hancock](#), won £30m in contracts to produce Covid test vials despite having no experience of the medical devices industry. [His firm is now under investigation](#) by the industry’s regulator.

The National Audit Office reported that the Department of Health created a secret high-priority VIP channel to process offers of PPE supplies that had been raised by ministers, MPs, peers and senior NHS staff.

Aria, which will have access to £800m in funding over the course of the parliament, is to be exempt from freedom of information legislation. Although it will be audited by the National Audit Office and required to submit annual reports, there is concern be allowed to invest taxpayers' money in financially risky projects.

Jolyon Maugham, the director of the Good Law Project, which last month [won a legal challenge](#) over the government's failure to publish multibillion-pound Covid contracts within the 30-day period required by law, said Aria's legal exemptions appeared problematic.

"It is no less remarkable for the government to respond to concerns around cronyism with legislation that removes the right to challenge it. If it was your goal to give money to your pals and have those choices both hidden from public view, and be protected from legal challenge, it's hard to know what you'd do differently," the barrister said.

Aria is intended to invest in hi-tech projects. But with Cummings, Boris Johnson's former senior adviser, now out of government, there is some scepticism as to what the agency's focus will be. This month, the science and technology committee warned that it was "[a brand in search of a product](#)".

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/mar/02/new-uk-science-body-could-be-used-as-cover-for-cronyism>

Politics

Tory London mayor hopeful says basic income would be used for 'lots of drugs'

Shaun Bailey tells London Assembly the universally-paid sum would be misused by citizens



Conservative party candidate for the London mayoralty, Shaun Bailey.
Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

Conservative party candidate for the London mayoralty, Shaun Bailey.
Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

[Lucy Campbell](#)

Tue 2 Mar 2021 18.58 EST

The Conservative candidate for London mayor, [Shaun Bailey](#), has been criticised for arguing people paid a universal basic income (UBI) would blow the money on “lots of drugs”.

Liberal Democrats and Green party on the [London](#) Assembly have been pushing for a trial of the UBI scheme, in which the state would grant all citizens a set sum of money on a regular basis, regardless of economic status.

However, speaking to the Assembly's economy committee on Tuesday, Bailey said the idea needed to take "human condition" into account.

He said: "I've been a youth worker for over 20 years. I know some people would absolutely fly if you gave them a lump sum to deal with every week. I know some people who would buy lots of drugs. So where is the care in this, where is the care for the person? How do you get past just universally giving people money?"

Bailey also questioned whether it could "drive prices up for basic goods when we know people could just buy them because the money's there". He added he was "concerned about work incentive" and a UBI was not clearly defined.

Also in the hearing was Simon Duffy, the founder of the Centre for Welfare Reform thinktank, who told Bailey it was an "extraordinary claim". He said: "I'm sure the people spending most of the money are not the poor – they're the well-off. It's your City traders and their cocaine habits. Where's the love for them?"

The Labour MP Wes Streeting said Bailey's comments had "shown his utter contempt for hard-pressed families". He said: "He has proven once again that he does not share London's values."

The comments are the latest in a series of controversial remarks by the Tory candidate that have made headlines during the campaign. Last week, he was criticised for an interview with the Sun in which he said teenage mothers [pushed people who "do the right thing" down the housing ladder](#). He has also suggested that homeless Londoners [could save up a £5,000 deposit for a mortgage](#).

Labour has called for the Crown Prosecution Service to investigate his publication of leaflets [headed with fake City Hall insignia](#), accusing them of

employing a “fraudulent device” to gain undue influence, as described by the 1983 Representation of the People Act.

Bailey, trailing in the polls, is preparing to face the incumbent London mayor, Sadiq Khan, in leadership elections on 6 May. Khan has previously expressed that the UK should explore ideas like UBI, saying last year that it “is gaining support around the world and would ensure everybody can at least survive.”

A spokesperson for Bailey’s campaign said: “Shaun Bailey has over twenty years of experience as a youth worker. He’s been homeless and he’s been out of work. So Shaun won’t take any lectures from career politicians on what life is like for those struggling to get on.

“Instead of scoring political points, Shaun Bailey is focused on building a city where every resident in every community can thrive – and he’s using his two decades of experience as a youth worker to deliver a fresh start for London.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/mar/02/tory-london-mayor-hopeful-says-basic-income-would-be-used-for-lots-of-drugs>

China

'Two sessions': China expected to unveil new controls on Hong Kong

Delegates descend on capital for week of pomp and pageantry including unveiling of 14th five-year plan



Beijing is hosting the two sessions this week, a meeting of the advisory and legislative bodies Photograph: Lintao Zhang/Getty Images

Beijing is hosting the two sessions this week, a meeting of the advisory and legislative bodies Photograph: Lintao Zhang/Getty Images

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei and [Emma Graham-Harrison](#)

Tue 2 Mar 2021 22.00 EST

China is expected to unveil new political controls on Hong Kong at this week's meeting of its rubber-stamp parliament, which is also likely to showcase President Xi Jinping's further consolidation of power.

Beijing plans to ensure only “patriots” – Communist party loyalists – can run Hong Kong, according to a speech by [a top Chinese official](#) ahead of the annual meeting of the National People’s Congress (NPC).

The gathering serves as an important showcase of power and policy shifts within China’s opaque one-party system, though the thousands of delegates have little say over the laws they pass and discussions are largely political theatre.

The national security law, which has been used to muzzle Hong Kong’s pro-democracy movement, was announced at last year’s NPC.

That session was delayed from its usual early March date, as China fought to contain the Covid-19 pandemic. This year, the NPC and its advisory body will meet on schedule – although for fewer days than usual – and promote an official narrative of triumph over the Coronavirus and economic success.

China has largely managed to contain Covid-19 within its borders, through strict lockdowns and controls on international travellers. It has developed its own vaccines, which it is using as part of a global push diplomatic push to bolster its influence.

It was also one of the few countries in the world to officially register economic growth in 2020, and recently claimed to have ended “extreme poverty” at home.

But Beijing’s domestic triumphs come at a time of increasing pressure from western powers about authoritarian policies at home, its handling of the early days of the pandemic and subsequent investigations into the origins of Covid-19, and its aggressively expansionist behaviour in [disputed regions](#), [border territories](#), and [towards Taiwan](#).

Diplomatic and trade sanctions have been piled on Beijing over its [intervention in Hong Kong](#), and human rights abuses in western [Xinjiang](#). Officials have also raised concerns about [crackdowns and mass arrests of domestic lawyers](#).

These are only likely to be exacerbated by any new policies on Hong Kong unveiled at this year's NPC.

In a speech published this week, the head of the Hong Kong and Macao affairs office, Xia Baolong, said the city's electoral system had to be "improved", to close loopholes and guarantee "central government's comprehensive management of Hong Kong".

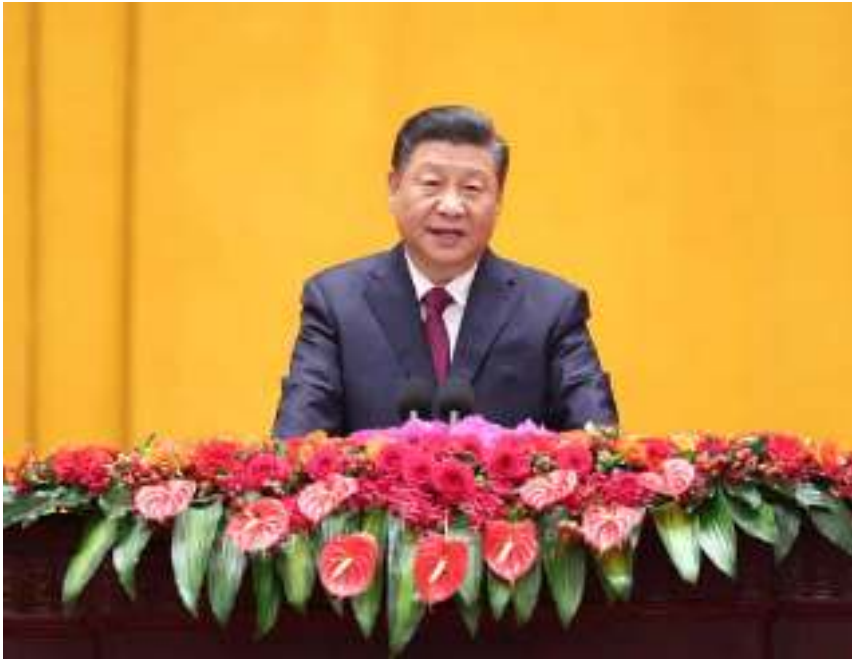
Unnamed government sources have told media it was likely the changes would shake up the process of both elections to the city's Legislative Council, and the composition of the committee to elect the city's leader, known as the chief executive.

Currently the committee includes district councillors, the majority from pro-democracy parties that won a landslide in November 2019 elections. The flagged changes have caused concern even among some pro-Beijing politicians.

"Don't go too far and kill the patient," Shiu Sin-por, a pro-Beijing politician and former head of Hong Kong's Central Policy Unit, told reporters after a briefing session with on the matter.

The "two sessions" are also being closely watched for details of how President Xi Jinping, already considered the most powerful Chinese leader since Mao Zedong, has cemented both his personal power and place in the communist pantheon.

"The most important significance of the two sessions to China's political life may be observing the consolidation of Xi's rights, the totalitarianism of China's politics, and the reaction of China to the surrounding issues and security environment," said Wu Qiang, a former political lecturer at Beijing's prestigious Tsinghua University.



Xi Jinping Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

They come at a time of great focus on legacy, as Beijing prepares to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist party in July, although no major announcements are expected.

“It’s not that any one thing will make us suck in a collective gasp, but it’s important in that it gives you a sense of the priorities of the leadership, and the language they’re using ... and how much Xi is being elevated even further in the rhetoric,” said the law professor Margaret Lewis, a China specialist at Seton Hall.

The most-watched part of the agenda is usually the GDP growth target report, but none was given in 2020 and sources told Reuters there would be none this year either.

The NPC will, however, witness the launch of the 14th “five-year plan”, which lays out the medium-term agenda for the national economy. Outlines released [after planning sessions in October](#) indicated a focus on trying to replace lost international trade with increased domestic demand – although the government has been trying to bolster consumption at home for years with mixed success.

As China faces a social and economic crisis with its ageing population, state officials have already flagged plans for a new pension system, which could be announced, along with potential delays to the statutory retirement age.

Raising the retirement age was a necessary but politically risky move which threatened to upset the party's support base among retired party cadres and officials, said the Fordham University law professor Carl Mizner.

“They’ve been kicking this can down the road for a couple of years now,” he told the Guardian. “There are pressing financial pressures they face and they have to address them ... But it’s politically difficult in China, just as much as anywhere else.”

Eyes will also be on the attendance of [China’s tech industry elite](#) at their first gathering since authorities tightened regulation and began targeting monopolistic behaviour.

Xi also made [major environmental pledges](#) and state officials promised amendments of animal protection laws, following a [ban on the illegal consumption of wildlife](#).

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/03/two-sessions-china-political-elite-descend-on-beijing-amid-global-tensions>

[Boris Johnson](#)

Creating a charity to pay for PM's flat refurb would be 'an outrage'

Former chairman of Committee on Standards in Public Life questions whether such a plan would be legal



Sir Alistair Graham's comments come amid concerns over the rising costs of the refurbishment of the flat over No 11 overseen by Johnson's fiancée, Carrie Symonds. Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters

Sir Alistair Graham's comments come amid concerns over the rising costs of the refurbishment of the flat over No 11 overseen by Johnson's fiancée, Carrie Symonds. Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters

[Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Rajeev Syal](#)

Tue 2 Mar 2021 16.06 EST

[Plans to set up a charity](#) to cover the costs of the refurbishment of Boris Johnson's flat which he shares with his fiancée Carrie Symonds have been

challenged by a former chair of the standards watchdog and a former charity commissioner.

Their comments have been made as lawyers within Downing Street try to establish whether the government can legitimately fund the prime minister's flat through a charitable vehicle using cash from Tory donors.

The scheme is thought to be based on one used by the White House to raise money for interior design and restyling the building, which is bankrolled by private donors.

It comes amid reported concerns over the spiralling costs of the refurbishment of the flat over No 11 overseen by Johnson's fiancée, [Carrie Symonds](#).

Sir Alistair Graham, a former chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, questioned whether establishing a charity to fund the prime minister's flat would be legal.

"I'd be surprised if it was within the law to set up a charity and get tax benefits for the home of a public servant.

"To do so there has to be wider public benefits for a group who are in charitable need. I am really not sure if the prime minister and his fiancée would qualify," he told the Guardian.

Any such arrangement would also raise questions over possible conflicts of interest, offering a potential backdoor way of providing a financial benefit to Johnson, Graham said.

"It would be an outrage, if it was allowed," he said.

It is understood that the plan to establish a charity has been widely discussed across Downing Street and with senior civil servants, but is yet to be signed off by government lawyers or seen by the Charity Commission.

[Does charity begin at Boris Johnson's chintzed-up home?](#)
[Read more](#)

The official purpose of a future charity would be to raise funds to preserve No 10 and No 11 Downing Street for the nation on heritage grounds.

But insiders say the proposal, first reported by the Daily Mail, stemmed from the soaring cost of a makeover of the No 11 flat, which is preferred by prime ministers with families because it is bigger than the No 10 flat.

An article in Tatler magazine claims that Symonds has been overhauling the flat to remove all vestiges of Theresa May's "John Lewis furniture nightmare".

A former charity commissioner has also questioned how any arrangement could be justified as being "for the public benefit".

Andrew Purkis, a board member of the Charity Commission for four years until 2010, said: "For something to be for the public benefit, you would assume there would have to be some sort of public access to whatever the place is that's being decorated, or sufficient access for it to be seen as something that is of benefit to the public, rather than some narrow section or a particular family."

Downing Street insiders said that allowing the public access to the building has been ruled out on security grounds.

Caroline Slocock, Margaret Thatcher's former private secretary, also questioned if any flat refurbishment would be for the public's benefit, describing it as a "strange move" to set the fund up as a charity.

"It's for the Charity Commission to decide if it qualifies but it does seem to be for personal benefit rather than public benefit," she said.

The commission has a standard "test of charity status" which would decide if it is legitimate an organisation with "exclusively charitable purposes for the public benefit".

"It's hard for the general public to see the prime minister as an object of charity," Slocock said, adding that Johnson and Symonds "have the free use of Chequers, which is a very grand house, so they're already living quite well".

Commenting on reports the prime minister has privately been complaining he is cash-strapped, she said: “If this becomes a way of increasing his pay through the back door through benefits, that is a concern.”

According to the Mail, Johnson is reported to have complained the cost of refurbishment – which is now said to be complete – was “totally out of control” and had run to “over a hundred grand”.

Johnson has asked multimillionaire financier and Tory peer Lord Brownlow to run the charity, the Mail reported.

One major Conservative donor said he would support funding Downing Street changes through a charity.

John Griffin, the taxi tycoon who has given more than £4m to the Tories, defended any future attempt to set up a charity scheme and said he would be willing to make a nominal contribution.

“Boris Johnson has done very well over Covid-19. The public are happy with his performance and would be willing to back him.

“I’d also give him a few quid – buy a raffle ticket, at the very least,” he said.

On Tuesday, Johnson’s press secretary Allegra Stratton described the reports about plans to fund the refurbishment through a charity as “speculation”.

“Downing Street is maintained to appropriate standards for the Grade I and II listed building that it is.

“The Cabinet Office sits in oversight of that. As things stand there is already a process in place for maintaining it to the right standard,” she said.

The prime minister’s official spokesperson referred journalists to the Cabinet Office annual report and accounts which have yet to be published for the relevant period.

Brownlow did not respond to the Guardian’s queries.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/mar/02/creating-a-charity-to-pay-for-pms-flat-refurb-would-be-an-outrage>

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Olympic Games

Tokyo Olympics add 12 women to executive board in late gender equality push

- Organising committee's board now consists of 42% women
- Committee will be dissolved after this year's Games



The postponed Olympics in Tokyo are to open on 23 July, followed by the Paralympics on 24 August. Photograph: Yoshio Tsunoda/AFLO/REX/Shutterstock

The postponed Olympics in Tokyo are to open on 23 July, followed by the Paralympics on 24 August. Photograph: Yoshio Tsunoda/AFLO/REX/Shutterstock

Associated Press

Tue 2 Mar 2021 22.05 EST

The Tokyo Olympics has made a symbolic gesture toward gender equality by appointing 12 women to the body's executive board, which will now have 19 women among its 45 members, or 42%.

To accommodate the new women, the size of the board was increased from 35 to 45. Several resignations on Tuesday also created more space.

The move was announced by CEO Toshiro Muto after an executive board meeting. The names of the new members were expected to be announced on Wednesday.

[Boycott questions over Beijing Winter Olympics raise eerie echoes of 1936 | Sean Ingle](#)
[Read more](#)

Seiko Hashimoto, the new president of the organising committee, prompted the changes. She took over last month after 83-year-old former president Yoshiro Mori was forced to resign after making derogatory comments about women. Essentially, he said they talk too much.

“Regarding the promotion of gender equality, we believe that it is necessary to work with a sense of speed and produce solid results in order to restore the trust in the organising committee,” Hashimoto said at the start of the board meeting.

Hashimoto, a former Olympic bronze-medal winner in speedskating, promised when she took over to increase female participation in the body's executive board. It had stood at about 20%.

Muto also said the board will now have one female vice president among seven.

Japan ranks 121st out of 153 in the World Economic Forum's gender-equality ranking, and women are seldom found in leadership roles or in the boardroom.

The move is unlikely to have long-term impact. The Tokyo Olympic organising committee employs about 3,500 people but will be dissolved

after the postponed Olympics take place.

Hashimoto is scheduled to meet on Wednesday in a “five-party meeting” with International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach, International Paralympic Committee president Andrew Parsons, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike and Olympic minister Tamayo Marukawa.

A main item is likely to deal with fans being allowed into Olympic venues, and if any fans from abroad will be permitted to enter Japan.

The postponed Olympics are to open on 23 July, followed by the Paralympics on 24 August.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/mar/03/tokyo-olympics-add-12-women-to-executive-board-in-late-gender-equality-push>

Japan

Japanese billionaire looking for people who 'push the envelope' for moon flight

Yusaku Maezawa, an online fashion tycoon, needs to fill eight spare seats on the lunar spaceship being developed by SpaceX



Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa wants to take eight people to the moon Photograph: Toru Hanai/Reuters

Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa wants to take eight people to the moon Photograph: Toru Hanai/Reuters

Agence France-Presse

Tue 2 Mar 2021 22.28 EST

It's the sort of chance that comes along just once in a blue moon: a Japanese billionaire is throwing open a private lunar expedition to eight people from around the world.

[Yusaku Maezawa](#), an online fashion tycoon, was announced in 2018 as the first man to book a spot aboard the lunar spaceship being developed by SpaceX.

Maezawa, who paid an undisclosed sum for the trip expected to launch in 2023 at the earliest, originally said he planned to invite six to eight artists to join him on the voyage around the moon.

But on Wednesday, in a video posted on his Twitter account, he revealed a broader application process. “I’m inviting you to join me on this mission. Eight of you from all around the world,” he said.

[Elon Musk to launch Japanese billionaire on Space X rocket to the moon](#)
[Read more](#)

“I have bought all the seats, so it will be a private ride,” he added.

Maezawa, 45, said his initial plan of inviting artists had “evolved” because he came to believe that “every single person who is doing something creative could be called an artist.”

The Japanese entrepreneur said applicants would need to fulfil just two criteria: being ready to “push the envelope” creatively, and being willing to help other crew members do the same.

In all, he said around 10 to 12 people will be on board the spaceship, which is expected to loop around the moon before returning to Earth.

The application timeline for spots on the trip calls for would-be space travellers to pre-register by 14 March, with initial screening carried out by 21 March.

No deadlines are given for the next stages – an “assignment” and an online interview – but final interviews and medical checkups are currently scheduled for late May 2021, according to Maezawa’s website.

Maezawa and his band of astronauts will become the first lunar voyagers since the last US Apollo mission in 1972 – if [SpaceX](#) can pull the trip off.

[Lunacy: how science fiction is powering the new moon rush](#)
[Read more](#)

Last month, a prototype of its Starship [crashed in a fireball](#) as it tried to land upright after a test flight, the second such accident, after the last prototype of the Starship met a similar fate in December.

But the company hopes the reusable, 394-foot (120-metre) rocket system will one day carry crew and cargo to the moon, Mars and beyond.

“I’m highly confident that we will have reached orbit many times with Starship before 2023 and that it will be safe enough for human transport by 2023. It’s looking very promising,” SpaceX founder Elon Musk said in Maezawa’s video posted Wednesday.

The mission will be the first private space flight beyond Earth’s orbit, Musk said.

Because it will not land on the moon, but loop behind it, “we expect people will go further than any human has ever gone from planet Earth,” he added.

Maezawa, known for his eccentric comments and extravagant lifestyle including a penchant for pricey art, was last year valued around \$1.9 billion, making him one of Japan’s richest people.

He made his fortune as founder of online fashion store Zozo, which he sold to Yahoo! Japan in 2019.

Maezawa has previously made headlines with an online ad for a girlfriend to join him on his SpaceX flight – only to abruptly cancel the hunt, despite attracting nearly 30,000 applicants.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/03/japanese-billionaire-looking-for-people-who-push-the-envelope-for-moon-flight>

Marine life

Cuttlefish have ability to exert self-control, study finds

Delaying gratification may have evolved in the squid-like creature to maximise efficiency



The cuttlefish delayed gratification when it led to a food item of higher quality and were able to maintain delays for periods of up to 50 to 130 seconds. Photograph: Mark Thomas/PA

The cuttlefish delayed gratification when it led to a food item of higher quality and were able to maintain delays for periods of up to 50 to 130 seconds. Photograph: Mark Thomas/PA

[Natalie Grover](#)

Tue 2 Mar 2021 19.01 EST

Humans, chimps, parrots and crows have evolved to exert self-control, a trait linked to higher intelligence. Now, researchers say cuttlefish – chunky

squid-like creatures with eight arms – also have the ability to delay gratification for a better reward.

Researchers used an adapted version of the Stanford marshmallow test, in which children were given the choice of scoffing an immediate reward (one marshmallow) or waiting to earn a delayed, but better, reward (two marshmallows), on six cuttlefish in an aquarium environment.

