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[OpinionPrince Philip](#)

The Observer view on the legacy of Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh

[Observer editorial](#)

He was a man who served Britain with gusto, a war hero, never dull; his loss for both Queen and country is profound



Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, attending his final individual public engagement at Buckingham Palace in 2017. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, attending his final individual public engagement at Buckingham Palace in 2017. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Sun 11 Apr 2021 01.15 EDT

The [death of Prince Philip](#), the Duke of Edinburgh, at the age of 99, marks both a moment of personal grief for the Queen and the royal family and a moment of national mourning for a man who dedicated his life to public service.

The Queen's loss is a profound one: at the age of 94, she has lost her husband and companion, her "strength and stay" of 73 years. Many people up and down the country who have lost their spouses in a year that has brought more death and grief than usual will know and understand her pain.

To the country, [Prince Philip](#) was one of the last living members of a generation of war heroes. Much of his time as consort to the Queen spanned an age where the press was more deferential, when the royal family was more private, when it commanded an even greater presence in the national consciousness than it does today. And his death, though expected, serves as a reminder that even an institution as enduring as the monarchy has to evolve and change, and that the Queen herself will not live forever. The nation, too, has much to grieve: not just the man, but what his passing represents.

[A life in pictures – Prince Philip](#)
[Read more](#)

One thing stands out about Prince Philip above all else as a public figure: his unwavering commitment to service to this country. He fought with great courage during the Second World War, becoming one of the navy's youngest first lieutenants. That sense of duty shaped the way he chose to live his role as consort to the Queen. The anachronisms of the hereditary institution he married into, with its constitutional role in a modern democracy, may be manifold. But he embraced a lifetime of service with gusto and deserves respect and acclaim for the positive impact he had on Britain.

His most notable achievement was the foundation of the [Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme](#), which since 1956 has helped create opportunities for millions of young people around the world to undertake service in the community and enjoy the outdoors. But he also did much to advance British [engineering and science](#), to highlight issues around conservation, and he served as patron to many important charitable causes. He carried out more than [22,000 solo public engagements](#) before retiring from public life at the age of 96. But perhaps his most important role was as a partner and personal support to the Queen, who has shown such enduring dedication to this country as our sovereign of almost seven decades.

Prince Philip was anything but a dull character. He reportedly did not enjoy pomp and circumstance for its own sake and his wishes for his funeral were for it to be kept simple. One imagines he may have had little time for some of the more sycophantic coverage of his life in the last 48 hours. He was considered immensely likable by those who met him, but was not afraid to cause controversy through his occasional public use of racist and sexist language long considered unacceptable.

It is easy to forget that Prince Philip was viewed as a great modernising force for the monarchy that helped keep it in step with an evolving postwar nation. His eldest son, and heir to the throne, Prince Charles, who has long spoken of his wishes to slim down the institution and reduce the number of working members of the royal family, will inherit that mantle from him.

The fact of a long and richly lived life can never compensate for its loss. There will be many who grieve Prince Philip in the days, months and years to come, here in the UK and abroad; some because they met him and were touched by him, others because of what he represents to them. But above all else, he was a husband and a father. No one could envy the Queen the role she was born into, which she has performed with extraordinary commitment for 70 years. That solitary role of hereditary sovereign has just become more lonely, without her partner in life by her side. It is her for whom the most heartfelt condolences should be felt.

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OpinionJoe Biden

The Observer view on Joe Biden's audacious spending plans

Observer editorial

If the president pushes through his proposed investments, he will revitalise the economy and make America great again



Joe Biden discusses his infrastructure plan in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, last month. Photograph: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

Joe Biden discusses his infrastructure plan in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, last month. Photograph: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

Sun 11 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

The dramatic scale and ambition of Joe Biden's public spending and tax plans came into sharper focus last week. The emerging picture is breathtaking. As expected, the US president aims to repair the damage done by the pandemic. But huge, longer-term investments in jobs, education and

clean energy, and his new insistence on the social responsibilities of big business, point to something far more momentous: a watershed in American economic policymaking.

Comparisons abound with Franklin D Roosevelt's 1930s New Deal. Progressive politicians hail an end to the post-2008 age of austerity. Neoliberalism's divisive grip is at last [being broken](#); free market dogmas are in retreat, they say. Biden is re-legitimising the power of government and the state to equally serve the interests of all its citizens. This revolution, it is claimed, will dent populism's appeal and may save democracy itself. Such optimism is rare in contemporary politics and is not to be discouraged. The prospect that a leader – any leader – can and will achieve a decisive change for the better in ordinary people's lives is almost a novel idea these days. The absence of such hope and trust accounts for much that has gone wrong within western democracies in recent years. It has encouraged political extremism and the rise, beyond Europe, of authoritarian regimes.

Yet Biden has set himself an enormous task, or series of tasks, which he knows will prove difficult to fulfil. Take, for example, his plan for a global minimum corporate tax rate of 21% that could raise an extra [\\$300bn annually](#) for governments around the world. Setting such a minimum would help curb tax avoidance and profit-shifting, especially by multinationals, and potentially end the controversies over rival national digital taxes.

This bold idea has the backing of tax-fairness campaigners and European members of the [G20 group](#) of finance ministers. But it is already under attack from corporate lobbyists and Republicans in Washington, who claim it would place American companies at a competitive disadvantage. Countries such as Ireland that benefit from the current system may also object. As with any proposal that requires global adherence, China's attitude will be crucial.

Reversing normal practice, he ran from the centre, yet now he governs from the left

Biden already has one big win under his belt: the \$1.9tn Covid recovery [stimulus bill](#) passed by Congress last month. This package by itself is

mould-breaking, by recent American standards, in facilitating a vast expansion of the country's social safety net. It extends federal benefits, allocates funds to tackle child poverty and provides help for states, tribal governments and small businesses damaged by the pandemic.

Hot on the heels of that landmark success comes his [\\$2.3tn initiative](#) for a longer-term boost for the economy, by creating jobs and repairing and upgrading roads and other infrastructure. Biden calls it a “once in a generation investment in America”. He says the plan will address climate change and pollution through a systemic shift to cleaner energy sources. Beating the climate crisis will henceforth be a “whole of government” endeavour.

Yet more plans are in the offing, including substantial new federal spending on healthcare and early years education, and investment in green technologies and scientific research. Some of these proposals were contained in last week's 2022 federal budget outline. If agreed – and that's a big “if” – they represent a whopping 16% overall rise in [discretionary government spending](#).

And the huge investments required will be paid for from two sources – borrowing and higher taxes on the wealthy. Biden argues these and other programmes are essential to reverse a decade of underinvestment in American society. That's a criticism of Donald Trump, who consistently tried to slash federal spending, but also of Biden's cautious old boss, Barack Obama, whose record he has begun to eclipse. Republicans, predictably, are opposed, complaining, for example, that military spending is neglected.

Yet like many Americans right across the political spectrum, they appear dumbstruck by Biden's sheer audacity. Over a long career, he was many things but never a radical. Reversing normal practice, he ran from the centre, yet now he governs from the left. Perhaps, at 78, he feels he has little to lose and the nation much to gain. Biden is a man in a hurry and spurring him is not only an older man's zeal but a crude calculation. The Democrats' majority in Congress is wafer-thin and the 2022 midterms loom.

If Biden pulls off only half of what he plans, it will be a remarkable achievement. Whatever happens, he has already changed the conversation.

Economically, the essential, leading role of the state has been forcefully reasserted. This holds true for the US, and also for Britain and Europe, in the transformative age of Covid. Politically, Biden is in the process of demonstrating that liberal democracies, when ably led, can both reform themselves and outperform authoritarian regimes.

Positive US global leadership, based on revived prosperity and multilateralism, is returning. More than Trump ever did, Biden is making America great again. Yet even as they cheer him and urge even grander feats, those on the British left, in particular, should take careful note. If you want to “do a Biden” and enact great change, you must first forge alliances and win an election.

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Farewell Prince Philip – cartoon

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[NotebookEducation](#)

Returning pupils need a gold star, not 'behaviour hubs'. Poor work, Mr Williamson

[Tim Adams](#)



Generosity of spirit can play a pivotal role in the classroom – perhaps someone should tell the education secretary



After a year of home study, pupils need to be inspired. Photograph: Florian Gaertner/Photothek/Getty Images

After a year of home study, pupils need to be inspired. Photograph: Florian Gaertner/Photothek/Getty Images

Sun 11 Apr 2021 02.15 EDT

I went to a grammar school in which praise was, in that repressed British tradition, very strictly rationed. You were far more likely to be singled out for doing something wrong than getting something right. Some classmates came and went from the school still hoping for a pat on the back.

That changed for me, aged about 14, in the inspired English lessons of Mr Langley, the kind of teacher not only capable at sharing brilliant ideas about books and art, but consistently alive to the vaguest hint of them in the work of his students. Homework would routinely come back with detailed exclamatory notes and paragraphs of thoughtful commentary. The effect of that adult generosity of spirit on my own enthusiasm for learning was transformative and lasting.

[After a year of Covid, a behaviour crackdown is an insult to England's children](#) | [Carolyn Willow](#)

[Read more](#)

In this regard alone, it is hard to imagine any more dispiriting announcement than that of our education secretary last week who, [without evidence](#), suggested that teenagers returning to school would “lack discipline and order”.

Having been separated from their mates and banished to their bedrooms to study for most of a grim 12 months, they would now be expected to move between lessons in “silent corridors”. Young people have sacrificed a huge amount on behalf of their more vulnerable elders in the last year. Rather than advertising “[behaviour hubs](#)”, how about first offering a heartfelt gold star?

Disentangling Marilyn



Magnum photo agency founder Eve Arnold, pictured in 1997. Photograph: Jane Bown/The Observer

The Magnum photo agency is currently selling a selection of poster prints by its celebrated founding member Eve Arnold, among them some of her candid [early portraits of Marilyn Monroe](#). I was lucky enough to interview Arnold in her attic flat in Mayfair a few years before she died, aged 99, in 2012. Our talk turned to how times had changed for journalists since she first started out, when access to Hollywood stars was not so tightly policed by PR agents.

She recalled a story about Monroe. “One time,” she said, “I went to see her and, naked under her transparent robe, she asked if I minded if she brushed her hair first? She then proceeded to brush her pubic hair.” Arnold paused. “You probably wouldn’t get that nowadays, would you?” she wondered. Probably not, I agreed.

Heads I win

The cliché has it that sport is played mostly in the mind. It was intriguing to read that the British golfer Justin Rose prepared for the [US Masters](#) not, as his 87 competitors had done, by getting match sharp in the tournaments prior to the “major”, but by spending solitary hours, day after day, sitting at home “playing” the Augusta National course in his mind. On the first afternoon, those mental images helped Rose to a score of 65, four shots ahead of his nearest rival. I’d like to imagine that, during lockdown, I’ve put in a similar level of visualisation with my dodgy tennis forehand. When I eventually manage to book a slot at my local courts, no doubt those hard yards will pay off.

Governing by the book

Observing Boris Johnson, it can seem that he thinks he’s acting a part in a drama for the amusement of his father, Stanley. If you read the clunky political thrillers Johnson senior has written, the impression is reinforced. The first of Stanley’s novels, [The Virus](#), imagined governments panicking to produce a vaccine against a deadly pandemic. The second, *Tunnel*, in 1984, conjured an unlikely climax in which the French president, François Mitterrand, and Margaret Thatcher hurtled towards each other on Eurostar trains, primed for collision. Does the prime minister keep copies at his bedside?

Tim Adams is an Observer columnist

[Opinion](#)Politics

Down with statue politics! Let's put this lifeless public art back in its box

[Catherine Bennett](#)



When Laurence Fox gets in on the act, it's time to leave Churchill and others in peace



Laurence Fox launches his mayoral manifesto in front of the statue of Churchill in Parliament Square, London. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Laurence Fox launches his mayoral manifesto in front of the statue of Churchill in Parliament Square, London. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Sun 11 Apr 2021 02.45 EDT

Who wouldn't like to be a statue in Boris Johnson's Britain? Cherished by the powerful and honoured with collective gatherings, as Churchill's shrine was last week, by supporters of the [London mayoral candidate Laurence Fox](#). Without themselves needing to organise, these historically neglected members of the inanimate community have within the last few months secured privileges, protections and high-level advocacy that, in addition to their existing plinth status, falls only narrowly short of full suffrage – and even that cannot confidently be ruled out.

[More war hero statues 'wholly retrograde' move, says UK women's group](#)
[Read more](#)

Demonstrating that the government does have a heart, albeit one of stone, the culture secretary, Oliver Dowden, accepted that, where sentient arts

freelancers could [manage unaided](#) in lockdown, statues needed help. Not just in their personal struggles against decay and pigeons but against official “[bullying](#)” (mercifully for the statues, largely of an ideological as opposed to a violent, Tory, intra-departmental nature). His department identified a “noisy minority of activists constantly trying to do Britain down”.

One respectable statue had been toppled purely because of his slave fortune. Another’s plinth had been scrawled on. A few obscure stone dignitaries had been unceremoniously relocated from their old haunts, for all the world as if they were random old ladies blocking demolition of a [care home](#). Since these humiliations had hardly been invited by the effigies themselves, everything pointed to institutional statueism. New [laws](#) would therefore protect statues from ever again being disturbed without government permission. Precedents in historical [iconoclasm](#) – Henry VIII’s and Cromwell’s, say, or Johnson’s [devastation of the London skyline](#) – were no excuse. Disobedient organisations could lose funding.

And what of the statues’ right to be out alone at night, without fear of assault or unwanted touching? In an emotional [article](#), sounding fully as insulted as any woman being lectured on how to dress by Imran Khan, Johnson lamented the [boarding up](#) of Churchill’s statue before a Black Lives Matter protest. “It was outrageous,” he wrote, “that anyone could even have claimed that the statue needed protection. It was and is miserable to see his statue entombed in its protective sheath.” (Sheath? He’s familiar, then, with the concept.)

Yes, the prime minister conceded, such “outrageous” precautions predated BLM. But that, you gathered, occurred in the long period separating Pygmalion’s very successful relationship with a statue from Johnson’s 2019 accession, during which statues were widely considered lifeless, only transiently meaningful, possibly even pathetic relics of antique grandiosity. Maybe they didn’t do Ozymandias at Eton.

“Why attack Churchill?” Johnson demanded. “What has it come to when one of this country’s greatest ever leaders – perhaps our greatest – has to be shielded from the wrath of the mob?”

If, outside [Britain First](#) and the [Daily Telegraph](#), many civilians were disappointingly apathetic on this point (only 33% disapproved of the Colston statue's removal), instructive penalties would re-educate them. The 10-year prison terms introduced in the new crime bill confirm that, in the punitive enforcement of statue veneration, Johnson's UK now competes with any efficiently run tyranny.

"There has been widespread upset about the damage and desecration of memorials," the [Home Office lies](#), by way of explaining why statue damage may now be sentenced more severely than rape. "It has long been considered," it adds, just as vaguely, "that the law is not sufficiently robust in this area." It has? Can it point us to any manifesto promise, indeed to any serious, even fleeting Tory interest in statuary not of Margaret Thatcher, prior to the Bristol monument being immersed, retrieved and thereafter the sole pretext for *Telegraph* articles about baying/wrathful/imaginary mobs?

Maybe any creative impulse is to be welcomed from a government so noted for philistinism

Maybe shame about this earlier indifference helps explain the [intensity](#) of the government's current passion for monument protection (alas, excluding Stonehenge). Seeking respectable support for this idolatry, Johnson declares common cause, as per, with women. Notwithstanding Maggi Hambling's recent [catastrophe](#), there are feminists who think, understandably enough, that the lack of heroic female statuary is worth the effort of rectifying. The government's first demand, however, has been for a "[great big statue](#)" of Captain Tom, "not just for this generation to remember Captain Tom", said the vaccines secretary, Nadhim Zahawi, "but for future generations". And why not. It might even remind a future Tory government to close its borders in a pandemic.

Maybe any creative impulse is to be welcomed from a government so noted for philistinism. But ministerial fetishisation may yet be a mixed blessing for landmark statues, in particular for the Churchill bronze installed in Parliament Square in 1973. Last year, Johnson vowed to resist its relocation with "every breath in my body". In practice, the greatest physical risk from this posturing was obviously to the statue.

Again, thanks to Churchill's most embarrassing fan, the war leader is yet more firmly identified as – perhaps the worst thing for any public statue – pre-eminently a divisive figure, recognised as flawed by the left and thus ostentatiously venerated by the right. The more Johnson depicts it as worthy of martyrdom (Dowden favours Nelson's column) the more magnetic the site to smaller-time demagogues.

Laurence Fox has duly rhapsodised, plinthside, on the various ways – from mask defiance to low traffic suspensions – he aspires, in a kind of reversal of blitz priorities, to shorten Londoners' lives. Even Churchill's admirers might welcome, if this is to be his statue's fate, its overdue [removal](#) to a place of safety.

Long before the Tory project to cultivate public discord out of stone and bronze, the raising of figurative public statues had become a complicated, dated, probably doomed enterprise, a theme underlined by artists contributing to Trafalgar Square's fourth plinth. Indifference that protected the most dreadful old statues could not be extended to the new. Even if people agreed on a subject – eg Oscar Wilde – they were likely to be divided on the execution – eg Maggi Hambling. In characteristic style, Johnson's insane statue legislation is premised on an invention, a reverence that never existed.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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[The weekly stats uncovered](#) **Coronavirus**

How big are the blood-clot risks of the AstraZeneca jab?

[David Spiegelhalter](#) and [Anthony Masters](#)

Young people have as much chance of winning the lottery as of getting serious blood clots from the AstraZeneca vaccine



A nursing home worker receives the AstraZeneca vaccine. Photograph: Heo Ran/Reuters

A nursing home worker receives the AstraZeneca vaccine. Photograph: Heo Ran/Reuters

Sun 11 Apr 2021 03.28 EDT

Last Wednesday, the European Medicines Agency [stated](#) there was a plausible link between the Oxford/AstraZeneca (Vaxzevria) vaccine and rare types of blood clotting, which the MHRA [estimates](#) may happen in one in 100,000 young adults who get the vaccine.

It is challenging to think of such low risks: when we have to count the zeros, all intuition goes. So what else has roughly a one in 100,000 chance for a young adult? We could choose from the risk of dying when under general anaesthesia, or in a [skydiving jump](#), or, on the positive side, winning the [Lotto jackpot](#) if you bought 450 tickets, or guessing the last five digits of someone's mobile phone number.

Perhaps more pertinently, it's roughly the risk of a young woman on the [contraceptive pill](#) having some form of blood clot in one week.

But think how you react to these risks: do they seem negligible or important? Risk is as much a matter of feeling as analysis. For the [briefing](#) last week, the [Winton Centre](#) (which DS chairs) constructed a comparison of benefits and risks in different age bands, balancing avoiding intensive care with Covid-19 against getting one of these specific clots. When there is not much virus circulating, these may be finely balanced in [younger people](#), as they do not tend to get severely ill with Covid-19.

But this analysis leaves out important potential benefits of vaccination, such as preventing other risks from Covid, including [blood clotting](#). Then there's long Covid – around 12% of people aged 17 to 24 reported symptoms [12 weeks after infection](#).

Vaccination is also not just for the person who gets jabbed; it looks like it will help prevent symptomless infections and viral spread and so benefit all those they meet.

Life is neither safe nor unsafe: risk is a spectrum. There are acceptable risks, which are so low people do nothing in response. There are risks so high we desist our activities.

The third kind is tolerable risks: where we seek to reap the benefits while mitigating downsides. For most people, when there is virus circulating, the risks of Covid-19 outweigh the minimal risks from the vaccines.

David Spiegelhalter is chair of the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication at Cambridge. Anthony Masters is statistical ambassador for the Royal Statistical Society

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[Opinion](#) Immigration and asylum

A new Windrush is in the making. Its victims are the most vulnerable of young people

[Sonia Sodha](#)



Children in care born to EU parents face complex barriers to remaining in the UK

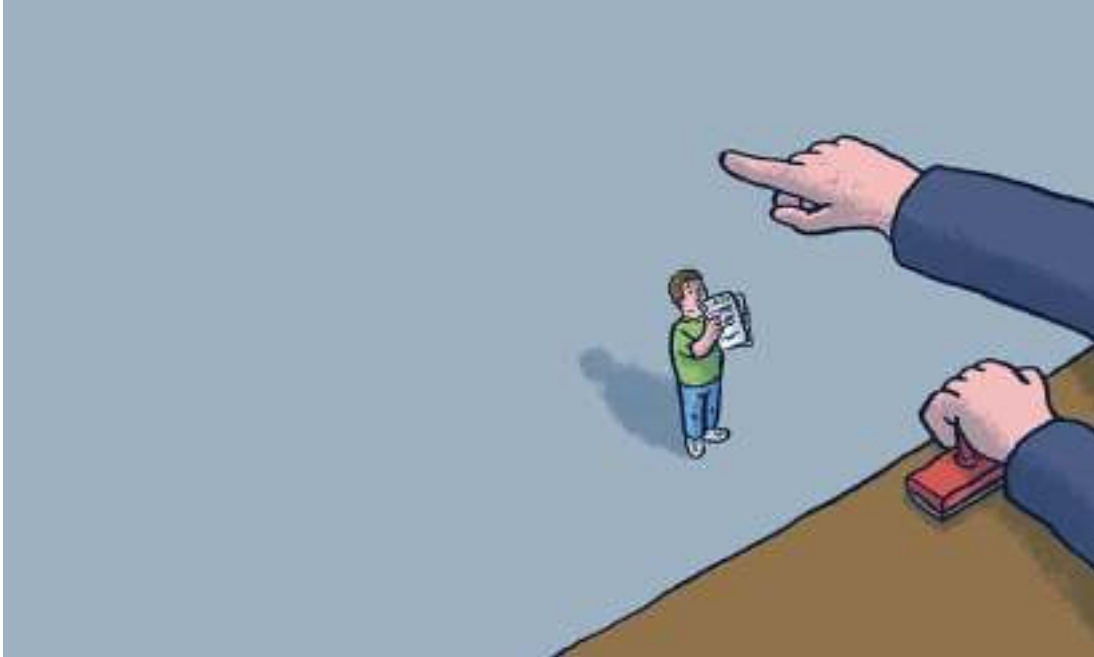


Illustration: Dominic McKenzie.