The invertebrates were presented with chambers that were marked with different visual cues in the form of shapes. For instance, one cue meant the moment food was put in that chamber, the door would open – while another meant that when food was placed in that chamber, there would be a delay before the door opened. One of the cues was counterintuitive – even though the food was placed in the chamber, and the door was opened, there was an extra layer of plastic thwarting the cuttlefish from eating the reward.

When the cuttlefish were exposed to the chambers initially, they immediately attacked when they saw the food. Over time, they realised that each chamber had its own rules. Eventually, the molluscs didn't even bother approaching the “unobtainable” chamber because they learned they could never secure access to the food.

[Specieswatch: cuttlefish – clever, colourful and now at risk](#)

[Read more](#)

With training completed, the cuttlefish were then tested in the presence of two chambers – in the “immediate” chamber they were presented with their second-preference food, while in the “delay” chamber they were given their first-preference food.

In the control setting, these conditions were mirrored, except the delay chamber was the unobtainable chamber. “We wanted to see if they were able to exert self-control in a flexible manner depending on the context,” said lead author Dr Alex Schnell, a behavioural ecologist from the University of Cambridge.

“They could see their preferred food in the unobtainable chamber, but they could never get to it – so they needed to make a decision whether to attempt

to, or just take the immediate option.”

[Anthropomorphism: how much humans and animals share is still contested](#)
[Read more](#)

Overall, the cuttlefish delayed gratification when it led to a prey item of higher quality and were able to maintain delays for periods of up to 50 seconds to 130 seconds, the authors [wrote in the journal Proceedings of the Royal Society B](#).

Previous research had suggested that some primates and birds exhibited this advanced level of self-control because they were social species that maintained multiple relationships and used tools, said Schnell.

These species might not forage or hunt in a particular moment so that they could build tools or wait until their partner had eaten, she noted. “But that doesn’t apply to cuttlefish ... they are not social and they don’t use tools.”

Instead, self-control might have evolved in cuttlefish to maximise efficiency, she speculated. “They’re a juicy meal ... so they spend really long periods camouflaged, and remain almost motionless so that they can avoid being detected by predators. And this motionless behaviour is broken up when cuttlefish forage.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/mar/03/cuttlefish-have-ability-to-exert-self-control-study-finds>

2021.03.03 - Coronavirus

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- [New Zealand Auckland lockdown divides 'team of five million'](#)
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Coronavirus live news: 168m children worldwide have missed school for a year; Brazil reports record deaths

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[New Zealand](#)

Auckland lockdown threatens to split 'team of five million'

Checkpoints, swabs and isolation make residents in New Zealand's biggest city question the government's approach to Covid-19



Motorists wait in line for a Covid-19 test in Auckland as New Zealand's largest city goes into lockdown. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Motorists wait in line for a Covid-19 test in Auckland as New Zealand's largest city goes into lockdown. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

[Phil Taylor](#) in Auckland

Wed 3 Mar 2021 01.02 EST

The catch cry of “be kind” – which prime minister Jacinda Ardern impressed upon [New Zealand](#) since its first lockdown a year ago – is in danger of being replaced with a less positive mantra as Aucklanders struggle through their second Covid-19 lockdown in a fortnight.

The country's biggest city has been in [level-three lockdown](#) since Sunday morning as a result of two cases of community transmission, which were found to have happened while an earlier period of level-three restrictions were in place – threatening to fracture the unity of the “team of five million”.

On Monday, Ardern expressed frustration and urged people to hold each other to account. No one she had spoken to thought it was tolerable, she said, adding that the most recent cases were “facing the full judgment of the entire nation”.

['Everyone is angry': Ardern under pressure over latest Auckland Covid lockdown](#)

[Read more](#)

Many members of the public have released pent-up frustrations on social media directed at Covid-19 rule breakers, Aucklanders who took the chance to get out of the city in the hours before the lockdown began at 6am Sunday, and the government.

Motorists returning to Auckland on Sunday fumed about waits of up to seven hours to get through checkpoints. “I can understand checking people leaving Auckland but it is ridiculous checking those who come in,” one reader tells the New Zealand Herald.

“Our two-hour journey home took nine hours. It was 26 degrees and there were many families with young children ... I wonder if Jacinda thinks it is OK to be in a car for that long with small children and little food or liquid?”

While waiting time at Auckland's road borders was down to less than 30 minutes by Monday evening, on Wednesday there were many signs Aucklanders were losing their patience.

[Repeated lockdowns are a version of hell – Aucklanders deserve our thanks | Morgan Godfery](#)

[Read more](#)

“Well I am grumpy too,” says Tina Woodfield, at the Covid-19 testing station in the Otara town centre in south Auckland. She had just had her third voluntary nasal swab in a year.

“We have all been advised what to do. [If you have symptoms] get tested and stay home. There are no excuses. We shouldn’t have to go through this,” says Woodfield, a hotel receptionist who got tested because she had flu symptoms.

“It’s frustrating because it is affecting lives and businesses.” She has not seen her partner since he took a job as a special education worker in Australia a year ago, just before Covid-19 first surfaced in New Zealand. “We want to get him home but everything is delayed.”

At the nearby Otara Kai village, Swanie Nelson, says the mood is different this time. People were fine during the three-day lockdown last month, she said. “It was really only one family we were talking about. This time there are multiple families and many more locations of interest and we are at the epicentre of those places.”



Swanie Nelson, manager at Otara Kai village, Auckland. Photograph: Phil Taylor

“People think ‘what the hell am I going to do if cases increase’. They are not optimistic at the moment.”

To date, there have been 15 confirmed cases of Covid-19 linked to the Auckland February cluster, across four South Auckland families.

Kai is the Maori word for food and Otara Kai village is part of a community initiative begun during the first lockdown. On Wednesday they gave out 400 hot meals – “mince chow mein and buttered French breadsticks” – but Nelson says they don’t call it a food bank because of the stigma.



Moinul Khan of Supervalu Supermarket Otara, Auckland. Photograph: Phil Taylor

“We rescue and redistribute kai for all. It’s more dignified. We call it mana-enhancing.”

Around the corner at the family-owned Supervalu Supermarket, Moinul Khan, says it is almost business as usual. “More people are wearing masks but the number of people coming to the shop is normal.”

That, he suggests, reflects lockdown fatigue as Auckland deals with its fourth lockdown at level three or above.

[Papatoetoe high school](#), which is in a neighbouring suburb in south Auckland, has been open for only one-and-a-half days since mid February when a pupil tested positive. Two more students have since tested positive, prompting all of its staff and students to be tested, returning negative results.

The school principal, Vaughan Couillault, notes the Covid rule breakers are not students but relatives. “Everybody is frustrated when people don’t follow the rules. But for each negative message I’m probably getting 50 positives ones.”

[No new community cases](#) were announced on Wednesday, while some test results are still to come in the Auckland outbreak. There are two new border-related cases in managed isolation facilities. The government will reconsider the alert levels on Friday.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/03/auckland-lockdown-threatens-to-split-team-of-five-million>

[Scotland](#)

All Scottish pupils to return to school after Easter, Sturgeon says

First minister says it may be possible to accelerate Scotland's exit from coronavirus lockdown

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

[Libby Brooks](#) Scotland correspondent

Tue 2 Mar 2021 10.50 EST Last modified on Tue 2 Mar 2021 16.36 EST



Nicola Sturgeon emphasised that twice-weekly lateral flow testing would remain available for all school staff. Photograph: Jane Barlow/AFP/Getty Images

[Nicola Sturgeon](#) has said it may be possible to accelerate Scotland's exit from the coronavirus lockdown, as she confirmed that all school pupils would return to the classroom after the Easter break.

Scotland's first minister told the Holyrood chamber the next phase of school reopening would begin from 15 March, when all children in primary 4 to 7 will go back full time as well as secondary pupils preparing for exams, while all secondary school pupils should be back in class after Easter.

She added that, while older pupils remained the priority, she expected all secondary pupils to receive some in-school education each week before the Easter break at the beginning of April.

Last week, Sturgeon said that the stay-at-home rule would remain in force until 5 April at the earliest and that she did not expect non-essential shops, or outdoor bars and restaurants, to reopen until late April, the date when the Scottish government expects to move to regional lockdown levels.

But on Tuesday afternoon Sturgeon said she hoped to be able to confirm changes to the framework for leaving lockdown next week, telling MSPs: "We will be considering if it might be possible to accelerate the exit from lockdown in any way."

She said that recent data strongly suggested case numbers were declining to the lowest level since the first week of October last year, adding that the average test positivity rate had fallen below 5% and that hospital admissions were also falling.

Education [Scotland](#) will publish guidance for local authorities on the phased return of secondary schools in the coming week, and Sturgeon said that local authorities would have flexibility in how they implement the phased return.

Opposition leaders raised concerns about schools' ability to welcome all pupils back while sticking to social distancing – which is required in secondary schools at least until Easter – as well as how teachers would manage both remote and in-person learning at the same time.

Ruth Davidson, the Scottish Conservative leader at Holyrood, said the announcement was “typically vague and only prolongs uncertainty”.

Sturgeon also said face coverings would need to be worn at all times when secondary schools returned, while ventilation remained important. She said many local authorities were using some of the £375m education recovery funding to monitor and improve ventilation in schools.

She emphasised that twice-weekly lateral flow testing would remain available for all school staff in primary, secondary and special schools, and all secondary school pupils in years 4, 5 and 6, adding: “It is a further important way in which we can ensure schools remain as safe as possible.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/02/all-scottish-pupils-to-return-to-school-after-easter-sturgeon-says>

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland announces cautious five-step plan for Covid lockdown easing

Deputy first minister tells Stormont the plan has no hard dates and will be led by data

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Northern Ireland deputy first minister Michelle O'Neill at Stormont before a meeting with the assembly to announce a roadmap to recovery on 2 March. Photograph: Liam McBurney/PA

Northern Ireland deputy first minister Michelle O'Neill at Stormont before a meeting with the assembly to announce a roadmap to recovery on 2 March. Photograph: Liam McBurney/PA

[Rory Carroll](#)
[@rorycarroll72](#)

Tue 2 Mar 2021 12.44 EST

[Northern Ireland](#)'s deputy first minister, Michelle O'Neill, has announced a cautious five-step plan to ease the region's Covid-19 lockdown.

She told the Stormont assembly on Tuesday that the plan has no hard dates and will be led by data, notably the reproductive rate of the virus.

The power-sharing executive signed off on the strategy earlier on Tuesday after days of intensive talks between party leaders and health officials.

The 28-page plan, titled [Moving Forward: The Executive's Pathway out of Restrictions](#), is a "careful, cautious and hopeful approach", O'Neill told the chamber. "Our aim is to find a safe, secure and sustainable way forward for our citizens and businesses."

[Northern Ireland's five steps out of Covid lockdown: key points](#)
[Read more](#)

The plan envisages a five-stage process moving from lockdown to relaxation of restrictions for nine different sectors. There will be regular reviews in the middle of March, April, May and June but no set timetable for progressing to each stage, said O'Neill.

"These should not be viewed as dates on which we will move to lift certain restrictions; rather, they are appropriate dates ... to examine all relevant indicators. We do not want to set potentially unachievable dates which will only disappoint."

[Scotland's plan](#), unveiled last month, also eschewed a timetable, unlike [England's](#), which included dates.

O'Neill, who is Sinn Féin's [Northern Ireland](#) leader, said the plan would protect the health service. "We must do everything we can to try to make this one the last lockdown."

Each week government departments will pool and analyse information, she said. “After each step we take, we will pause and reflect, look at the data and the impacts, engage with key sectors and enable them to reopen only if it is the right thing to do.”

The first step in the plan represents the current lockdown, with ensuing steps permitting progressive relaxations in household mixing and the economy.

The plan is a compromise between the Democratic Unionist party (DUP), which has chafed at lockdowns, and Sinn Féin, Alliance, the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist party.

The DUP last week sought to accelerate the reopening of schools in line with England’s plan for all pupils to return on 8 March, prompting a veiled rebuke from Northern Ireland’s chief medical officer, Michael McBride.

“There is a significant risk at this point in time if we move back ... too quickly or too rapidly that we will see a resurgence in cases that could result in a further wave of infection which could be even greater than the numbers we saw back in January,” he said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/02/northern-ireland-announces-cautious-five-step-plan-for-covid-lockdown-easing>.

[Dolly Parton](#)

Dolly Parton gets vaccinated with Moderna jab she helped fund

Iconic country music star sings a vaccine version of Jolene while getting inoculated in Nashville

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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01:24

'Vaccine, vaccine': Dolly Parton adapts Jolene as she receives Covid-19 jab – video

PA Media

Tue 2 Mar 2021 19.18 EST

Dolly Parton has been inoculated with the Covid-19 vaccine that she helped to fund.

The country music star, 75, broke into song while getting the Moderna jab and adapted one of her best-known ballads.

To the tune of Jolene, she sang: “Vaccine, vaccine, vaccine, vaccine, I’m begging of you, please don’t hesitate. Vaccine, vaccine, vaccine, vaccine, because once you’re dead, then that’s a bit too late.”

Parton was credited with helping fund the Moderna vaccine after donating \$1m (£716,000) to Vanderbilt University medical centre in Nashville, [Tennessee](#).

“I’m so excited. I’ve been waiting a while,” the singer told fans in a video posted from the university. “I’m old enough to get it and I’m smart enough

to get it.

“I’m trying to be funny now, but I’m dead serious about the vaccine. I think we all want to get back to normal, whatever that is. And that would be a great shot in the arm, wouldn’t it, if we could get back to that?”

“But anyhow, I just wanted to encourage everybody because the sooner we get to feeling better, the sooner we are going to get back to being normal.



Dolly gets a dose of her own medicine. Photograph: Vanderbilt Health

Parton added: “I just want to say to all of you cowards out there – don’t be such a chicken squat. Get out there and get your shot.”

Parton masked up before inviting a doctor into the room. The medic, an old friend of Parton, praised her for urging others to get the vaccine.

After he knocked an item off the table while preparing the jab, a giggling Parton quipped: “I didn’t know you was going to be so clumsy, I hope you’re going to do better with my shot!”

After getting her first jab, she said: “That didn’t hurt.”

Parton is the latest celebrity to publicly confirm they have had a coronavirus vaccine, following on from Sir Elton John, Sir Michael Caine, Sir David Attenborough, Sir Tony Robinson and Sir Ian McKellen.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/mar/03/dolly-parton-gets-vaccinated-with-moderna-jab-she-helped-fund>

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[Coronavirus](#)

Brazil variant evaded up to 61% of immunity in previous Covid cases

Scientists call for more genetic sequencing of emerging variants like P1 to bring pandemic under control

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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A health worker administers a Covid-19 vaccine in Brazil. Photograph: Bruno Kelly/Reuters

A health worker administers a Covid-19 vaccine in Brazil. Photograph: Bruno Kelly/Reuters

[Sarah Boseley](#) *Health editor*

Tue 2 Mar 2021 10.09 EST

The coronavirus variant originally found in Manaus in [Brazil](#) and detected in six cases in the UK was able to infect 25% to 61% of the people in the Amazonian city who might have expected to be immune after a first bout of Covid, researchers say.

The extent to which P1 can evade the immune system, and potentially vaccines, emerged as the UK health secretary said the hunt for one person who tested positive for P1 – but did not leave contact details – had narrowed to 379 households in the south-east of England.

Matt Hancock said five people had quarantined at home. The sixth took a home test but did not fill in the necessary form. “Incidents like this are rare and only occur in around 0.1% of tests,” he told MPs in the House of Commons.

“We’ve identified the batch of home test kits in question, our search has narrowed from the whole country down to 379 households in the south-east of England and we’re contacting each one.”

Hancock also said that a third vaccine might be necessary in the autumn, against P1 and similar variants such as B1351, which was first detected in South Africa. Both have mutations in the spike protein that can help virus variants escape the current vaccines.

“Our current vaccines have not yet been studied against this variant and we’re working to understand what impact it might have, but we do know that this variant has caused significant challenges in Brazil, so we’re doing all we can to stop the spread of this new variant in the UK, to analyse its effects and to develop an updated vaccine that works on all these variants of concern and protect the progress that we’ve made as a nation,” said Hancock.

The international team of scientists that detected P1 in Manaus is calling for more genetic sequencing of emerging variants around the world, saying that only with knowledge of how Sars-Cov2 is mutating can the pandemic be brought under control.

The variant, called P1, not only has potential to evade the immune protection of previous illness or vaccines, but is more transmissible than the original coronavirus. The [study in Manaus](#), which has not yet been published in peer-reviewed form, found it was about 1.4 to 2.2 times more transmissible than the original virus.

The scientists said at a briefing that six cases, detected promptly in the UK, did not presage a significant spread of the variant. It was vital, however, to identify variants emerging throughout the world in countries that had little or no genomic sequencing capacity at the moment, they said.

The research was carried out by the Brazil-UK Cadde project, whose work on genetic sequencing predates the pandemic. It includes the Institute of Tropical Medicine in São Paulo, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and universities in Oxford, London and Birmingham.

[Covid-19: what can we learn from Manaus? – podcast](#)

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Manaus, the largest city in the Amazon basin, suffered a first wave of Covid in April/May. Studies of blood donors suggested 66% of people had antibodies against the virus in July and 76% by October, which would have been expected to give them immunity.

But the city suffered a serious second wave. There could have been various explanations, including the possibility that the data on previous infection was wrong, but the team of researchers identified the P1 variant on 6 December. It spread rapidly: within eight weeks, it was implicated in 87% of cases.

Dr Nuno Faria of the MRC Centre for Global Infectious Disease Analysis at Imperial College London, said it had concluded that the variant was causing people who had already suffered from Covid to get it again.

“If 100 people were infected in Manaus last year, somewhere between 25 and 61 of them are susceptible to reinfection by P1,” he said at a briefing. “We caution, however, that our results from analysis should not be

generalised to other epidemiological contexts and/or other variants of concern.”

Prof Sharon Peacock, the director of Cog-UK, the consortium responsible for the genomic sequencing of the virus and its variants, said P1 has spread to 25 countries to date. “It is being distributed around the world. But I would say that in terms of the UK, we have just six cases identified, which we heard about yesterday from Public Health England, and from the government,” she said.

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Peacock expressed a note of caution about the findings from Manaus. “We need to see whether this is generalisable to other settings, she said. “So I think it would be wise to indicate that this is relevant to where the study was done, but we don’t know how that will pan out in other countries, including the UK.

“The response that we’ve taken in the UK has been very brisk, and is appropriate, but very vigorous.”

Public Health England was investigating the six known cases of people infected with P1, tracing contacts and taking appropriate action, she said.

The research shows that P1 has 17 mutations and many are similar to those found in the spike protein of the variant found in South Africa, called B1351. In particular, a mutation called E484K that they share appears to enable the variants to escape the immune system, which means that vaccines may have reduced efficacy.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/02/brazil-variant-evaded-immunity-previous-covid-cases>

[Coronavirus](#)

What problems do coronavirus variants pose?

The hunt is on for the Brazilian variant, and tracking mutations will be necessary for some time to come

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Surge testing in South Gloucestershire, after two cases of the Brazilian variant were recently identified there. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

Surge testing in South Gloucestershire, after two cases of the Brazilian variant were recently identified there. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

[Sarah Boseley](#) *Health editor*

Tue 2 Mar 2021 13.30 EST

Of the many coronavirus variants identified so far, there is particular concern about P1, first identified in Brazil, with fears about [the extent it can evade the immune system and possibly vaccines](#). The UK has recorded six cases so far, with the hunt now on for the one positive result who did not leave their contact details.

How worried should we be?

From the intensity of the search for the unidentified person with P1, it would appear the government is very concerned. A public appeal is being followed by knocks on the doors of 379 households in the south-east of England where it is thought the individual may live.

On the other hand, experts say the fact that we know there are six cases and are taking robust measures to ensure there is no spread is a very good sign that the UK can control new variants. We are not in the situation now that we were with the B117 “Kent” variant, which took off under the radar in the late autumn. Nobody knew we had it until it was widespread and it is now the dominant form of infection in the UK.

[Brazilian Covid variant: what do we know about P1?](#)
[Read more](#)

How did P1 manage to get into the UK?

Realistically there is no net that can keep variants out. [P1 is already in 25 countries](#). The key is knowing the variants have arrived and then preventing their spread. The three Scottish cases, we are told, came from people who had been in Brazil and flew back to Aberdeen via Paris and London. They followed the rules and quarantined on arrival. Testing later showed they had P1. The two cases in South Gloucestershire flew from São Paulo to London via Zurich.

Unless international flights are stopped completely, Covid cases and variants will arrive from overseas. Testing people before they fly and after they have arrived, together with self-isolation or hotel quarantine and contact tracing, are key. “Test, trace and isolate” has always been the mantra for containing

infectious diseases, but it is very difficult unless the numbers of infections are at least as low as they are now.

Are there other variants we should worry about?

B1351, which was first detected in South Africa, is just as worrisome as P1. The variants have similar mutations to the spike protein, which is targeted by the vaccines. Of greatest concern is a mutation called E484K, which appears to throw off the virus-fighting antibodies produced by the immune system after vaccination. Scientists think vaccine effectiveness will be reduced, but protection against severe disease, hospital admission and death may not be affected. E484K has also turned up in a few cases of the Kent variant.

But these will not be the last variants we see. Others will occur – and there are probably some already out there that have not yet been identified in the many countries that do not have the extensive and high quality genetic sequencing seen in the UK.

Is this the death knell for foreign travel?

They certainly make it difficult. The health secretary, Matt Hancock, has been careful not to encourage the idea of foreign holidays this summer. Tracking, tracing and isolating cases of variants is not so difficult in a lockdown, when few people are moving about and socialising and we are not allowed to go abroad. But if planeloads of tourists were to start landing in the sort of quantities we used to know, it would be very much harder.

Won't vaccines protect us?

That is still the hope. We are probably looking at either booster shots or jabs with newly tweaked vaccines to combat the variants we now know about in the autumn. But we could be racing to keep up with a mutating virus for some time to come – and it will take years to get even basic vaccines to many parts of the world, let alone new ones to keep variants at bay. Much more genetic sequencing around the world will also be vital.