Illustration: Dominic McKenzie.

Sun 11 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

Three years on, the individual tales of [Windrush injustice](#) still have the power to catch my breath. Men and women who moved to Britain as children decades ago, who found themselves banished from the UK for the remainder of their life after a holiday abroad, wrongfully arrested, detained and [threatened with deportation](#), and [denied life-saving care](#) on the NHS. So many stories of the British state ruining black lives, but one stands out for its exquisite cruelty: that of Jay, the son of a Windrush immigrant.

[From Macpherson to Windrush: UK inquiries into racial injustice](#)
[Read more](#)

Jay was born in the UK and taken into care as a baby. When he applied for a passport as a teenager he was told he did not have enough information about the status of his estranged mother. After his third unsuccessful application, the Home Office threatened to deport him to Jamaica and forced him to declare himself [stateless](#). He was only able to [secure a passport](#) years later, after the Windrush scandal broke and his case received significant media attention.

It is so extraordinary, I struggle to get my head round it. A baby is so vulnerable that the state assumes parental responsibility for him soon after his birth. That same state refuses him a passport again, and again, and again, then, as a young man, it threatens to forcibly deport him to a country he has never set foot in. There can be no greater symbol of the sick rot that Conservative prime ministers have introduced into our immigration system through the “hostile environment”.

And yet not only have ministers declined to fix this, they are putting thousands more children in care at risk of this fate as a consequence of [Brexit](#).

The deadline for EU citizens living in the UK, including children, to apply to the EU settlement scheme for the right to remain is less than three months away. Local authorities have to do this for children in care. No one knows exactly how many are affected; many local authorities did not keep nationality data for children in their care. But the Children’s Society [has established](#) through Freedom of Information requests that, so far, fewer than 40% of the 3,700 or so eligible children in care and care leavers we know about have applications in; the true number could be much higher. It is unclear what will happen to them if they fall through the net, only to discover their unlawful status when they are older and can’t get a job, open a bank account or rent a flat and are at risk of deportation.

By opting for an EU scheme where people have to actively apply for what should be an automatic legal right, the government has created an anomaly that could leave children in care in a similar situation to Jay. It has batted away efforts from MPs and peers to try to fast track all children in care through that process. And it is deeply worrying that the government is encouraging local authorities to register these children for settlement status, putting them on an immigration track that offers nowhere near the same guarantees as a passport, even though most, or even all, could have [rights to citizenship](#), according to Solange Valdez-Symonds, a lawyer who specialises in citizenship.

It is a system designed to catch out people who grew up in the UK, to make it as difficult as possible for them to stay

Children born here to parents settled in the UK, or who have lived the first 10 years of their life here, have the right to register for British citizenship. If a child was born in the UK to parents who settle before they turn 18, they also have that right, but it expires when they turn 18. The home secretary also has a discretionary power to grant any child citizenship if it is clear their future lies here, for example if they are taken into care, but again they must apply before they turn 18.

But knowledge of the full extent of children's rights to citizenship law is poor. Not only that, local authorities have to pay extortionate fees of more than £1,000 to register a child in their care for citizenship and too often nobody even knows the required information about parents' immigration status. Some of these children will lose their rights to citizenship forever when they turn 18. All children over 10 are subject to a [good character test](#), which many children in care are at risk of failing; the Home Office has turned down children born in the UK because of a minor police caution or a referral order following a school fight.

All this creates a system where too many children in care are likely to be dumped on a conveyor belt to the hostile environment and possible deportation. It takes young people starting from scratch, who may have no memory of living anywhere else, four applications costing more than £8,000 in fees and charges over 10 years to apply for [indefinite leave to remain](#). The applications are fiendishly complex and require specialist legal advice; the Home Office rejects applications with the tiniest of mistakes, even as its own processes are ridden with errors and there is no right to appeal if you get rejected. If young people miss a deadline for one of the applications, or can't afford the fees, they become undocumented, vulnerable to exploitation without the legal right to work or rent, and go back to the start of the decade-long process. It is a system designed to catch out people who grew up in the UK, to make it as difficult as possible for them to earn the right to stay here.

Even as the government apologises for Windrush, it is planting the seeds for a future injustice no less profound that will affect some of the most vulnerable children in society. The only way to resolve this is to give all children, including children in care, who grow up in Britain the lifelong right to register for citizenship for free, without a test that fails them if they get into a fight at school. The government was warned again and again about the

consequences of its policies for the Windrush generation, to no avail. Will they listen this time?

Sonia Sodha is an Observer columnist

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[Names in the news](#)[Celebrity](#).

We've all suffered Khloé Kardashian's fate, even if we're not as famous

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



Her efforts to suppress what she believed was an embarrassing photograph only made matters worse



Khloé Kardashian revealed ‘the pressure, constant ridicule and judgment my entire life to be perfect’. Photograph: Broadimage/REX/Shutterstock

Khloé Kardashian revealed ‘the pressure, constant ridicule and judgment my entire life to be perfect’. Photograph: Broadimage/REX/Shutterstock

Sat 10 Apr 2021 12.30 EDT

It has been quite the fortnight for the [Streisand effect](#), the cultural phenomenon of attracting far more attention to a photograph by trying to suppress it than if it had been left to exist without comment. Named after the singer, who [sued a photographer](#) for \$10m in 2003 for posting pictures of her house online, which few knew was Streisand’s house until she sued him, it has really come into its own in the age of social media, particularly if you are part of one of the most curated, carefully lit families in the celebrity world.

There was a recent precedent for the current drama. On a podcast, former *The OC* star Rachel Bilson discussed the time she [posted a picture](#) to Instagram of her with an old classmate, the actor Rami Malek, during their school days. She admitted that it was “dorky”. He messaged her and unceremoniously asked her to take it down as he is “a private person”; Bilson said that she was “a little bummed at how it was handled”. A picture

that might have gone unnoticed has now done the rounds, particularly since Bilson shared the anecdote. Maybe that is a Streisand-by-proxy.

The Malek/Bilson saga was just the opening act for the dissemination of a photograph of [Khloé Kardashian](#) last week, seemingly without makeup, by a pool, unfiltered. Kardashian quickly attempted to get it removed from the internet, which, as the internet has a tendency to behave like a toddler who finds it hilarious to copy everything you say, led to it being posted everywhere. It was photographic whack-a-mole and the mole appeared to be winning.

People wrote that she looked gorgeous, even “better”, unfiltered and unlit, thus getting involved in the circus of scrutiny that led to Kardashian [posting her reasons](#) for trying to get it taken down: “The pressure, constant ridicule and judgment my entire life to be perfect and meet others’ standards of how I should look.” Some might argue that the beast the Kardashians reared and sold is coming back to bite them, others that she is brave for opening up about her body image issues. The saga is sad, a cautionary tale about image and control.

Kardashian made it sound as if her situation were hard to relate to for anyone not being scrutinised by millions of people. She has clearly not been on the receiving end of my mother’s blanket approach to posting family pictures to Facebook, which include every blink, triple chin and open mouth, as if she has put a filter only on the word “flattering”.

JonOne: enough to give him art failure



US graffiti artist JonOne: could you do better than him? Photograph: Patrícia de Melo Moreira/AFP/Getty Images

Anyone who has heard that familiar grumble of “I could do that” lobbed in the direction of modern or abstract art will enjoy the story of what happened in Seoul recently, when a poor couple went to see a piece of art by the US artist JonOne.

The untitled painting, estimated to be worth up to \$500,000 is a vast graffiti work, created by JonOne in front of an audience in South Korea in 2016. The paint cans and brushes from the performance are considered to be part of the piece and are therefore displayed along with it, at the bottom, on the floor.

You may be able to guess what happened next. The unfortunate couple [mistook the painting for “participatory art”](#), according to head of exhibition, Kang Wook, and were captured on CCTV adding their own special touches to it, in the form of three black daubs. They later explained that they had made a genuine mistake, but they may still be at least partially liable for any restoration fees. In its unrestored form, it has been a magnet for visitors, who are taking selfies in front of it. I could do that? They could and they did.

Robert Mapplethorpe: all his life is here, thanks to a canny recut



Robert Mapplethorpe: this is your life... again. Photograph: Richard Young/REX/Shutterstock

When *Mapplethorpe*, the biopic of photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, came out in 2018, it passed me by. Directed by Ondi Timoner and starring a pre-*Crown*, post-Doctor Matt Smith, the reviews weren't great and still hover at around a 33% splatter on Rotten Tomatoes. But it has now been rereleased with a new director's cut. "This is my original, complete version," Timoner explained.

There is a growing movement of do-overs. Ever since 2017, fans had been calling for original director Zack Snyder's cut of *Justice League* to be released, rather than the Joss Whedon version that appeared in cinemas, which even the screenwriter Chris Terrio last week called "[an act of vandalism](#)". The #SnyderCut was released in colour and then, for good measure, in black and white too and it restored the film's reputation. I wonder if that's what *Game of Thrones* was aiming for with a brand new trailer for its [much-maligned final season](#), released to mark the "Iron Anniversary" of the show's debut 10 years ago.

Predictably, pop's headgirl, Taylor Swift, is proving to be the master of the redo, slowly rerecording and releasing new versions of her older albums, in order to regain control over songs that had been sold in their original masters. [*Fearless \(Taylor's Version\)*](#) came out last week. It is not exactly a reimagining, more a clever business move, but the idea that nothing is fixed any more, or finished, is an intriguing one: imagine a new, reworked *Game of Thrones* finale. A Taylor's Version, if you will.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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[Observer letters](#) **Keir Starmer**

Letters: time for Starmer to pump up the volume

Enough rhetoric: if the Labour leader wants to create a better future, he must act



Keir Starmer's Labour 'must make palpable a post-carbon society that offers something for all.' Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Keir Starmer's Labour 'must make palpable a post-carbon society that offers something for all.' Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Sun 11 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

There is little to object to in Keir Starmer's article; there is even less to be inspired by, or to set the blood racing ("[We must be bold and end the idea that inequality is inevitable. Let's get Britain working again](#)", Opinion). Faced with a government doing more to dismantle democracy than any in living memory and abusing its position to favour friends and supporters, surely this is a time to stand tall and proud for the values that matter.

Where the Tories are about division, fear and loathing, [Labour](#) must be about unity, hope and tolerance. Where the Tories seek to evoke a nostalgia for a past that never existed, [Labour](#) must make palpable a post-carbon society that offers something for all. Most of all, [Labour](#) must be honest that we are living in a time of fundamental change that can create a better future. To do otherwise boxes [Labour](#) in to being no more than a slightly less toxic alternative to the Tories which, while still desirable, is not enough to make the difference.

Dave Hunter

Bristol

Keir Starmer comments on a long list of shocking inequalities in the UK, many of which are related. He omits the most far-reaching inequality of all: that of political representation. Only if every voter believes that his or her vote counts equally with all other votes do we live in a true democracy.

Karl Gehring

Sheffield

Keir Starmer is quoted as insisting: “I’m now looking forward to taking the mask off and opening the throttle” (“[I’ll take my mask off and show why I should be prime minister](#)”, News). I really hope he can, but far better than promising then failing to deliver, as is Johnson’s wont, is to let actions make the rhetoric superfluous. The phrase “opening the throttle” is too similar to when Iain Duncan Smith avowed, to no effect: “The quiet man is turning up the volume.” Starmer must turn up the volume to 11.

Eddie Dougall

Walsham le Willows, Bury St Edmunds

Suffolk

The shocking story of Easter

Barbara Ellen contrasts the widespread popularity of Christmas with the lack of public impact of Easter (“[At Easter, I can cope without church and chocolate. But how I miss people](#)”, Comment). There are two reasons for this. Christmas was originally a midwinter festival of pagan revelry which was baptised into Christianity in the fourth century. In a secularised Britain, it happily reverts to its previous role of feasting and fun. Easter, on the other hand, proclaims a story that is so shocking and unsettling it cannot easily be

placarded in public. That is why the early church tried to shield this mystery from public view with its *disciplina arcani*.

What happened on Good Friday and Easter Day is so threatening to how we think of ourselves that the only way we can cope with it is to tame it into chocolate eggs and bunnies. However, in those churches which did manage to open last week people could still be found before the cross on every day of Holy Week.

Richard Harries

London SW13

Shoddy, cynical race report

Your editorial is right that the report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities is based on the “apparent belief that people of colour should stop complaining and be grateful for their lot” (“[Race report shuns evidence in the service of ideology](#)”). For instance, Dr Tony Sewell disgracefully claims: “There is a new story about the Caribbean experience which speaks to the slave period not only being about profit and suffering but how culturally African people transformed themselves into a remodelled African/Britain.”

This is the same as telling Irish people to just get over the “great hunger” and concentrate instead on the “positive story” of how mass death and emigration led to an Irish reinvention that was so successful it produced the first Catholic US president. This shoddy, cynical and disingenuous report is about putting race at the heart of the Tories’ divisive culture wars. But it does nothing to help tackle the very real problems of racial inequality in modern Britain.

Joe McCarthy

Dublin

Biden’s monumental reset

Last Sunday’s paper contained two of the most significant and exciting reports in almost half a century. Will Hutton writes of Joe Biden “ending a 45-year embrace of Wall Street neoliberalism”, calling it a “monumental reset” (“[With Biden’s own audacious New Deal, the democratic left](#)

[rediscovered its soul](#)”, Comment). The Business leader (“[America used to fear federal spending, but Biden knows the mood has changed](#)”) writes of Biden “grabbing his moment” and of the US “for the first time in many years... shining a light for the world”. If Biden succeeds, the curse of the Reagan/Thatcher toxic experiment may at long last be over.

John Airs

Liverpool

I value my right to protest

I was horrified to read reports of unacceptable police behaviour in connection with the “kill the bill” protests in Bristol (“[Women’s anger at ‘abuse of power’ in Bristol police raids](#)”, News). They apparently used tactics which make no distinction between violent terrorists and peaceful protesters, and their use of handcuffs on one (innocent) young woman and their threat to use a Taser against another is extremely disturbing. It seems that elements of the force revel in disproportionate violence.

The police, crime, sentencing and courts bill is partly designed to give clarity to the police in dealing with various kinds of disorder, including protests, under cover of breaches of Covid regulations, but the section which aims to make all forms of protest illegal will turn this country (though not Scotland – yet) into a police state. I am 75 and a supporter of Extinction Rebellion, which in no way condones violence. All my adult life I have protested peacefully against war, apartheid, environmental desecration and injustices various, and I don’t relish becoming criminalised just because I cherish the democratic right to disagree with unempathetic and rigid Home Office edicts.

If we emerge from this Covid nightmare, it would be good to have a few civil rights to return to!

Caro Wilkinson

Edinburgh

Red hot chilli peppers

Robert Carrier was ahead of his time and it is wonderful that Jay Rayner has promoted his talents, and love of butter (“[Cook dinner with Robert Carrier and you’ll need butter, cream, wine and quite a lot of cognac](#)”, Magazine). Yes, Floyd was fab and Rick is a trusted go-to but Carrier was the first person to really show us how to eat. His use of ingredients and spices were new to most of us. He showed us that good food was fun and accessible and his work has not dated.

Alas, he was not always perfect. Delia Smith tells a story that when working as a private cook she followed his recipe in *Great Dishes of the World* for chilli con carne which had a large amount of chilli powder; so much, that the family she cooked for couldn’t eat it. It was years later that she found out it was a typing error.

Ian Sellers

Boreton, Shrewsbury

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

For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 11 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

A travel feature gave the surname of Rowena Cade, the creator of the Minack theatre in Cornwall, as “Carr” and located the Italian Riviera town of Portofino on the Amalfi coast (“[Foreign exchange](#)”, 4 April, page 43, Magazine).

A match report should have referred to the referee as Graham, not George, Scott (“Harrison steers Leeds to win over dogged Blades”, 4 April, page 4, Sport).

The string theorist Michio Kaku was referring to the “[James] Webb telescope”, not the “web telescope”, as we had it, in his answer to a question about the possibility of finding an alien civilisation (“[Q&A](#)”, 4 April, page 22, the New Review).

Other recently amended articles include:

[The Red Wall test: Labour fights to regain trust in its heartland](#)

[Washington shaken after officer and suspect killed in attack at US Capitol](#)

Write to the Readers' Editor, the Observer, York Way, London N1 9GU, email observer.readers@observer.co.uk, tel 020 3353 4736

[Opinion](#) Prince Philip

Prince Philip was a rarity in public life – the man walking two steps behind

[Barbara Ellen](#)



For 70-plus years, the Duke of Edinburgh went against his instincts and stood in the Queen's shadow



‘Supporter, confidant and sounding board’: Prince Philip with the Queen in 1955 after his team won a polo tournament. Photograph: Getty Images

‘Supporter, confidant and sounding board’: Prince Philip with the Queen in 1955 after his team won a polo tournament. Photograph: Getty Images

Sat 10 Apr 2021 13.00 EDT

Whatever your thoughts on [Prince Philip](#), it can’t have been easy trudging in the Queen’s shadow all those years. A few careful steps behind, but a galaxy away in status. He famously erupted (“I am nothing but an amoeba”) when at first he couldn’t give his children his own surname. For a man of that generation and temperament, you can see how it must have been frustrating, even maddening. You can understand how sometimes he may have felt emasculated by his secondary supportive role.

Despite everything – despite himself – perhaps we could cast Philip as an early prototype of the “new man”. His great achievement was that, all things considered, he bore it well. And while occasionally he lost it, he could have lost it more often.

Was this the triumph and the tragedy of [Philip](#) – that he was a born alpha forced into a lifetime role as a beta? A square peg rammed into a round royal hole, who committed wholeheartedly to duty, service and, let’s face it,

frequent staggering tedium. Even the most ardent of anti-monarchists would have to acknowledge that royal life can be drenched in unimaginable privilege and yet still be the soggiest and heaviest of straitjackets.

Not that this excuses those infamous outbursts of “casual” racism and sexism that Philip seemed to enjoy directing at people who couldn’t answer back. Those weren’t “gaffes” – they were deliberate, a triumphant internal bark of “Look what I can get away with!” I don’t buy this as “banter” or that that side of the duke was “refreshing”. For a more intriguing view of his essential character, the key lies with the Queen.

Much continues to be made of Philip’s role as the [Queen’s rock](#), her supporter, confidant and sounding board. Many women have done this for their husbands with nowhere near as much swooning praise and reverence, but still, indisputably, he did it and for more than seven decades. Give him that. In fact, give him more, for, crucially, wasn’t he also the Queen’s rebellion? She chose him as a young teenager and wouldn’t budge, despite the fact that he was distrusted and disliked by many in the influential inner circles for being too foreign, too rootless, too broke – or, as one detractor put it, “rough, ill-mannered, uneducated”.

Clearly, young Elizabeth wanted her Bad Boy, her love match, and wouldn’t be put off having him, showing off a quite different, daring and defiant side to her character, a world away from her well-honed mask of stiff, ribbon-cutting paragon of monarchy and duty. Just as she was the key to his essential character, so he was to hers.

This was another way he supported her: stopping her collapsing with boredom, relieving and lifting the grim weight of the crown. The rest of us may or may not miss the Duke of Edinburgh. The Queen will miss the man for whom she was a real woman and not just an image on a stamp.

No chair for Ursula von der Leyen, but at least she had her dignity



Standing room only for Ursula von der Leyen thanks to Charles Michel and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Ursula von der Leyen is one classy dame. The European commission's first female president was [left without a chair](#) during a meeting in Ankara with the former Belgian prime minister and now president of the European council, Charles Michel, and the Turkish leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Von der Leyen responded with an icy “ehm”, before sitting on an adjacent sofa. Her composure was even more admirable considering that an issue scheduled for discussion was equal rights, following Turkey's withdrawal from a convention on gender violence. Bravo to Von der Leyen for behaving with dignity. But how I wish she'd told those self-satisfied oafs to “shift!” or insisted that an extra chair be found.

This wasn't about gallantry (or lack of it), this was an abuse of power, showing the “little lady” who was boss. It was high-stakes political chauvinism played out as musical chairs with a dash of “a cup of tea would be nice, love”. The fact that Michel and Erdoğan didn't care about coming across as ill-mannered boors was a major part of the theatre.

The result: a key European power hub came across like a scuzzy locker-room with towel-flicking jocks in charge. Nice work, gentlemen. Von der

Leyen should be congratulated on keeping her cool. I'm not sure I'd have managed it.

What kind of society leaves a disabled person with £3 a day?



‘How long before physically disabled people find themselves targeted by a “care tax”?’ Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

As if life weren't tough enough for disabled people, some are being subjected to a stealth “[care tax](#)”. A number of English councils are quietly increasing charges to people with learning difficulties and mental illness, including autism and cerebral palsy. These charges (contributions to their care) are generally taken from their benefits, with people now facing shocking and unmanageable increases. One contribution rose from £5.59 to £83 a week, another from £40 to £151. A family with adult children with learning disabilities received a backdated bill for more than £20,000.

This is proving catastrophic for the people affected and their families, causing acute distress and anxiety. One man with bipolar disorder is being forced to consider putting his dog down if he can no longer afford to keep her. Vulnerable people are being left with barely enough money – little more

than £3 a day – to pay for essentials, which is in direct contravention of Care Act guidance. Some claimants are considering legal action.

Mental health charities and support groups lay the blame at the door of the ever-worsening government [funding of social care](#). Put simply, certain councils appear to be trying to retrieve some of the money paid to disabled people (such as with Personal Independence Payments) by vastly increasing their care contributions.

The official line is that people can appeal, but everyone knows how long and complicated such actions can be. Are mentally ill people supposed to go through all that? How long before physically disabled people find themselves targeted by a “care tax”? Is this a taster of how people with mental health conditions associated with long Covid will be treated? There are serious issues regarding the long-term financing of social care, but disabled people shouldn’t be the ones to suffer. If this isn’t a national disgrace, what is?

Barbara Ellen is an Observer columnist

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OpinionPolice

Is a party that sells police stations to criminals so very tough on crime?

Nick Cohen



Far from defending the police and justice system, the Tories have ruinously defunded them



The former Leckhampton police station in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, one of around 600 that have been sold off. Photograph: Sam Frost

The former Leckhampton police station in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, one of around 600 that have been sold off. Photograph: Sam Frost

Sat 10 Apr 2021 14.00 EDT

Defund the police was a provocative slogan for the US radical left and the settled policy of Britain's ruling right. You should switch off politicians and commentators who talk about building a safer country, if they don't face up to the debilitation that 11 years of Conservative defunding has inflicted on the criminal justice system.

Let one anecdote stand in for the bigger picture. The Tories [sold](#) half the magistrates' courts and more than a third of county courts in England and Wales between 2010 and 2020, and about [600 police stations](#). The same government is engaged in a screeching U-turn today and trying to deal with the tens of thousands of Covid-delayed trials by opening "[Nightingale courts](#)", although I doubt that Florence Nightingale would have sent the lowliest British soldier in Crimea to our fetid prisons.

Bewildered detectives reported to former chief crown prosecutor Nazir Afzal that a police station in the north-west was included in the fire sale and

an organised crime group bought it. The gang run it as a pizza restaurant and a front for the distribution of drugs – “extra toppings”. Afzal tells me police intelligence heard the gangsters “crowing” about getting one over on their old adversaries.

A country where crime gangs do business from former cop shops is not one whose politicians should be able to boast of their toughness on crime. Boris Johnson and Priti Patel get away with it by saying they will restore the 15% cut in police numbers their own party imposed by 2023. No sensible person believes a Johnson promise. But humour me and assume he isn't lying. When newspapers from [Cheshire](#) to the [Thames Valley](#) report that local officers dealt informally with suspects accused of child sex crimes, drugs trafficking, stalking, robbery, firearms possession, kidnapping and blackmail rather than take them to court, the softest liberal may concede Johnson has a point.

He cannot make it stick, and not just because the courts will still be hearing Covid-delayed cases in 2023, and have no idea when they will return to normal. For the court system, failure was the “normal” of the 2010s. As with so much else, the pandemic has accelerated existing trends and, in the case of the criminal justice system, the trend was downhill all the way.

Johnson's party reduced the Crown Prosecution Service to an organisation “[creaking](#)” under the strain of a loss of a quarter of its budget, in the words of Alison Saunders, a former director of public prosecutions. With malign timing, the explosion in evidence from online data coincided with the assault on the public sector, slowing the ability of prosecutors and police officers to process cases. Legal aid payments for defence solicitors have become so miserly that suspects may soon be [unable to find lawyers](#) in large parts of the country. Prisons have confined inmates to their cells, meanwhile, in conditions the [Prison Reform Trust](#) says “amount to solitary confinement”. The pandemic destroyed what attempts the jails made to turn them from crime when it closed classrooms, gyms, libraries, workshops and offending behaviour programmes.

I could go on to the withdrawal of public support from youth workers, social workers and teachers who might identify and divert young men at risk of

turning to crime, and from probation officers who might rehabilitate offenders. I could look at drug and alcohol consumption rates and poverty.

However long I spent, the fact would remain that, when Patel said: “[I want criminals to feel terror](#)”, she must have known the odds were criminals would be left in peace. What applies to the failing system applies to libertarians who worry, understandably, about the authoritarian powers the government has taken in the crisis. They cry that the UK is becoming a [police state](#) without understanding that we don’t have enough police to police a police state. Liberals, who want a humane prison system or a police force that takes the abuse of women seriously and does not disproportionately target young black men, not only need to think about where they will find the funding, but about who they might train and recruit and how many years it will take to rebuild from the wreckage.

The Conservatives got away with defunding the police and the rest of the criminal justice system in part because their 11 years in power began during a period of social peace across the developed world. From the mid-1960s until the 1990s, crime rates exploded and then fell back, spectacularly, in the 21st century. Criminologists argue about the reasons: ageing populations, the aborting of unwanted children, even reductions in air pollution and levels of lead in the blood. As always, left and right pick the explanation that suit their biases. Perhaps we do not need an explanation. What American researchers call “[the great crime decline](#)” may just be a reversion to the mean. Humanity progresses, as [Steven Pinker](#) has argued, and a part of the progress has been a decline in everyday violence that began at the end of the [Middle Ages](#).

On this view, the brutal decades of the late 20th century were a temporary diversion from the road to greater peace. In 2014, when UK crime rates had [fallen](#) significantly below 1990 levels, researchers from Cambridge University and the World Health Organization said a future in which rates of homicide, child abuse and domestic violence fell by as much as 50% was achievable [in 30 years](#). Today, they may not be so confident. Gun deaths reached their highest point in US history in 2020, a year the Princeton sociologist Patrick Sharkey described as “[the most violent](#)” of the century. A gradual rise in crime since 2014 had culminated in “a really terrible year across the whole country”.

American exceptionalism should make you wary of looking west for guides to what will happen next here. I just mention in passing that UK crime rates have risen since 2014, too, and plateaued around their 1990 level. They are still below their peak but, if they should explode, the justice system would fall apart. Indeed, it has already fallen apart.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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Headlines thursday 8 april 2021

- [Covid vaccines UK expert urges people in 20s to keep getting jabs](#)
- [Live UK Covid: AstraZeneca jab 'safe at all ages', says Hancock, and does not deny shipment to Australia](#)
- [AstraZeneca jab Vaccine confidence fears as under-30s offered alternative](#)
- [Analysis 'Course correction' could dent confidence far beyond UK](#)

Coronavirus

Coronavirus: UK expert urges people in 20s to keep getting vaccine

Prof David Spiegelhalter says advantages of vaccinating young people far outweigh risks

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Spiegelhalter is the chair of the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication at the University of Cambridge. Photograph: Richard Baker Risk/Alamy

Spiegelhalter is the chair of the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication at the University of Cambridge. Photograph: Richard Baker Risk/Alamy

[Kevin Rawlinson](#)

Thu 8 Apr 2021 10.19 EDT

People in their 20s should continue to get vaccinated against Covid despite the very rare cases of blood clotting linked to the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine because of the wider benefit to their families, friends and neighbours – as well as the direct benefit to themselves, a leading expert has said.

Prof David Spiegelhalter, the chair of the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication at the University of Cambridge, said the advantages of continuing to vaccinate people far outweighed the risks.

Speaking to BBC Radio 4's Today programme on Thursday, he said the evidence suggested that if a cohort of people in their 20s large enough to fill Wembley Stadium was given the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab, one person among them would likely develop blood clotting.

While Spiegelhalter acknowledged the concerns around each individual case, he said the risk of each must be weighed against the direct benefits to the tens of thousands more directly protected by the vaccine – as well as the indirect benefits to anyone those people came into contact with thereafter.

“This is something that perhaps should have been emphasised all the time for younger people, who [can get long Covid](#), and it would prevent the huge numbers of that as well, but [also] being vaccinated is as much a contribution to the community and their relatives and the people around them. Preventing transmission has this direct benefit for themselves.”

He was speaking the day after the government's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) announced that healthy 18- to 29-year-olds who were not at high risk of Covid should have the option of an alternative to the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab if one is available.

Explaining the move in terms of risk, Spiegelhalter said that with lower incidence of Covid at the moment and a plentiful supply of alternative vaccines, it was relatively important to try to avoid the risk of the blood clots in healthy younger people, who the evidence suggests are a little more susceptible to the blood clots than older people.

However, he said that, should there be a resurgence of Covid transmissions or a decrease in the vaccines available, the relative importance of the risk of blood clots would decrease.

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Share your stories

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Speaking to Sky News, the health secretary, [Matt Hancock](#), said there were “more than enough” stocks of the Pfizer and Moderna jabs for younger people to have them if they wished. But he said all three vaccines were safe and anyone who had had a first dose should have a second because there was no evidence of blood clotting after a second jab.

Prof Andrew Pollard, the director of the Oxford vaccine group behind the AstraZeneca jab, said “this is not the time to waver”.

He told Today that while relatively small risks to having the vaccine had been identified, the pandemic “really does continue to threaten the whole of humanity – today about 12,000 people around the world will be confirmed dead as a result of coronavirus”.

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Brandon Lewis restates determination to address problems with Northern Ireland protocol – as it happened

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Vaccines and immunisation

Vaccine confidence fears as under-30s in UK offered AstraZeneca alternative

Experts warn of impact after advice changes in response to 79 blood clot cases out of 20m vaccinations

- [Jab fears may play into hands of anti-vaxxers](#)
- [Coronavirus – latest UK updates](#)
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04:15

Under-30s in UK should be offered alternative to AstraZeneca Covid vaccine, say officials – video

[*Sarah Boseley*](#) and [*Daniel Boffey*](#)

Wed 7 Apr 2021 11.31 EDT

Experts warned of damage to confidence in the UK's vaccine programme after 10 million adults under 30 were told they will be offered an alternative to the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab following concerns over rare blood clots.

Healthy 18- to 29-year-olds who are not at high risk of Covid should have the option of a different jab if one is available in their area, the government's joint committee on vaccines and immunisation (JCVI) said, weeks after some European countries suspended the use of Oxford/AstraZeneca jabs in younger people.

For older people, the benefits of the vaccine – the most widely used in the UK – far outweigh the risks, the JCVI added. The UK has recorded 79 rare blood clots cases, 19 of whom died, out of 20m AstraZeneca jabs administered.

England's deputy chief medical officer, Prof Jonathan Van-Tam, called the move "a course correction" and said there should be little or no impact on the vaccine rollout timeline, though he warned that under-30s could face short delays in getting inoculated.

Boris Johnson tweeted: "We will follow today's updated advice, which should allow people of all ages to continue to have full confidence in vaccines, helping us save lives and cautiously return towards normality."

The recommendation came as it was confirmed that the European regulator is examining whether other vaccines using similar technology to the AstraZeneca jab pose any risk.

There had been three cases of venous thromboembolism blood clots with low platelets involving the Johnson & Johnson jab, a European Medicines Agency (EMA) official said.

Symptoms of the rare brain blood clots include severe headaches and blurred vision, and most cases occur within two weeks of a jab – but such events are treatable if medical help is sought, experts said.

02:13

Possible link between AstraZeneca vaccine and blood clots, says EU regulator - video

In the UK up to 31 March, there were 79 reports of these rare blood clots with low platelets – some but not all of them in the brain, it was revealed on Wednesday. Of those affected, 19 people died, although it is not known if the blood clots were the cause in every case.

More were women – 51 – and they were all aged 18-79. Three were under 30. But the recommendation of an alternative vaccine for that age group is because their risk from Covid itself is very low.

In older age groups, the experts believe, the benefits of vaccination significantly outweigh the rare side-effect risk, but in younger people "it is more finely balanced".

Dr June Raine, CEO of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Authority (MHRA), said the risk was “extremely small” and the authority had not yet concluded that the vaccine was responsible.

“The evidence is firming up. While it is a strong possibility, more work is needed to establish beyond all doubt that the vaccine has caused this side-effect,” she said.

[Vaccine benefit v harm - chart](#)

There are concerns, however, that confidence in the AstraZeneca jab has been hit.

“Today’s decision is a severe blow to the public’s vaccine confidence, which is already fragile,” said Dr Chris Papadopoulos, principal lecturer in public health at the University of Bedfordshire. It might be the right decision, but needed to be coupled to efforts to counter vaccine hesitancy, he added.

Prof Martin Hibberd, of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said it was a sensible decision. “However, I would like to see the evidence that the other vaccines are safer.”

The Royal College of Midwives (RCM) said young people and pregnant women would be concerned.

While “blood clots are incredibly rare”, the college said, the JCVI had “taken the right decision in exercising caution”. Women who are pregnant should raise any questions with their midwife or obstetrician. The RCM added: “Pregnant women should not be excluded from the vaccination programme and we urge the MHRA and JCVI to redouble their efforts to support this group.”

The new JCVI advice came as the European Medicines Agency said the rare blood clots would be listed formally as a side-effect of the AstraZeneca vaccine, though it did not announce any restrictions on use. Several EU countries, including France and Germany, have already limited use to citizens aged over 55 or 60, or suspended its use entirely.

Emer Cooke, executive director of the EMA, said: “In the UK, I cannot comment on the decision-making to restrict to a certain age but what I can tell you is there is a lot more use in the younger age groups in the UK than in the EU at the moment and we will certainly take this into account in our further evaluations.”

Asked why European countries have different stances from the UK, Adam Finn from the JCVI said Britain had “extremely detailed data” based on a high number of administered AstraZeneca jabs.

“I think other countries in Europe that have seen clusters of cases ... they are not in such a good evidence-driven position to make their judgments,” he said, adding that “the risk-benefit [equation] does vary ... from one country to another”.

The EMA said it could not identify the cause of the blood-clotting event, which was mostly, but not entirely, in women under 60.

It is advising that healthcare professionals and people getting the vaccine should be made aware of the issue and the symptoms of the clots, which range from shortness of breath and chest pain to persistent headaches and blurred vision.

“It is of great importance that healthcare professionals and people coming for vaccination are aware of these risks and look out for signs or symptoms,” said Cooke.

Like the EMA, the MHRA is a regulator and an adviser on safety and efficacy to governments.

The UK recommendation that under-30s should be offered an alternative vaccine comes from the JCVI. Its head, Prof Wei Shen Lim, said it had only made the recommendation to government “out of the utmost caution rather than because we have any serious safety concerns”.

Dr Peter Arlett, the head of the EMA data analytics and methods taskforce, said the agency was examining whether other vaccines posed any risk, citing cases of rare blood clots involving the Johnson & Johnson jab.

“There have been three cases with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine of blood clots associated with low platelets which have some similarities to these cases that we’ve been describing today,” he said.

“However, the numbers are extremely small compared with the 5 million patients that have received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine worldwide. This is, however, under close scrutiny, the [committee] is looking at it carefully, and I think it would be fair to say there’s intensive monitoring of this issue across the vaccines.”

A UK government spokesperson said: “The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is safe, effective and has already saved thousands of lives.

“Everybody who has already had a first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine should receive a second dose of the same brand, irrespective of age, except for the very small number of people who experienced blood clots with low platelet counts from their first vaccination.”

This article was amended on 8 April 2021 to update a comment from the Royal College of Midwives.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/apr/07/under-30s-in-uk-should-be-offered-alternative-covid-vaccine-to-astrazeneca-jab-says-regulator>

Vaccines and immunisation

AstraZeneca jab ‘course correction’ could dent confidence outside UK

Analysis: Up to now, people have been willing to take any vaccine offered – but that may change

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A member of a vaccination centre team in Penrith draws up the Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

A member of a vaccination centre team in Penrith draws up the Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

[Sarah Boseley](#) *Health editor*

Wed 7 Apr 2021 14.15 EDT

Until now almost nobody in the UK has been able to choose which Covid vaccine they were given – even, apparently, cheerleaders for the homegrown Oxford/AstraZeneca jab such as Boris Johnson and the NHS England boss Simon Stevens, who [received it very publicly in a bid to boost confidence](#) earlier this year.

But now all adults under 30 are to be [offered an alternative to the AstraZeneca jab](#) and the effect of that may be to undo some of Johnson's and Stevens's work.

That age group – as long as they are fit and healthy – run very little risk from Covid.

The reasoning is that they could possibly run a greater risk from the very rare side-effects of the jab, which are [blood clots allied to low platelets](#). That's not because they are more likely to get blood clots – just less likely to end up in hospital from Covid.

The blood clots causing concern are very rare, affecting four in a million people who have had the vaccine in the UK.

Of 79 people who have suffered them, 19 have died, and only three of these were aged under 30.

04:15

Under-30s in UK should be offered alternative to AstraZeneca Covid vaccine, say officials – video

But for people over 30, the risks of Covid rise. And there is no doubt that the AstraZeneca vaccine saves lives – 6,000 so far in the UK, according to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Authority (MHRA), which approved it.

[Vaccine benefits v harm](#)

It is not the MHRA that has said young adults should have the choice of an alternative.

Both the UK regulator and its EU equivalent, the European Medicines Agency (EMA), say the [vaccine is safe and effective](#), the side-effects are rare and people should carry on having it.

It is the Joint Committee on Vaccines and Immunisation (JCVI), an independent body of scientists that advises the UK government, which has recommended giving under-30s another option if it is available.

Quick Guide

Vaccines: how effective is each one?

Show



Pfizer/BioNTech

Country US/Germany

Efficacy 95% a week after the second shot. Pfizer says it is only 52% after the first dose but the UK's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) says this may rise to 90% after 21 days.

Doses Clinical trials involved two doses 21 days apart. The UK is stretching this to 12 weeks.

Oxford/AstraZeneca

Country UK

Efficacy 70.4% 14 days after receiving the second dose. May have up to 90% efficacy when given as a half dose followed by a full dose. No severe disease or hospitalisations in anyone who received the vaccine. There have been concerns it is [less effective against the South African variant of the coronavirus](#), and some countries have suggested that it is less-effective against either older patients or younger patients.

A UK government-funded study of care home residents in England found that their risk of infection with Covid-19 – either symptomatic or asymptomatic – [fell by 62% five weeks](#) after they received their first Oxford/AstraZeneca or Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine dose.

Doses Two, four to 12 weeks apart

Moderna

Country US

Efficacy Phase 3 trial results suggest 94.1%.

Doses Two, 28 days apart

Novavax

Country US

Efficacy Phase 3 trials suggest 89.3%.

Doses Two

Janssen (part of Johnson & Johnson)

Country US

Efficacy 72% in preventing mild to moderate cases in US trials but 66% efficacy observed in international trials. 85% efficacy against severe illness, and 100% protection against hospitalisation and death.

Doses: One, making it unique among Covid vaccines with phase 3 results so far

Photograph: Stéphane Mahé/X02520

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Wednesday's developments may have made it look as though the UK, which was the world's first country to license the Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid vaccine and has stoutly supported its developers through thick and thin over the last six months, is now taking a tougher stance than Europe. But in reality that is not so.

The EMA has listed the rare blood clots as an official side-effect and said patients and doctors should know what symptoms to look out for but, like the MHRA, it has not recommended any change in vaccination policy.

02:13

Possible link between AstraZeneca vaccine and blood clots, says EU regulator - video

However, [many European countries have taken action already](#). France, Germany and Spain already restrict the vaccine (to over-55s, over-60s and those aged 55-65 respectively), while the Netherlands and much of Scandinavia have suspended the vaccine entirely.

[Tell us: are you under 30 and have had the AstraZeneca vaccine in the UK?](#)
[Read more](#)

So far, people in the UK have gratefully accepted whichever vaccine they were offered. Recipients are not told until they arrive at the vaccination centre which one it will be.

The actual differences in efficacy between the AstraZeneca and Pfizer jabs are slight – the variation has as much to do with technicalities such as the definition of illness in the trials.

But it is easy to imagine that people's readiness to have what they are given may change.