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[Lockdown living](#)Pets

'Our rescue cat rescued us': how pets provided unconditional love in lockdown



Bill Chilton at home in Aberdeenshire with his pets Tiree and Cava, gifts from his wife, Lisa. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Bill Chilton at home in Aberdeenshire with his pets Tiree and Cava, gifts from his wife, Lisa. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

As the pandemic enters its second year, Guardian readers celebrate the animals that helped them navigate a difficult 12 months – from dogs to guinea pigs to cows

[Guardian readers](#) As told to [Jenny Stevens](#)

Wed 3 Mar 2021 01.00 EST



Freya McMurray with her boxer dog, Dolly. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

‘Our neighbours’ children call her Window Doggy’

My parents collected our puppy, Dolly, in late February and by mid-March we were locked down with her – and she has eased our anxiety a huge amount. My brother and I were suddenly cut off from our active social lives and team sports, and having Dolly around made the loss of outside activity much more palatable.

The effect Dolly has on the people around us is what I’ve noticed most. During clap for carers, people would point and swoon over the tiny little puppy, and make an effort to bring their children over to wave at a distance. Those small children still walk past our house to watch Dolly in her favourite spot on the back of the sofa near the windowsill. The daughter from the house opposite has affectionately dubbed her “window doggy” – they can’t believe the size of the puppy who was once small enough to hold in one hand.

When the first lockdown eased, I took Dolly along on one of the first in-person dates I had with my girlfriend. I still believe that if I hadn’t had such

a sweet dog in my dating profile, we wouldn't have got together!
Freya McMurray, 20, apprentice solicitor, south-west London



Sarah Dove's daughters with their two bantam hens. Photograph: Sarah Dove

‘My daughters looked forward to finishing the day with the chickens on their lap’

To raise funds, our local farm and visitor attraction was offering the opportunity to foster young chicks during the first lockdown. In early June, desperate for something new, uplifting and a little educational for our daughters, we took home two young bantams. It had never crossed my mind to keep chickens, but they charmed us so much as a family that when the time came to return them to the farm, we just couldn't do it – the farm agreed to sell them to us so they are now permanent members of the family.

The chickens motivated us to spend time in the garden every day, and the girls looked forward to finishing the day with the chickens on their laps, stroking them and giving them corn. After all these months, looking after the chickens continues to give me a reason to be out in the fresh air. The arrival of the first egg caused considerable excitement and it was great to be able to re-engage the girls by getting them to check the nestbox every day.

Had I known we would end up having to house them indoors (their very own lockdown), thanks to bird flu regulations, I might have thought twice about keeping them but, much like the rest of us, they seem pretty resigned to lockdown life – they just seem to expect snacks about 400 times a day, much like my children.

Sarah Dove, 38, Basingstoke

‘If you’ve never experienced the vibrations of a happy cat purring, you haven’t lived’



Dizzee the cat. Photograph: Fran Eyre

I already had a rescue cat, Winston, who is six years old. I noticed he seemed lonely – he would call to outdoor cats when sitting on the window ledges. Then a few weeks ago, a friend spotted an advert for a four-month-old kitten that needed a home so I took him in. It was a bit of a shock for Winston to be chased around the house by a little scrap like Dizzee. Living alone with health problems has its challenges, and it may seem crazy to give myself more work, but the cats get me out of bed in the morning, make me laugh out loud and warm my heart. If you’ve never experienced the vibrations of a happy, grateful cat purring, you haven’t lived.

Being responsible for other living beings doesn't need to stop just because of ill health and old age. The joy and laughter they bring makes the physical effort of cleaning up after them all worth it. I know I'm needed and wanted and not forgotten.

Fran Eyre, 71, Derby

'It's hard to feel cross with the world when you have a sleeping puppy on your chest'



Sheriff the cockapoo. Photograph: Graham Smith

Last March, when lockdown was announced, I had just gone back to work after being signed off with depression the previous November. I was still feeling fragile and apprehensive so lockdown gave me more time to get better. At the beginning of April, my eldest son showed the family a video of a litter of cockapoo puppies that his friend's dog had just had. We already had an old labrador but had spoken about getting another dog. It took us about 20 minutes to agree we wanted one. All of us had a different name we wanted to give him, but when a Bob Marley song was playing and somebody suggested Sheriff (as in I Shot the Sheriff), it stuck.

Sheriff, true to his name, waltzed into our home as if he owned it. He terrorised our poor old dog, stole socks, chewed up both pairs of my wife's

glasses as well as all the flowers in the garden, but was super-affectionate and loved a cuddle. My two boys were 17 and 15 when lockdown began. They tended to mooch about with their AirPods permanently glued in their ears, making conversation or interaction almost impossible. Getting a puppy lifted their mood like a sunburst; it's hard to feel cross with the world when you have a sleeping puppy on your chest.

In September, my eldest son and his girlfriend – who was living with us – contracted Covid-19. We made them isolate in their room as much as possible. One afternoon, I began to feel some discomfort in my big toe – the pain got worse and my foot turned red and black. I had no idea [“Covid toe”](#) was a thing until I looked it up, but Sheriff had already noticed; he'd sniffed my toe and given it a lick much earlier in the evening as if to say: ‘Don't worry, it will be OK.’ By the next day, the pain had receded.

Sheriff has reminded us that, like the cliché, life is best lived in the moment: eat, sleep, steal a sock, repeat.

Graham Smith, 48, Southwick, West Sussex



Milo the rescue cat. Photograph: Annie and Freya Lawrie

‘We rescued him but in the end I think he rescued us’

We sadly lost Mick, my husband and our daughter Freya's father, to Covid-19 in April. We were devastated and isolated in lockdown. Mick was a huge, larger-than-life character who was always laughing – our house just felt so empty without him. We decided to get a rescue cat as a bit of a distraction from our grief and found Milo at a rescue centre in south Wales. When we got there, we discovered he was the only cat there, surrounded by lots of barking dogs. We decided to adopt him on the spot and took him straight home.

We didn't think you could train a cat, but Milo has turned out to be very clever and will sit for treats and give his paw on command. He really loves his food and is very vocal when he thinks it's time to eat: no one told him about the clocks going back so he still thinks breakfast time is 4am.

Milo has certainly kept us entertained and amused during lockdown. He's been great company and it's been wonderful to have another energy in the house. He has melted our hearts and gets lots of hugs and attention. Even though we rescued him in the first place, somehow I think it was really him who rescued us.

Annie and Freya Lawrie, Brecon

'After Mum died, the cat and I cried all the way down the M5'



Dusty ... ‘She’s the best decision I’ve made in a long time.’ Photograph: Liz

My mum died at the start of March 2020, just prior to the first lockdown, and we couldn’t find a home for her cat. Despite wanting a cat for years, I’d always put it off as I’m not usually home for most of the day, enjoy my furniture unclawed and live in a built-up area. However, I couldn’t bear the thought of leaving her at a shelter. So, despite my reservations, I took Dusty home. As the cat and I cried the entire way down the M5, I promised her that nobody would ever leave her again and that I would always look after her. She’s the best decision I’ve made in a long time.

I once thought Dusty was the only cat I couldn’t get along with, but I’ve since found that she loves nothing more than being close to me – and me working from home in the pandemic has really worked in her favour. She’s like a little stress-seeking missile, always arriving when my cortisol level starts to rise. This more than makes up for the claw marks in my beloved sofa and bi-monthly vomit attacks.

Dusty has definitely been a source of comfort and amusement – she’s always doing something to make me laugh and manages to cheer me up when I’m feeling depressed. Having someone who needs you to function in order to be able to look after them helps to provide a sense of structure to the day and motivation to “get on with it”. She’s also helped enhance the relationship

between my dad and me by providing a regular talking point, which is lovely. With 2020/21 being the gift that keeps on giving, I anticipate her being a much-needed source of company when my now ex-boyfriend moves out, too.

Liz, 34, Exeter

‘A beast with horns isn’t everyone’s cup of tea, but they make me smile’



Bill Chilton with Tiree and Cava. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

I love cows and always wanted one. When my wife, Lisa, and I relocated to Aberdeenshire we found a house we loved that also had a hectare of land with it. On Christmas Eve 2019, I was told to put my wellies on and go outside. There she was, a four-month-old highland cow with a big red bow around her neck, being walked down the track to our house – a gift from Lisa. We called her Tiree.

Cows are very sociable animals and, after a few months, we realised that Tiree was looking a bit lonely, so we bought her half-sister, Cava, during the first few weeks of lockdown. These really are pet cows as the family is all vegetarian.

Cows are very good-natured and friendly souls – inquisitive and intelligent. If you put something in the field, they're all over it. We had a lot of snow last month and my son Sol, who is 10, built an igloo with me. Within minutes, the cows were there, digging their horns in it like bulldozers. They love being stroked and rubbed under the chin; if they're lying down and having a siesta, you can go and lie down with them.

They've helped us immensely during lockdown – they're so wonderful to look at and to be around, they really are like therapy cows. I guess that a quarter-tonne beast with horns isn't everyone's cup of tea, and you definitely wouldn't let them play on the furniture, but they make me smile. They have a long lifespan – about 20 or 30 years, so I hope they'll be my retirement pals as well.

The cows are very photogenic, too, and friends and family demand updates if we go too long without sending them pictures. Grass is getting low in the field now but it's worth it. It's very funny to be summoned with a deep lowing first thing in the morning.

Bill Chilton, 47, Aberdeenshire

‘Bozo is old, often sick and has poor bladder control but we can't imagine life without him’



Let sleeping cats lie ... Bozo in the garden. Photograph: Maureen Kowles

In early March last year, we went to our son's one morning to do our weekly childcare for our grandchildren. We usually arrive to find sleepy children eating cereal in a trance, but on that day, there was tension. Our son rushed out, late to work (he's a primary school headteacher) and our daughter-in-law was in no mood for niceties. As well as the three children, she was dealing with their old cat, who had eaten too quickly and been sick on the sofa for the third time that week. "Do you want us to take him for a couple of weeks?" we said.

Almost a year later, we still have Bozo – a large black-and-white 14-year-old mog – and we really can't imagine life without him. He is often sick, his bladder control isn't perfect and he has disgraced himself on a couple of occasions – we've had to wash duvet covers and cushions. During the lovely summer, he would sleep out in the garden and we would check on him through the night. Now with the colder weather, he loves the underfloor heating and doesn't move for hours at a time. We bought him an electric blanket (a small heated pad intended for reptiles) for Christmas, and it's a hit.

Our grandkids have decided that as much as they miss Bozo, we need him more than they do: with no visiting or entertaining friends or family, our life has shrunk. But we send them lots of pictures. He is a real living thing that needs us, too, and we love having him in our retirement home.

Maureen and Roger Knowles, in their 70s, Bristol



Wooders. Photograph: John Thoo

‘We have a purpose to get up every day and go out, regardless of the weather’

My son is an only child and, at the start of lockdown, he was struggling a lot. He’s an extrovert and loves being around his friends, aunties, grandparents – sometimes his boring old mum and dad are just not fun enough. It was breaking my heart.

My girlfriend is a nurse, so was pretty sure that Covid was going to be around for a while. We didn’t want our son to continue to be so lonely, so decided the time was finally right to get a dog.

Wooders, our little pup, has been a revelation in the family. Not only has he helped with my son, keeping him busy with a “mate” that is always delighted to see him, it’s helped me and my girlfriend, too. Wooders has given me a purpose when I’ve been on and off furlough in my job as a bartender. Walking him has been keeping me fit, and has really helped with my mental health. Before we got Wooders, I was finding myself slipping into a very bad habit of laziness, getting up late, not going to bed at a reasonable time, and allowing my son to fall into those traps, too. Wooders

has brought in a routine. We need to be up at certain times, we need to take him for a walk three times a day, regardless of the weather.

Even the social side of having a dog is something I never expected, as I've never had one before. I feel part of the community for the first time since having moved to the area – you begin to develop friendships with the walkers you see every day.

The only problem was the barking, for which I profusely apologise to my neighbours, but I've booked some online tutorials to train him out of chasing every leaf that blows past the window.

John Thoo, 24, Liverpool

‘The guinea pigs get me out for walks, collecting leaves for them to eat’



Helen Nicolson at home in south Manchester with Snowdrop and Sable.
Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Lockdown hit me pretty hard at first. I am no stranger to depression, but before coronavirus, I had created a lifestyle that worked well for me, with plenty of activities that involved being with other people: playing chamber

music, playreading, going to see films and concerts. Suddenly, I was cut off from all that.

For the few years before lockdown, I had been a long-distance carer for my father, who lived alone in Cambridge. Sadly he died last March (of old age, at nearly 95), but I was relieved that he didn't have to live through this weird era, and I haven't had to worry about him being exposed to the virus. The pandemic meant that what should have been a carefree time to travel and see distant family and friends has instead been lockdown – and the knowledge hanging over me that there is a house waiting to be cleared and difficult decisions about how to honour my father's memory.

Then a glimmer of an idea popped into my mind: I had had two guinea pigs about 10 years ago, so why not get some again? I collected Sable and Snowdrop on the longest day of 2020. They have helped me hugely: just having two little living beings around, having a reason to speak aloud, hearing them rustling about, squeaking when they hear the fridge door open, having one on my lap while I watch yet another film on my computer. It gives me a real purpose to think about their needs, going for walks in places where I can gather grass, leaves and dandelions for them to eat.

I'm in danger of being a guinea pig bore, as phone calls are often punctuated with a chuckle and a report on their latest antics, and of course my iPad is filling up with photos and videos. My social life also improved as friends came round, when rules permitted, for suitably distanced admiration sessions, too.

Helen Nicolson, 72, Manchester

‘He is the only living creature I’m allowed to hug’



Freddie the kitten. Photograph: Anna

I live alone and, due to having Crohn's disease, I am immunosuppressed. When the first lockdown happened I realised that, potentially, months lay ahead with nobody to hug and I could feel my oxytocin levels slipping away to critical. And so I decided, cat-pe diem – I bit the bullet and got myself a furry housemate. Freddie moved in at 10 weeks old, and instantly I had a warm, fluffy, purring distraction from the pandemic, my illness and a recent breakup. I loved waking up to him greeting me at my living room door with squeaky miaows at breakfast time.

I've suffered from insomnia on and off for 20 years, but suddenly I had a reason to keep to a better schedule (cats, like dogs, like routine) and for the first time in a while, I slept like a log and woke up like clockwork every morning. I get up, put out his breakfast, he eats half, then trots over to me and hops on my knee. I give him a cuddle and a scratch behind the ears then I plonk him down in front of his food to finish his breakfast. It is wonderfully relaxing. He is a confident, affectionate and boisterous little chap – I had to have surgery two weeks ago and when I was recovering at home his sympathy levels towards me were pretty much nonexistent as he still wanted to climb on me.

Even though I am in a support bubble, he is still the only creature I'm allowed to hug and I wouldn't be without him now.

Anna, 37, Belfast

‘My ex-husband hates cats so having one is a celebration of being my own person again’



Sarah Mo with Kitty. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

My two children, 16 and 11, and I adopted Kitty, a 14-year-old cat, during the first lockdown. I had just gone through a difficult divorce, so adopting Kitty was partly a celebration of being my own person again – my ex-husband hates cats!

I'm surprised at how attached I have become to Kitty. I suffer from complex PTSD and she helps me with my anxiety and gives me a reason to get up and keep going – she doesn't care if there's a pandemic, she just wants food and strokes. She's a constant source of unconditional love. Kitty came to us with a history of stomach issues, which have resulted in some toileting accidents on my yoga mat – she has commandeered it as her own. But despite her habits – and my having to buy a new yoga mat – she has become an indispensable part of our family. She has a wonderfully disdainful

personality, which is perfect for my lockdown mood.
Sarah Mo, 51, London

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[Smartwatches](#)

Fitbit Sense review: a good smartwatch that fails on sustainability

Feature-packed health and fitness-tracking smartwatch has advanced sensors but failure to address screen and battery repairs is poor



The expensive Sense is a jack of all trades but master of none, while Fitbit fails to address sustainability concerns and offers no out-of-warranty repair options. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The expensive Sense is a jack of all trades but master of none, while Fitbit fails to address sustainability concerns and offers no out-of-warranty repair options. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

[Samuel Gibbs](#) *Consumer technology editor*

Wed 3 Mar 2021 02.00 EST

Fitbit is attempting to challenge the dominance of the Apple Watch with the Sense: a smartwatch packed with advanced health sensors for stress, heart rate and ECG wrapped up in a neat and tidy package. But be careful, because if you damage the watch, it appears you can't even pay Fitbit to fix it.

It costs £300 and is Fitbit's top model above the £200 Versa 3, which is essentially the same smartwatch without the advanced sensors, plus a cheaper line of fitness trackers.

The watch measures just 40.5mm across and 12.35mm thick, making it one of the smallest smartwatches available. The 1.58in OLED display is bright and surrounded by a polished stainless steel bezel that forms part of the electrical connections for the sensors. The rest of the body is aluminium.



The Sense comes with a silicone strap in two sizes, which clips into proprietary quick-release slots on the back of the watch. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The screen can be set to always show the time and other data, or to light up on turning your wrist or pressing the button in the side of the watch. You cannot wake it up by tapping the screen, which I found annoying. There are

hundreds of watch faces available from Fitbit and third parties, which you can download using the Fitbit app on your phone.

Specifications

- **Screen:** 1.58in OLED
- **Case size:** 40.5mm
- **Case thickness:** 12.35mm
- **Weight:** 45.9g
- **Operating system:** Fitbit OS 5.1
- **Water resistance:** IP68, 50 metres (5ATM)
- **Sensors:** gyro, HR sensor, ECG, EDA, blood oxygen, light, GPS+GLONASS, altimeter, skin temperature
- **Connectivity:** Bluetooth 5, wifi n, NFC, speaker, mic

Battery life and connectivity



The watch charges to 100% in 77 minutes or 50% in 26 minutes with a small magnetic USB-A puck that clips to the back. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The battery can last up to six days between charges, but lasts more like two with the screen on all the time, calls and notifications turned on, and using some of the more advanced health monitoring features.

I had to charge it before bed every other night with everything turned on, running a couple of times a week, tracking walks and my sleep. A 26-minute run with the screen on and GPS active consumed 6% of the battery, meaning it should last the length of a marathon or so.

The watch connects to the Fitbit app on your Android or iPhone via Bluetooth, but also has wifi for downloading updates, apps and similar.

Sustainability

Despite [publishing a sustainability statement](#), Fitbit declined to answer any of the Guardian's sustainability questions, including on the use of recycled materials, whether the watch is repairable and the costs to do so out of warranty, and battery lifespan, losing it a star. Batteries in other

smartwatches typically last for at least 500 cycles while maintaining at least 80% of their original capacity.

[How we are changing the way we rate sustainability of consumer electronics](#)
[Read more](#)

The Sense was awarded [five out 10 for repairability](#) by repair specialists iFixit, but Fitbit does [not appear to offer](#) any out-of-warranty [repair services](#), such as those for broken screens or battery replacement, also losing it a star. It ships with a charging cable, but not a power adaptor.

Fitbit has recently been [bought by Google](#), which has made significant progress on sustainability, so hopefully Fitbit will improve in this area.

Fitbit OS 5.1



There are built-in apps for timers, alarms, health monitoring and viewing your calendar, but good third-party apps are a little thin on the ground. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Fitbit's software is fairly slick. Swipe down from the top for smartphone notifications, up for widgets including health stats and the weather, left for apps and right for quick settings.

Press the side button once to return to the watch face, or twice to access four quick shortcuts for music, apps and other functions. Press and hold it to invoke Amazon's Alexa or [Google](#) Assistant for voice queries, timers and other functions, which are responsive as long as the watch has a good connection to your phone.

Notifications from your phone are fairly basic, showing texts and alerts, but no images from chats, smart cameras or similar. You can reply to messages with canned responses or voice dictation on Android, but not if used with an iPhone.

Music controls do not automatically appear and are somewhat cumbersome to get to: double-press the side button and tap the music shortcut to control playback, volume and other functions.

The Spotify app is only a remote and cannot store or play music directly. Deezer or Pandora in the US can download tracks and play them via Bluetooth headphones. The watch has Fitbit Pay for contactless payments, but the number [of UK banks that support it](#) is very slim.

Daily health



The ECG feature works much like those of competitors – hold your fingers on the metal band around the outside of the screen for 30 seconds. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The Sense is packed with health and fitness features. It records your heart rate every five seconds, counts steps and active time, and has automatically adjusting high and low heart rate alerts, move reminders and daily activity goals.

It also has advanced sleep monitoring, recording an overall “sleep score”, various sleep cycles, heart rate variability, skin temperature, breathing rate and blood oxygen saturation. A smart alarm function wakes you up at the optimum time in your cycle, too.

One of the key features is the electrocardiogram (ECG) sensor, which records the rhythm of your heartbeat and works just as well as rivals, useful for keeping an eye out for early warning signs of heart trouble. The other is the electrodermal activity (EDA) sensor, which detects changes in the sweat level of your palm to measure stress levels in addition to data on stress interpreted from heart rate and sleep.

The idea is sound but it requires you to place your palm for two minutes each time you want to record it – not something I’m going to do regularly. Guided mindfulness sessions use the EDA sensor too, but I didn’t feel any more relaxed than after doing some basic breathing exercises. It could be useful for keeping more empirical records of stress levels if you’re particularly worried.

Workouts



The watch has a simple but functional display showing three stats at once. Tap the middle one to rotate through your choice of time, distance, pace, heart rate, calories steps, laps and active minutes. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

On top of general health and activity monitoring, the Sense can track and record 20 different exercises, including the usual walking, running, swimming and cycling, yoga, circuit training, golf, tennis and others.

The watch can automatically track many of the more vigorous activities taking more than 15 minutes in length, including walking and running: this records time, heart rate, calories burned, steps and other bits, but doesn't activate the GPS for a route map. Manually recording the activity adds distance, pace, laps and a GPS map of the route where applicable.

For running, the Sense gets a GPS lock in about 30 seconds. Its heart rate data varies slightly to that produced by a Garmin Fenix 6 Pro Solar or Apple Watch Series 6, but reached similar averages. The distance and pace of routes run along straight roads appeared accurate, but recordings for routes around parks or with many different corners were shorter than competitors by as much as 200m over 5km, which is disappointing. The Sense also doesn't record or display cadence or any other more advanced running dynamics information, either.

Much of Fitbit's goals are based on heart rate zones, where more intense exercise begets more "zone minutes", which are effectively exercise points towards your daily goal. It is an easy to understand scheme and more motivating than using just steps as a metric for success. Fitbit Coach provides guided exercises, too, which vary from basic running or walking plans to mindfulness and diet habit-building schemes.