The “course correction”, as the deputy chief medical officer, Prof Jonathan Van-Tam calls it, may be slight but it will probably have a disproportionate impact on confidence – not just in the UK, where there are other vaccine options, but in parts of the world where there are not, and where the affordable and easy-to-use AstraZeneca vaccine is the only life-saver available.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/apr/07/astrazeneca-jab-course-correction-could-dent-confidence-beyond-uk>

2021.04.08 - Coronavirus

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- ['Think of others' Elderly people in Zimbabwe dispel scepticism on Covid vaccine](#)
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Among the Covid sceptics: ‘We are being manipulated, without a shadow of a doubt’

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/apr/08/among-covid-sceptics-we-are-being-manipulated-anti-lockdown>

Global development

‘Think of others’: elderly people in Zimbabwe dispel scepticism on Covid vaccine

While younger generations remain suspicious, growing numbers of senior citizens are taking up the jab



Elderly people queue for the Sinopharm vaccination outside the tent while nurses prepare paperwork at a local hospital on 29 March in Harare, Zimbabwe. Photograph: Tafadzwa Ufumeli/Getty Images

Elderly people queue for the Sinopharm vaccination outside the tent while nurses prepare paperwork at a local hospital on 29 March in Harare, Zimbabwe. Photograph: Tafadzwa Ufumeli/Getty Images

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[About this content](#)

[Nyasha Chingono](#) in Harare

Thu 8 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

They may be old, frail, and vulnerable but they are the foot soldiers at the front of Zimbabwe's Covid vaccination drive. Amid widespread scepticism among the younger population, it is elderly people who are coming out to lead by example.

The queues at the vaccination centres in the capital, Harare, are dominated by older people. At Wilkins Hospital, Felda Mupemhi, 85, grasps her walking stick as she trudges toward a white tent, where nurses are administering the Sinopharm vaccine.

“We stand a chance of beating Covid-19 if we take this vaccine. So, I came here to make a statement to the younger [generation] that they too can get vaccinated, so that we save others,” says Mupemhi.

There were worries the vaccine might cause her health complications but after a short assessment interview with a health worker, she received her first dose of the Sinopharm vaccine.

I came here to make a statement to younger people that they too should be vaccinated

Felda Muphemi, 85

Mupemhi says initially she had been sceptical: “I had already dismissed prospects of getting this vaccine. I feared it would trigger some health issues, as I am not young. But after seeing that my neighbour, who is my age, was still OK a week after getting it, that gave me the courage.”

Peter Hadingham, 82, was initially turned away when health officials cited his age and asthma as possible risk factors, but a few weeks later he was thrilled to be accepted for his first dose.

“I have a bit of asthma and a bad back, so I cannot walk straight, but otherwise I am healthy. I have a flu vaccine every year, there is no difference. [People] should think of the rest of the population – they should get vaccinated, because there is nothing to be afraid of,” Hadingham says.



An elderly woman is vaccinated against Covid-19 at a local hospital on 29 March in Harare, Zimbabwe. Photograph: Tafadzwa Ufumeli/Getty Images

Health officials have recorded growing numbers of senior citizens getting the Sinopharm and the Sinovac vaccine as Zimbabweans begin to soften

their attitudes towards the Chinese jab.

“The uptake from last week is very encouraging. The elderly are coming, and those with chronic diseases have also been visiting our centres in large numbers,” Harare city health department director Dr Prosper Chonzi told the Guardian.

“Our older population appreciates that they are vulnerable. Once you get the infection, chances of severity are high, so they are jumping at the opportunity. If you are given the offer of getting the vaccine, and it is free, it is wise to take it,” he says.

Our older population appreciates they are vulnerable ... and are jumping at the opportunity

Dr Prosper Chonzi

President Emmerson Mnangagwa launched the second phase of the country’s vaccination rollout on 24 March, covering people with pre-existing conditions, the elderly and those confined to settlements and institutions, such as prisons and refugee camps.

Zimbabwe’s economy was [precarious before the pandemic](#), and has been hit very hard by Covid lockdowns; in March the [World Food Programme](#) reported that food insecurity, particularly among the urban poor, is soaring. Food prices in February were 35% higher than the same month in 2020.

Parirenyatwa Hospital, one of the biggest in the country, was overwhelmed by Covid patients at the peak of the pandemic, just after Christmas. Now its stressed health professionals are working their way through the long vaccination queue, a stark contrast to the low numbers who showed up during the first phase of the programme. By 29 March, [about 69,751 Zimbabweans had been vaccinated](#), up from 43,295 people the week before.



Zimbabweans receive a Covid vaccination at Parirenyatwa Hospital in Harare, on 31 March. Photograph: Aaron Ufumeli/EPA

The government plans to inoculate 60% of its population to achieve herd immunity, about 10 million people, and has received nearly two million doses of vaccines from China, while India donated 35,000 doses of the Covaxin at the start of April.

Health officials say there was initial scepticism about the efficacy of the Sinopharm vaccine, said by the government to be between 65% to 70% effective. Low uptake was also recorded among frontline health workers during the first phase of the rollout, despite efforts by doctors to encourage uptake on social media.

At a Harare vaccination centre, Malcom Michelle, 65, has been queueing for an hour, and is not happy about the lack of social distancing.

“There is need for more vaccination centres to open. As you can see, there is hardly any social distancing here. Apart from that, we just must go with the flow,” Michelle says.

According to Harare city council, which runs satellite clinics around the city, 24 vaccination centres have been set up, but people still prefer to go to the major referral centres such as Parirenyatwa, meaning longer queues.



People queue to receive a vaccine at Parirenyatwa Hospital on 31 March.
Photograph: Aaron Ufumeli/EPA

Sean Moyo, 41, is frustrated by the slow pace of the process. “The experience was horrible; I was here at 8am but I got my vaccine at 12pm. I do not know why the queue is not moving. I know of several people who left without being vaccinated. I’m asthmatic, so I feared that I would get Covid. But thankfully I managed to do all I can to stay safe,” Moyo says.

Elizabeth James, 61, has been struggling to eke out a living during the pandemic. She says: “The vaccine is good for some of us who have underlying health issues, like diabetes and hypertension.”

James hopes that the vaccination programme will enable the country to return to normalcy, as long periods of lockdown continue to impoverish millions of informal workers forced to stay home without an income.

“When we were younger, we used to drink herbs [because] there were no such things as vaccines, but we appreciate the efforts by government to get us a vaccine, if it is safe,” she says.

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[New Zealand](#)

New Zealand suspends travel from India after jump in Covid-19 cases

PM Jacinda Ardern said the government would look at risk management measures during suspension

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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New Zealand's prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, said the suspension of travel from India would begin on 11 April Photograph: Hagen Hopkins/Getty Images

New Zealand's prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, said the suspension of travel from India would begin on 11 April Photograph: Hagen Hopkins/Getty Images

Reuters

Thu 8 Apr 2021 00.55 EDT

New Zealand has temporarily suspended entry for all travellers from India, including its own citizens, for about two weeks following a high number of positive coronavirus cases arriving from the South Asian country.

The move comes after New Zealand recorded 23 new positive coronavirus cases at its border on Thursday, of which 17 were from [India](#).

“We are temporarily suspending entry into New Zealand for travellers from India,” the prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, said in a news conference in Auckland.

India is battling a deadly second wave of Covid-19 with [daily infections this week passing the peak of the first wave seen last September](#).

[How New Zealand's Covid success made it a laboratory for the world](#)
[Read more](#)

The suspension will start on 11 April and will be in place until 28 April. During this time the government will look at risk management measures to resume travel.

“I want to emphasise that while arrivals of Covid from India has prompted this measure, we are looking at how we manage high risk points of departure generally. This is not a country specific risk assessment,” Ardern said.

New Zealand has virtually eliminated the virus within its borders, and [has not reported any community transmission locally](#) for about 40 days.

But it’s been reviewing its border settings as more people with infections arrive in New Zealand, the majority from India.

Ardern said the rolling average of positive cases has been steadily rising and hit 7 cases on Wednesday, the highest since last October.

New Zealand on Thursday also reported one new locally infected case in a worker who was employed at a coronavirus managed isolation facility. The 24-year-old was yet to be vaccinated.

The travel suspension came just two days after [New Zealand announced it would be launching a trans-Tasman travel bubble with Australia](#) on 19 April.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/08/new-zealand-suspends-travel-from-india-after-jump-in-covid-19-cases>

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[Lost on the frontline](#)[US news](#)

Calls mount for Biden to track US healthcare worker deaths

As the Guardian and KHN end Lost on the Frontline, a year-long project to count healthcare worker deaths in the pandemic, the White House is under pressure to take up the task

- [3,607 healthcare workers have died in the first year of the pandemic. Explore our interactive database](#)



Joe Biden speaks at the Cross Hall of the White House in February about lives lost to Covid after the death toll passed 500,000. Photograph: Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images

Joe Biden speaks at the Cross Hall of the White House in February about lives lost to Covid after the death toll passed 500,000. Photograph: Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images



[Ed Pilkington](#)

[@edpilkington](#)

Thu 8 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

Calls are mounting for the Biden administration to set up a national tracking system of Covid-19 deaths among frontline healthcare workers to honor the thousands of nurses, doctors and support staff who have died and ensure that future generations are not forced to make the same ultimate – and in many cases needless – sacrifice.

[KHN logo](#)

Health policy experts and union leaders are pressing the White House to move quickly to fill the gaping hole left by the Trump administration through its failure to create an accurate count of Covid deaths among frontline staff. The absence of reliable federal data exacerbated critical problems such as shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) that left many workers exposed, with fatal results.

In the absence of federal action, Lost on the Frontline, a [joint project](#) between the Guardian and Kaiser Health News (KHN), has compiled the most comprehensive account of healthcare worker deaths in the nation. It

has recorded 3,607 lost lives in the first year of the pandemic, with nurses, healthcare support staff and doctors, as well as workers under 60 and people of color affected in tragically high numbers.

The Guardian/KHN investigation, which involved more than 100 reporters, is drawing to a close this week. Pressure is now growing for the federal government to step into the breach.

Harvey Fineberg, a leading health policy expert who approved a recent [National Academy of Sciences report](#) that recommended the formation of a new national tracking system run by the federal government, backed the calls for change. He said his ideal solution would be a nationwide record that both looked back on the heavy human price paid in the pandemic so far and looked ahead to coming challenges.

[Fauci thanks US health workers for sacrifices but admits PPE shortages drove up death toll](#)

[Read more](#)

“There would be a combination of a selective look backward to gain more accurate tabulations of the past burden, and a system of data gathering looking forward to ensure more complete counts in future,” he said.

Zenei Triunfo-Cortez, a president of National Nurses United, the largest body of registered nurses in the US, said it was unconscionable how many healthcare workers have died from Covid. The [KHN/Guardian interactive](#) found that almost a third of those who died were nurses – the largest single occupation followed by support staff (20%) and physicians (17%).

Triunfo-Cortez said the death toll was an unacceptable tragedy aggravated by the lack of federal data which made identifying problem areas more difficult. “We as nurses do not deserve this – we signed up to take care of patients, we did not sign up to die,” she said.

Anthony Fauci, the nation’s top infectious disease expert, also sees a role for federal agencies in tracking mortality among frontline healthcare workers. In an interview with the Guardian, he expressed a desire for a definitive picture of the human toll.

“We certainly want to find an accurate count of the people who died. That’s something that I think would fall under the auspices of the federal government, likely Health and Human Services (HHS).”

The lack of federal intelligence on deaths among frontline healthcare workers was one of the running failures of the Trump administration’s [botched response](#) to the crisis. The main health protection agency, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, does curate some information but has itself [acknowledged](#) that its own record of [1,527 health worker fatalities](#) – more than 2,000 fewer than the joint Guardian/KHN tally – is an undercount based on limitations in its data collection.

Overall, healthcare workers were revealed to be singularly at risk from the pandemic. Some studies have shown that they were more than three times as likely to contract Covid as the general population.

To date there is no sign of the Biden administration taking active steps to set up a comprehensive data system. An HHS spokesperson said they currently have no plans to launch a comprehensive count. However, Triunfo-Cortez said there was a new willingness on the part of the White House and key federal agencies to listen and engage.

“We have been working with the Biden administration and they have been receptive to the changes we are proposing. We are hopeful that they will start to mandate the reporting of deaths because if we don’t have that data how can we know how effective we are being in stopping the pandemic?”

The responsiveness of the new administration is likely to be heightened by the fact that Biden’s chief of staff, Ron Klain, has a track record in fighting infectious disease outbreaks. In 2014 Barack Obama appointed him [“Ebola tsar”](#).

In an [article in the Guardian](#) last August, Klain drew on the findings of Lost on the Frontline to decry the ultimate price paid by healthcare workers. “Although America has applauded health workers, banged pots in their honor and offered grateful video tributes, we have consistently failed them where it mattered most.”

David Blumenthal, the national coordinator for health information technology under Obama, said a national tracking system is an important step in healing the wounds of the pandemic inflicted on frontline staff. “So many healthcare workers feel as though their devotion and sacrifice weren’t valued. We must combat the widespread fatigue and disappointment.”

Christina Jewett of KHN contributed reporting to this article

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Interview

Elizabeth Perkins on luck, sexism and Big's love scene: 'It would not be acceptable today'

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'I turn down a lot of work because I don't want to be around any divas' ... Elizabeth Perkins. Photograph: Victoria Will

'I turn down a lot of work because I don't want to be around any divas' ... Elizabeth Perkins. Photograph: Victoria Will

The star of hit films in the 80s and 90s has since moved into TV. She discusses life with 10 siblings, #MeToo and why she couldn't ask for a better life



[@eminesaner](#)

Thu 8 Apr 2021 05.00 EDT

Veering from horror to joy and back again, Elizabeth Perkins is contemplating what it would be like if her adult children moved back home. “The thing is, you miss them so much, then they’ll come back for a holiday and within a week there’s dirty dishes everywhere, there’s wet towels on the floor, they’ve eaten all the food. After a couple of weeks, you’re like: ‘Will they ever leave?’”

This is the timely theme of Perkins’ show *The Moodys*, the first season of which, in 2019, saw three grownup children return home to Chicago for Christmas. Perkins plays Ann Moody, their mother; Denis Leary plays her husband. In the new season, all three children are living at the family home, with predictably messy consequences. “It really explored that dichotomy of: you love them to death, but, man, they get on your nerves,” says Perkins.

It is a dynamic familiar to many families. Perkins’ daughter and three stepsons – all in their 20s – have not returned home, but lots of her friends’ kids have, due to the pandemic. “It’s interesting, because, in my generation, you were considered a loser if you moved back in with your parents,” says Perkins, 60. “But things have changed. When I look at how hard my kids

have to work to earn a living compared with when I was their age, it's much harder for them." The stigma of moving back home, she says, "is outdated". There is a perfectly timed pause. "But it still doesn't help the parents when the kids move back."



'They don't necessarily see women my age as a box office draw' ... Perkins with (from left) Jay Baruchel, Denis Leary, Chelsea Frei and François Arnaud in *The Moodys*. Photograph: Fox/Getty Images

For the past 15 years, Perkins' most interesting work has been on television – she was the nightmare neighbour Celia Hodes in *Weeds*, the boozy busybody Jackie O'Neill in [Sharp Objects](#) and a mother trying to prove her son's innocence in [Truth Be Told](#). These are not roles with which the film industry is awash, "particularly for women my age", she says. "They don't necessarily see you as a box office draw." There are exceptions – she is impressed by the work actors such as Viola Davis, 55, and Frances McDormand, 63, are doing. She says of the film industry: "It would be nice if they got on that bandwagon, but it is what it is."

Perkins' film career peaked in the 80s and 90s – her big break was as Tom Hanks' girlfriend in *Big* in 1988. In the 90s, she featured in intelligent, critically acclaimed films (Barry Levinson's *Avalon*) and more obviously

commercial projects (she played Wilma in *The Flintstones* and starred in a remake of *Miracle on 34th Street*).

But television is where the meaty projects are, even if she still finds herself rolling her eyes at scripts that come in with underwritten parts for older women. “But I also think that people hire me based on what they know I’ll bring – I can read something and say: ‘I can make this into something interesting,’” she says. “I don’t base my interest on the size of the role, which I think some actors do. If it’s an interesting character, like with *Sharp Objects*, that’s more interesting to me than: ‘Am I the lead?’” With her background in ensemble theatre, you get the sense that Perkins just loves being around other actors, rather than being the star; the result, perhaps, is that she is underrated, even if she is a regular scene-stealer in supporting roles.



‘I was incredibly lucky to be there and pull that off’ ... Perkins (*left*) with Demi Moore, Jim Belushi and Rob Lowe in her debut film, 1986’s *About Last Night*. Photograph: Tristar Pictures/Allstar

When Perkins made her debut in the Brat Pack movie *About Last Night*, she was barely three years out of drama college. The film, with Rob Lowe, Demi Moore and Jim Belushi, “set me on my way. I know a lot of really talented

actors who never had that kind of break and I was just incredibly lucky to be there and be able to pull that off.”

This seems typically self-effacing. Although we are separated by a phone line, her voice is low and warm and there are small but telling details – she asks questions about my life; she has been with the same agency all her career – that hint at a grounded actor not driven by ego. She says there is a point at which “you only want to work with people you like – that you admire as people and what they stand for. I turn down a lot of work because I don’t want to be around any divas; I don’t want people who yell and scream.”

Her character in *The Moodys*, Ann, has retrained as a psychologist after years raising her children – she is partly informed by Perkins’ mother, who became a counsellor when Perkins, the youngest of three daughters, left home. “It really changed her perspective on the world,” says Perkins. “It boosted her self-esteem: she finally had something that was all hers, that was not based around the home and the kids. She just blossomed as a woman in her 50s.”

Perkins’ childhood sounds like an improbable screenplay pitch. She was born in New York, but when her parents divorced and her mother remarried, Perkins moved with her to live on her maternal grandfather’s farm on the border of Vermont and Massachusetts. “It was like: ‘We’re going to go be hippies now and have a garden.’ We were completely ill-prepared,” she says with a laugh. “I think I coped the same way everybody else in the family did – shock and awe, then the realisation that we were going to have to plough our own road. It was a learning curve, but it definitely made me stronger and it turned me on to a love of nature. We had cows and chickens and I learned how to work the land.”

Her new stepfather came, too – along with his eight children. If swapping the streets of Queens for a 243-hectare (600-acre) farm in the middle of nowhere was a shock, she was also suddenly one of 11 children. “When my sisters and I look back on that, we’re like: ‘Wow, what were you thinking?’ Like: ‘Oh, I met this wonderful guy. He has eight children.’ I mean, I married a man who had three children, and that’s as far as you really want to go.”



‘I couldn’t ask for a better life’ ... Perkins with Melanie Silver and John Goodman in 1994’s The Flintstones. Photograph: Hanna-Barbera/Universal/Allstar

There were so many of them that two pairs even had the same names – there was a big Susan and a little Susan, and a big Betsy and a little Betsy (that was Perkins). “It was like living in a commune,” she says. Later, when she met her husband, Julio Macat, a cinematographer, “the idea that he had children and I could have a big family was comforting to me. I found the idea of having all these people in the house very familiar.”

She says she “just kind of fell into” acting, discovering plays at primary school. “Everybody was being creative and making costumes and jumping around – I was a very hyperactive kid, always on the move, running somewhere, climbing a tree, and it just looked like fun.” At 17, Perkins moved to Chicago to take up a place at the prestigious Goodman School of Drama (now the Theatre School at DePaul University). She became part of the city’s [Steppenwolf theatre](#) – the groundbreaking company that counted John Malkovich and Laurie Metcalf among its first members – and was married to one of its founders, Terry Kinney, for half of the 80s.

What was it like being part of that crowd? “They were just creating some of the most electric theatre that we’d ever seen,” she says. Being with them, she

felt “elated all the time. We all played softball together, went out to restaurants together, and bars ... it was just this really tight group of people.”



‘I speak out for those who can’t speak for themselves’ ... Elizabeth Perkins on a #MeToo march in Hollywood in 2017. Photograph: Sarah Morris/Getty Images

Being strong-willed and down-to-earth – qualities forged, she thinks, in her large family and then in this theatre environment – protected Perkins as a young woman entering Hollywood in the 80s. “There were no safety nets, no HR. It was just: you’re in this system and it’s overwhelming.” Did she experience sexism? “Of course – we all did.” She remembers going to meetings with producers and directors “where they would just flat-out say: ‘Yeah, you’re just not sexy enough.’ Today, that would just not be something that would come out of anyone’s mouth.”

That is one effect of the #MeToo movement and the reckoning the film and TV business has had since [the conviction of Harvey Weinstein](#). “It has changed the industry, but there’s a lot of work still to be done,” says Perkins. “I don’t think change happens quickly, and inclusivity, diversity and equality are always going to be something you have to fight for. I’m proud to speak up when I can, because we do have the power to change if enough people speak up. That’s important to me as a woman who has been in this business

for 35 years, to defend and speak out if I see injustice or ...” She pauses. “For people who don’t have a voice of their own.”