Fitbit differs from competitors in requiring an additional £7.99-per-month [premium subscription](#) for many of the advanced tracking and analysis features. These include analysis of duration, heart rate and restlessness of sleep and the health metrics dashboard in the app showing skin temperature, heart rate variability and breathing rate. Fitbit premium also adds features based around guided workouts, plans and challenges, where you can link up and compete with other Fitbit users.

Observations



There are plenty of watch face options available from Fitbit and third-party developers. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

- You need to routinely open the Fitbit app on an iPhone to keep it from being shut in the background and stopping things such as weather from

updating on the watch.

- The charging cable is annoyingly short, at just 52.5cm.
- The Sense comes with a six-month free trial of Fitbit premium for new customers.

Price

The Fitbit Sense costs [£299.99](#) and is available in black or gold.

For comparison, the RRP for the Fitbit Versa 3 is [£199.99](#), the [Samsung Galaxy Watch Active 2](#) costs [£199](#) and the [Apple Watch Series 6](#) costs [£379](#).

Verdict

The Fitbit Sense is a solid smartwatch with a good screen, a relatively slim design, two day-plus battery life, solid Google Assistant or Alexa integration and simple smartphone alerts.

It has many advanced health sensors, including ECG for heartbeat rhythm and EDA for stress monitoring, and good sleep and daily activity tracking. But some of the features and analysis require a £7.99-a-month subscription to access, which is irritating for a £300 device.

Automatic and manual workout tracking is solid, but the watch lacks more advanced metrics offered by rivals such as cadence for running and has issues with GPS accuracy on curvy or circular routes.

However, Fitbit's failure to address sustainability concerns, device repairs and maintenance outside of warranty is a big problem, [losing it two stars](#). If you smash the screen or the battery wears out, you're on your own; users report that you simply can't pay Fitbit to fix the watch, making it an expensive disposable item, which is a real shame.

Pros: good screen, responsive, slim design, extensive health tracking, ECG, good basic workout tracking, GPS, good activity motivation, Google Assistant/Alexa, solid smartwatch battery life.

Cons: not sustainable, no OOW repair options, proprietary straps, issues with GPS accuracy, no advanced workout tracking, some health-tracking features require additional monthly subscription, short charging cable.



Alexa/Google Assistant timers and alarms are kept separate from the built-in alarm or timer apps on the Sense. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Other reviews

- [Fossil Gen 5 review: Google's Wear OS smartwatch at its best](#)
- [TicWatch Pro 3 review: faster, slicker Wear OS smartwatch misses mark](#)
- [Samsung Galaxy Watch 3 review: the new king of Android smartwatches](#)
- [Samsung Galaxy Watch Active 2 review: the best smartwatch for Android](#)
- [Garmin Forerunner 245 Music review: a runner's best friend](#)

- [Apple Watch Series 6 review: faster, cheaper, still the best](#)
 - [Apple Watch SE review: an almost great cheaper option](#)
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Art

'My pubic hair paintings could hang in your living room': the artists reclaiming women's sexuality

A Woman's Right to Pleasure is a new compendium celebrating female erotic art. We meet its contributors, including the photographer who turned her vagina into a camera



'I'm still visible, I'm still viable' ... a detail from Renee Cox's *Fur*, part of *American Family*, which appears in *A Woman's Right to Pleasure*. Photograph: Renee Cox

'I'm still visible, I'm still viable' ... a detail from Renee Cox's *Fur*, part of *American Family*, which appears in *A Woman's Right to Pleasure*. Photograph: Renee Cox

[Hettie Judah](#)

Wed 3 Mar 2021 01.00 EST

During the darkest days of the Trump presidency, writer Alexandra Weiss and her colleagues at the [Black Book](#) gallery in New York decided to address an issue that felt increasingly pressing. For centuries, women's sexuality had been seen as a subject for men to pick over, the man in charge at the White House being the most prominent recent offender. But there was no shortage of examples, from L'Origine du Monde, Gustave Courbet's 1866 painting of a woman parting her legs invitingly, to Alfred Kinsey's revelatory 1953 report, Sexual Behavior in the Human Female.

It seemed a potent time to celebrate women's perspectives on sexuality instead. Reproductive rights were under threat: among other things, the Trump administration had banned taxpayer-funded family planning clinics from referring women for terminations. Exploring women's sexual pleasure in words and images, says Weiss, felt like "an act of resistance. Why not now? With social media, women have felt more comfortable talking about their bodies, but pleasure is often left out of the conversation."

The result, Weiss's erotic compendium *A Woman's Right to Pleasure*, was published late last year, while an accompanying podcast has just launched. Both are joyously pansexual, featuring a spicy roster of writers, artists, activists and performers. The tone is set in the book's forewords by [Bad Feminist author Roxane Gay](#) and novelist [Erica Jong](#), whose 1973 bestseller *Fear of Flying* introduced the concept of the "zipless fuck", a sexual encounter as quick as it is free of guilt.

Alongside fleshy, upfront paintings by Jenny Saville, Sarah Lucas's reweaponising of misogynistic imagery, and glossy bondage-inspired magazine shoots by [Ellen von Unwerth](#) are photographs lifted from Renee Cox's bold and fearless 2001 series *American Family*. Cox addresses big issues: religious conservatism, the absence of the black body in art history, and the tensions raised by representing an American family with a black mother and a white father.



Inspired by slurs directed at her friends ... a work from Betty Tompkins' *Insults/Laments* series. Photograph: Courtesy of Betty Tompkins and P·P·O·W, New York

American Family also foregrounds Cox's own sexuality as she turns 40, the age female allure apparently begins to dwindle, or so we are frequently told. Posing in high-cut black lace lingerie, tightly corseted, or naked but for a white fur thong, Cox refuses to fade into the background, or hide her desire. The work, the artist tells me, makes a proud announcement: "I am still visible, I'm still viable. I'm still out here. I'm still doing my thing. And I'm going to do it the way I want to. You can't write me off."

Cox credits her French husband's family for giving her an ease with her body. "When I met him," she says, "his parents were naturists. We spent six weeks in a nudist camp in Corsica. The first three days were a little bizarre. After that, you don't even pay attention to it any more."

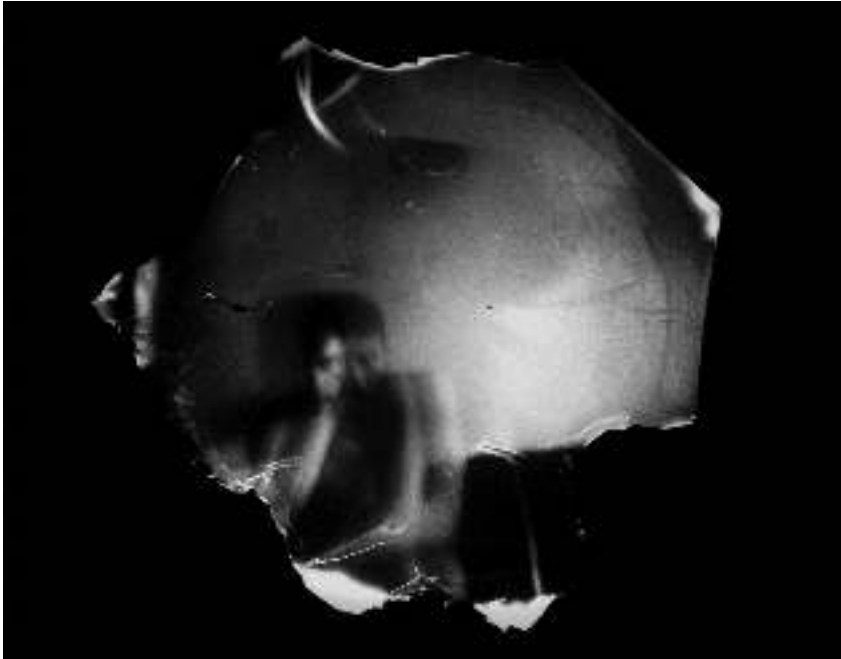
She makes a distinction between the sexual imagery used in *American Family*, and other works, such as 1996's *Yo Mama's Last Supper* – in which she is merely nude, filling Christ's position in a take on Leonardo's original. "Nudity was about the release of being judged, of being placed into a box because of clothing or paraphernalia." Once you have clothes, she points

out, the attention shifts to “class, where you’re from, and other little reference points. So I like nudity in terms of its purity.”

I know how great my bush paintings look. I don't care if no one buys them

The first edition of *A Woman's Right to Pleasure* sold out in weeks. No surprise there, you may think: sex sells. Not necessarily. The exploration of sexuality from a woman's perspective has, and continues to be, controversial. When New York-based artist Marilyn Minter went searching through art history for nude works that included women's pubic hair, she could find just 10 paintings. “Artists thought pubic hair was vulgar,” says Minter. In the early 2010s, she started a series of large, lush paintings zooming in on pubic triangles from “all colours, all races. And I make them so beautiful that you can put them in your living room. But no one buys them. I don't care. I know how great these bush paintings look.”

Minter, who has several works in the compendium, is no hip ingénue. These days, so many young artists are shoving their fingers suggestively into dewy, yonic foodstuffs that it has become a cliché. But Minter was getting sexy with food as far back as 1976, with the painting series *100 Food Porn*, in which the preparation of everything from lobster claws to corn on the cob is given a sexually charged treatment. Minter went on to use actual porn as source material for the tightly cropped, blown-up paintings of 1989's *Porn Grid*. Her work is shown and collected by institutions around the world. Five years ago, she had a large travelling retrospective called *Pretty/Dirty*. But can Minter shift big bush paintings? No, she cannot.



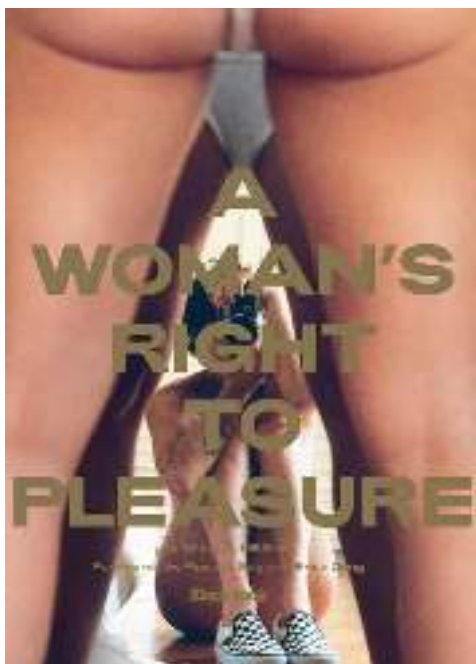
‘By the eighth shot, people are disarmed’ ... a detail from one of the photographs Dani Lessnau made using her vagina as a camera. Photograph: Keith Snyder/Dani Lessnau

The book also features the gloriously upfront feminist artist [Betty Tompkins](#), who recalls a talk once given by a New York gallery director. “Somebody,” she tells me, “had given him this great advice: the hardest paintings to sell were paintings of dicks, and green paintings.” So after the talk, Tompkins “did an airbrush painting of a dick. The whole painting is grounded with a green. I also did a version of it on canvas. And then I did some others with greenish colours.” She laughs. “And I own them all.”

While Minter and Tompkins test the conservatism of the art market, defying it is not their *raison d’être*. The paintings by them chosen for the book probe less obvious, less charted territory: things kept hidden, such as pubic hair, and subjects ignored, such as women’s desire. Particularly in the early years, this made their work a troublesome proposition – not only for collectors, but also for their feminist contemporaries.

Sex, explains Tompkins, “has definitely not been considered a feminist subject”. In 1969, she made her first Fuck Paintings, based on details of penetration from black and white pornographic photos owned by her then-husband. These large, photorealistic paintings seemed out of step with the

anti-porn feminism of the time. Largely ignored in New York, the Fuck Paintings were selected for exhibition in Paris, but censored on arrival and never made it past customs. They have only been widely shown in the 2000s.



‘An act of resistance’ ... the cover of A Woman’s Right To Pleasure. Photograph: Cass Bird. Cover courtesy of BlackBook Publishing.

Tompkins says this territory is still considered risky. “My observation over the years was that, once in a while, a younger female artist would embrace the subject of sex. And they would do it until they were just a little bit known. Then they branched out, every one of them, because it was not really acceptable as a subject.”

This is hardly surprising: foregrounding sexuality remains a double-edged sword for women. In Tompkins’ series *Insults/Laments*, slurs directed at her friends hover before airbrushed paintings of vaginas: “The only way you will make it in the art world is on your back” or “I’m going to Jackson Pollock all over her face.”

In 2016, when Minter wanted to photograph Miley Cyrus to raise funds for Planned Parenthood, an organisation battling to maintain termination services across the US, she had to argue hard for the group to agree. “I saw

how [Cyrus] totally owned her own sexual agency from day one,” says Minter, who speaks admiringly of the star’s Happy Hippie foundation for homeless and LGBTQ youth.

As a young woman, Cyrus’s “crime” was an overtly sexual performance on MTV. “She grabbed her crotch,” says Minter, “and she was slut-shamed all over the country. I had to make the case she was an activist.” The artist blames the insidious influence of conservatism in the US for the fact that Cyrus is one of the few celebrities who will speak publicly about termination. The point was brought home to her last year: “I did a show called Abortion Is Normal. And women I know well, my age group, were saying, ‘You can’t say abortion is normal.’ They really drank the Kool-Aid of the far right, constantly chipping away.”

[Shunned, seized and now celebrated: the porn paintings of Betty Tompkins](#)
[Read more](#)

Curiously, in a book dedicated to the erotic female gaze, there are few images of men, while a disappointing preponderance are of model-like attractive women. (According to Minter, “women get off on looking at other women: what turns women on is being desired”.) Notable among the few male nudes are blurry, jagged-edged portraits captured by artist Dani Lessnau, using her vagina as a camera shutter. “I was trying to photograph a relationship I had in a normal way and it felt flat,” says Lessnau. “It didn’t feel like my perspective. I encountered Ann Hamilton’s work – she put pinhole cameras in her mouth. It hit me that if she can put it in her mouth ...”

Like sex, the process was messy: Lessnau turned eight plastic film canisters into pinhole cameras, covering each with a condom before use. A single exposure took up to 90 seconds: a long time when you’re trying to keep still with your legs apart. “Sometimes the shoots were sexual and sometimes they weren’t,” she says. “But there was always a lot of desire. The men in the series all responded differently – some saw it as fun, freeing. There were always interesting conversations.”

The friends and ex-lovers who sat for her initially felt awkward about having to stare steadily at Lessnau’s vagina for a prolonged period. But, she says,

“by the eighth shot, people are disarmed”. After centuries of women’s bodies being observed by male artists, it is an immaculate reversal: Courbet’s *L’Origine du Monde* shoots back.

[A Woman’s Right to Pleasure](#) is published by BlackBook. [The podcast](#) is available now.

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'I am a woman who wants': on disability and desire

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Digital citizensChina

Smile for the camera: the dark side of China's emotion-recognition tech

Xi Jinping wants 'positive energy' but critics say the surveillance tools' racial bias and monitoring for anger or sadness should be banned



Passengers in Xi'an check in with ID cards and facial recognition. Technology in China can now supposedly detect one's state of mind. Photograph: Zhang Yuan/China News/Getty

Passengers in Xi'an check in with ID cards and facial recognition. Technology in China can now supposedly detect one's state of mind. Photograph: Zhang Yuan/China News/Getty

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[Michael Standaert](#) in Shenzhen

Wed 3 Mar 2021 01.00 EST

“Ordinary people here in [China](#) aren’t happy about this technology but they have no choice. If the police say there have to be cameras in a community, people will just have to live with it. There’s always that demand and we’re here to fulfil it.”

So says Chen Wei at Taigusys, a company specialising in emotion recognition technology, the latest evolution in the broader world of surveillance systems that play a part in [nearly every aspect of Chinese society](#).

Emotion-recognition technologies – in which facial expressions of anger, sadness, happiness and boredom, as well as other biometric data are tracked – are supposedly able to infer a person’s feelings based on traits such as facial muscle movements, vocal tone, body movements and other biometric signals. It goes [beyond facial-recognition technologies](#), which simply compare faces to determine a match.

[Facial recognition for pigs: Is it helping Chinese farmers or hurting the poorest?](#)

[Read more](#)

But similar to facial recognition, it involves the mass collection of sensitive personal data to track, monitor and profile people and uses machine learning to analyse expressions and other clues.

The industry is booming in China, where since at least 2012, figures including President Xi Jinping have emphasised the creation of [“positive energy”](#) as part of an ideological campaign to encourage [certain kinds of expression](#) and limit others.

Critics say the technology is based on a pseudo-science of stereotypes, and an increasing number of researchers, lawyers and rights activists believe it has serious implications for human rights, privacy and freedom of expression. With the global industry forecast to be [worth nearly \\$36bn by 2023](#), growing at nearly 30% a year, rights groups say action needs to be taken now.

‘Intimidation and censorship’

The main office of Taigusys is tucked behind a few low-rise office buildings in Shenzhen. Visitors are greeted at the doorway by a series of cameras capturing their images on a big screen that displays body temperature, along with age estimates, and other statistics. Chen, a general manager at the company, says the system in the doorway is the company’s bestseller at the moment because of high demand during the coronavirus pandemic.

Chen hails emotion recognition as a way to predict dangerous behaviour by prisoners, detect potential criminals at police checkpoints, problem pupils in schools and elderly people experiencing dementia in care homes.



Visitors to Taigusys in Shenzhen are greeted by cameras capturing their images on a big screen that displays body temperature, estimated age and other statistics. Photograph: Michael Standaert/The Guardian

Taigusys systems are installed in about 300 prisons, detention centres and remand facilities around China, connecting 60,000 cameras.

“Violence and suicide are very common in detention centres,” says Chen. “Even if police nowadays don’t beat prisoners, they often try to wear them down by not allowing them to fall asleep. As a result, some prisoners will have a mental breakdown and seek to kill themselves. And our system will help prevent that from happening.”

Chen says that since prisoners know they are monitored by this system – 24 hours a day, in real time – they are made more docile, which for authorities is a positive on many fronts. “Because they know what the system does, they won’t consciously try to violate certain rules,” he says.

Q&A

What is the Digital Citizens series?

Show

As part of our [Rights and Freedoms](#) project, we investigate how rapid advances in data-intensive technologies are affecting human rights around the world.

Under the cover of the pandemic, many governments have used digital technologies to track and analyse citizens' movements, quash dissent and curtail free speech – while on digital platforms truth has been manipulated and misinformation spread.

But technology can also be a powerful force for hope and justice, helping to preserve rights and freedoms in the face of rising authoritarianism.

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Besides prisons and police checkpoints, Taigusys has deployed its systems in schools to monitor teachers, pupils and staff, in care homes for older people to detect falls and changes in the emotional state of residents, and in shopping centres and car parks.

While the use of emotion-recognition technology in schools in China has sparked some criticism, there has been very little discussion of its use by authorities on citizens.

Chen, while aware of the concerns, played up the system's potential to stop violent incidents. He cites an incident where a security guard stabbed about 41 people in the province of Guangxi in southern China last June, claiming it was technologically preventable.

Vidushi Marda is a digital program manager at the British human rights organisation Article 19 and a lawyer focused on the socio-legal implications of emerging technologies. She disputes Chen's view on the Guangxi stabbing.



A ‘Smart AI Epidemic Prevention’ made by the company SenseTime, in Shenzhen, can detect if people have a fever and identify faces even behind a mask.

Photograph: Alex Plavevski/EPA

“This is a familiar and slightly frustrating narrative that we see used frequently when newer, ‘shiny’ technologies are introduced under the umbrella of safety or security, but in reality video surveillance has little nexus to safety, and I’m not sure how they thought that feedback in real time would fix violence,” Marda told the Guardian.

“A lot of biometric surveillance, I think, is closely tied to intimidation and censorship, and I suppose [emotion recognition] is one example of just that.”

Biometrics 3.0

A recent report by Article 19 on the development of these surveillance technologies – which one Chinese firm describes as “biometrics 3.0” – by 27 companies in China found its growth without safeguards and public deliberation, [was especially problematic](#), particularly in the public security and education sectors.

Ultimately, groups such as Article 19 say that the technology should be banned before widespread adoption globally makes the ramifications too difficult to contain.

The Guardian contacted a range of companies covered in the report. Only Taigusys responded to an interview request.

Another problem is that recognition systems are usually based on actors posing in what they think are happy, sad, angry and other emotional states and not on real expressions of those emotions. Facial expressions can also vary widely across cultures, leading to further inaccuracies and ethnic bias.

One Taigusys system that is used by police in China, as well as security services in Thailand and some African countries, includes identifiers such as “yellow, white, black”, [and even “Uighur”](#).



Children pass cameras in Akto, near Kashgar, Xinjiang, where China’s Uighurs face intense surveillance. Cameras can tell Uighurs from Han Chinese. Photograph: Greg Baker/AFP/Getty

“The populations in these countries are more racially diverse than in China, and in China, it’s also used to tell [Uighurs](#) from Han Chinese,” Chen says, referring to the country’s dominant ethnicity. “If an Uighur appears, they will be tagged, but it won’t tag Han Chinese.”

Potential for misuse

Asked if he was concerned about these features being misused by authorities, Chen says that he is not worried because the software is being used by police, implying that such institutions should be automatically trusted.

“I’m not concerned because it’s not our technology that’s the problem,” Chen says. “There are demands for this technology in certain scenarios and places, and we will try our best to meet those demands.”

For Shazeda Ahmed, a visiting researcher at New York University’s AI Now Institute who contributed to the Article 19 report, these are all “terrible reasons”.

“That Chinese conceptions of race are going to be built into technology and exported to other parts of the world is really troubling, particularly since there isn’t the kind of critical discourse [about racism and ethnicity in China] that we’re having in the United States,” she tells the Guardian.

“If anything, research and investigative reporting over the last few years have shown that sensitive personal information is particularly dangerous when in the hands of state entities, especially given the wide ambit of their possible use by state actors.”

One driver of the emotion-recognition technology sector in China is the country’s lack of strict privacy laws. There are essentially no laws restricting the authorities’ access to biometric data on grounds of national security or public safety, which gives companies such as Taigusys complete freedom to develop and roll out these products when similar businesses in the US, Japan or Europe cannot, says Chen.

“So we have the chance to gather as much information as possible and find the best scenarios to make use of that data,” he says.