On a march against sexual harassment in 2017, Perkins held a sign bearing the name of the actor James Woods. Woods had been previously accused by the actor Amber Tamblyn of trying to pick her up when she was 16 (on Twitter, [Woods dismissed the allegation as “a lie”](#)). At the time of the march, Perkins did not comment further – and she does not want to now. “I think it speaks for itself. I speak out, like I said, for those who can’t speak for themselves, and for those people who feel they don’t have a voice.”



‘There is a lot of admiration and ultimately a great friendship’ ... opposite Tom Hanks in 1998’s Big. Photograph: 20th Century Fox/Allstar

Given how switched-on Perkins is, it seems like the right moment to ask how she feels about Big. The film, in which a boy makes a wish on a Zoltar funfair machine and wakes up the next morning as an adult, is brilliant and beloved – and also weird and wrong. If, like me, you grew up watching it over and over again, you loved it for the possibility that adulthood would contain apartments with trampolines and Pepsi machines; now, you watch it and think: there is Susan (Perkins’ character), a thirtysomething executive, about to have sex with Josh (Hanks), who is really a 13-year-old boy.

“Oh, I know. I’ve been called a paedophile,” she says with a chuckle. Then her voice becomes more serious. “You know, I get it. The only thing I can say is it was a different time. It was the 80s; it was not viewed through that lens and I get that it is being viewed through that lens now.” It wouldn’t be made today in the same way, would it? “I don’t think that scene ...” She is referring to the bedroom encounter in which Josh puts his hand on Susan’s breast and it is implied that they are about to have sex. It wouldn’t happen now, she says.

Were there any concerns at the time? “If you look at it in the movie, it was sort of used as a joke. Here he is the next morning, the elevator door opens and he bounces out like: ‘Wow, I just had my first sexual experience.’” He was – properly, this time, it implied – now a man. “It was a setup for a joke that today would not be acceptable.”

Producers and directors would flat-out say: ‘Yeah, you’re just not sexy enough’

Poor Susan – she could not look more horrified when Josh turns back into his 13-year-old self. She waves him off to his mother with a look approaching maternal affection; you or I might consider handing ourselves in to the police, or at least block-booking therapy. “Oh, we had several different takes,” she says. “We had me being horrified, me being scared. There are a lot of different ways that we can go, but I think Penny [Marshall, the director] chose very carefully – that there is a lot of admiration between Susan and Josh, and ultimately a great friendship.”

When you have worked for more than three decades, it is inevitable that earlier work will be reappraised with different standards (and Big’s creepy love angle is hardly Perkins’ fault). She seems to have been barely out of work since then. “The fact that I’m at this age and I’m still able to work with somebody like Denis Leary, whom I really respect – I feel like I couldn’t ask for a better life,” she says. When she talks about her dogs, her husband (“I’m in a long-term marriage with a man I adore”) and her kids, she sounds completely grateful for the fortune of it all – as if Zoltar himself could not have granted any more.

It was on her first film that Lowe, her co-star, observed that Perkins had been “born under a lucky star”. “That’s how I feel,” she says. “I think I was 24 years old, and I’ve always held on to that.”

Season two of The Moodys is broadcast in the US on Fox on Thursday nights

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Ted Brown: the man who held a mass kiss-in and made history

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Music

‘It has never been more pertinent’ – Margaret Atwood on the chilling genius of Laurie Anderson’s Big Science



‘A refugee from within America’ ... Anderson in the early 80s. Photograph: Leon Morris/Getty Images

‘A refugee from within America’ ... Anderson in the early 80s. Photograph: Leon Morris/Getty Images

The seminal album, with its extraordinary hit single O Superman, was unlike anything the writer had ever heard. As *Big Science* returns, Atwood pays tribute to its prophetic dissection of 80s America

[Margaret Atwood](#)

Thu 8 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

Here come the planes. They’re American planes! Musicologists and the less young will recognise those lines, which are from Laurie Anderson’s 1981

[unlikely voice-synthesiser hit O Superman](#). This song, if it is one – try humming it in the shower – led to Anderson's first multi-song album, 1982's Big Science.

Big Science is being reissued at a very timely moment: America is reinventing itself again. It's a self-rescue mission, and just in time: democracy, we have been led to believe, has been snatched from the jaws of autocracy, maybe. A New Deal, leading to a fairer distribution of wealth and an ultimately liveable planet, is on the way, possibly. Racism dating back centuries is being addressed, hopefully. Let's hope these helicopters don't crash.

I didn't understand, back in 1981, that [O Superman](#) was about the mission to retrieve embattled Americans during the Iranian revolution and the hostage crisis, in which 52 US diplomats were held by Iran for more than a year. Anderson herself has said that the song is directly related to Operation Eagle Claw, [a military rescue operation that failed](#): a failure that included a helicopter crash. This catastrophe demonstrated that the American military-industrial Superman was not invincible, and that the automation and electronics mentioned in the song would not always win. The helicopter crash, said Anderson, was the initial inspiration for the song or performance piece. When O Superman became a hit, first in the UK and then elsewhere, Anderson claims to have been astonished. What were the chances? Very slim, you would have said ahead of time.



‘An eerie sound came over the airwaves’ ... Atwood in the early 80s.
Photograph: Wally Fong/AP

You can always remember what you were doing at certain key moments in your life. Such moments are different for everyone. Some of my moments have been attached to public tragedies: when Kennedy was assassinated, I was working at a market research company in downtown Toronto; when 9/11 struck I was in Toronto airport, thinking I was about to fly to New York. Some of my moments have been weather-related: witnessing hurricanes, caught in ice storms. And some have been musical. I was four, sitting in an armchair in [Sault Ste Marie](#) ineptly sewing my stuffed bear into its clothes, when I first heard [Mairzy Doats](#) on the radio. [Blue Moon](#) came to me sung by a live band, while I was oozing across a high-school dance floor in the clinch favoured in those days. Bob Dylan revealed himself to me in 1964, curly-headed and be-mouth-organed, on a Boston stage with barefoot Joan Baez, queen of the folkies.

Jump cut. It was 1981. Time had passed. Unsurprisingly, I was older. Surprisingly – or it would have been a surprise to me in 1964 – I now had a partner and a child, not to mention two cats and a house. Ronald Reagan had just been elected president, and the morning he was promising for America was going to be a lot different from the new age of hippiedom and feminism we’d been living through in the 70s. The religious right was on the rise as a

political force. I'd already had the idea for [The Handmaid's Tale](#), and was struggling with whether or not I should write it. Surely it was too far-fetched?

Had I known [Laurie Anderson](#) then, she might have said: "There's no such thing as too far-fetched."



'Like something out of a sci-fi movie' ... Anderson's album. Photograph: Nonesuch

So, 1981. We had the radio on while cooking dinner, when an eerie sound came pulsating over the airwaves.

"What was that thing?" I said. It was not the sort of music, or even sound, that you ordinarily heard on the radio; or anywhere else, come to think of it. The closest to it was when, back in the days of record-players and vinyl, we teenagers used to play 45s on 33 speed because it sounded funny. A soprano could be reduced to a slow, zombie-like baritone growl, and often had been.

What I'd just heard, however, wasn't funny. "This is your mother," says a chirpy midwestern voice on an answering machine. "Are you coming home?" But it isn't your mother. It's "the hand, the hand that takes". It's a construct. It's something out of a sci-fi movie, such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*: it looks human but it's not human, which is both creepy and

sinister. Worse, it's your only hope, Mom and Dad and God and justice and force having proved lacking.

“That thing” I'd been mesmerised by was O Superman. As you can see, I've never forgotten it. It was not like anything else, and Laurie Anderson was not like anyone else, either.

Or anyone you would ordinarily think of as a pop musician. Up until her breakout single, she'd been an avant garde performance artist and inventor, trained initially in the visual arts, and collaborating with like-minded artists such as William Burroughs and John Cage. The 70s – remembered not only for wide ties, long coats and high boots, and the ethnic look, but also for active second-wave feminism – was a period of high energy for performance art events. These were evanescent by nature, emphasising process over product. They had roots that went back to dada in the teens of the 20th century, to [Group Zero](#), a late 50s attempt to create something new from the rubble of the second world war, and to [Fluxus](#), active in the 60s and 70s.



Double visions ... Anderson, left, and Atwood in 2019. Photograph: Hillel Italie/AP

Anderson's large project in Big Science was a critical and anxious examination of the US, though not exactly from without. She was born in

1947, and was thus 10 in 1957, old enough to have witnessed the surge of new material objects that had flooded American homes in that decade, 15 in 1962 during a highly active period of the civil rights movement, and 20 in 1967, when campus unrest and anti-Vietnam war protests were in full swing. The upending of norms, for a person of that age, must have seemed normal.

But although New York became her cultural base camp, Anderson was not a big-city girl. She grew up in Illinois, the heart of the heart of America. She came by her perky Mom voice and her “Howdy stranger” tropes honestly. She was a refugee, not to America but from within America: a Mom and apple pie America, an America of the past that was being rapidly transformed by material inventions, and by the freeways, malls, and drive-in banks cited in the song *Big Science* as landmarks on the road to town. What might be bulldozed next? How much of the natural matrix would be left? Was America’s worship of technology about to obliterate America? And, more largely, in what consisted our humanity?

[Laurie Anderson: where to start in her back catalogue](#)

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As the 20th century has morphed into the 21st, as the consequences of the destruction of the natural world have become devastatingly clear, as analogue has been superseded by digital, as the possibilities for surveillance have increased a hundredfold, and as the ruthless hive mind of the Borg has been approximated through online media, Anderson’s anxious and unsettling probings have taken on an aura of the prophetic. Do you want to be a human being any more? Are you one now? What even is that? Or should you just allow yourself to be held in the long electronic petrochemical arms of your false mother?

Big Science has never been more pertinent than it is right now. Have a listen. Confront the urgent questions. Feel the chill.

- [A new red vinyl edition of *Big Science* is released on 9 April on Nonesuch.](#)

- This article was amended on 9 April: Anderson grew up in Illinois, not Indiana.

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Holy waters: the spiritual journey of African migrants – in pictures

Abdul in the waters of Mondello Beach, Palermo.

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2021.04.08 - Opinion

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[Opinion](#)**Race**

The Sewell report cited my work – just not the parts highlighting structural racism

[Michael Marmot](#)

If the authors had referred to my latest research, they would not have been so quick to dismiss this crucial factor



Illustration: Sébastien Thibault/The Guardian

Illustration: Sébastien Thibault/The Guardian

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There has been a great deal of interest in the [report](#) of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (Cred), which reviewed pertinent evidence on discrimination in education, the labour market and elsewhere. My focus, unapologetically, is on the health chapter, which prominently cites my own

work. Unfortunately, the authors of the report quote my views from the 2010 [Marmot Review](#) produced by the UCL Institute of Health Equity (IHE) – but they do not mention the explicit reference to race/inequality in two reports from our institute last year, [Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On](#) and [Build Back Fairer: The Covid-19 Marmot Review](#).

I focus on health, not only because that is where Cred cites my work but because my longstanding worldview is that the level of health of the population tells us a great deal about how well a society is meeting the needs of its citizens. Inequalities in health tell us about inequalities in society. The health lens gives me a way of evaluating which inequalities in society are most salient. For example, should we care if one family lives in a bigger house than another? My approach to that difficult question is: no, we should not care, if those differences in housing do not lead to inequalities in health. But if living in an overcrowded, underheated, unaffordable dwelling leads to worse health, then we should indeed care. It means the way I evaluate the Cred report's conclusion on the existence or otherwise of racism is whether it provides an adequate explanation of racial/ethnic health inequalities. (The report's heading is "disparities", but in the health chapter it sometimes lapses into the more familiar language of "inequalities".)

Its chapter on health has much that is good in it. It states clearly that health inequalities are not primarily owing to inequalities in access to healthcare but to inequalities in the social determinants of health and in behaviours. It draws attention to the problems of the term Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) – there are important differences in health among ethnic groups. I can, though, illustrate Cred's shortcomings in its approach to racism by its shortcomings in the way it handles my reports on health inequalities. In reference to the IHE's 2010 Marmot Review, the Cred report states: "The Marmot Review did find variations by ethnic minorities, however, it did not answer why the social determinants of health are unequally distributed between different racial and ethnic groups. This question was beyond the remit of the review but was also affected by the lack of consistent data collection on ethnicity in health."

That is an accurate version of our thinking in 2010. Our charge then was to examine inequalities in health between social groups defined on the basis of socio-economic characteristics. Indeed, in 2010, I thought that most of the

ethnic differences in health could be accounted for by various socio-economic characteristics. My change in view was very much influenced by the experience of chairing the Commission of the Pan American Health Organisation (Paho) on Equity and Health Inequalities in the Americas. The [report](#), published in 2019 concluded that throughout the Americas – from North America to Latin America and the Caribbean – Indigenous peoples have worse health than non-Indigenous; and people of African descent consistently suffer disadvantage in health and in the social determinants of health. It highlighted the effects of colonialism and structural racism, and emphasised the overwhelming need to deal with such racism in combating the social determinants of health inequalities.

This thinking on structural racism informed our interpretation of evidence on health in the UK, and we cited the work of Paho in Build Back Fairer. Had the Cred commissioners consulted the [executive summary](#) of our 2020 report reflecting the first months of the Covid pandemic, they would have found a more pertinent insight: “The links between ill health, including Covid-19, and deprivation are all too familiar. Less so have been the findings of shockingly high Covid-19 mortality rates among British people who self-identify as Black, Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian. Much, but not all, of this excess can be attributed to living in deprived areas, crowded housing, and being more exposed to the virus at work and at home – these conditions are themselves the result of longstanding inequalities and structural racism.”

I think about these ethnic inequalities in two ways. The first perspective considers what *causes* the causes of ill health. Smoking, poor diet and obesity are causes of ill health, but the “causes of the causes” are the social determinants of health – the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. Structural racism can be one cause of the social determinants of health – the causes of the “causes of the causes”.

For example, we quote in Build Back Fairer the finding that, for 17 occupations, the higher the proportion of workers that come from BAME groups, the higher the Covid-19 mortality rates. The “causes of the causes of the causes” means that some ethnic groups are more likely to have adverse social conditions, in this case working in high-risk occupations.

The second way to think about ethnic health inequalities flows from the intersection between ethnic patterns of disease and socio-economic position. There are health differences between races that are not fully explained by class; it is likely that racism plays an important role. To put it simply, these two issues may overlap, but they are not the same thing. The report notes that some ethnic groups have better health than others, but this simply reveals the limitations of the BAME classification; it does not disprove the role of racism.

It is surprising that the Cred report's authors are so ready to dismiss structural racism when they quote "experts advise us that mental ill health has little to do with genetic predisposition but rather is to do with adverse social circumstances, including racism and hardship". The debate is more than semantic. The report's authors recognise the importance of social determinants of health but want to look downstream at what individuals and communities can do for themselves. What? If you find yourself in unaffordable housing or in-work poverty, do what you can to get out of it? Those of us who recognise that the nature of society is vital want to look upstream to the social structures that have such powerful influences on health and wellbeing. Achieving a fair distribution of health among social and ethnic groups will be a sign that we have changed society for the better.

- Michael Marmot is professor of epidemiology at University College London, director of the UCL Institute of [Health Equity](#), and past president of the World Medical Association

OpinionPoland

Under cover of Covid, Poland is stifling free media – and all Europe should be worried

[Timothy Garton Ash](#)



A planned ‘coronavirus tax’ on revenues and attacks on foreign-owned media threaten to cut away democracy piece by piece



Gazeta Wyborcza's front page reads 'Media without choice' in February, protesting against the new media tax. Photograph: Wojtek Radwański/AFP/Getty Images

Gazeta Wyborcza's front page reads 'Media without choice' in February, protesting against the new media tax. Photograph: Wojtek Radwański/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 8 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

Democracy dies in darkness. One of the European Union's most fragile democracies, Poland, now faces the spectre of the night that falls when public service media have been turned into propaganda organs for a ruling party while private, independent media are suffocated. In the end, light is cast no more on the failings and abuses of those in power, because there are no more torches to shine that light. Hungary – which is [no longer](#) a democracy – has almost reached that twilight moment, with the extinction of its last major [independent radio station](#).

Poland is still a long way from dusk, but the threat is real. In the World Press Freedom index, the country has [sunk](#) from 18th in 2015, ahead of Britain and France, to 62nd last year. (Hungary is down at 89th.)

If you watched only Polish state television news over the last fortnight, you would have no idea that Poland is currently among the countries doing the worst during the pandemic. According to Bloomberg's [Covid resilience ranking](#), Poland has fallen to 50th place among the world's 53 largest economies, with only Brazil, the Czech Republic and Mexico performing worse. But switch on the official news and, after brief mention of the latest Covid figures, there are long items about how the government is speeding up the vaccination campaign, with the help of the wonderful army, and how terrible the opposition's record was on public health when it was in power. In other "news", you learn how brilliant Poland's relations are with the US, especially in defence; how much money the government is pumping into the railways and local government; how Christians are being persecuted all over the world; and how a grave was recently uncovered showing more victims of wartime German occupation. The propaganda is more extreme but also more skilful than during the last decade of communist rule.

Only when you turn to the independent TVN24 news do you see footage of long queues of ambulances waiting outside hospitals, because there are no more intensive care beds, and hear doctors explaining how terrible the public health situation really is. TVN24 is not BBC-impartial, but it does serious journalism and gives you the other side of the story. The same "two realities" experience can be had switching from state to private radio, or from government-supporting papers to independent and opposition ones.

Such a hyper-polarised public sphere is already bad enough, as we see in the US, but now the ruling Law and Justice party has launched a systematic attack on independent media. The methods are straight out of Viktor Orbán's playbook in Hungary. Public sector advertising and subscriptions are withdrawn from independent media. All sorts of regulatory chicanery is used against them. Public money is pumped into state television and radio. A "[pandemic tax](#)" is proposed on media advertising revenue. A projected law on the "[repolonisation](#)" of media would target foreign owners of the biggest independent outlets. A state-owned petrol company, PKN Orlen, whose boss is a Law and Justice party crony, buys both a major press distributor, Ruch, and the largest network of regional newspapers, [Polska Press](#). The most critical papers are bombarded with lawsuits. Gazeta Wyborcza counts more than 60 lawsuits, including [one from the justice minister](#) in person. And, as European legal authorities have repeatedly [determined](#), the independence of

Polish courts has been so far eroded that you can no longer rely on a fair trial.

This is that old Hungarian speciality, [salami tactics](#): eliminating freedom slice by slice.

[Poland accused of abandoning domestic violence victims](#)

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Polish media and civil society are resisting strongly, but they need a little help from their friends. The US matters enormously here. The Law and Justice government and president, Andrzej Duda, make much of their special relationship with Washington. But they were strong supporters of Donald Trump, who in return gave Duda [electoral assistance](#) last summer. The administration of Joe Biden owes them no favours, and it has an agenda that claims to be strong on democracy and human rights. As well as [defending TVN](#), which is owned by the US company Discovery, Washington should now highlight independent media as the frontline of defending democracy in Poland.

Britain counts for less than it once did in Warsaw because of Brexit but, along with other liberal democracies such as Canada and Australia, it can help turn the spotlight on this issue. Germany is of the first importance, and a German-Swiss group, Ringier Axel Springer, [owns](#) one of the most important Polish online platforms, Onet.pl, the tabloid Fakt and a leading weekly, Newsweek Polska. The Polish government tries to silence Berlin by constantly bringing up the second world war, but the proper lesson from that history is not that Germany must be particularly reticent on these issues. It is precisely because of that terrible past that Germany should be the first to speak up for freedom and human rights.

Most important, and most problematic, is the EU. One of the most depressing discoveries of the last few years is that the EU, which spends so much time talking about democracy, is pathetically ineffective when it comes to defending democracy inside its own member states. Now it is going to hand out [many more billions of euros](#) to those states, both from the EU-wide post-Covid recovery fund and from the bloc's [new seven-year budget](#). Huge sums will go directly to the populist nationalist governments

in Warsaw and Budapest, with only minimal conditions attached. Most of those great investments trumpeted on Polish state television news are done with the help of EU money. At the very least, the EU should make it crystal clear that, under single market rules, foreign media owners may on no account be discriminated against. It should distribute a significant chunk of the new money directly through local government – as suggested by the mayors of Warsaw and Budapest. And it should create a substantial EU fund for the defence of media freedom across the continent.

Last week, the leadership of Poland's Law and Justice party began talks with Orbán and Matteo Salvini of Italy about forming a [new populist nationalist grouping](#) in the EU. It is not just democracy in Poland that is at stake here; it is democracy in Europe as a whole.

- Timothy Garton Ash is a Guardian columnist

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[Opinion](#)**Celebrity**

There are meant to be three phases of TV celebrity. But I've discovered a fourth

[Adrian Chiles](#)



As I sit in the makeup chair, ready to play myself in a sitcom, I realise I'm in new territory



‘I had my makeup done for the sitcom by a nice woman who made me up back in the day, when I was a real breakfast TV presenter.’ Photograph: vm/Getty Images

‘I had my makeup done for the sitcom by a nice woman who made me up back in the day, when I was a real breakfast TV presenter.’ Photograph: vm/Getty Images

Thu 8 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

I’ve heard it said that there are three phases of fame and fortune. During the first phase, people ask: have you heard of such and such? During the second phase, when you’re flying, they ask: did you see such and such last night? Then, when it’s all gone pear-shaped, you enter phase three. This is when people, perhaps to fill a lull in conversation, say: whatever happened to such and such? As far as live television is concerned, which I did more or less every day for 30 years, I’ve been very much stuck in phase three for a while now. I ask not for pity, not a bit of it, as I love doing my radio show and various bits of writing. But it is wearing to constantly have it pointed out to you in the street that you’re not on television any more, especially because it’s said in a tone of voice appropriate to a comment like: oh, I thought you were dead.