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Rodney King: 30 years after brutal beating, activists say LAPD 'still corrupt and violent'

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Fresh faces: striking images from debut photographers – in pictures

Mini me ... detail of Jade, Farmingville, New York, from American Girls.
Photograph: Ilona Szwarc

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The age of extinctionGlobal development

Pig in clover: how the world's smallest wild hog was saved from extinction



A female pygmy hog with members of her litter. Photograph: Craig Jones

A female pygmy hog with members of her litter. Photograph: Craig Jones

The pygmy hog is still endangered but a reintroduction programme in Assam, India, has given it a greater chance of survival

The age of extinction is supported by



[About this content](#)

Kalpana Sunder

Wed 3 Mar 2021 01.15 EST

The greyish brown pygmy hog (*Porcula salvania*), with its sparse hair and a streamlined body that is about the size of a cat's, is the smallest wild pig in the world, and also one of its rarest, appearing on the [International Union for Conservation of Nature \(IUCN\) red list](#) as endangered.

Named after the sal grasslands where they were first found, they once thrived in the lush plains of the sub Himalayas from Nepal to Uttar Pradesh. But today, there are thought to be less than 300 in the wild, in Assam, [India](#).

The pygmy hog's habitat has increasingly come under pressure from human encroachment, overgrazing and the clearing of land for agriculture. "The pygmy hog is the first to disappear when the habitat changes, unlike its cousin the wild boar which adapts well to changes in its environment," says Dr Goutam Narayan, project adviser at the Pygmy Hog [Conservation Programme \(PHCP\)](#).

"Though we tend to focus on conservation of habitats for large iconic animals like the rhino, small animals like the pygmy hog are great

barometers of habitat, and we should manage these eco-sensitive animals better. They draw our attention to even minute changes in the grasslands, much before the larger species,” he adds.



Pygmy hog transport crates at the release site. Photograph: Goutam Narayan

In the 1960s, the pygmy hog was thought to be extinct, before it was “rediscovered” by a tea estate manager in 1971. Early attempts to introduce captive breeding failed until 1995, when the PHCP was established by the [Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust](#), the IUCN Wild Pig Specialist Group, Assam’s forest department and India’s environment ministry.

The organisation set up a captive breeding programme with the aim of reintroducing the animals into the wild.

“The successful captive breeding started with six hogs caught in Manas reserve in Assam,” says Parag Deka, PHCP’s project director, a veterinary scientist who joined the programme in 1997 as an intern. “Reintroduction of the captive hogs into the wild began in 2008, with 16 pygmy hogs released into the Sonai Rupai wildlife sanctuary,” he adds.



An adult male pygmy hog. Photograph: Parag Deka

At the PHCP's Assam headquarters in Basistha, the animals are bred and eventually released into Orang, Sonai-Rupai, and Bornadi wildlife sanctuaries. Before they are released into the wild, the hogs are kept in a special facility for five months.

“The Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust has experience of bringing back several species from the brink of extinction, like the Madagascar teal and the [Rodrigues fruit bat](#), and sophisticated methods of captive breeding are followed, learning from the species and fulfilling their requirements in the wild,” says Deka.

“We make sure that the pygmy hogs live with minimal human contact, their supplementary diet is reduced to 15% and they learn to forage and build social relations with other hogs, before they are released into the wild. About 12 hogs a year are released.”

The purpose of my life has been bringing back this one species from the brink of extinction

Parag Deka, project director

An omnivore that feeds on tubers, fruit, grass, insects, eggs and small reptiles, the pygmy hog is one of the few mammals in the world that actually builds a house – a shallow depression in the earth lined with vegetation and even a roof of branches.

Once reintroduced into the wild, however, keeping track of the hogs is no easy task. “They are extremely shy and elusive creatures and it’s almost impossible to sight them during field work,” says Narayan.

“With the help of camera traps as well as tracking their droppings and footprints, we manage to keep track of the hogs, and evidence of breeding,” adds Deka. “We made several attempts to develop better tracking systems and now use a coin-sized implant.”



A pygmy hog enters the wild from the release enclosure in Manas reserve.
Photograph: Goutam Narayan

The grasslands that are their habitat protect forest lands from floods and provide fodder for livestock. “We work with local communities and the forest department in proper management of grasslands, restricting overgrazing and suggesting alternatives to burning the entire grasslands,” says Deka.

“Burning of grassland to encourage fresh growth during the dry season is the greatest threat to pygmy hogs, as they need thick cover and build grass nests throughout the year.”

[Up to 48 species saved from extinction by conservation efforts, study finds](#)
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The PHCP’s aim, says Deka, is that by 2025, on the 100th anniversary of British naturalist Gerald Durrell’s birth, “the ecosystem will be restored, and the pygmy hog can thrive once again in these grasslands”.

“The purpose of my life has been bringing back this one species from the brink of extinction,” he adds.

The PHCP is optimistic that the goal will be reached but, says Narayan: “Though we have these milestones to achieve we also need to be aware of the various constraints – social and people-related issues that are interconnected with the conservation of the pygmy hog, from encroachment to supporting local livelihoods.

“Our attempt is to sensitise the community to conserving these last remaining pockets of grasslands, which are important habitats for not only the pygmy hogs, but for many other animals and birds.”

Find more [age of extinction coverage here](#), and follow biodiversity reporters [Phoebe Weston](#) and [Patrick Greenfield](#) on Twitter for all the latest news and features

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OpinionBoris Johnson

Why Boris Johnson may not need to worry about the Tory party's infighting

Rafael Behr



With Labour struggling to be heard, the Conservatives have become both government and opposition. It can be an asset



‘It is now clearer that Boris Johnson sets the agenda, but unclear what that agenda will be.’ Photograph: Reuters

‘It is now clearer that Boris Johnson sets the agenda, but unclear what that agenda will be.’ Photograph: Reuters

Wed 3 Mar 2021 02.00 EST

Unity is strength in politics, but also rare. All governments contain divisions. All prime ministers learn to live with disloyalty.

For most of the time that Boris Johnson has been dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, Conservative MPs have muttered discontentedly in the background. They have [agitated against lockdowns](#), demanded more spending and resisted tax rises.

The prime minister’s commanding [victory at the last election](#) gives him a cushion, 80 seats deep, to absorb Commons rebellions, but he can still be damaged if all the malcontents kick off simultaneously. A large majority breeds indiscipline, creating a pool of MPs who languish in obscurity, unafraid of Labour and feeling neglected by their leader.

Divisions in Johnson’s ranks also reflect the diverse voter coalition he assembled in 2019, using Brexit as an electoral bridge from affluent

southern Tory heartlands to former Labour strongholds in the north and Midlands. Those voters channel [divergent demands](#) through their MPs. The “red wall”, with shallow electoral foundations, needs propping up with money. The Treasury says some of the revenue must come from taxes levied on the deeper-blue parts of the coalition, which are reluctant to pay.

Those competing budget imperatives limit Rishi Sunak’s room for manoeuvre before he has started on the journey of post-pandemic reconstruction. Downing Street is eager to build things in marginal constituencies; the chancellor wants to fill the holes in the public finances. That is a likely source of future conflict (leading to noisier speculation about [Sunak’s ambitions](#) for the top job).

According to the maxim of strength through unity, Johnson’s administration should already look debilitated. Yet the Tory poll rating is resilient and the party mood is upbeat. Mostly that is vaccine bounce – and Tory speculation that Johnson’s handling of the crisis will be remembered more for the speedy jabs than the preceding complacency and avoidable deaths.

It is not a coincidence that No 10 has projected a more professional demeanour since Dominic Cummings [left the building](#) last year, although policies have not changed. The difference, say insiders, is that the Vote Leave ethos of perpetual campaign aggression, carried over from the Brexit referendum, was not conducive to practical government.

[This budget will prolong the Tories' vaccine bounce: for now, Labour must sit tight | Polly Toynbee](#)
[Read more](#)

Also, Cummings had his own projects and methods, which chimed with Johnson’s worldview but were not always his priorities. The chief adviser did not see himself as a subordinate. It took the prime minister too long to realise that he was the vehicle and not the driver. That has been fixed. It is now clearer that Johnson sets the agenda, but unclear what that agenda will be: something to do with “levelling up”; something green.

Reducing the sociopath count inside No 10 has improved the government’s image but not solved the problem of Johnson’s [indecision and managerial](#)

[negligence](#). He will carry on agreeing with contradictory advice in successive meetings. He will still undermine his allies, then act wounded and surprised when they complain about the betrayal.

In Whitehall a reshuffle, cast as a full government reboot, is expected early in the summer. Johnson needs to dispose of incompetents who were given ministerial portfolios as rewards for subservience ([farewell then, Gavin Williamson](#)), and rehire veteran secretaries of state who might run departments without causing cascading crises (welcome back, Sajid Javid).

But reshuffles are fraught with risk. Demotion breeds enmity. It will be tricky to clear out a cabinet that was assembled in a spirit of peak Brexit fanaticism without sending hardliners into embittered backbench exile. The Conservative party is only ever a few duff poll results away from the conclusion that its leader is a namby-pamby liberal who must be dragged further to the right or replaced with someone who is there already.

Judging by recent experience, the Tory mood – currently on the upswing – will sway back to panic, despondency and talk of regicide before the year is out. And then, perhaps, it will revert to overconfident swagger. That is the usual rhythm.

Yet a pattern of volatility and civil strife has not stopped the party monopolising power in Westminster for more than a decade. Sometimes it makes things harder for [Labour](#) because the most effective, news-making opposition work has been insourced to the ruling party. A blue-on-blue riot drowns out the red leader. That is partly a legacy of Brexit and the Corbyn years. The opposition was consumed by its own civil war and had no position on the issue that dominated politics through two elections.

But before that, in the coalition years, Labour also struggled to make itself relevant. Too much political and media bandwidth was taken up by the dynamics of David Cameron's partnership with the Liberal Democrats, and the [backlash that provoked on the right](#) as disgruntled Tories made common cause with Ukip.

At the height of the New Labour era, it was the Tories who were pushed to the margins by a government with full-spectrum cultural dominance. Tony

Blair was more regularly troubled by rebellion on his own benches or [vendetta with his chancellor](#) than anything a Tory leader said.

The ability of a government to supply its own opposition is now being displayed to great effect by the Scottish National party, in the form of a [gruesome feud](#) between the current first minister and her predecessor. That spectacle might dent the SNP's performance in May's Holyrood elections, but no one expects the party to cede control.

In England, Labour still has regional and municipal bastions. Sadiq Khan and Andy Burnham will almost certainly hold London and Manchester in spring ballots. But at Westminster, the Tories are settling into comfortable equilibrium as government and in-house opposition. Johnson's lack of mooring to any belief is seen as a moral shortcoming by his critics, but most voters aren't fussy about doctrinal rigour. Precedent suggests they are also relaxed about dissent within a ruling party, as long as it does not descend into a spectacle of dysfunction. Ideological incoherence (if noticed) is tolerated. Incompetence is not.

Division brings governments down when the ruling party is more interested in fighting itself than anything else. Sometimes MPs are so exhausted and disillusioned that they start to fancy opposition as respite; a chance to regroup. The Tories reached that point in 1997, but only after 18 years in office. They do not surrender power casually. Their disputes over policy and principle are contained by the overarching ambition to govern, and a sense of entitlement to rule. Winning is their business; feuding is for pleasure. With Labour, it is often the other way round.

There will be more cycles of Tory infighting and reconciliation. Johnson's position will look alternately precarious and untouchable. Still, a lesson of history is that Conservative division does not necessarily end in defeat. Unity can be a strength, but there are times when disunity is no weakness.

- Rafael Behr is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionFashion

My friend's mantra, 'Face on, joggers off', has inspired me – it's time to rediscover the joys of dressing up

[Jenny Stevens](#)



After a year of collective agony and grief, rekindling our creative flair could be the way to find ourselves again



This spring, it's time to bring back the big-lash energy. Photograph: Lilly Roadstones/Getty Images (Posed by model)

This spring, it's time to bring back the big-lash energy. Photograph: Lilly Roadstones/Getty Images (Posed by model)

Wed 3 Mar 2021 02.00 EST

“I’ve lost my mascara, and do you know the worst thing?” my friend rails. “I didn’t even notice!” For context, this is a woman who permed her eyelashes in the first lockdown. So, imagine it as the cosmetic equivalent of Stevie Wonder waking up tone-deaf, or Jeff Bezos suddenly caring deeply about workers’ rights. This spring, she says, it’s time to bring back the big-lash energy. “Face on, joggers off,” is her new mantra.

The mood is catching. The cover of this week’s *Grazia* has the strapline “Making the case for getting dressed again”, while another friend has skipped the “joggers off” phase, and is already researching summer outfits. “Is 35 too old to wear a crop top?” she messaged the other day. “Should I get a tattoo?” asks another. The answers are always, in order: absolutely not and absolutely, but in 2021 there is even more reason to free ourselves from the constraints of what we think we “should” be wearing for our age and body type. After 12 months of social upheaval, collective agony and isolation, the very least we can allow ourselves is the joy of dressing however we please.

There is strength in the simple act of getting dressed. I am reminded of the women in the French resistance, photographed by Lee Miller, who saw [dressing as well as they could as an act of rebellion against the Nazis](#). The message was: you may have stripped our country of everything we have, but you will not trample our creative flair or spirit.

The Lebanese television host Raymonde Boutros said of the country's civil war: "Fashion is like a flower in a vase. It helps you forget the horrors of yesterday and cope with tomorrow." And so whether you plan to put on a face, a crop top, a shirt or even a bra, as we all emerge from this pandemic older, grieving and unkempt, remember that the very small act of getting dressed up could well be a way of finding ourselves again.

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Bitcoin and Robinhood will end badly for those who can least afford it

[Nouriel Roubini](#)

Millions in precarious jobs are betting scant savings on worthless stocks and cryptocurrencies via share-dealing apps



Markets are being inflated by QE, share-dealing apps such as Robinhood and the cryptocurrency craze. It will end badly, says Nouriel Roubini. Photograph: Dado Ruvić/Reuters

Markets are being inflated by QE, share-dealing apps such as Robinhood and the cryptocurrency craze. It will end badly, says Nouriel Roubini. Photograph: Dado Ruvić/Reuters

Wed 3 Mar 2021 01.00 EST

The US economy's K-shaped recovery is under way. Those with stable full-time jobs, benefits, and a financial cushion are faring well as stock markets

climb to new highs. Those who are unemployed or partially employed in low-value-added blue-collar and service jobs – the new “[precariat](#)” – are saddled with debt, have little financial wealth, and face diminishing economic prospects.

These trends indicate a growing disconnect between Wall Street and Main Street. The new stock market highs mean nothing to most people. The bottom 50% of the wealth distribution holds just [0.7% of total equity market assets](#), whereas the top 10% commands 87.2%, and the top 1% holds 51.8%. The [50 richest people](#) have as much wealth as the 165 million people at the bottom.

Rising inequality has followed the ascent of “big tech”. As many as three retail jobs [are lost](#) for every job that Amazon creates, and similar dynamics hold true in other sectors dominated by tech giants. But today’s social and economic stresses are not new. For decades, strapped workers have not been able to keep up with the Joneses, owing to the [stagnation](#) of real (inflation-adjusted) median income alongside rising costs of living and spending expectations.

For decades, the “solution” to this problem was to “democratise” finance so that poor and struggling households could borrow more to buy homes they couldn’t afford, and then use those homes as cash machines. This expansion of consumer credit – mortgages and other debt – resulted in a bubble that ended with the 2008 financial crisis, when millions lost their jobs, homes, and savings.

Now, the same millennials who were shafted over a decade ago are being duped again. Workers who rely on gig, part-time, or freelance “employment” are being offered a new rope with which to hang themselves in the name of “financial democratization.” Millions have [opened accounts](#) on Robinhood and other investment apps, where they can leverage their scant savings and incomes several times over to speculate on worthless stocks.

The recent [GameStop](#) narrative, featuring a united front of heroic small day traders fighting evil short-selling hedge funds, masks the ugly reality that a cohort of hopeless, jobless, skill-less, debt-burdened individuals is being exploited once again. Many have been convinced that financial success lies

not in good jobs, hard work, and patient saving and investment, but in get-rich-quick schemes and wagers on inherently worthless assets such as cryptocurrencies (or “shitcoins” as I prefer to call them).

[Wall Street versus the Redditors: the GameStop goldrush – podcast](#)

[Read more](#)

Make no mistake: The populist meme in which an army of millennial Davids takes down a Wall Street Goliath is merely serving another scheme to fleece clueless amateur investors. As in 2008, the inevitable result will be another asset bubble. The difference is that this time, recklessly populist members of Congress have taken to [inveighing](#) against financial intermediaries for not permitting the vulnerable to leverage themselves even more.

Making matters worse, markets are starting to worry about the massive experiment in [budget-deficit monetisation](#) being carried out by the US Federal Reserve and Department of the Treasury through quantitative easing (a form of Modern Monetary Theory or “helicopter money”). A growing chorus of critics [warns](#) that this approach could overheat the economy, forcing the Fed to hike interest rates sooner than expected. Nominal and real bond yields are already [rising](#), and this has shaken risky assets such as equities. Owing to these concerns about a Fed-led taper tantrum, a recovery that was supposed to be good for markets is now giving way to a market correction.

Meanwhile, congressional Democrats are moving ahead with a \$1.9tn rescue package that will include additional direct support to households. But with millions already in arrears on rent and utilities payments or in moratoria on their mortgages, credit cards, and other loans, a significant share of these disbursements will go toward debt repayment and saving, with only around one-third of the stimulus likely to be translated into actual spending.

[Why the GameStop affair is a perfect example of 'platform populism' | Evgeny Morozov](#)

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This implies that the package’s effects on growth, inflation, and bond yields will be smaller than expected. And because the additional savings will end

up being funneled back into purchases of government bonds, what was meant to be a bailout for strapped households will in effect become a bailout for banks and other lenders.

To be sure, inflation may eventually still emerge if the effects of monetized fiscal deficits combine with negative supply shocks to produce stagflation. The risk of such shocks has risen as a result of the new Sino-American cold war, which threatens to trigger a process of deglobalization and economic Balkanisation as countries pursue renewed protectionism and the re-shoring of investments and manufacturing operations. But this is a story for the medium term, not for 2021.

When it comes to this year, growth may yet fall short of expectations. New strains of the coronavirus continue to emerge, raising concerns that existing vaccines may no longer be sufficient to end the pandemic. Repeated stop-go cycles undermine confidence, and political pressure to reopen the economy before the virus is contained will continue to build. Many small- and medium-size enterprises are still at risk of going bust, and far too many people are facing the prospects of long-term unemployment. The list of pathologies afflicting the economy is long and includes rising inequality, deleveraging by debt-burdened firms and workers, and political and geopolitical risks.

[The GameStop affair is like tulip mania on steroids | Dan Davies](#)
[Read more](#)

Asset markets remain frothy – if not outright bubbly – because they are being fed by super-accommodative monetary policies. But today's [price/earnings ratios](#) are as high they were in the bubbles preceding the busts of 1929 and 2000. Between ever-rising leverage and the potential for bubbles in special-purpose acquisition companies, tech stocks, and cryptocurrencies, today's market mania offers plenty of cause for concern.

Under these conditions, the Fed is probably worried that markets will instantly crash if it takes away the punch bowl. And with the increase in public and private debt preventing the eventual monetary normalization, the likelihood of stagflation in the medium term – and a hard landing for asset markets and economies – continues to increase.

Nouriel Roubini is professor of economics at New York University's Stern School of Business. He has worked for the IMF, the US [Federal Reserve](#) and the World Bank.

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Steve Bell on French ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy's corruption conviction - cartoon

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OpinionNicolas Sarkozy

Sarkozy's conviction shows, at last, French presidents may no longer be above the law

Philippe Marlière



The corruption verdict reflects growing exasperation at heads of state's aloofness and lack of accountability



Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy arriving at court in Paris, 1 March 2021. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy arriving at court in Paris, 1 March 2021. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

Tue 2 Mar 2021 12.25 EST

On Monday, a criminal court in Paris handed down its verdict in Nicolas Sarkozy's corruption trial. The former French president was sentenced to [three years in jail](#) – two of them suspended – for bribery and influence-peddling.

This is a legal landmark for the French judicial system for two main reasons. First, no former president had been sentenced to an actual prison sentence since France's collaborationist leader [Marshal Pétain in 1945](#). (This said, Sarkozy's one-year jail sentence will probably not be spent behind bars, but under house arrest [with an electronic tag](#)). The former president Jacques Chirac received a two-year suspended sentence in 2011 for embezzling public funds [when he was Paris mayor](#).

And second, the French judicial system has long been seen as being deferential to the government of the day in sensitive political cases. This court decision definitely runs counter to this tradition. It took a lot of

tenacity on the part of the Parquet National Financier (the judicial institution in charge of tracking down complex financial crimes) to counter attempts by [Sarkozy and his allies](#) to undermine its authority. In the end, the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law prevailed. It was also the triumph of democracy: evidence that no citizen, however powerful he or she might be, is above the law.

The case centred on phone conversations between Sarkozy and Thierry Herzog, his former lawyer. These calls were monitored by French police from September 2013, as part of an investigation into claims Sarkozy had received an illegal and undeclared donation to his 2007 presidential campaign from Muammar Gaddafi, then leader of Libya. (Sarkozy has denied any impropriety.) At the same time, a separate police investigation was under way into allegations that Sarkozy had received illegal payments from the ailing L'Oréal heiress Liliane Bettencourt for the 2007 campaign. (These charges against Sarkozy were dropped in October 2013.)

The court heard that conversations between Sarkozy and Herzog in 2014 suggested that Sarkozy had promised a senior magistrate, Gilbert Azibert, a top job in Monaco in return for inside information about the Bettencourt inquiry.

Judge Christine Mée ruled that compelling evidence demonstrated a “pact of corruption” between Herzog, Azibert and [Sarkozy himself](#).

She concluded that Sarkozy, a former lawyer, “knew that he was doing something wrong”. His actions and those of his lawyer had given the public “a very bad image of justice, and this called for a criminal sanction”. She also added that Sarkozy’s crimes were “extremely serious because they had been committed by a former president who, constitutionally, should guarantee the [judiciary’s independence](#)”.

The damning verdict did not silence Sarkozy’s political supporters. They rushed to the broadcast studios to denigrate the decision and lambast the judges, questioning the fairness and independence of what they regard as a “[political verdict](#)”. This reaction is reminiscent of Silvio Berlusconi’s attacks on Italian magistrates – whom the former Italian president labelled “[red judges](#)”.