Now, though, rather like Spinal Tap's amps going up to 11 instead of just 10, I've discovered a fourth phase, which I've just entered. I have a part in a sitcom in which I play myself as presenter of a breakfast television show. I write this on location, sitting in a makeshift dressing room having just had my makeup done by a nice woman who happened to have made me up back in the day, when I was a real breakfast television presenter. Outside I can see the small van they have given me to drive. On the side it says: "Wake Up with Adrian Chiles." I might be wrong, but even for [Alan Partridge](#) I don't believe it quite came to this. Naturally I'm fantasising that someone senior on the crew is going to look up from a monitor and say: "Eh, what have we here, then? This lad could go far."

No sign of this so far, I'm afraid, and I'm freezing to death. I can't say I'm not enjoying it, though. One of the extras has just spent three weeks saying nothing on the set of Batman, the costume woman's from Venezuela and the stunt bloke once pole-vaulted for Great Britain. All interesting chats – a change is a good as a rest.

Adrian Chiles is a Guardian columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/apr/08/there-are-meant-to-be-three-phases-of-tv-celebrity-but-ive-discovered-a-fourth>

OpinionRace

Why celebrating 'mixed-race beauty' has its problematic side

[Natalie Morris](#)

The trend personified by the Kardashians is driven by the aesthetics of ambiguity – and proximity to whiteness



Kim Kardashian West at a Paris Fashion Week event on 2 March 2020.
Photograph: Marc Piasecki/WireImage

Kim Kardashian West at a Paris Fashion Week event on 2 March 2020.
Photograph: Marc Piasecki/WireImage

Thu 8 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

I was insecure about how I looked when I was younger. My hair was frizzy and embarrassingly enormous. My bum stuck out too much. My lips were too big. My thighs were too big.

Everything about me – specifically my racialised features as a Black mixed woman – felt “too much”. I remember the distinct feeling of wanting to shrink myself, melt myself down into something neater, smaller, sleeker – which is how I saw my white friends, and the beautiful white people on TV.

[Boris Johnson urged to reject ‘disingenuous’ UK race disparities report](#)
[Read more](#)

Then, in my early 20s, soon after moving to London from my home in Manchester, I began to notice a shift in how beauty was being represented. Suddenly, faces, hair and bodies that looked like mine were plastered on shop windows, grinning down from billboards, smizing (smiling with their eyes) from the pages of magazines. Every other TV ad featured mixed models or an interracial family.

White influencers began plumping their lips, baking their skin, braiding their hair, even undergoing invasive surgical procedures to create curves where none existed. The things about myself I had wanted to disguise or alter in my youth were now in vogue – and I struggled to get my head around that. How did it become “trendy” to look like me? And should I feel *pleased* about it?

This growth of racial ambiguity as an aesthetic trend was, at least in part, accelerated by celebrity culture and the likes of [the Kardashians](#). The accusations of “[Blackfishing](#)” levelled against the family are well documented, with criticisms about their adoption of Black hairstyles, body types and facial features. The reality TV stars, along with thousands of imitators who came in their wake, have been cherrypicking the elements of Blackness that suit their brand without any of the uncomfortable or disadvantageous implications of actually *living* as Black.

This “trend” had an impact on mixed women – at least those of us with Black and white heritage – as we found that our features became covetable and desirable, just as long as they were wrapped in the palatable package that comes with proximity to whiteness.

And that is why it’s impossible to see the rise of mixed beauty ideals as a positive thing, because at its heart sits an unsettling insistence on white

superiority.

It's often hard to articulate why something that sounds like a compliment can be so harmful. On the racism scale, being told that you're beautiful is hardly the worst thing that can happen. But just because something presents as a positive on the surface, doesn't mean we shouldn't dig deeper into the wider implications of this phenomenon.

In the research for my book, *Mixed/Other*, I interviewed more than 50 mixed Britons of all ages, with different ethnic makeups, from all over the country. They told me that being perceived in this way – this hyper-focus on how we look – makes them feel like a collection of commodified parts, rather than real people.

Alexander, who has Sri Lankan and white British heritage, told me he was fetishised by men he dates. They called him exotic, and one guy even rejected him when he found out he wasn't Māori – his favourite “type”. Becky, who has Black Caribbean and white British heritage, said she was frequently hypersexualised – that men reduced her to a litany of racialised parts and make assumptions about what she will be like in bed.

People I spoke to who are not mixed with white – those with multiple minority heritage – say this narrative erases them from the conversation altogether. For people like Jeanette, with Cameroonian and Filipino heritage, these assumptions of “inherent mixed beauty” don't apply. She doesn't fit the blueprint.

It is not “mixedness” that is being glorified, then, but simply the aesthetics of ambiguity and, crucially, being close enough to whiteness.

We are right to be wary of compliments that are not compliments, to push back against this disproportionate interest in how we look. It wasn't so long ago that the mixed population was being scrutinised with a similar energy but with an entirely different outcome. In the 1930s and 1940s, there were groups warning about the dangers of “[race crossing](#)”; there were calls for mixed people to be sterilised; we were denigrated as deviant, stupid, contaminated, undesirable. Isn't the contemporary idealisation of mixedness

– the suggestion that we are more beautiful or have “the best of both” – simply the other side of the same coin?

This trend continues. Hashtags such as #MixedBeauty and #MixedBabies have millions of posts on Instagram. Hit shows such as [Bridgerton](#) spotlight mixed stars at the expense of monoracial Black actors. This kind of fetishisation is pervasive and enduring, yet often goes unremarked because many think it is positive, or represents progress. But being a trend, or being commercially popular because of your racialised appearance, is never going to be a good thing.

[Meghan Markle](#) is the most recent example of this. Celebrated as a beautiful emblem of a progressive future in the lead-up to the royal wedding, the tide quickly turned on her when she was deemed not to be sticking to the script, and was instead proud and outspoken about her Black heritage. No matter how much mixed people may be celebrated or glorified for their appearance, her treatment shows that there is ultimately so little power in that, and that any privilege which comes with being perceived as beautiful is precarious.

Celebrating mixed beauty risks doing little more than bolster a pre-existing racial hierarchy, ensuring that whiteness remains fixed at the top. It's important to acknowledge the problematic and damaging nature of these attitudes – even when they sound complimentary.

- Natalie Morris is the author of *Mixed/Other: Explorations of Multiraciality in Modern Britain*

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/apr/08/why-celebrating-mixed-race-beauty-has-its-problematic-side>

2021.04.08 - Around the world

- [Derek Chauvin trial Officer used deliberate and excessive pain technique on George Floyd, police expert says](#)
- [Thai cave rescue, the sequel Meditating monk saved from flooded cave after four days](#)
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- [US foreign policy Biden restores \\$200m in US aid to Palestinians slashed by Trump](#)

[George Floyd](#)

Chauvin used deliberate and excessive pain technique on George Floyd, police expert says

Jody Stiger, a police specialist on the use of force, tells trial ‘pain compliance’ technique was used for much longer than necessary

01:50

Force used on George Floyd was 'excessive', police expert says at Chauvin trial – video

[Chris McGreal](#)

Wed 7 Apr 2021 18.26 EDT

An expert police witness has told the Derek Chauvin murder trial in Minneapolis that the accused former officer used a technique designed to deliberately inflict pain and subjected [George Floyd](#) to it for an extended period.

Sgt Jody Stiger, a Los Angeles police specialist on the use of force, said on Wednesday that video shows Chauvin applying a “pain compliance” procedure by pulling the 46-year-old Black man’s wrist into the handcuffs, which can be heard clicking tighter.

Stiger said the technique, which also involves squeezing the knuckles together, is normally used to inflict pain in order to persuade a person to comply with an officer’s commands – but at that point Floyd was not resisting and was lying prone on the ground.

The procedure was also used for much longer than was necessary, Stiger told the jury.

The prosecutor asked Stiger what the effect is of using the pain compliance procedure if there is no opportunity for compliance.

“At that point it’s just pain,” he said.

Chauvin, 45, who is white, has denied charges of second– and third–degree murder, and manslaughter, over Floyd’s death last May, which prompted mass protests for racial justice across the US and other parts of the world.

The officer and three others who assisted in the arrest of Floyd were fired the following day and Chauvin faces up to 40 years in prison if convicted of the most serious charge. He denies all the charges.

The prosecution continued to build the core of its case that the level of force used by Chauvin was illegitimate.

A succession of Chauvin’s colleagues, trainers and even the Minneapolis police chief, [Medaria Arradondo](#), have testified that there was no justification for Chauvin to keep his knee on Floyd’s neck for nine minutes and that it endangered his life.

Most have said there was no reason to put it there in the first place, although the defence was able to muddy the waters about the [Minneapolis](#) police department training on the use of neck restraints before they were barred following Floyd’s death.

On Wednesday, the eighth day of testimony in the trial, Stiger told the court that video showed Chauvin had one knee on Floyd’s neck and the other on his back throughout the time he was pinned on the ground. The witness said this meant that all of the accused officer’s body weight was pushing down through his knees on to Floyd.

“The pressure that was being caused by the body weight would cause positional asphyxia, which could cause death,” said Stiger.

The officer said that Chauvin was justified in using force to try to get Floyd to sit in the squad car. But once the detained man was lying on his stomach on the ground, he ended his resistance and the level of force used against him “was excessive”.

“As the time went on in the video, clearly you could see Mr Floyd’s medical ... his health was deteriorating. His breath was getting lower. His tone of voice was getting lower. His movements were starting to cease,” said Stiger.

The officer said that at that point Chauvin should have taken some action such as sit Floyd up or put him in the recovery position.

Earlier, Stiger questioned the use of any force, given the low-level offence Floyd was accused of - using an allegedly forged \$20 bill in a store.

Chauvin’s defence lawyer, Eric Nelson, said that under a supreme court ruling the standard by which the accused officer should be judged is “objective reasonableness”.

In cross-examination, Nelson put it to Stiger that Chauvin’s actions were governed by being told by the police dispatcher who sent him to the scene that the incident involved a large, intoxicated man resisting arrest.

Stiger agreed that created “a heightened degree of expectation”, because force was already being used by fellow officers.

Nelson said that it was reasonable for Chauvin to be sceptical about Floyd’s claims not to be able to breathe, given the force he was using to resist being put in the squad car.

Stiger agreed that Floyd’s pleas might have been an attempt “to bargain” with the officers to stop the arrest.

The defence has claimed that Chauvin’s actions later were affected by a threat from the “chaos” of a growing crowd of hostile bystanders demanding the officer take his knee off Floyd’s neck because it was killing him.

Nelson suggested the accused officer faced “multiple threats” and that the one posed by the crowd distracted Chauvin from focusing on Floyd’s medical condition and caused him to use a level of force to prevent the prone man from resisting again.

Stiger said he heard name-calling and foul language but did not perceive the bystanders as a threat.

“They were only filming. Most of it was their concern for Mr Floyd,” he said.

A dispute arose during the testimony of James Reyerson, a senior investigator for the state into Chauvin’s use of force, over whether Floyd is heard to say on video “I ate too many drugs” or “I ain’t do no drugs”.

The defence claimed it was the former, the prosecution the latter.

Part of Chauvin’s defence hinges on the claim that Floyd was under the influence of drugs and that affected his behaviour and contributed to his death. The prosecution claims that Chauvin failed to offer appropriate medical care to a man having a medical crisis.

Susan Neith, forensic chemist, told the trial that she tested pills found in Floyd’s vehicle and in the back seat of the squad car. She detected a powerful and dangerous opioid, fentanyl, and methamphetamine – the drugs found in Floyd’s system by the state’s autopsy.

Three other officers involved in Floyd’s death are scheduled to be tried together later this year on charges of aiding and abetting murder and manslaughter.

The trial continues.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/apr/07/derek-chauvin-trial-george-floyd-death-police-expert>

Thailand

Thai cave rescue, the sequel: Meditating monk saved from flooded cave after four days

Buddhist Phra Ajarn Manas was fitted with a diving mask to help him swim out of flooded cave he visited in order to meditate

00:44

Thai monk rescued from flooded cave after four days – video

Reuters

Wed 7 Apr 2021 21.40 EDT

Thai rescue workers have freed a meditating Buddhist monk who was trapped inside a flooded cave for four days .

The monk, identified by rescuers as 46-year-old Phra Ajarn Manas, was on a pilgrimage from another province and had gone into the Phra Sai Ngam cave in Phitsanulok on Saturday to meditate.

An unseasonal rainstorm struck on Sunday and continued through to Tuesday, flooding parts of the cave while he was inside, the local rescue unit said on its Facebook page.

Seventeen divers participated in the effort to find and free the monk from the spot, which could be accessed only by divers. A video posted by rescuers shows the monk fitted with a diving mask making a 12-metre swim underwater.



Rescuers help Phra Manas, centre, walk out of the cave on Wednesday.
Photograph: AP

The unit said local residents told them the monk was still trapped inside the cave on Tuesday afternoon. They went in looking for him but had to call off the operation after about an hour due to rising water levels. They were concerned he may be “exhausted or unconscious because of not having food at all”.

[Thailand cave rescue sparks celebration of 'mission impossible'](#)
[Read more](#)

Pictures on the unit’s Facebook page showed the monk on Wednesday sitting inside the cave surrounded by rescue workers and having his blood pressure taken. “At 11.30am we successfully rescued Phra Manas out of the cave,” the unit said.

One of the rescue workers confirmed in a phone call that the monk was out of the cave and receiving first aid.

Thailand made global headlines in 2018 with the [high-profile rescue of 12 Thai boys](#) and their football coach from a flooded cave in the northern town of Chiang Rai.

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Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

Japan denies planning to prioritise Olympic athletes for Covid vaccine

Reports the government was considering the move have provoked outrage on social media

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Commuters wearing face masks stand in a train decorated with Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games mascots in Tokyo, Japan. Japan is considering vaccinating Olympic athletes ahead of the rest of the population. Photograph: Franck Robichon/EPA

Commuters wearing face masks stand in a train decorated with Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games mascots in Tokyo, Japan. Japan is considering vaccinating Olympic athletes ahead of the rest of the population. Photograph: Franck Robichon/EPA

[Helen Sullivan](#) and agencies

[@helenrsullivan](#)

Thu 8 Apr 2021 04.29 EDT

Japan's government moved to cool a social media furore by saying it was not looking to prioritise Covid-19 vaccines for Olympic athletes, dismissing a media report that said it was considering the option.

The chief cabinet secretary, Katsunobu Katō, said the government had no plans to give priority to Olympic athletes.

Japan's vaccination drive is far behind that of most major economies, with only one vaccine approved and roughly 1 million people having received a first dose since February, even as the country struggles with a rising number of new cases.

The Kyodo news agency report claiming the government was considering the vaccine plan provoked outrage on social media, with many commentators noting that the original government plans for vaccinations gave priority to medical workers, elderly people and those with chronic conditions, with ordinary citizens unlikely to get theirs before the summer.

Vaccinations for elderly people are set to start next week. If the Japanese athletes were given priority, they would have begun receiving shots before older people finish.

[North Korea pulls out of Tokyo Olympics, citing coronavirus fears](#)

[Read more](#)

According to government officials quoted by Kyodo late on Wednesday, however, the government has begun looking into the possibility of making sure its Olympic and Paralympic athletes have had both shots by the end of June – so they have enough time to recover by the 23 July opening of the Games.

Kyodo reported that discussions with the Japanese Olympic and Paralympic committees were just beginning, and they had not decided whether all Japanese athletes or only those competing in certain events would be eligible

for inoculation, it cited an official as saying, while voicing concern that including coaches and other staff could invite public criticism.

Inoculation is not a requirement to participate in the Games, Japan and the International Olympic Committee have said. But some countries, including the United States and nations in Europe and the Middle East have said they will be doing so. Australia's Olympics athletes [will not be required to have a Covid-19 vaccination](#) but will be encouraged to do so, Australian Olympic Committee president John Coates said in February.

Earlier this week, [North Korea withdrew from the Games](#) citing coronavirus fears.

One user wrote online: "This is really weird. Given that we have no idea if even all the elderly will have received their vaccines by mid-June, you're going to have all the athletes have theirs?"

The vast majority of Japanese want the Olympics, already postponed once, to be cancelled or postponed again, but the government says the event will go ahead as planned from 23 July – prompting one commentator to say: "They must really want the Olympics to go ahead, if they're coming up with plans like this."

But others had much simpler concerns. "Give it to my mother first," wrote one. "Athletes are all young and healthy."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/apr/08/japan-considering-vaccinating-tokyo-olympic-athletes-before-rest-of-population>

[Lost on the frontline](#)US news

Twelve months of trauma: more than 3,600 US health workers died in Covid's first year



Hospital staff hold a vigil for Celia Marcos, a health worker who died in Los Angeles in May. The absence of reliable federal data exacerbated critical problems such as shortages of PPE that left many workers exposed. Photograph: Étienne Laurent/EPA

Hospital staff hold a vigil for Celia Marcos, a health worker who died in Los Angeles in May. The absence of reliable federal data exacerbated critical problems such as shortages of PPE that left many workers exposed. Photograph: Étienne Laurent/EPA

Lost on the Frontline, a year-long investigation by the Guardian and KHN to count healthcare worker deaths, ends today. This is what we learned in a year of tracing the lives of those who made the ultimate sacrifice

- [3,607 healthcare workers have died in the first year of the pandemic. Explore our interactive database](#)

[Jane Spencer](#) and [Christina Jewett](#)

Thu 8 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

More than 3,600 [US healthcare](#) workers died in the first year of the pandemic according to Lost on the Frontline, a 12-month investigation by the Guardian and Kaiser Health News (KHN) to track such deaths.

[khn logo](#)

Lost on the Frontline is the most complete accounting of US healthcare worker deaths. The federal government has not comprehensively tracked this data. But [calls are mounting for the Biden administration to undertake a count](#) as the Guardian/KHN project comes to a close today. The project, which tracked who died and why, provides a window into the workings – and failings – of the US healthcare system during the pandemic. One key finding: two thirds of deceased healthcare workers for whom we have data identified as people of color, revealing the deep inequities tied to race, ethnicity and economic status in America’s healthcare workforce. Lower-paid workers who handled everyday patient care, including nurses, support staff, and nursing home employees, were far more likely to die in the pandemic than physicians.

[race](#)

The year-long series of investigative reports found that many of these deaths could have been prevented. Widespread PPE and mask shortages, a lack of Covid testing, weak contact tracing, inconsistent mask guidance by politicians, missteps by employers, and lax enforcement of workplace safety rules by government regulators all contributed to the increased risk faced by healthcare workers. Studies show that healthcare workers were more than 3 times as likely to contract Covid as the general public.

[time](#)

“We rightfully refer to these people without hyperbole – that they are true heroes and heroines,” said Dr Anthony Fauci in an [exclusive interview with the Guardian and KHN](#). The Covid deaths of so many health workers are “a reflection of what healthcare workers have done historically, putting themselves in harm’s way, by living up to the oath they take when they become physicians and nurses,” he said.

Lost on the Frontline launched last April with the [story of Frank Gabrin](#), the first known American emergency room doctor to die of Covid-19. In the early days of the pandemic, Gabrin, 60, was on the frontlines of the surge, treating Covid patients in New York and New Jersey. Yet, like so many others, he was working without proper personal protective equipment, known as PPE. “Don’t have any PPE that has not been used,” he texted a friend. “No N95 masks – my own goggles – my own face shield.”

Gabrin’s untimely death was the first fatality entered into the Lost on the Frontline database. His story of working through a crisis to save lives shared similarities with the thousands that followed.

Maritza Beniquez, an emergency room nurse at Newark’s University hospital in New Jersey, [watched 11 colleagues die](#) in the early months of the pandemic. Like the patients they had been treating, most were Black and Latino. “It literally decimated our staff,” she said.

[occupation](#)

Her hospital has placed 11 trees in the lobby, one for each employee who has died of Covid-19; they have been adorned with remembrances and gifts from their colleagues.

More than 100 journalists contributed to the project in an effort to record every death and memorialize those who died. The project’s journalists filed public records requests, cross-connected governmental and private data sources, scoured obituaries and social media posts, and confirmed deaths through family members, workplaces, and colleagues.

Among its key findings on those fatalities for which we have detailed information:

- **More than half of those who died were younger than 60.** In the general population, the median age of death from Covid-19 is 78. Yet among healthcare workers in our database, it is only 59.
- **More than a third of the healthcare workers who died were born outside the United States.** Those from the Philippines accounted for a disproportionate number of deaths.
- **Nurses and support staff died in far higher numbers than physicians.**
- **Twice as many workers died in nursing homes as hospitals.** Only 30% of deaths were among hospital workers, and relatively few were employed by well-funded academic medical centers. The rest worked in less-prestigious residential facilities, outpatient clinics, hospices and prisons, among other places.