More worrying, though, was the reaction of Gérard Darmanin, the rightwing interior minister, whose role is to fight corruption. Though in Emmanuel Macron's government, he's a former member of Sarkozy's party. Minutes after the verdict was released, he declared his "[friendly support](#)" for the ex-president. Such a statement could be a massive boost to the far right – whose support feeds off the sense that France's elite are all in it for themselves. The public reaction [on social media](#) was incandescent.

Several of Sarkozy's friends and associates have also separately been convicted of financial wrongdoing, [including](#) his political mentor Charles Pasqua, his former prime minister François Fillon, his former chief of staff Michel Gaudin and a former close adviser, [Boris Boillon](#). Yet, despite such baggage, Sarkozy was recently being touted as the potential [conservative candidate](#) for the 2022 presidential election. And, further fuelling distrust of the political elite, Macron is said to have been on cordial terms with Sarkozy before his conviction. In 2018, the current host of the Élysée Palace even [asked Sarkozy to deputise for him](#) in a state ceremony.

How could Macron, the once feted [young liberal leader](#), have been so reckless and entertained [the most polarising president](#) of the postwar period? How could he have befriended someone who epitomises "[bling](#)" and who once launched an [astonishing attack](#) on the "moral and intellectual permissiveness of May 1968" and the progressive, liberal attitudes it heralded?

Leftwing critics may argue that the men are two sides of the same neoliberal-authoritarian coin. However, what they indeed have in common is that they were both elected to the presidency of the Fifth Republic – the "Gaullist Republic", born in 1958 as a reaction to the ongoing French colonial war in Algeria. It allocates extraordinary constitutional powers to the president but imposes [little accountability](#) on him. As a consequence, French voters elect a "hyper-president" or a "[republican monarch](#)" with all the pomp that goes with it. It is no surprise that presidents, once in office, are rapidly perceived as out of touch.

The Sarkozy brand is now irreversibly contaminated, and his political career is over. He is due to appear in court again later this month over the so-called

Bygmalion affair, in which he is accused of having overspent in his unsuccessful 2012 re-election campaign.

The Sarkozy trials may be heralding a change of political culture in [France](#). The era of arrogant and aloof presidents who seem untouchable and above the law may be about to end. This criminal conviction is happening at a time when the French have grown exasperated at the lack of accountability of their president. With presidential elections taking place next year, and the left and the far right eager to capitalise on public discontent with the system, who knows what the political consequences might be?

- Philippe Marlière is professor of French and European politics at University College London

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[Opinion](#)**Mental health**

I'm not ashamed medication got me through the pandemic – but we need talking therapies too

[Jenny Stevens](#)



Prescription drugs helped my fraying mental health, but a lack of psychological support can undermine the good work they do



The difference became obvious ... I could feel the warmth of the sun on my face. (Posed by a model.) Photograph: Moof/Getty Images/Cultura RF

The difference became obvious ... I could feel the warmth of the sun on my face. (Posed by a model.) Photograph: Moof/Getty Images/Cultura RF

Tue 2 Mar 2021 09.31 EST

How did you get through lockdown? Was it baking or running or meditating? Maybe you took up art, or the guitar, or joinery – or just screaming into a pillow. For me, it was psychiatric medication. At present, I am on more meds than I have ever taken before – which says something as I spent a full year in a psychiatric hospital.

Before the pandemic, I was on antidepressants, working on getting slowly better from an eating disorder, managing depression and anxiety and the voices that yell or chatter – depending on the day – telling me I'm a failure, that I should stop breathing, that my friends and family hate me. Taking my meds significantly reduces the stretches of time I spend stagnant, gripped by blackness and staring at the cobwebs on my bedroom ceiling. They give me the fight I need to do weekly talking therapy, which in turn gives me the fight to get on with the job of living.

However, Covid unsteadied me, as it did for everyone. The bad voices became clearer and louder as the world became more viscous, confusing and frightening. I barely slept, and, when I did, my dreams started to seep into my reality. My mind was fraying.

I was referred to a psychiatrist, who suggested an additional medication. “But I want to reduce my meds, not take more,” I said. “Why?” was his exasperated reply. And the answer was simple – no matter how irrational I knew this was, I somehow felt that I should.

People too often still look at their shoes when you mention antidepressants or other psychiatric medication. Headlines speak of patients being [“trapped for life”](#) on them, or their links to [serial killings](#), and their drain on NHS resources. Antidepressant prescriptions on the NHS in England have doubled in the space of 10 years; in the three months to September 2020, [more than 6 million](#) patients were issued scripts for the drugs, the highest figure on record. This is encouraging. That more people feel able to speak to their GPs about mental health problems and low mood, particularly in a time of global crisis, can only be a good thing.

However, that period also marked a dramatic 28% [fall in patients being referred to NHS talking therapies](#) – their [Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme](#). The [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence](#) guidelines are clear that any initial prescription of antidepressants should be given alongside psychological treatment such as therapy, and yet waiting times of upwards of 12 months are increasingly common.

I have been on and off antidepressants since I was a teenager and was never offered therapy, despite continually asking for it, until I was admitted into hospital in 2018 at the age of 32. About six months before my admission, I was misdiagnosed by a psychiatrist and prescribed the maximum dose of a mood-stabilising medication with some uncomfortable side-effects that took me a full year to come off; again, I was offered no talking therapy.

This is how stigma is allowed to flourish about medication: when patients are not listened to, are fobbed off or left to flounder with just a prescription

and no follow-up. A lack of psychological support undermines the good work that medication can do. And, in the very worst of cases, it costs lives.

My psychiatrist suggested a few different types of medication that would work with my antidepressants to help with the insomnia and heightened anxiety and “leaking” between reality and fantasy – something extra to patch the frayed edges.

The difference became obvious in just a few weeks. I sleep at night, I feel the warmth of the sun on my face, I know when I am awake. I am out of bed and dressed and back on the ground.

From this place, I am able to do the day-to-day things that keep me sane and stable. I have been quilting, running, speaking to friends and family on video calls, going out in the garden and working and thinking and reading. I feel no shame in getting some extra help to cope with an unprecedented period of grief and strain – and nor should anybody else.

Jenny Stevens is a commissioning editor on Guardian Features

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

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The politics sketch Yemen

Even inaptly named Cleverly sees fault lines in Yemen aid argument

[John Crace](#)



MPs reckon government is taking calculated risk in assuming Tories are keener on money spent at home



James Cleverly could only repeat the feeble lines his advisers had prepared for him. Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

James Cleverly could only repeat the feeble lines his advisers had prepared for him. Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

Tue 2 Mar 2021 12.41 EST

Yemen remained among the worst humanitarian crises in the world, said James Cleverly, junior Foreign Office minister responsible for the Middle East, in answer to an urgent question from fellow Tory Andrew Mitchell. Two-thirds of the population were in need of assistance. 47,000 people were living in famine conditions and a further 16.2 million were at risk of starvation.

After an opening like this, you rather expected Cleverly to explain why the UK government was increasing its overseas aid budget to the country. Instead he chose to justify [cutting it by over 50%](#) during the next financial year. Yemen would be getting “at least” £87m of the £214m it was currently receiving. Indeed if it played its cards right, the minister might even bung in an extra £100,000 as a goodwill gesture. The truth was that the UK had already been doing too much to help Yemen and it was time to step back and let the country fend for itself.

Cleverly may be one of the most inappropriately named MPs, but even he could see the fault lines in his argument and he spent much of the next 45 minutes fending off hits from both his own and the opposition benches. First in was Mitchell, who questioned the morality of the fifth-wealthiest country in the world cutting aid to one of the poorest in the middle of a pandemic. “This is not who we are,” he said. Unfortunately, it is.

That was only the start. The shadow international development secretary, Preet Kaur Gill, wondered if it was any coincidence that we were cutting aid while selling arms to the Saudis who were using them on the Yemenis. What goes around comes around, I suppose. David Davis and Damian Green reminded the government that it had been elected on a manifesto of donating 0.7% of GDP in overseas aid and that any cuts to the budget could only be passed by a vote in the Commons. This wasn’t just a matter of trust; it was also a moral duty.

By now Cleverly was cutting a thoroughly broken figure at the dispatch box and could only repeat in a dull monotone the feeble lines his advisers had prepared for him. Labour had never donated more than 0.51% of GDP in foreign aid, so they could shut up for a start. It didn’t seem to have occurred to him that having previously done the right thing by donating 0.7% was no excuse for doing the wrong thing now.

Time and again he repeated that the £87m to Yemen was “a floor not a ceiling” but no one really believed him. Once the money had been cut, there wasn’t a cat in hell’s chance of it being revised upwards when the economic situation improved. Rather, MPs from all sides reckoned the government was taking a calculated risk in assuming that most Tories would be more interested in money spent at home than aid to help hundreds of thousands of Yemenis stay alive. And if all it took was for Cleverly to be made to look a bit hopeless and untrustworthy for just under an hour, then it was a price worth paying.

Next up in the chamber was [Matt Hancock](#), who had come to give an entirely unnecessary update on coronavirus, given that almost everything he had to say was already in the public domain. But the health secretary is now living his best life and is determined to milk it for all its worth. Not so long ago, every Commons statement was fraught with danger for Door Matt. An

opportunity for his opponents to raise awkward questions about the UK death toll and the failures of test and trace.

But the success of the vaccination programme has changed everything. While the Pfizer and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines are providing unexpectedly high levels of immunity to the virus in older members of the population, they are granting the health secretary near-total immunity from all awkward questions. No one wants to focus on negative stuff, such as the death rate, when there is finally some hope on the horizon. Even the missing person with the [Brazilian variant](#) is merely a nuisance rather than a serious cause for concern.

It may still all go tits up, of course, with a mutant strain that is resistant to the vaccine, but for now Matt is just happy to ride the wave. More disturbingly, the change in fortunes has released his inner bumptious child. He displays little graciousness in being bailed out by the scientists: rather, he increasingly acts as if he alone has saved the UK and is irked when MPs aren't sufficiently grateful to him. Still, if that's what it takes to beat the pandemic, I guess most of us can live with it. For a while at least.

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OpinionBudget 2021

This budget will prolong the Tories' vaccine bounce: for now, Labour must sit tight

[Polly Toynbee](#)



This is the worst of times for an opposition, but rest assured Johnson and Sunak's charms will begin to wear thin



‘Rishi Sunak brims with self-confidence, his PR machine churning out flattering videos. He is king of the castle – for now.’ Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters

‘Rishi Sunak brims with self-confidence, his PR machine churning out flattering videos. He is king of the castle – for now.’ Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters

Tue 2 Mar 2021 02.00 EST

Rishi Sunak will have a glorious day on Wednesday. Nothing will ever be as perfect as this budget – [bounty will flow](#) and yet he will proclaim himself a traditional, tight-fisted, low-tax Conservative chancellor.

[Keir Starmer is right to oppose the corporation tax increase | Alan Johnson](#)
[Read more](#)

In this golden moment he will renew temporary cash-splashing. Expect pork barrel munificence for “red wall” seats perched on thin majorities: the pork will look deceptively lavish, with most voters too distracted to count noughts or to examine who it really benefits. He’ll no doubt reprise those northern rail schemes re-announced [60 times in seven years](#), with not a spade in the ground. And there are others more in need of housing security than those [saving for their first home](#).

All budgets are pure politics, so he will sonorously “level with people” that debt means future tax rises, to sound sternly prudent with the purse-strings. He [reassured](#) the Sunday Telegraph leader-writing diehards calling for tax and spending cuts with his true creed: “I am a Conservative and I believe in lower taxes.” So in this budget, and for this budget only, he will outdo his boss on cakeism.

This is odd. Objectively any chancellor would hold their head in their hands at spreadsheets on their desk showing sky-rocketing debt, a spectacular fall in growth and the Bank of England predicting unemployment at [a shocking 7.75%](#) soon. Yet he brims with self-confidence, his PR machine churning out [flattering videos](#). He is king of the castle – for now.

Precisely as pollsters predicted, the Tories are benefiting from a [vaccine bounce](#). The end is nigh (barring new Covid variant catastrophe), freedom dates are ringed on every calendar. No government in my lifetime has had a chance to gift every citizen such instant euphoria as this life-preserving injection.

This is the worst of times for an opposition, a bystander carping at the government’s monumental blunders and disgraces, too soon forgotten (though never forgiven by many families of the dead). In this Covid-transfixed time, few are interested in Labour policies. Except, of course, Labour-supporting political aficionados, writhing at painful polls with Opinium showing the Tories [seven points ahead](#). Yet while the “vaccine bounce” is inevitable, the opposition and its supporters would do well to keep calm: it won’t last.

An absurd brouhaha blew up on Labour’s twitchy benches when Keir Starmer and Anneliese Dodds [opposed tax rises now](#), including corporation tax. Were they outflanking the Tories from the right? No, this was pure Keynes: don’t tax and choke off a recovery. When the economy is in a trough, borrow and spend, don’t repeat George Osborne’s blunders. As you head into a recession, keep cash flowing and hold off on business taxes. Dodds is appalled by the [5% rise in council tax](#) crippling already stricken households: instead, councils need the grants that were stripped from them in the austerity decade.

The [Institute for Fiscal Studies \(IFS\)](#) says [£60bn](#) in tax must be raised at some point, including radical reforms to lavish reliefs for the wealthy – but they too say not now. The Resolution Foundation wants a £100bn Biden-style [stimulus package](#). However, a progressive thinktank's wise policy for massive borrowing may not be so easy for Labour to promote.

Labour is up against this: on trust to run the economy, [Johnson and Sunak score 39%](#) while Starmer and Dodds trail at just 25%. Without at least level-pegging on economic trust, Labour can never win. The albatross around its neck is the unjust blame it still carries for the 2008 crash and the Corbyn manifesto seen as wildly spendthrift. The bitter lesson is those policies were affordable financially, but not politically. Credibility is all and it's usually an artifice.

Voters believed Osborne's [maxed-out-the-credit-card lie](#). Imagining Treasury debt as a household overdraft, they accepted national belt-tightening. Keynes understood that borrowing more when in debt was a [hard-to-sell "paradox"](#). Sunak will try Osborne's trick: you can bet his "fiscal responsibility" hides austerity cuts alongside tax rises. The chancellor seeks clear blue water between his "fiscal rectitude" and Labour "prodigality", but he already knows austerity is out of favour. Boris Johnson has promised spending, but filling the black holes in funds for schools, social care, council services, law courts and nurseries is nowhere in Treasury plans. As pay freezes bite, "levelling up" will soon emerge as the imposter it always was.

Economic trust is 10 times harder for Labour to win. Extreme caution saw Tony Blair and Gordon Brown sign up to [eyewatering Tory plans](#) in 1997, economically needless, but politically essential. Right now, Labour needs to keep calm, be patient. When vaccine joy is over, the charm of Sunak's showbiz and Johnson's rumpled roguery will wear thin, raising the unflashy appeal of a serious, decent and honest opposition frontbench.

Is that enough? Where are the lighthouse ideas? For now, Labour should continue to hammer this government's serial outrages – and soon enough, its better answers will be heard. Catastrophic [youth unemployment is worsening](#), the government's "kickstart" scheme [is already failing](#) and Labour will always do social programmes better. Nonetheless, last week's

major King's College London and IFS survey on [attitudes to inequality](#) is a dire warning to Labour not to leap too far ahead of voters, with half saying Covid unemployment is people's own fault.

All those impatient, straining at the leash over this budget, stop and think: rallying existing [Labour](#) supporters with radical social justice policies feels good, but currently cuts little ice with a conservative electorate. I share the extreme frustration, but patience comes first. Like an army waiting for the enemy, don't break ranks but sit tight until the time is ripe.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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[Nils Pratley on finance](#)Stock markets

London stock market review does nothing for private retail investors

[Nils Pratley](#).



Lord Hill's gentle easing of other governance principles will still invigorate the listings regime



Jonathan Hill's changes to Spacs will cause controversy due to the lack of scrutiny that will result. Photograph: Olivier Hoslet/EPA

Jonathan Hill's changes to Spacs will cause controversy due to the lack of scrutiny that will result. Photograph: Olivier Hoslet/EPA

Tue 2 Mar 2021 17.30 EST

“It makes no sense to have a theoretically perfect listing regime if in practice users increasingly choose other venues,” says Lord Hill in the introduction to his report on how to shake up London’s stock market listings regime.

It’s a fair, pragmatic point. London accounted for only 5% of IPOs, or flotations, globally between 2015 and 2020, which is a feeble performance if the post-Brexit ambition for the stock market is to rival New York, and not just deflect Amsterdam’s challenge. A few of London’s supposedly sacred governance principles were always likely to be sacrificed.

At least Hill has tried to soften the process. The least objectionable proposal is the green light for dual classes of shares. Such “golden share” structures are a governance no-no but the US, by accepting them, has dealt itself an ace card to lay in front of footloose founders of technology firms. Hill proposes a five-year limit on “golden share” structure. That is better, governance-wise, than open-ended US arrangements.

Nor should a reduction in “free floats” – the minimum proportion of shares available to outsiders – from 25% to 15% cause too much fuss. Actual liquidity, rather than percentages, is more important.

Hill’s embrace of Spacs, or “blank cheque” special purpose acquisition companies that are all the rage in the US, will rightly be more controversial. He could have taken a harder line against elaborate structures that seem designed to bypass traditional levels of scrutiny by investors. Hill recommended a Spac regime that would be stricter than Amsterdam’s. That’s not saying much.

The real disappointment, though, was the lack of a big proposal to boost the role of private retail investors in stock markets – the cause [championed here yesterday](#). There were warm words about the importance of individual investors, and a few ideas to make IPO prospectuses more user-friendly, but the Treasury has effectively been handed the job of conducting another review to remove obstacles in front of retail participation. Maybe it will happen; maybe it won’t.

The rest of review, though, should be broadly acceptable. London needs to be in the game of attracting young and growing companies. For governance purists, it could have been worse.

Engineering a tricky sale

It’s end-of-an-era time in Wotton-under-Edge in Gloucestershire, global base of Renishaw, one of the UK’s most quietly successful engineering companies.

Sir David McMurtry and John Deer founded the maker of ultra-precise measuring devices and equipment in 1973 and now, having reached their 80s, they want to sell their stakes. Between them, they own 52% of Renishaw, a holding worth roughly £2.5bn, so the whole firm is on the block.

As you would expect (or hope), McMurtry and Deer do not wish their life’s work to end up with a carve-up merchant. They are seeking innovation-led

buyers that will “respect the unique heritage and culture of the business, its commitment to the local communities in which its operations are based”.

One hopes the duo find what they are looking for, but the task does not look easy, however. At £5bn – in other words, within touching distance of the [FTSE](#) 100 index – Renishaw is not a small mouthful. It is hard to think of a British engineering company that is both big enough and would fit the bill. Rolls-Royce is valued at £9bn but is fighting fires on many fronts; in any case, while it is customer of Renishaw, this isn't its market.

A large overseas engineering combine therefore seems the most likely buyer. That could still be honourable way to go, of course; it would depend on the buyer's commitments to the business. But it would also feel a slightly underwhelming finale.

Furlough relief shouldn't be budget spin

Is there anything left to reveal in the budget? We'll find out soon enough but the Treasury's late news on Tuesday that the furlough scheme is being extended until September would normally have qualified as a “rabbit out of the hat” announcement. An extension of only two or three months from the current April cut-off had been expected.

A longer timetable is sensible and will be welcomed, especially by small employers in sectors such as hospitality and events. But why couldn't it have been made a month ago or six weeks ago, which was the point of greater uncertainty for firms? The obsession with budget day (and the run-up to budget day) is not healthy.

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FBI

FBI chief calls Capitol attack 'domestic terrorism' and defends US intelligence

Christopher Wray says ‘that attack, that siege, was criminal behavior, plain and simple ... and has no place in our democracy’

- [US politics – live coverage](#)

05:04

FBI chief calls Capitol attack 'domestic terrorism' and defends US intelligence – video highlights

[Joan E Greve](#) in Washington and agencies

[@joanegreve](#)

Tue 2 Mar 2021 12.31 EST

The [FBI](#) director, Chris Wray, has condemned the 6 January riot at the US Capitol as an instance of “domestic terrorism”, while defending the bureau’s handling of intelligence indicating that violence was likely.

[Seditionaries: FBI net closes on Maga mob that stormed the Capitol](#)

[Read more](#)

“That attack, that siege, was criminal behavior, plain and simple, and it’s behavior that we, the FBI, view as domestic terrorism,” Wray told the Senate judiciary committee on Tuesday. He also said the bureau was pursuing about 2,000 domestic terrorism investigations, up from 1,400 at end of 2020.

Donald Trump incited the Capitol attack, telling supporters at a rally near the White House to “fight like hell” in an attempt to overturn his electoral defeat based on the lie, repeatedly thrown out of court, that Biden won thanks to electoral fraud.

Five people including a Capitol police officer were killed. Trump was impeached on a charge of inciting an insurrection but acquitted when only seven Republican senators voted to convict.

Wray told senators the attack had “no place in our democracy, and tolerating it would make a mockery of our nation’s rule of law”.

The FBI was aggressively pursuing those who carried out the attack, he said, adding that investigations were under way in 55 of 56 FBI field offices. More than 200 people have been charged.

His comments in his first appearance before Congress since the Capitol attack amounted to the FBI’s most vigorous defense against the suggestion it did not adequately communicate to police the distinct possibility of violence as lawmakers gathered to certify presidential election results.

Wray told lawmakers information was properly shared before the riot, even though it was raw and unverified.

A 5 January report from the FBI field office in Norfolk, Virginia, warned of online posts foreshadowing a “war” in Washington the following day. Capitol police leaders have said they were unaware of that report and received no intelligence from the FBI that would have led them to expect the sort of violence which ensued.

Wray said the Norfolk report was shared though the FBI’s joint terrorism taskforce, discussed at a command post and posted on an internet portal. Ideally the FBI would have had more time to try to corroborate it, he said.

“Our folks made the judgment to get that to the relevant people as quickly as possible,” Wray said.

He was also pressed on how the FBI is confronting a national security threat from white nationalists and domestic violent extremists and whether it has adequate resources to address those issues. Wray described white supremacist extremism as a “persistent, evolving threat” that has grown since he took over the FBI in 2017.

White supremacists make up “the biggest chunk of our domestic terrorism portfolio overall”, he said, adding that such people “have been responsible for the most lethal attacks over the last decade”.

The violence at the Capitol made clear that a law enforcement agency that remade itself after the 11 September 2001, attacks to deal with international terrorism is now scrambling to address homegrown violence from white Americans. The Biden administration has asked its national intelligence director, Avril Haines, to work with the FBI and Department of Homeland Security to assess the threat.

In his opening statement, Wray said: “6 January was not an isolated event. The problem of domestic terrorism has been metastasizing across the country for a number of years now, and it’s not going away any time soon.”

The committee chairman, Dick Durbin, asked if the FBI believed the insurrection was carried out by “fake Trump protesters”. The Illinois Democrat’s question came two weeks after the Republican Wisconsin senator Ron Johnson amplified baseless claims that leftwing provocateurs carried out the Capitol attack.

“We have not seen evidence of that at this stage,” Wray said. In answer to Patrick Leahy of Vermont, another Democrat, he said: “We have not to date seen any evidence of anarchist violent extremists or people subscribing to antifa [antifascist groups] in connection with [6 January].”

Wray has kept a low profile since the Capitol attack. Though he has briefed lawmakers and shared information with law enforcement, Tuesday’s hearing was his first public appearance before Congress since before the election.

He was also likely to face questions about a massive Russian hack of corporations and US government agencies, which happened when elite hackers injected malicious code into a software update.

Texas

Texas governor lifts mask mandate and declares: 'It's time to open 100%'

- Greg Abbott: businesses can open at capacity from next week
- Democrats condemn 'crazy' decision amid Covid surge warning



Greg Abbott at a Hurricane Laura briefing in August last year. Following Abbott's decision, Texas will be the most populous state in the country that does not require residents to wear masks. Photograph: Jay Janner/AP

Greg Abbott at a Hurricane Laura briefing in August last year. Following Abbott's decision, Texas will be the most populous state in the country that does not require residents to wear masks. Photograph: Jay Janner/AP

[Alexandra Villarreal](#)

Tue 2 Mar 2021 18.40 EST

With [less than 7% of Texans fully vaccinated](#) and [another Covid-19 surge potentially imminent](#), Texas is flinging open businesses to full capacity while simultaneously ending its highly politicized mask mandate, the state's governor, Greg Abbott, announced on Tuesday.

[Biden: US 'on track' to have enough vaccines for all adults by May.](#)
[Read more](#)

“It is now time to open [Texas](#) 100%,” a maskless Abbott declared to cheers at a crowded restaurant in the city of Lubbock.

When Abbott's policy changes go into effect next week, Texas will be the most populous state in the country that does not require residents to wear masks. Restaurants and other businesses can choose to maintain their own mask policies, but without government backing to do so.

“We had a chance maybe by the end of the summer of getting a handle on this pandemic. This governor is just going to throw all of that out and put us back to the stone ages,” said Gilberto Hinojosa, the chair of the Texas Democratic party. “This is crazy.”

Other states and cities have likewise started rolling back precautions. In Mississippi – another Republican stronghold – Governor Tate Reeves also announced [on Tuesday](#) that the state was lifting rules for businesses and doing away with county mask mandates.

In other states and cities, including Michigan, Louisiana, and the city of San Francisco, California, officials are also lifting some restrictions, albeit not with the sweeping approach of Mississippi or Texas.

Abbott's announcement – which comes after about 43,000 Texans have died from the virus, and while many Texans are still [ineligible for the vaccine](#) – sparked immediate and vehement backlash, from Democratic mayors to workers' advocates infuriated that Texans of color will once again be the hardest hit.

“I think this is a slap in the face of working people, especially frontline workers, who have been risking their lives,” said Emily Timm, the co-

executive director of Workers Defense Action Fund.

Local leaders in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and Austin – Texas’s biggest cities – called on Abbott “not to create any ambiguity or uncertainty about the importance of wearing a mask by changing the rules at this time”, Austin’s mayor, Steve Adler, said in a statement.

“We as a state should be guided by science and data, which says we should keep the mask mandate. [Too much is at stake](#) to compromise the positive outcomes we have seen with over-confidence,” Adler said.

The policy changes also follow a devastating winter storm that pummeled Texas mere weeks ago, in a crisis made worse because of the state’s bungled emergency management.

Some critics say Abbott is using this moment to distract from that catastrophic failure, while also playing politics with lives to curry favor with a far-right Republican base that turned against him after he implemented coronavirus restrictions last summer.

[A Texas city had a bold new climate plan – until a gas company got involved](#)
[Read more](#)

“He’s made a decision based upon politics,” Hinojosa said.

As most meaningful coronavirus-related restrictions disappear from Texas, the state is simultaneously staring down what could easily be a series of super-spreader events over spring break.

South Texas beach towns in Corpus Christi and the already hard-hit Rio Grande Valley have long been popular destinations among party-going college students from around the country, and as tourists pack into bars and restaurants, none of them will have to wear masks or socially distance.

“You think we had a horrible spike on Memorial Day, and the Fourth of July, and during the holidays?” Hinojosa said. “The spike that this state will experience in coronavirus cases will be extremely high – and will cause

many, many more deaths than any responsible governor should have allowed.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/mar/02/texas-governor-ends-mask-mandate-and-declares-it>

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[Rio Tinto](#)

Rio Tinto investors welcome chair's decision to step down after Juukan Gorge scandal

Simon Thompson accepts he is 'ultimately accountable' for the destruction of ancient rock shelters



Simon Thompson will not stand for re-election to the Rio Tinto board next year. Photograph: Getty Images

Simon Thompson will not stand for re-election to the Rio Tinto board next year. Photograph: Getty Images

[Ben Butler](#) and [Calla Wahlquist](#)

Tue 2 Mar 2021 21.24 EST

Investors and First Nations groups have welcomed the [Rio Tinto](#) chair Simon Thompson's decision to leave the company after accepting he was

“ultimately accountable” for the mining company’s decision to blow up ancient rock shelters at Juukan Gorge in the Pilbara.

Thompson will not stand for re-election to the board next year in a decision that follows the resignations in September of the chief executive Jean-Sébastien Jacques, the head of corporate relations Simone Niven and the iron ore boss Chris Salisbury.

Separately, the non-executive director Michael L’Estrange will retire after this year’s shareholder meeting. Rio Tinto said he needed to reduce his workload after “significant surgery”.

[Former Rio Tinto CEO handed 20% pay rise despite caves scandal](#)
[Read more](#)

L’Estrange [wrote the internal review](#) of the Juukan Gorge disaster, which was later criticised by Senator Pat Dodson as [an “unsatisfactory piece of work”](#) that was “full of mea culpas and corporate lingo”.

The National Native Title Council welcomed the announcement but said if Rio Tinto was serious about cultural change it would replace at least one of the outgoing executives or directors with at least one Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

“They are in desperate need of First Nations voices in there and First Nations leadership,” NNTC chief executive Jamie Lowe said.

“And whether that be from an executive perspective or board level or other, that needs to happen ... Because Rio Tinto is not going anywhere, they are a multinational company, they have got a large footprints in Australia, so it’s critical we get those First Nations voices in there to make sure they are doing the right thing.”

Lowe said that while the turnover in senior leadership was significant, he would wait to see if the company’s actions changed.

“It’s no mean feat to get rid of your CEO, your chairman, other executives, other board members, all in the space of a six month period,” he said. “They

are signalling the right intent but the proof will be in the pudding, in the action that they deliver.”

Ian Silk, the chief executive of Australia’s biggest superannuation fund, AustralianSuper, said the resignations of Thompson and L’Estrange provided Rio with an opportunity to appoint more Australians to the board.

He said it was “appropriate and timely” for Thompson to assist with the transition from Jaques to Jakob Stausholm, who was appointed CEO in December.

“However, as Mr Thompson has said, he is ‘ultimately accountable’ for the failings that led to the Juukan Gorge incident, and as a result his resignation is an appropriate acknowledgement of that governance failure,” Silk said.

Super fund Hesta, which campaigned heavily for change at Rio after Juukan Gorge, also welcomed the departures.

“Investors need confidence Rio, throughout the organisation, will act in good faith with all stakeholders,” chief executive Debby Blakey said.

“The decision today allows for a fresh perspective and a renewed board focus on repairing and building stronger links with Indigenous communities in the countries in which Rio operates.

“Rigorous board oversight and governance will be crucial to achieving future progress in this regard.”

The activist shareholder group the Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility welcomed Thompson and L’Estrange’s departures but said other directors including Sam Laidlaw should also consider their positions.

Laidlaw, who chairs a remuneration committee that approved payouts for the departing executives, and another senior independent director, Simon McKeon, are to act as joint chairs while Rio Tinto searches for a permanent replacement for Thompson.

“I am proud of Rio Tinto’s achievements in 2020, including our outstanding response to the Covid-19 pandemic, a second successive fatality-free year,

significant progress with our climate change strategy, and strong shareholder returns,” Thompson said.

“However, these successes were overshadowed by the destruction of the Juukan Gorge rock shelters at the Brockman 4 operations in Australia and, as Chairman, I am ultimately accountable for the failings that led to this tragic event.”

ACCR’s legal counsel, James Fitzgerald, said that there was “no realistic prospect of Rio Tinto rebuilding its relationships and its reputation while those responsible for the degradation of its culture remained on its board”.

“The departure of Thompson and L’Estrange suggests that Rio Tinto is also well aware of this.

“News of their departure is welcome but other directors like Sam Laidlaw need to reflect on whether their continuing as directors is the interests of the company and its shareholders.”

Labor’s Indigenous affairs spokesperson, [Linda Burney](#), said Thompson’s acknowledgement that the destruction of Juukan Gorge was “a source of personal sadness and deep regret” was “important”.

“I sincerely hope this acknowledgement is a further step towards substantive cultural change – not only within Rio Tinto, but the mining sector as a whole – which sees companies work more closely and constructively with Traditional Owners to ensure incidents like this never happen again.”

L’Estrange’s review found Rio received four separate reports detailing the significance of the Juukan Gorge rock shelters to the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura peoples (PKKP) in the years between receiving government approval to destroy the site in 2013 and detonating the blast last May.

They included: a 2013 ethnographic survey stating the site was “of high significance to Puutu Kunti Kurrama, in the old days and still today”; a 2014 draft report of an archeological survey, paid for by Rio, which detailed signs of continuous occupation over 46,000 years including a 4,000 year-old hair belt which DNA testing revealed showed a direct genetic link to PKKP

living today; the 2018 final report of that archeological survey which said the site has “the amazing potential to radically change our understanding of the earliest human behaviour in Australia”; and an ethnographic survey in 2020 further outlining the significance of the site to the PKKP.

At a Senate inquiry last year, Rio Tinto’s vice-president of corporate relations in Australia, Brad Haynes, [said no one in the senior executive team had read any of those reports before May 2020](#) “because we were always operating on the basis that there was consent”.

At the same hearing, Jacques said Rio had not told the PKKP that it had considered, and dismissed, options for expanding the mine that would have left the sacred sites intact.

[Rio Tinto boss admits destroying Juukan rock shelters 'was a dark day' and announces US\\$9.77bn profit](#)

[Read more](#)

The destruction of the site was outlined in a lengthy and complicated partnership agreement in 2011. Once permission to destroy the site was granted under WA’s outdated Aboriginal heritage laws, it was removed as an obstacle from Rio’s operational maps.

Evidence presented to the Senate inquiry showed the PKKP repeatedly voiced their concerns directly to the company. The partnership agreement contained non-disparagement clauses that prevented the PKKP from publicly expressing their concerns about the site.

Minutes from meetings held by Rio in the days before the site was destroyed show that the company [hired lawyers for a potential injunction against the PKKP in the event the gag clause was breached](#). The PKKP issued a media release the day after the sites were destroyed.

The PKKP and the Indigenous affairs minister, Ken Wyatt, both declined to comment on Thompson’s resignation.

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Conflict and arms

Civilian deaths in conflict plummeted during pandemic, report finds

The number of civilians reported killed in explosions nearly halved in 2020 to the lowest level in a decade



The scene of an attack on a security agency in Kandahar in January. Afghanistan overtook Syria to become the deadliest conflict for civilians last year. Photograph: M Sadiq/EPA

The scene of an attack on a security agency in Kandahar in January. Afghanistan overtook Syria to become the deadliest conflict for civilians last year. Photograph: M Sadiq/EPA

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Wed 3 Mar 2021 02.00 EST

The number of civilian casualties in conflicts around the world plummeted during the Covid-19 pandemic, a new report shows.

Last year, an average of 10 civilians a day were reported killed by [explosive weapons](#), compared with 18 in 2019, according to [analysis by Action on Armed Violence](#) (AOAV), a London-based charity.

In all, 8,165 people were reported killed by explosive weapons – artillery shells, rockets, mortar bombs and aerial bombing – across 48 countries and territories last year, of whom 3,668 were civilians, it said. More than 10,500 people were reported injured.

['Shot at by both sides': Families flee as Taliban battles for territory in Kandahar](#)
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The fall of 43% represents the largest percentage drop in civilian casualties in conflict reported over the past 10 years.

In March last year, the UN secretary general, António Guterres, [called](#) for a global ceasefire to allow the respite needed to manage the coronavirus pandemic.

Iain Overton, the director of AOAV, said: “Our data seems to support there being a general decline in deaths and injuries as a consequence of the pandemic. It could be due to less reporting of violence, or it could be due to restrictions due to the pandemic and ceasefires.

“If the pandemic can stop people blowing people up then why can’t states?” he added. “This is proof that man-made violence can be prevented.”

The data was published as nations gather online this week to resume [negotiations](#) on a political declaration to strengthen the protection of civilians in urban warfare. About 70 states are expected to take part in the consultations, which begin on 3 March.

Laura Boillot, coordinator of the International Network on Explosive Weapons, an international network of NGOs, said: “What Covid has shown is that when humanity is focused on more pressing issues, it can reduce violence. Why does it have to take a pandemic to stop bombing civilians?”

Last year was the fourth consecutive year that reports of civilian deaths from explosives have declined, largely due to the short-term defeats of Islamist groups such as Isis in Iraq and Syria, and Boko Haram in Nigeria.

Afghanistan was the deadliest conflict for civilians last year, with 3,490 reported deaths and injuries of civilians from explosives, according to the data. The country overtook Syria, which recorded 3,013 deaths and injuries, for the first time since 2011, when AOAV began gathering data.

Pakistan, Yemen and Libya followed with 684, 683 and 671 civilian casualties reported respectively.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (Unama) has reported a “disturbing” rise in the number of civilians killed and injured

since the start of peace negotiations in September.

About 43% of recorded civilians killed in 2020 were women and children. More women died in the conflict in 2020 than in any year since Unama began systematic documentation in 2009.

In a [report last month](#), Unama expressed “grave concern” over the use of [explosive weapons](#) in populated areas, especially the use of indirect fire, such as artillery shells, mortars and rockets during ground engagements, but also the use of airstrikes and improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

AOAV’s explosive violence monitoring project records casualties using data from the Londo-based non-profit monitoring agency Airwars, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and reliable English-language media sources.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/mar/03/civilian-deaths-in-conflict-plummeted-during-pandemic-report-finds>

Extinct wildlife

Australia confirms extinction of 13 more species, including first reptile since colonisation

Christmas Island forest skink and 12 mammals on list, which also includes the desert bettong, broad-cheeked hopping mouse and Nullarbor barred bandicoot



The Christmas Island forest skink is the first reptile known to have gone extinct in Australia since European colonisation. More than 10% of the 320 land mammals known to have lived in Australia in 1788 are extinct. Photograph: Hal Cogger

The Christmas Island forest skink is the first reptile known to have gone extinct in Australia since European colonisation. More than 10% of the 320 land mammals known to have lived in Australia in 1788 are extinct. Photograph: Hal Cogger

[Adam Morton](#) *Environment editor*

[@adamlmorton](#)

Wed 3 Mar 2021 00.15 EST

The Australian government has officially acknowledged the extinction of 13 endemic species, including 12 mammals and the first reptile known to have been lost since European colonisation.

The addition of the dozen mammal species confirms Australia's unenviable position as the world's capital for mammal extinction, lifting the total number of mammals known to have died out to 34.

None of the 13 is a surprise. All but one of the mammal extinctions is historic, with most having disappeared between the 1850s and 1950s.

But [the list](#) also includes two species lost in the past decade, both from Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean.

[Australian scientists warn urgent action needed to save 19 'collapsing' ecosystems](#)

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[As Guardian Australia has reported](#), the last Christmas Island pipistrelle, a species of bat, died in 2009. It was followed by the sole remaining Christmas Island forest skink – the first Australian reptile known to have become extinct – in 2014. Both extinctions have previously been recorded by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).



The now extinct Christmas Island pipistrelle. Photograph: Lindy Lumsden

The updated list means more than 10% of the 320 land mammals known to have lived in Australia in 1788 are extinct.

The Wilderness Society's Suzanne Milthorpe said there was "not another country, rich or poor, that has anything like this record" in mammal extinction. She said Haiti was next on the IUCN list for mammal extinctions with a total of nine.

Prof John Woinarski, a conservation biologist at Charles Darwin University who helped record the plight of many of the newly listed extinct species in two books, said the listings were "humbling and sobering".

He said it was a reminder that extinction was a "likely event" after a species was listed as threatened if not enough was done to save it. "It is important to acknowledge that the losses have occurred and it's a reminder that if we don't manage our threatened species then extinction is the end result," he said.

The confirmed historic mammal extinctions are the desert bettong, the Nullarbor dwarf bettong, the Capricorn rabbit-rat, the broad-cheeked hopping mouse, the Liverpool Plains striped bandicoot, the marl, the south-

eastern striped bandicoot, the Nullarbor barred bandicoot, the long-eared mouse, the blue-grey mouse and the Percy Island flying fox.

[Morrison government's new environment commissioner 'toothless', conservation groups say](#)

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Woinarski said in almost all cases the most plausible explanation for their extinction was predation by [feral cats](#), though introduced foxes, habitat destruction and fire may have played a role. "No other country has suffered anywhere near that number of mammal species extinctions over the past 200 years," he said.

He said as museums had few-to-no records of the species, recording the extinctions often relied on knowledge shared by Indigenous elders living in remote parts of the country who had experienced them first-hand.

About 100 endemic Australian species have been listed as extinct by the government or the IUCN, but Woinarski said the real number was likely to be more than 10 times that once extinct invertebrates were counted. At least 50 invertebrate species on [Christmas Island](#) alone had not been seen for more than a century and were likely to be extinct, he said.

He said the first recorded modern extinction of an Australian reptile was "obviously a really lamentable landmark". The Christmas Island forest skink was almost certainly killed by the accidental introduction of a predator from Asia, the wolf snake, in the 1970s.

He said the Christmas Island pipistrelle's extinction was a result of a lack of government action, as it had been clear it was in rapid decline for two decades before it went extinct and the response was insufficient. There had never been an inquest or inquiry to find out what went wrong, he said.

"That was one we really should have been able to save," he said.

Milthorpe, the Wilderness Society's national environment laws campaign manager, said the updated list was a "devastating reality check on

Australia's environmental performance". "It cements our reputation as the global leader in mammal extinctions," she said.

She said it should drive the environment minister, Sussan Ley, to make [a stronger response than what it has offered](#) since a review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act by the competition watchdog Graeme Samuel.

['Development should stop': serious flaws in offsets plan for new western Sydney airport](#)
[Read more](#)

Samuel found the environment was in an unsustainable state of decline and the EPBC was ineffective and [needed an overhaul, including some urgent changes](#).

"Unfortunately, we haven't seen a full response to the review from the Morrison government yet, only a disjointed attempt to devolve their environmental responsibilities to the states," Milthorpe said. "Without the full package [of recommendations], Samuel made clear that extinction and a decline of our iconic natural areas will continue."

Ley's spokesperson said the minister had overseen a comprehensive review of the historical extinction list to accurately reflect the state of Australia's mammals and provide an important record that could help improve the management of native plants and animals.

They said the government had "mobilised" more than \$535m for projects to support threatened species and ecological communities since 2014, was preparing a 10-year threatened species strategy and introducing new predator-free safe havens.

"We are working to manage threats to native animals and plants on Christmas Island and across the rest of Australia, including supporting the recovery from the catastrophic black summer bushfires," the spokesperson said.

Labor's environment spokeswoman, Terri Butler, said the Coalition was presiding over an “accelerating and disastrous extinction crisis”, and had [slashed environment department funding](#) since coming to power. “They have no solutions to this crisis and they just don’t care,” she said.

A groundbreaking study by 38 scientists working across Australia and Antarctica last week found [19 ecosystems were collapsing due to the impact of humans](#) and warned urgent action was required to prevent their complete loss.

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Andrew Cuomo

Cuomo stays quiet amid calls to quit over sexual harassment claims

- New York governor has avoided public appearances this week
- State attorney general to investigate allegations against Cuomo



Cuomo at the Riverside church in Manhattan in November. Neither Cuomo nor his spokespeople have commented on the latest allegation made against him on Monday night. Photograph: Andrew Kelly/Reuters

Cuomo at the Riverside church in Manhattan in November. Neither Cuomo nor his spokespeople have commented on the latest allegation made against him on Monday night. Photograph: Andrew Kelly/Reuters

Associated Press

Tue 2 Mar 2021 17.42 EST

Andrew Cuomo has avoided public appearances for days as some members of his own party call for him to resign over sexual harassment allegations.

The [New York](#) governor hasn't taken questions from reporters since a 19 February briefing, an unusually long gap for a Democrat whose daily, televised updates on the coronavirus pandemic were must-see TV last spring.

He was last before video cameras on Thursday, when he introduced Joe Biden at a virtual meeting of the National Governors Association, which he chairs. He also participated Tuesday in the group's conference call, which was off-limits to reporters.

Neither Cuomo nor his spokespeople have commented on the latest allegation made against him Monday night. A woman told the New York Times that Cuomo touched her lower back, then grabbed her cheeks and asked to kiss her at a September 2019 wedding.

[Cuomo faces new calls to resign as harassment investigation looms](#)
[Read more](#)

Most leading Democrats have signaled they want to wait for the results of an investigation by the New York attorney general, Letitia James, into claims that Cuomo sexually harassed at least two women in his administration.

The state Democratic party chair Jay Jacobs, a close Cuomo ally, said it's "premature" to opine before the investigation concludes.

That inquiry has yet to begin. James said her office is working to hire an outside law firm to conduct it.

US congressman Hakeem Jeffries said New York's congressional delegation in Washington has not met on the issue but "everyone is monitoring the situation closely".