The death rate among healthcare workers has slowed dramatically since the vaccine was made available to them last December. A [study](#) published in late March found that only four of 8,121 fully vaccinated employees at the University of Texas Southwestern medical center in Dallas became infected. But deaths lag behind infections and KHN and the Guardian have [tracked more than 400 healthcare worker deaths](#) since the vaccine rollout began.

Many factors contributed to the high toll – but our investigations uncovered some consistent problems that heightened the risks faced by healthcare workers.

[Our reporting](#) found that CDC guidance on masks – which encouraged hospitals to reserve high performance N95 masks for intubation procedures and initially suggested surgical masks were adequate for everyday patient care – may have put thousands of health workers at risk.

We exposed how the labor department, run by Trump appointee Eugene Scalia in the early part of the pandemic, took a hands-off approach to workplace safety. We identified [4,100 safety complaints](#) filed by healthcare workers to OSHA, the Labor Department's workplace safety agency. Most

were about PPE shortages, yet even after some complaints were investigated and closed by regulators, workers continued to die at the facilities in question.

ppe

We also found that healthcare employers were [failing to report worker deaths](#) to OSHA. Our data analysis found that more than a third of workplace Covid deaths were not reported to regulators.

Among the most visceral findings of Lost on the Frontline was the devastating impact of PPE shortages. [Adeline Fagan, a 28-year-old OB-GYN resident in Texas](#), suffered from asthma and had a long history of respiratory ailments.

Months into the pandemic, her family says she was using the same N95 mask over and over, even during a high-risk rotation in the emergency room.

Her parents blame both the hospital administration and government missteps for the PPE shortages that may have contributed to Adeline's death last October. Her mother, Mary Jane Abt-Fagan, said Adeline's N95 had been re-used so many times the fibers were beginning to disintegrate.

Not long before she fell ill – and after she'd been assigned to a high risk ER rotation – Adeline talked to her parents about whether she should spend her own money on an expensive N95 with a filter that could be changed daily. The \$79 mask was a significant expense on her \$52,000 resident's salary.

“We said you buy this mask, you buy the filters, your father and I will pay for it. We didn't care what it cost,” said her mother, Abt-Fagan.

She never had the opportunity to use it. By the time the mask arrived, Adeline was already on a ventilator in the hospital.

Fagan's family feels let down by the US government's response to the pandemic.

“Nobody chooses to go to work and die,” said Abt-Fagan. “We need to be more prepared, and the government needs to be more responsible in terms of

keeping healthcare workers safe.”

Adeline’s father, Brant Fagan, wants the government to begin tracking healthcare worker deaths and examining the data to understand what went wrong. “That’s how we’re going to prevent this in the future, he says. “Know the data, follow where the science leads.”

Adeline’s parents say her death has been particularly painful because of her youth –and all the life milestones she never had the chance to experience. “Falling in love, buying a home, sharing your family and your life with your siblings,” said her mother. “It’s all those things she missed that break a parent’s heart.”

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US foreign policy.

Biden restores \$200m in US aid to Palestinians slashed by Trump

Former US president had gradually cut virtually all US money to Palestinian aid projects



A Palestinian aid worker prepares food supplies at a UNRWA distribution centre in Gaza. Photograph: Mohammed Salem/Reuters

A Palestinian aid worker prepares food supplies at a UNRWA distribution centre in Gaza. Photograph: Mohammed Salem/Reuters

[Oliver Holmes](#) in Jerusalem

Thu 8 Apr 2021 03.36 EDT

The US will restore more than \$200m (£145m) in aid to Palestinians, reversing [massive funding cuts](#) under the Trump administration that left humanitarian groups scrambling to keep people from plunging into poverty.

“[We] plan to restart US economic, development, and humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people,” the secretary of state, Antony Blinken, [said in a statement](#).

The aid includes \$75m in economic and development funds for the occupied West Bank and Gaza, which will provide food and clean water to Palestinians and help small businesses. A further \$150m will be provided to the United Nations relief and works agency for Palestine refugees in the near east ([UNRWA](#)), a UN body that supports more than 5 million Palestinian refugees across the region.

After Donald Trump’s row with the Palestinian leadership, President Joe Biden has sought to restart Washington’s flailing efforts to push for a two-state resolution for the Israel-Palestinian crisis, and restoring the aid is part of that. In his statement, Blinken said US foreign assistance “serves important US interests and values”.

“The United States is committed to advancing prosperity, security, and freedom for both Israelis and Palestinians in tangible ways in the immediate term, which is important in its own right, but also as a means to advance towards a negotiated two-state solution,” he said.

Palestinian leaders and the UN welcomed the resumption of aid. Israel, however, criticised the decision to restore funds to UNRWA, a body it has long claimed is a bloated, flawed group.

“We believe that this UN agency for so-called refugees should not exist in its current format,” [said](#) Israel’s ambassador to the UN, Gilad Erdan. Pro-Israel US lawmakers joined the country in opposition to the aid and said they would scrutinise it in Congress.

From 2018, Trump gradually cut virtually all US money to Palestinian aid projects after the Palestinian leadership accused him of being biased towards Israel and refused to talk. The US president [accused](#) Palestinians of lacking “appreciation or respect”.

The former president [cancelled](#) more than \$200m in economic aid, including [\\$25m earmarked for underfunded East Jerusalem hospitals](#) that have

suffered during the Covid-19 crisis. Trump's [cuts to UNRWA](#), which also serves Palestinian refugees in war-stricken Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East, was described by the agency's then head as "the biggest and most severe" funding crisis since the body was created in 1949. The US was previously UNRWA's biggest donor.

[People in Gaza sifting through rubbish for food, UN head says](#)
[Read more](#)

To outcry from aid workers, [leaked emails](#) suggested the move may have partly been a political tactic to weaken the Palestinian leadership. Those emails alleged that Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner had argued that "ending the assistance outright could strengthen his negotiating hand" to push Palestinians to accept their blueprint for an Israeli-Palestinian deal.

The cuts were decried as catastrophic for Palestinians' ability to provide basic healthcare, schooling and sanitation, including by prominent Israeli establishment figures.

Last April, as the coronavirus pandemic hit, [Trump's government announced it would send money to Palestinians](#). The \$5m one-off donation was roughly 1% of the amount Washington provided a year before Trump began slashing aid.

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Headlines friday 9 april 2021

- [Coronavirus People in England told they can 'start to think' about summer holidays abroad](#)
- [Live UK Covid: airline cancels all flights amid travel 'uncertainty'; Shapps to work on reducing cost of tests](#)
- [Long Covid Publish figures to show 'untold suffering', MPs urge](#)
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People in England told they can ‘start to think’ about summer holidays

Transport secretary pledges to work to drive down costs amid fears only wealthy will be able to travel abroad

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Grant Shapps speaking on ITV's Good Morning Britain after the government confirmed that from 17 May countries will be placed in a traffic light system. Photograph: ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

Grant Shapps speaking on ITV's Good Morning Britain after the government confirmed that from 17 May countries will be placed in a traffic light system. Photograph: ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

[Ben Quinn](#)
[@BenQuinn75](#)

Fri 9 Apr 2021 09.14 EDT

People in [England](#) can “start to think” about booking summer holidays, the transport secretary has said, pledging that government would work to drive down the cost of tests needed for international travel.

Grant Shapps was speaking after [the government confirmed](#) that from 17 May countries would be placed in a traffic light system with green, amber and red lists that would set out whether, and where, travellers must isolate on returning to England.

“I’m not telling people that they shouldn’t book summer holidays now, it’s the first time that I’ve been able to say that for many months,” he told Sky News.

The plans have already been criticised by airports, airlines and the travel industry, which said they risked recreating a period when only the wealthy could afford to travel.

Travellers returning from the lowest-risk countries will not have to quarantine but will have to pay for tests, including PCR tests that cost about £100 per person on arrival in England.

Shapps said he was looking to “drive down the costs” of coronavirus tests required for international travel to resume. He said he would “not spare” those companies that were seen to be profiteering.

“Costs are definitely a concern, it’s one of the factors this year, and we have to accept we’re still going through a global pandemic,” he told Sky News. “And so we do have to be cautious and I’m afraid that does involve having to have some tests and the like.

“But, I am undertaking today to drive down the costs of those tests and looking at some innovative things we could do. For example, whether we can help provide the lateral flow test that people need to take before they depart the country that they are in to return to the UK.

“And also drive down the costs of the test when they get home if it’s in the green category, where it’s just a single test.”

The travel industry wants the cheaper lateral flow tests to be used more widely. The Heathrow chief executive, John Holland-Kaye, said there were “far better ways” than using a costly PCR testing system for returning passengers.

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“It’s good news that we now have flying opened up again from 17 May at the earliest, and I think the risk-based approach with this traffic light system is a good step forward, and I think [Grant Shapps](#) has done a very good job to steer that through government,” he told BBC Breakfast.

“All of us will welcome the fact that if you are going to a country that is green, where there’s very low risk of variants of concern, very low levels of Covid, that you won’t need to quarantine when you’re back.”

He added: “If you are a British citizen, you’ve been fully vaccinated, and are going to somewhere low risk such as Israel or the United States, not only do you have to have a test before you get on the plane coming back to show that you don’t have Covid, you then have to take an expensive PCR test after you arrive to demonstrate again.”

Passengers were also being charged far more for PCR tests in the UK than abroad, the industry claimed.

Research from the travel association Abta and the Airport Operators Association found that the cost of PCR tests for international travel in the UK was more than double the average across other European countries. A UK pre-departure PCR test cost an average £128 per person, compared with just under £62 on average across Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain, they said.

The total cost for an individual travelling to even a green-listed European destination would be £306 in testing alone, under the rules that require a UK pre-departure test, a second abroad at the end of a holiday, and a final test in the UK on return.

Mark Tanzer, the chief executive of ABTA said: “Small changes, like requiring a PCR test only if the individual gets a positive result from a lateral flow test, would make international travel more accessible and affordable while still providing an effective mitigation against re-importation of the virus.

“The government should also consider whether those who have been vaccinated can be exempt from testing requirements, should scientific evidence suggest reduced transmissibility.”

Karen Dee, the chief executive of the Airport Operators Association, said: “The cost of testing could act as a significant barrier to the meaningful restart to aviation and should not be underestimated. A summer holiday will be out of reach for many and damage an already badly hit aviation and travel industry even further.”

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UK Covid: virus prevalence in England increases from last week – ONS – as it happened

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[Long Covid](#)

Publish figures on long Covid to show ‘untold suffering’, MPs urge

Cross-party group urge PM to give greater priority to potential harm posed by post-viral condition

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11:06

Inside a long Covid clinic: ‘I look normal, but my body is breaking down’ – video

[Denis Campbell](#) *Health policy editor*

Fri 9 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

The number of people suffering with long Covid should be published routinely, as happens with those infected with or hospitalised with coronavirus, MPs and peers are urging Boris Johnson.

The cross-party group of parliamentarians want the prime minister to ensure that the “untold human suffering” that the condition involves helps shape future government policy towards the pandemic.

Thirty-two MPs and 33 peers have signed a letter urging Johnson to give greater priority to the potential harm posed by long Covid following the Office for National Statistics’ finding last week that an estimated 1.1m people are suffering its effects – far more than previously thought.

The signatories come from eight parties and include the Tory MP Dr Dan Poulter, a former health minister; Lord Darzi, the surgeon and ex-health

minister; and the SNP MP Dr Philippa Whitford, who is an NHS breast surgeon.

In the letter, coordinated by the all-party parliamentary group on coronavirus, they say: “Cases, hospitalisations and deaths are not the only measure of this pandemic. We urge the government to also count the number of people left with long Covid, many of them whose lives have been devastated by this pandemic.

11:06

Inside a long Covid clinic: ‘I look normal, but my body is breaking down’ – video

“Your government has pledged to be guided by ‘data not dates’. This pledge risks becoming an empty slogan unless comprehensive data is collected on long Covid and factored into future decisions.”

Public sector workers such as health staff, teachers and transport workers are the most affected by long Covid, the ONS found. Symptoms include pain, exhaustion, heart problems and “brain fog” that often leave those affected unable to work or function normally.

Poulter said the ONS figures should act as a wake-up call as to the true prevalence of the post-viral syndrome. “The government needs to consider the potential long-term impact of coronavirus, including for otherwise fit and healthy people, as the lockdown is eased. Failure to do so risks placing even more pressure on our already overstretched health service and leaving more people suffering with long-lasting symptoms from this cruel disease.”

The letter calls long Covid “the hidden health crisis of the pandemic” and says: “Those suffering from long Covid were largely overlooked during the first and second waves in this pandemic. Given what we now know about this condition, it would be unforgiveable to make the same mistake again.”

The Labour MP Andrew Gwynne, another signatory, who suffers from long Covid himself, said: “The government’s current approach seems to be focused only on the short-term, while ignoring the long-lasting consequences of coronavirus and the human suffering it causes. It risks

causing a ticking timebomb for our NHS, economy and the key workers most likely to be affected by long Covid.”

In the [minutes released on Monday](#) of a meeting of the government’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage), held on 31 March, its members – who include England’s chief medical officer, Prof Chris Whitty, and the chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance – said that while the vaccination programme meant fewer people would end up in hospital with or dying of Covid, “there will be other impacts, including post-Covid syndromes (‘long Covid’).”

Sage stated: “The overall prevalence and impact of these syndromes is not well understood and nor is the potential role in vaccination in preventing them. This needs to be considered when assessing the impact of different levels of prevalence.”

Downing Street was approached for comment.

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Wales

Wales to allow two households to meet indoors earlier than planned

The drop in Covid cases and ongoing vaccine programme means the government can ease restrictions

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First minister Mark Drakeford said the ‘improvements’ in the public health situation meant changes could be made. Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images

First minister Mark Drakeford said the ‘improvements’ in the public health situation meant changes could be made. Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images

PA Media

Thu 8 Apr 2021 17.00 EDT

Two households will be able to meet indoors a week earlier than previously planned, as the Welsh government brings forward the easing of some coronavirus restrictions.

The reopening of gyms, leisure centres, and outdoor organised activities will also be brought forward amid a drop in new Covid-19 infections.

Wales' first minister [Mark Drakeford](#) said the “improvements” in the public health situation and the [vaccination programme](#) meant changes could be made to previously announced plans.

The Welsh government said on Thursday that coronavirus cases in [Wales](#) had dropped from 37 to fewer than 21 per 100,000 this week, while the number of people with Covid-19 in hospital beds was 89 – the lowest figure since 22 September.

Under the [changes to the timetable](#) organised outdoor activities for up to 30 people will be able to take place from 26 April instead of 3 May.

Wedding receptions for up to 30 people will also be permitted outdoors from 26 April – again a week earlier than previously announced.

The reopening of gyms, leisure centres and fitness facilities will now be allowed from 3 May, brought forward a week from 10 May. This will include for individual or one-to-one training, but not exercise classes.

An extended household rule will allow two households to meet and have contact indoors from 3 May, rather than 10 May.

All dates are “subject to the public health situation remaining favourable” and will be confirmed at a review of coronavirus regulations on 22 April, the Welsh government said.

Drakeford said: “The public health situation in Wales continues to improve thanks to everything you are doing to help us control this awful virus.

“Cases of the virus are falling and our incredible vaccination programme continues to go from strength to strength.

“Because of the improvements we continue to see, we can bring forward some of our plans.

“This is only possible because of the efforts everyone is making to protect themselves and their loved ones.”

Other relaxations of restrictions are still set to go ahead from Monday.

This includes the return of children to schools, all post-16 learners back at further education and training centres and university campuses reopening for blended face-to-face and online learning.

All remaining non-essential retail and close contact services will reopen.

Restrictions on travel in and out of Wales are also to be lifted, but people will not be able to journey to countries outside the common travel area – the UK, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and Ireland – without a reasonable excuse.

Restrictions on political canvassing will be removed, so long as it is done safely, and wedding “show-arounds” by appointment will be allowed.

From 26 April outdoor attractions, such as funfairs and theme parks, could be allowed to reopen – the date for which has not been changed.

Outdoor hospitality, including at cafes, pubs and restaurants, is also set to resume from the same unchanged date.

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- [Norway PM fined after breaking Covid rules with birthday party](#)
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Norway.

Norwegian PM fined after breaking Covid rules with birthday party

Erna Solberg breached ban on events attended by more than 10 people

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The prime minister of Norway, Erna Solberg, apologised last month for breaching Covid-19 rules. Photograph: Ints Kalniņš/Reuters

The prime minister of Norway, Erna Solberg, apologised last month for breaching Covid-19 rules. Photograph: Ints Kalniņš/Reuters

Reuters in Oslo

Fri 9 Apr 2021 09.32 EDT

Norway's prime minister, Erna Solberg, has been fined 20,000 kroner (£1,713) after breaking coronavirus social-distancing rules when organising a family gathering to celebrate her birthday.

The matter came to light in a report by the public broadcaster NRK, which triggered a police investigation.

The two-term leader has apologised several times for organising the event for her 60th birthday with 13 relatives at a mountain resort in late February, despite a government ban on gatherings of more than 10 people.

Solberg said on Friday she would pay the fine, which was issued by police. "I'd like to say again that I'm sorry for breaking the coronavirus rules," she told Norway's TV2 News. "I will accept the fine, and pay it."

While police would not have issued a fine in most such cases, they said the prime minister had been at the forefront of the government's work to impose restrictions.

"Though the law is the same for all, all are not equal in front of the law," the police chief, Ole Saeverud, told a news conference, justifying the fine. "It is therefore correct to issue a fine in order to uphold the general public's trust in the rules on social restrictions."

Police said Solberg and her husband, Sindre Finnes, made the decision together to hold a celebration and picked the restaurant, with Finnes taking care of the practical arrangements.

Though police said he had broken the law as well, he was not fined. The restaurant where the celebration took place was also found to have violated the law but not penalised.

"Solberg is the country's leader and she has been at the forefront of the restrictions imposed to limit the spread of the virus," said Saeverud.

[Johns Hopkins graphic of coronavirus deaths in Norway](#)

Solberg, who faces elections for parliament in September, has championed strict rules to curb the spread of the coronavirus, resulting in some of

Europe's lowest rates of infection and deaths.

But Norway saw a rapid rise in infections in the first quarter of 2021, led by more contagious variants of the virus, forcing the government to tighten restrictions in late March.

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Coronavirus

UK Covid cases could rise again despite vaccine progress – WHO official

Exclusive: Dr Catherine Smallwood says there is potential for surge unconnected to increases in Europe



Dr Catherine Smallwood said lockdown measures rather than the vaccination programme were keeping Covid case numbers down. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Dr Catherine Smallwood said lockdown measures rather than the vaccination programme were keeping Covid case numbers down. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

[Aubrey Allegretti](#)
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Thu 8 Apr 2021 13.10 EDT

The success of Britain's vaccine programme is not enough to protect it from another wave of coronavirus unconnected to rising cases in Europe, a senior [World Health Organization](#) expert has said.

Dr Catherine Smallwood, a senior emergency officer at WHO Europe, also said confidence in vaccines may have dipped after changes to the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab rollout, with [under-30s to be offered alternative options](#) amid concerns over rare blood clots.

In an interview, Smallwood said there were still a "significant number" of Covid-19 infections being reported daily in the UK, and that "very restrictive measures" were holding them down. From Monday, non-essential shops, gyms and outdoor-only pubs and restaurants will reopen across England following the third national lockdown.

Boris Johnson said last month that the effects of a new wave of coronavirus on the continent would "wash up on our shores", urging the public to get vaccinated to "build our defences" against the surge "when it comes".

But Smallwood cautioned that the UK "still has potential to develop its own sort of renewed resurgence of cases without any involvement from the rest of Europe". She said the tough measures that have been in place for nearly two months were "what's keeping the cases down at the moment – it's not the vaccination".

"The population groups that are really driving transmission are still in the majority sense the ones that have not yet been vaccinated as a whole," Smallwood said. "Transmission can still happen in the UK without any washing up on the shores of the European outbreak."

Transmission is most common among younger groups, while the eldest – who are most at risk of getting seriously ill or dying from Covid – have been prioritised for vaccinations. Reported UK cases fell to 3,030 on Thursday, with 58 deaths within 28 days of a positive test.

Ministers have been giving reassurances over the safety of the vaccine after Wednesday's decision by a UK advisory body to recommend that an alternative to the AstraZeneca vaccine should be offered to under-30s.

Smallwood praised the “swift action” and “clear” communication in Wednesday’s announcement, which she said would improve confidence in the regulation of vaccine safety, but she added: “Whenever these things happen, the first thing that we worry about is the level of confidence that people have in both the processes and the vaccines themselves. So yes, of course, it’s a concern. And that’s where transparency, trust and communication are all really, really key here.”

She reiterated that WHO advice remained that “we urge everyone who can be to be vaccinated, including with the AstraZeneca vaccine”.