"Well these are very serious allegations and they require a very serious investigation," Jeffries told reporters Tuesday. "I'm confident that Attorney General Tish James will get to the bottom of everything, release a report

that's fully transparent and then we can decide the best way to proceed thereafter."

As of midday Tuesday, at least one Democratic Congress member from Long Island – Kathleen Rice – four state senators, several left-leaning Assembly members and the leaders of the progressive Working Families Party said they have already heard enough and that Cuomo should resign. Some suggested he be impeached.

The governor is also facing criticism for withholding, for months, a full accounting of the number of nursing home residents who died of Covid-19.

The leaders of the state assembly and senate, both controlled by Democrats, announced Tuesday the legislature will pass legislation to limit emergency powers related to the pandemic that they granted Cuomo last spring.

Cuomo's existing Covid-19 mandates would remain in place but he wouldn't be able to extend or tweak them without responding to questions from lawmakers, under a bill outlined by senate majority leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and assembly speaker Carl Heastie.

Both the legislature's top leaders have said they support the attorney general's investigation of Cuomo's workplace conduct.

One former aide, Charlotte Bennett, 25, said Cuomo quizzed her about her sex life and asked whether she would be open to a relationship with an older man. Bennett rejected Cuomo's attempted apology, in which he said he'd been trying to be "playful" and that his jokes had been misinterpreted as flirting.

Another former aide, Lindsey Boylan, said Cuomo commented on her appearance inappropriately, kissed her without her consent at the end of a meeting, and once suggested they play strip poker while aboard his state-owned jet. Cuomo has denied Boylan's allegations.

The woman who spoke to the New York Times about Cuomo's conduct at the wedding, Anna Ruch, hasn't responded to request for comment from the Associated Press.

Ruch told the newspaper that when she removed Cuomo's hand from her back, he called her "aggressive", placed his hands on her cheeks and asked if he could kiss her. Cuomo then planted a kiss on her cheek as she turned away.

A photograph taken by a friend captured a look of discomfort on Ruch's face as the governor held her face.

"I felt so uncomfortable and embarrassed when really he is the one who should have been embarrassed," Ruch told the newspaper.

Bill de Blasio, the New York city mayor, who has had a contentious relationship with Cuomo for years, said Tuesday that if all the allegations against Cuomo are true, "he cannot govern".

"He would not be able to govern, it's as simple as that," de Blasio said.

Asked by a reporter whether Cuomo should resume holding in-person events, de Blasio said: "I think all leaders have to answer tough questions from the media, regardless of whether it's convenient."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/mar/02/andrew-cuomo-new-york-sexual-harassment-claims>

US foreign policy.

US hits Russian officials with fresh sanctions over Navalny poisoning

Seven government officials and 13 companies sanctioned as Biden administration says more punitive measures to be issued soon



Alexei Navalny during a court hearing in Moscow earlier this month. The US said policy towards Russia was now being closely coordinated with European allies. Photograph: Handout/EPA

Alexei Navalny during a court hearing in Moscow earlier this month. The US said policy towards Russia was now being closely coordinated with European allies. Photograph: Handout/EPA

[Julian Borger](#) in Washington

Tue 2 Mar 2021 13.26 EST

The US has announced sanctions on seven Russian government officials and 13 Russian and European companies in response to the poisoning of the

opposition leader [Alexei Navalny](#), which a US intelligence assessment confirmed to be the work of the FSB.

[US refuses to say whether crown prince one of 76 Saudis hit by visa ban](#)
[Read more](#)

Senior administration officials described the measures taken, which are also a response to Navalny's continued imprisonment, as catching up with sanctions imposed on Moscow by the EU in October while the Trump administration had [largely turned a blind eye](#).

The officials said policy towards Russia was now being closely coordinated with European allies, and that more punitive measures would be issued in the coming weeks in response to last year's [Solar Winds cyber-attack](#), Russian interference in the 2020 election and [bounties allegedly offered to Taliban fighters](#) and other extremists for killing US soldiers.

"The tone and substance of our conversation with [Russia](#), and our conversations about [Russia](#), will be very different from what you saw in the previous administration," one senior official said.

"We are not seeking to escalate, we are not seeking to reset. We are seeking stability and predictability and areas of constructive work with Russia, where it is in our interest to do that."

The sanctions are being imposed under the 1991 Chemical and Biological Weapons Act, "and other authorities", and represent an expansion of those already imposed in response to the attack on the former spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter in the UK in 2018.

Among those blacklisted were Andrei Yarin, the chief of the Kremlin's domestic policy directorate; Alexander Bortnikov, the director of the Federal Security Service (FSB); and deputy ministers of defense Alexei Krivoruchko and Pavel Popov, among others, according to a statement.

Any property or dealings in the US will be frozen or blocked and foreigners holding transactions with them could also face sanctions.

The commerce department announced a tightening of export controls on items potentially used to make chemical or biological weapons.

Nine Russian, three German and one Swiss company, as well as one government research institute, are being placed on an “entity list” which means US dealings with them would require a license “on presumption of denial”. The names of the companies and the institute were due to be published later on Tuesday.

“As sanctions go, this isn’t going to change any sort of behavior by Putin or force them to all of a sudden release Navalny – I’m highly suspect of that,” said Daniel Tannebaum, a sanctions expert and former compliance officer at the US Treasury’s office of foreign assets control.

But he added: “I’m encouraged by the rhetoric out of the [Biden administration](#) that this is the beginning, and not necessarily a reset but the first step to impose sanctions against the Putin regime for a variety of different issues.”

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[Global development](#)

Anti-coup protesters in Myanmar critically injured by live rounds

Rally in Kale turns violent and stun grenades deployed in Yangon

00:47

Myanmar: police fire stun grenades at protesters in Yangon – video

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Guardian reporter in Yangon and [Michael Safi](#)

[@safimichael](#)

Tue 2 Mar 2021 11.53 EST

Three people have been critically injured after security forces fired live rounds at anti-coup protesters in north-western [Myanmar](#), medics said, as a regional meeting of south-east Asian countries failed to find a breakthrough to the political crisis.

Police also fired stun grenades and rubber bullets on Tuesday to disperse protesters in the city of Yangon, according to witnesses, as demonstrations continued over the military's [removal of Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government](#) a month ago.

In the north-western town of Kale, a rally turned violent when security forces opened fire on protesters, according to medics who treated those wounded.

“About 20 people were injured in a morning crackdown by police and soldiers in Kale,” said a rescue worker, on condition of anonymity for fear of repercussions. “Three ... were hit by live rounds and are in critical condition,” he said, adding that police had initially deployed teargas and rubber bullets, before doubling back with live rounds.

A doctor who treated the patients in a local hospital confirmed the number of people in critical condition.

“One was hit in his thigh and he’s now undergoing an operation. Another one got hit in the abdomen and he requires blood transfusions ... Another one got hit in the chest,” he told Agence France-Presse. “His condition is a concern – we do not like it.”

[Sunday was the bloodiest day since the 1 February coup](#), with the UN saying that at least 18 protesters across the country were killed.

Foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) discussed the coup and subsequent violence at a virtual meeting on Tuesday that failed to produce a common position during the meeting, two Asean diplomatic sources told Reuters.



Protesters carrying makeshift shields protest in Yangon on Tuesday.
Photograph: Lynn Bo Bo/EPA

A statement from the meeting's chair, Brunei, on the outcome of the meeting, said Asean expressed concern about the situation in Myanmar and called on "all parties to refrain from instigating further violence".

"We expressed Asean's readiness to assist Myanmar in a positive, peaceful and constructive manner," it said.

In a statement of remarks made during the summit, Singapore's foreign minister, Vivian Balakrishnan, warned an inability to find a common Asean position "would starkly underscore our lack of unity, and undermine our credibility and relevance as an organisation".

The use of lethal force against unarmed civilians was "inexcusable", he said.

Balakrishnan and the foreign ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines called for the release of political detainees including the civilian leader [Aung San Suu Kyi](#), a position that was not endorsed by all at the summit.

The "informal" meeting was the first involving the 10-nation group since the coup and included Myanmar's military appointed foreign minister, Wunna

Maung Lwin.

Protesters – many wearing hard hats, thick gloves and goggles and holding makeshift shields – gathered on Tuesday behind barricades in different parts of Yangon, Myanmar’s commercial capital, to chant slogans against military rule.

“If we’re oppressed, there will be explosion. If we’re hit, we’ll hit back,” the crowd chanted at one Yangon protest before police moved in to break it up with stun grenades, witnesses said. There were no reports of any injuries.

“There is an anxious feeling,” said a 24-year-old demonstrator in a hard hat at Myaynigone Intersection. “No one knows what’s going to happen.”

Moments later, police began firing stun grenades at the crowd she was in. In between the shots, she said: “They are trying to scare us to get us to disperse.” Crowds also gathered in other parts of the country, media reported.

Sanchaung Street, a popular stretch about 20 minutes from downtown Yangon, was barricaded with sandbags by residents. A 25-year-old demonstrator said he expected the security forces to raid the area by the end of the day.

“They come here shooting and steal anything valuable that they see,” he said outside his local teashop, which he said police had looted. “They are robbers. Now we are protecting our neighbourhood. They shot in this area this morning. It seems like they are taking a lunch break now, like they did yesterday. We are waiting for the second strike.”



Protesters wearing safety helmets shout slogans and flash three-finger salutes in Yangon. Photograph: AP

Hundreds of people have been arrested since the coup, according to activists. Among them is a journalist for the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), who livestreamed the arrival of security forces outside his apartment on Monday in the coastal town of Myeik, where he had been filming protests.

Loud bangs could be heard during Kaung Myat Hlaing's live stream, which was hosted on DVB's official Facebook page. "If you are shooting like this, how will I come down?" he shouted at the security forces outside.

DVB said it had "no knowledge of where he was taken away, and which military authority took him", adding that Kaung Myat Hlaing's latest reports were on a weekend military crackdown in Myeik, as well as on Monday's demonstrations.

[Global oil giants urged to stop cash flow from Myanmar projects to military junta](#)

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The military justified the coup saying its complaints of fraud in a November election won by Aung San Suu Kyi's party were ignored. The election

commission said the vote was fair.

Asean's efforts to engage with Myanmar's military have been criticised by some. A committee of ousted Myanmar lawmakers has declared the junta a "terrorist" group and said Asean's engagement would give it legitimacy. Sa Sa, the committee's anointed envoy to the United Nations, said Asean should have no dealings with "this illegitimate military-led regime".

With Reuters and Agence France-Presse

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Cyprus

Cypriot church calls for 'devil' Eurovision song to be scrapped

Orthodox church says entry ‘praises the fatalistic submission of humans to the devil’s authority’



Elena Tsagrinou singer of ‘El Diablo’, Cyprus’ entry into the Eurovision song contest 2021. Photograph: YouTube/Elena Tsagrinou -

Elena Tsagrinou singer of ‘El Diablo’, Cyprus’ entry into the Eurovision song contest 2021. Photograph: YouTube/Elena Tsagrinou -

AP in Nicosia

Tue 2 Mar 2021 17.08 EST

The Orthodox Church of Cyprus has called for the withdrawal of the country’s controversial entry into this year’s [Eurovision](#) song contest titled “El Diablo,” charging that the song makes an international mockery of

country's moral foundations by advocating "our surrender to the devil and promoting his worship".

The Holy Synod, the church's highest decision-making body, said in a statement that the song "essentially praises the fatalistic submission of humans to the devil's authority" and urged the state broadcaster to replace it with one that "expresses our history, culture, traditions and our claims."

The song and its lyrics – "I gave my heart to el diablo ... because he tells me I'm his angel" – had already caused a stir in the east Mediterranean island nation, where some have alleged it is fraught with satanic connotations.

The church's official stance came a few days after a man was charged with uttering threats and causing a disturbance when he barged on to the grounds of the public broadcaster to protest what he condemned as a "blasphemous" song that was an affront to [Christianity](#).



The Orthodox Church of Cyprus said it had received thousands of complaints about the choice of song for May's contest. Photograph: Petros Karadjias/AP

Police said witnesses to Saturday's incident told investigators the man verbally accosted employees outside the [Cyprus](#) Broadcasting Corporation's (CyBC) news department. Amateur video of the man confronting CyBC

staff showed him screaming at a number of employees in the yard, asking how they could justify supporting such a song.

Vocal critics included a senior cleric, an organization representing theologians who teach in high schools, a far-right party and many ordinary Cypriots who took to social media to heap scorn and “disgust” at the song. However, many others defended the tune in social media posts as a simple ditty about a “scorching love affair” gone bad or to label its detractors as religious zealots.

CyBC board chairman Andreas Frangos insisted that the song won’t be withdrawn and that it wasn’t the broadcaster’s intention to insult anyone’s religious sentiments.

Speaking on the broadcaster’s midday news show, Frangos conceded that the broadcaster should’ve done a better job explaining the core message of the tune, which describes an abusive relationship between two lovers.

But the Cyprus church rejected the broadcaster’s “metaphorical interpretation” of the tune, which it said “in no way reflects the lyrics’ provocative and unacceptable content which doesn’t cease to represent a terrible subculture that is completely at odds with our people’s values and goes against their Greek and Orthodox traditions.”

The church said it has received a “deluge of reactions from thousands” of people who express their “justified disappointment” over the song, including many “respected musicians.”

“From whatever angle you choose to look it and whichever explanations are given about the lyrics of the song, they don’t send the most ideal messages which must be sent from a semi-occupied homeland that struggles for freedom and to prevent its complete subjugation,” the Holy Synod’s statement said.

[Cyprus](#) has been divided along ethnic lines since 1974 when Turkey invaded following a coup by supporters of union with Greece. For centuries, the church had been considered as the guardian of Greek Cypriots’ faith and ethnic identity.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/02/cypriot-church-calls-for-countrys-eurovision-song-to-be-scrapped>

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Meat

Eating meat ‘raises risk of heart disease, diabetes and pneumonia’

UK researchers find link between regular meat intake and nine non-cancerous illnesses



The Oxford University study found that eating red meat, processed meat and poultry meat, either alone or together, three times a week put people at greater risk of certain illnesses. Photograph: Ed Brown/Alamy

The Oxford University study found that eating red meat, processed meat and poultry meat, either alone or together, three times a week put people at greater risk of certain illnesses. Photograph: Ed Brown/Alamy

[*Denis Campbell*](#) *Health policy editor*

Tue 2 Mar 2021 09.20 EST

Eating meat regularly increases someone’s risk of developing heart disease, diabetes, pneumonia and other serious illnesses, research has found.

It is already known that intake of red and processed meat heightens the [risk of being diagnosed with bowel cancer](#). But these findings are the first to assess whether meat consumption is linked to any of the 25 non-cancerous illnesses that most commonly lead to people being admitted to hospital in the UK.

The academics from Oxford University who published the study found that consumption of red meat, processed meat and poultry meat such as chicken and turkey, either alone or together, at least three times a week was linked to a greater risk of nine different illnesses.

Their results add to the growing evidence from researchers and the World Health Organization that eating too much meat, especially [red and processed meat](#), can damage health.

The [findings, published in the journal BMC Medicine](#), are based on analysis of the health records of 474,985 middle-aged Britons. The researchers examined details provided about their diets with information from their medical records about hospital admissions and also mortality data for an average of eight years.

The study concluded: “On average, participants who reported consuming meat regularly (three or more times per week) had more adverse health behaviours and characteristics than participants who consumed meat less regularly.

“Higher consumption of unprocessed red and processed meat combined was associated with higher risks of ischaemic heart disease, pneumonia, diverticular disease, colon polyps and diabetes, and higher consumption of poultry meat was associated with higher risks of gastro-oesophageal reflux disease, gastritis and duodenitis, diverticular disease, gallbladder disease and diabetes.”

The academics, led by Dr Keren Papier from the university’s [Nuffield department of population health](#), found that every 70 grams of unprocessed red meat and processed meat that someone consumed daily raised their risk of heart disease by 15% and of diabetes by 30%.

Those meats may raise the risk of heart disease because they contain saturated fatty acids, which can increase low-density lipoprotein, or “bad” cholesterol, which is known to put people at greater risk of heart problems.

Similarly, every 30 grams of poultry meat eaten daily increased the risk of developing gastro-oesophageal reflux by 17% and of diabetes by 14%, they found.

[The alternative milk taste test](#)

[Read more](#)

However, it was mainly meat-eaters who were overweight or obese who were running these risks, it emerged during the study. Most of the increased risks of disease identified were reduced once participants’ body mass index was taken into account.

“Differences in BMI across the categories of meat consumption appear to account for a substantial part of the increased risks,” the article in BMC Medicine says.

Eating meat regularly did reduce the risk of someone suffering from iron-deficiency anaemia, though.

“We have long known that unprocessed red meat and processed meat consumption is likely to be carcinogenic and this research is the first to assess the risk of 25 non-cancerous health conditions in relation to meat intake in one study,” said Papier.

Further research was needed into whether the differences in risk she and her team observed reflected “causal relationships [with meat intake] and, if so, the extent to which these diseases could be prevented by decreasing meat consumption”, she added.

Public [Health](#) England said that anyone who eats more than 90g of red or processed meat a day should cut down to 70g.

Dr Alison Tedstone, the agency’s chief nutritionist, said: “Globally the evidence suggests that people who eat red and processed meat should limit

their intake. While it can form part of a healthy diet, eating too much has been linked to increased risk of developing bowel cancer.” For the sake of their health, people should follow the guidelines for a healthy, balanced diet set out in PHE’s [Eatwell Guide](#), she added.

The Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition first declared in 2010 that eating too much red or processed meat probably increased the risk of bowel cancer.

Prof Robert Pickard, a member of the [Food](#) Advisory Board, which responded on behalf of the meat industry, said: “Overall, it is important to think about the balance of foods that make up a varied and healthy diet – plenty of whole grains, fruit and vegetables and limited amounts of foods high in saturated fat, salt and sugar – rather than focusing on one particular food alone. Red meat can form part of a healthier dietary pattern, and is included in the government’s healthy eating model, the Eatwell Guide.”

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Mohammed bin Salman

Criminal complaint filed against Mohammed bin Salman in German court

Reporters without Borders accuses Saudi heir of crimes against humanity over persecution of journalists



The press freedom group hopes a full investigation will be opened into Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and his officials. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

The press freedom group hopes a full investigation will be opened into Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and his officials. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

[Stephanie Kirchgaessner](#) in Washington and [Michael Safi](#)

Tue 2 Mar 2021 04.30 EST

Saudi Arabia's crown prince [Mohammed bin Salman](#) and other high-ranking Saudi officials have been accused of committing crimes against humanity in a criminal complaint filed in Germany by Reporters without Borders (RSF), the press freedom group.

The 500-page complaint, filed with the German public prosecutor in general in the federal court of justice in Karlsruhe, centres on the “widespread and systematic” persecution of journalists in Saudi Arabia, including the arbitrary detention of 34 journalists there and the assassination of [Jamal Khashoggi](#), the Washington Post columnist.

“These journalists are the victims of unlawful killing, torture, sexual violence and coercion and forced disappearance,” said Christophe Deloire, the secretary-general of Reporters Without Borders, at a press conference on Tuesday.

The complaint came [just days after the US release of an unclassified intelligence report into Khashoggi's 2018 murder in the Saudi consulate](#) in Istanbul, which US intelligence agencies said was approved by the 35-year-old Saudi heir.

RSF has chosen to file its complaint in [Germany](#) because German laws give its courts jurisdiction over international crimes committed abroad, even without a German connection. RSF indicated that it hoped its complaint, which centres on Prince Mohammed and four senior officials, will lead the German prosecutor to open what is known as a “situation analysis”, which could lead to a formal prosecutorial investigation into whether the Saudi officials have committed crimes against humanity by targeting reporters.

[Khashoggi fiancée: Saudi crown prince must be 'punished without delay'](#)
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“The official opening of a criminal investigation in Germany into the crimes against humanity in [Saudi Arabia](#) would be a world first,” said RSF Germany director Christian Mihr. “We ask the public prosecutor general to open a situation analysis, with a view to formally launching a prosecutorial investigation and issuing arrest warrants.”

The prosecutor's office said it had received the complaint and was assessing its legal and factual merits.

RSF said that the journalists who are in detention are victims of multiple counts of crimes against humanity, including wilful killing, torture, sexual violence and coercion, enforced disappearance, unlawful deprivation of liberty, and persecution. By focusing on dozens of cases of journalists who are being detained, RSF said it was revealing that all Saudi journalists, particularly those who speak out against the government, were under threat.

"The truth has been revealed but that is not enough," said Khashoggi's fiancée, Hatice Cengiz, who said she would give evidence as part of any investigation. "The murderer cannot be allowed to get away with it, otherwise it will happen again."

The bid by RSF to try to get German prosecutors to open a case against the Saudi crown prince [followed the recent conviction in Germany](#) of a former Syrian secret police officer of aiding and abetting crimes against humanity for his role in the torture of protesters a decade ago. Eyad al-Gharib, a 44-year-old former low-ranking officer in the Syrian intelligence service, carried out orders in one of Bashar al-Assad's prisons.

The "suspects" in RSF's Saudi case are the crown prince, known as "MBS", his close adviser Saud al-Qahtani, Ahmad Asiri, who has been sanctioned by the US and is alleged to have supervised Khashoggi's murder, Mohammad al-Otaibi, the consul general in Istanbul at the time of the murder, and Maher Mutreb, an intelligence officer who is accused of leading the torture.

The group said in a statement that the named suspects were identified for their "organisational or executive responsibility in Khashoggi's killing, as well as their involvement in developing a state policy to attack and silence journalists."

The [Biden administration](#) has been criticised for its decision not to take further actions against Prince Mohammed, even as it publicly acknowledged he was behind the Khashoggi murder.

The US intelligence agencies based the assessment on the prince's "control of decision-making in the kingdom, the direct involvement of a key adviser and members of [the prince's] protective detail in the operation, and [his] support for using violent measures to silence dissidents abroad, including Khashoggi."

It also found that the prince's "absolute control" of the kingdom's security and intelligence organisations made it "highly unlikely" that Saudi officials would have carried out an operation like Khashoggi's murder without his approval.

Khashoggi had gone to the Saudi consulate to pick up documents needed for his wedding. Once inside, he died at the hands of more than a dozen Saudi security and intelligence officials and others who had assembled ahead of his arrival. Surveillance cameras had tracked his route and those of his alleged killers in Istanbul in the hours before his killing.

The Saudi government has denied it planned to assassinate the Washington Post columnist and has said the killing was a rogue operation by Saudi agents.

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