Downing Street and the Department of [Health](#) said they were confident that the change of strategy on the AstraZeneca rollout in the UK and in several countries across Europe would not overly dent public confidence in the programme, and said there were no plans for a publicity campaign on vaccine take-up.

Next Thursday marks the mid-April date by which ministers pledged to have offered at least a first dose to everyone in phase 1 of the programme, covering the first nine priority groups, taking in adults up to the age of 50 and those deemed to be clinically vulnerable. A government source said they were “very confident” this goal would be met.

Smallwood said that despite concern over case numbers, deaths seemed to have plateaued and increased only slightly, and not at the same rate as infections. An Imperial College London study found strong evidence that the UK’s vaccine programme is breaking the link between cases and fatalities.

Despite governments in the UK grappling with how to ease border restrictions this summer to let people go on foreign holidays, Smallwood said travel bans were not “necessarily a feasible strategy”. She pointed to how many countries had tried to block arrivals from the UK after the variant first discovered in Kent was found to be more transmissible, yet it had still become “predominant across much of Europe”.

“It may slow entry by giving you a little bit more time as a strategy to prevent,” she said. “[But] that is not a sustainable strategy in the context of a

highly globalised situation, and specifically for the UK with its very, very close ties to the rest of continental Europe.”

While the WHO is opposed to the concept of so-called vaccine passports, Smallwood said “we’ll be looking at this on an ongoing basis” and raised the possibility that the Covid status certificates being developed by the UK government could be considered more suitable for international travel, given these would not just prove vaccine status but also antibodies from prior natural infection or a recent negative test result.

“We’ll look very closely at the systems that are being proposed by, for example, the European Union, looking at bringing together health information around an individual into a single system and then looking at doing that in the run-up to the summer,” Smallwood said.

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[Coronavirus](#)

Brazilian Covid variant: what do we know about P1?

What threat does variant that is causing devastation in Brazil pose, and how is it different?

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Emergency services at work during the Covid lockdown in São Paulo, Brazil. The city has increased restrictions to contain the pandemic. Photograph: Igor Do Vale/Zuma/Rex/Shutterstock

Emergency services at work during the Covid lockdown in São Paulo, Brazil. The city has increased restrictions to contain the pandemic. Photograph: Igor Do Vale/Zuma/Rex/Shutterstock

[Sarah Boseley](#) *Health editor*

Thu 8 Apr 2021 10.14 EDT

Is the P1 coronavirus variant a major threat to the world?

The P1 variant is causing devastation in Brazil, where an uncontrolled Covid pandemic is raging. P1, behind the terrible scenes of hospital overload in Manaus with [patients' relatives pleading for oxygen cylinders](#), is now the dominant form of coronavirus in many of Brazil's cities and partly responsible for the high death toll. Other Latin American countries have [closed their borders and restricted travel to and from Brazil](#) but P1 is now in at least 15 countries in the Americas, according to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

P1 is highly transmissible. Jesem Orellana, an epidemiologist at Fiocruz, the renowned Brazilian scientific research institution, said on 10 March that because of its epidemic, [Brazil](#) was “a threat to humanity”.

As of 6 April, there were 356 cases of P1 in the US, spread across 25 jurisdictions, [according to the Centers for Disease Control](#). The first case arrived in Minnesota in early January. There are far more cases of the UK variant – 16,275 – which like P1 spreads easily, but is very susceptible to vaccines. There were 32 cases of P1 [in the UK as of 31 March](#).

What do we know about the P1 variant?

It is one of two coronavirus variants that have been detected in Brazil, or in people who have travelled from Brazil, called P1 and P2. The P1 variant has more changes – three mutations to the spike protein instead of one – and is causing the most concern.

P1 was first detected in Japan, in people who had travelled from Manaus in Brazil. Investigations [confirmed the variant in Manaus](#), the city on the Amazon that suffered an intense first wave of coronavirus that peaked in April last year. A survey of blood donors in October suggested that 76% of the population had antibodies, so were presumed at least temporarily immune. But in January, there was [a resurgence](#) among people who had previously recovered from Covid, suggesting that P1 is capable of infecting people who thought they had natural immunity.

P2 is widespread in Brazil but has fewer worrying mutations.

The UK's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (Nervtag) has designated P1 a "variant of concern", as has the CDC in the US. Not only is it more transmissible – like the "Kent" variant B117 – but may also be capable of antigenic escape. In other words, the vaccines designed to stop coronavirus may not work so well against it.

How is it different from other variants and will vaccines work?

Nervtag says P1 "contains 17 unique amino acid changes, three deletions, four synonymous mutations and one 4nt insertion". A variant is a virus with mutations, which sometimes have little effect. However, P1 has three that cause concern: K417T, E484K, and N501Y.

E484K is the most worrying. It is in the so-called South African variant too, which has almost identical changes in its spike protein. There are also a few cases where B117, the Kent variant, known for its rapid spread, has gained the E484K mutation. This is the mutation thought to give the variants some ability to escape the vaccines.

Lab tests have suggested so far that the major approved vaccines will work against P1, but with reduced efficacy. A [study from Oxford University](#), published on 30 March in the peer reviewed journal Cell, looked at the antibody response in blood samples from people with P1 elicited by the AstraZeneca and also the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines. They showed nearly a threefold reduction in neutralisation, so efficacy is reduced – but not as much as it is against the South African variant. The Chinese CoronaVac vaccine, which is being widely used in Brazil, also appears to have some efficacy, according to [a separate, non-peer-reviewed study](#).

What are the chances of P1 becoming widespread in Europe, the UK or US?

It will depend on genomic sequencing of the samples of virus given by people taking Covid tests – and thorough follow-up contact tracing to find

anyone else who may have picked up P1.

The UK has become good at this. It is surge testing wherever cases of variants are found, whether P1 or B1351, which originated in South Africa. The UK does more genomic sequencing of viral samples than any other country so is in a good position to know what is going around. When six cases of P1 were picked up in February in the UK, a major search was launched to find one person who had not left contact details when he took his test. Forty people were involved over five days. Eventually the person came forward.

Other countries are stepping up their genomic sequencing as the threat of the variants becomes clear. Even in highly vaccinated countries, P1 could pose problems. Controlling its spread will become ever more difficult as people resume foreign travel.

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Seascape: the state of our oceansPlants

The rice of the sea: how a tiny grain could change the way humanity eats

Ángel León made his name serving innovative seafood. But then he discovered something in the seagrass that could transform our understanding of the sea itself – as a vast garden



Chef Ángel León found eelgrass seeds have 50% more protein than rice – and the plant stores carbon far faster than a rainforest. Photograph: Álvaro Fernández Prieto/Aponiente

Chef Ángel León found eelgrass seeds have 50% more protein than rice – and the plant stores carbon far faster than a rainforest. Photograph: Álvaro Fernández Prieto/Aponiente

Seascape: the state of our oceans is supported by

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[About this content](#)

[Ashifa Kassam](#) in Madrid

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Fri 9 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

Growing up in southern [Spain](#), Ángel León paid little attention to the meadows of seagrass that fringed the turquoise waters near his home, their slender blades grazing him as he swam in the Bay of Cádiz.

It was only decades later – as he was fast becoming known as one of the country’s most innovative chefs – that he noticed something he had missed in previous encounters with *Zostera marina*: a clutch of tiny green grains clinging to the base of the eelgrass.

His culinary instincts, honed over years in the kitchen of his restaurant Aponiente, kicked in. Could this marine grain be edible?

[Meet the 'star ingredient' changing fortunes in Alaska's waters: seaweed](#)
[Read more](#)

Lab tests hinted at its tremendous potential: gluten-free, high in omega-6 and -9 fatty acids, and contains 50% more protein than rice per grain, according

to [Aponiente's research](#). And all of it growing without freshwater or fertiliser.

The find has set the chef, whose [restaurant won its third Michelin star in 2017](#), on a mission to recast the common eelgrass as a potential superfood, albeit one whose singular lifecycle could have far-reaching consequences. “In a world that is three-quarters water, it could fundamentally transform how we see oceans,” says León. “This could be the beginning of a new concept of understanding the sea as a garden.”

It's a sweeping statement that would raise eyebrows from anyone else. But León, known across Spain as *el Chef del Mar* (the chef of the sea), has long pushed the boundaries of seafood, fashioning chorizos out of discarded fish parts and serving sea-grown versions of tomatoes and pears at his restaurant near the Bay of Cádiz.



The tiny grains within the eelgrass. The plant is capable of capturing carbon 35 times faster than tropical rainforests. Photograph: Álvaro Fernández Prieto/Aponiente

“When I started Aponiente 12 years ago, my goal was to open a restaurant that served everything that has no value in the sea,” he says. “The first years

were awful because nobody understood why I was serving customers produce that nobody wanted.”

Still, he pushed forward with his [“cuisine of the unknown seas”](#). His efforts to bring little-known marine species to the fore were recognised in 2010 with his first Michelin star. By the time the restaurant earned its third star, León had become a fixture on Spain’s gastronomy scene: a trailblazing chef determined to redefine how we treat the sea.

What León and his team refer to as “marine grain” expands on this, in one of his most ambitious projects to date. After stumbling across the grain in 2017, León began looking for any mention of *Zostera marina* being used as food. He finally found an [article from 1973 in the journal Science](#) on how it was an important part of the diet of the Seri, an Indigenous people living on the Gulf of California in Sonora, Mexico, and the only known case of a grain from the sea being used as a human food source.

Next came the question of whether the perennial plant could be cultivated. In the Bay of Cádiz, the once-abundant plant had been reduced to an area of just four sq metres, echoing a decline seen around the world as seagrass meadows reel from increased human activity along coastlines and steadily rising water temperatures.

Working with a team at the University of Cádiz and researchers from the regional government, a pilot project was launched to adapt three small areas across a third of a hectare (0.75 acres) of salt marshes into what León calls a “marine garden”.

It was not until 18 months later – after the plants had produced grains – that León steeled himself for the ultimate test, said Juan Martín, Aponiente’s environmental manager.



Salt marshes near Cádiz were used to create a ‘marine garden’ where the eelgrass seeds could be sown. Photograph: Álvaro Fernández Prieto/Aponiente

“Ángel came to me, his tone very serious, and said: ‘Juan, I would like to have some grains because I have no idea how it tastes. Imagine if it doesn’t taste good,’” says Martín. “It’s incredible. He threw himself into it blindly, invested his own money, and he had never even tried this marine grain.”

León put the grain through a battery of recipes, grinding it to make flour for bread and pasta and steeping it in flavours to mimic Spain’s classic rice dishes.

“It’s interesting. When you eat it with the husk, similar to brown rice, it has a hint of the sea at the end,” says León. “But without the husk, you don’t taste the sea.” He found that the grain absorbed flavour well, taking two minutes longer to cook than rice and softening if overcooked.

In the marine garden, León and his team were watching as the plant lived up to its reputation as an architect of ecosystems: transforming the abandoned salt marsh into a flourishing habitat teeming with life, from seahorses to scallops.

The plant's impact could stretch much further. Capable of capturing carbon 35 times faster than tropical rainforests and described by [the WWF as an “incredible tool”](#) in fighting the climate crisis, seagrass absorbs 10% of the ocean's carbon annually despite covering just 0.2% of the seabed.

News of what León and his team were up to soon began making waves around the world. “When I first heard of it, I was going ‘Wow, this is very interesting,’” says Robert Orth, a professor at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, who has spent more than six decades studying seagrass. “I don't know of anyone that has attempted to do what this chef has done.”

We've opened a window. It's a new way to feed ourselves

According to Orth, seagrass has been used as insulation for houses, roofing material and even for packing seafood, but never cultivated as food. It is an initiative riddled with challenges. Wild seagrass meadows have been dying off at an alarming rate in recent decades, while few researchers have managed to successfully transplant and grow seagrass, he says.

In southern Spain, however, the team's first marine garden suggests potential average harvests could be about 3.5 tonnes a hectare. While the yield is about a third of what one could achieve with rice, León points to the potential for low-cost and environmentally friendly cultivation. “If nature gifts you with 3,500kg without doing anything – no antibiotics, no fertiliser, just seawater and movement – then we have a project that suggests one can cultivate marine grain.”



A pilot project was successful in cultivating seagrass and obtaining grains that Ángel León then tried in different recipes. Photograph: www.MAPDIGITAL.es

The push is now on to scale up the project, adapting as much as five hectares of salt marshes into areas for cultivating eelgrass. Every success is carefully tracked, in hopes of better understanding the conditions – from water temperature to salinity – that the plant needs to thrive.

While it is likely to be years before the grain becomes a staple at Aponiente, León's voice rises with excitement as he considers the transformative possibility of *Zostera marina*'s minuscule, long-overlooked grain – and its reliance on only seawater for irrigation. “In the end, it's like everything,” he says. “If you respect the areas in the sea where this grain is being grown, it would ensure humans take care of it. It means humans would defend it.”

He and his team envision a global reach for their project, paving the way for people to harness the plant's potential to boost aquatic ecosystems, feed populations and fight the climate crisis. “We've opened a window,” says León. “I believe it's a new way to feed ourselves.”

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Nomadland

‘It’s an utter myth’: how Nomadland exposes the cult of the western



‘We all look to stories to understand what we are doing’ ... Frances McDormand in Nomadland. Photograph: Everett Collection/Alamy

‘We all look to stories to understand what we are doing’ ... Frances McDormand in Nomadland. Photograph: Everett Collection/Alamy

From cowboys to ‘van-dwellers’, itinerant Americans are often portrayed as heroic lone wolves. Chloé Zhao’s film shows that the truth is more complicated and less glamorous



[Xan Brooks](#)

[@XanBrooks](#)

Fri 9 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

It has been a wild ride for [Nomadland](#), Chloé Zhao's roving portrait of the US's rootless modern migrants. Shot for \$5m and largely featuring amateur actors, it is the little movie that could: this year's rags-to-riches story, [beloved by the critics and odds-setters alike](#). The road has been cleared, the gold rush is on, but the Hollywood happy ending feels at odds with the film. As Nomadland steers its westerly course – from the Baftas in London to the Oscars in Los Angeles – it is living a dream that it knows is a lie.

[Condé Nast Traveler called it](#) “a love letter to America's wide open spaces”, which is true up to a point, but this ignores the pathos, poverty and desperation at its core. Adapted from [Jessica Bruder's nonfiction bestseller](#), the film bounces Frances McDormand's hard-bitten loner through a modern American badland in which the saloon and the sheriff's office have been replaced by the RV park and the Amazon warehouse. I would file the film as an anti-western, a wholesale repudiation of [manifest destiny](#), the pursuit of happiness, all the Hollywood snake oil we have long been fed. “Yeah, OK,” Bruder says. “But it's more complicated than that.” Frustratingly, I think she may be right.

For Bruder, at least, the journey is almost done. She first reported on the US's "van-dweller" or "workamper" community [for Harper's magazine](#), which laid the ground for her 2017 book. She is serving as a consulting producer and, from time to time, a spokesperson for the picture as it trundles through awards season. Bruder likens the experience to moving a bucket of water from one place to the next. Lots of responsibility. Lots of potential for spillage.



‘They don’t believe the cavalry is coming’ ... Jessica Bruder, the author of *Nomadland*. Photograph: Swankie

Nomadland clears centre stage for an invented heroine: Fern, a widow who takes to the road claiming that she is “not homeless, just houseless”, shuttling from one seasonal gig to the next. But the film folds her in with several of the nomads from Bruder’s book, all playing versions of themselves. These include white-bearded Bob Wells, [the founder of the Rubber Tramp Rendezvous](#) (RTR) – probably the largest gathering of nomads in the world – and the no-nonsense survivor Charlene Swankie, who bustles across the RTR’s campsite with her arm in a sling. Linda May dreams of buying a plot of land and building an earthship – a sustainable, self-sufficient home made from natural and recycled materials. Until then, she is stuck with the Squeeze Inn, her 9ft x 6ft (2.7m x 1.8m) trailer, broiling

through the summers, freezing through the winters; another zero-hours tiddler in the US's growing low-cost labour pool.

In researching [Nomadland](#), Bruder trailed the migrants between the beet fields of North Dakota and the camp grounds of California in her own camper van. Most, she says, were keen to frame the lifestyle in the soaring rhetoric of the old west. They cast themselves as outlaws, cowboys, pioneers. They spoke of freedom and opportunity, individualism and self-reliance. Only later did she start hearing about all the rest: the lost jobs, ruinous divorces and foreclosed homes that put them on the road to begin with. They printed the legend, then they told her the facts. "The initial stories gave them a sense of agency," Bruder says. "We all look to stories to understand what we are doing. But stories are always an imperfect match."

The film-maker John Ford used to claim that he was good friends with Wyatt Earp and that, therefore, his depiction of the gunfight at the OK Corral was 100% accurate, a matter of historical record. The truth was that Ford was a myth-maker, a spinner of tales, his wild west a fiction thrown over the terrain. In film after film, he took the lowly American cowboy – an itinerant labourer, whose work was seasonal and precarious – and cast him in the role of the heroic lone wolf. In so doing, he provided a convenient cover story for all the cowboys that followed.

Bruder understands the romance associated with the nomad lifestyle, in part because it dovetails with the cowboy lifestyle. But the reality, she says, is not romantic at all. "We want this sense of boundless opportunity, the sense that down the road is something better. But it doesn't play out: look where it's got us, look where the planet is now. We think we can keep growing indefinitely. But we're on a rock with finite resources, with stagnant wages and rising housing costs, with growing inequality.



‘She had a story, a direction. A lot of the others wanted to drive until they couldn’t drive any more’ ... Linda May in *Nomadland*. Photograph: Joshua Richards/Searchlight/Allstar

“Rugged individualism can only get us so far. I’ve seen that on the road: people who you’d think of as cowboys, but who love being together and sharing meals, having a chilli feed. I have a hippy tendency. I favour collaboration. The idea of a self-made person who goes it alone: we all know it’s an utter myth.”

In [Andrea Arnold’s giddy American Honey](#), itinerant workers sell subscriptions door to door across the midwest. [Debra Granik’s Leave No Trace](#) shows a father and daughter hiding out in the woods. Kelly Reichardt’s *Wendy and Lucy* leaves its heroine stranded on the road to Alaska. So *Nomadland* is not alone. It is part of a vibrant subgenre of western – modern-dressed, female-centred and defined by a mood of pensive restlessness – that is in turn connected to a classic Hollywood tradition. The finest westerns, after all, are self-questioning and self-critical. [The last shot of The Searchers](#) provides the genre’s most telling image: John Wayne in the doorway, shut out of the homestead. Explicitly or otherwise, the message is plain. Cowboy dreams are for suckers. They point the way to a lonely life.

Once, long ago, the big lie came easier. The magnetic west exerted a powerful pull. There was a frontier to carve out, people to slaughter, an ocean to reach. A man could convince himself that he was running towards something as opposed to fleeing. These days, it is not so simple. Wayne's spiritual offspring are frequently depicted as lost and damaged, in flight from everything (Jack Nicholson sneaking aboard the logging truck at [the end of Five Easy Pieces](#); Harry Dean Stanton haunting the freeway [in the closing shots of Paris, Texas](#)).



‘The finest westerns point the way to a lonely life’ ... John Wayne in The Searchers. Photograph: AP

Bruder explains that the current generation of van-dwellers are – in part, at least – a consequence of the 2008 financial crash and the wave of evictions that followed. The ripple effect of the pandemic is likely to put more vehicles on the road. The larger this group becomes, the harder it will be for society to ignore. But the evidence suggests that the nomads remain unengaged and apolitical, neither Democrat or Republican. By and large, they don't vote, because they don't see the point. “They don't believe the cavalry is coming,” Bruder says.

In the book of Nomadland, Bruder installs John Steinbeck as a touchstone. She tells how the van-dwellers love Travels With Charley, the author's tale

of a counter-clockwise road trip, from Maine to California to Texas to New York. She references [The Grapes of Wrath](#), with its account of Depression-era migrants on their way to California.

But the Steinbeck the film most made me think of was the last few pages of *The Red Pony*, when the grandfather recounts leading a wagon train across the country and then wonders what on earth the people are meant to do after that. “There’s no place to go. There’s the ocean to stop you. There’s a line of old men along the shore hating the ocean because it stopped them.” Films such as *Nomadland* and *American Honey* are not anti-westerns so much as frustrated westerns, arrested westerns. They are post-revisionist and post-frontier, the cinematic equivalent of backwash. It is as though each hit the coastline and was thrown into reverse.

I like [Martin Scorsese’s take](#) on that famous Ford image: the gunslinger in the doorway, society’s exile. “In its final moment, *The Searchers* becomes a ghost story,” he says, with Wayne’s character “destined to wander for ever between the winds.” Bruder’s un-settlers are a bit like that themselves: not so much the descendants of the pioneers as their remains or their shadows. Tellingly, Zhao’s film shows them rattling around faded old tourist attractions (dinosaur parks, the National Grasslands visitor centre), poring over holiday slides and photo albums, listening to the antique hits of yesteryear. “I’ve spent too much of my life remembering,” says Fern. Towards the end, like Steinbeck’s old men, she arrives at the coastline and stares out at the sea.



‘It’s the greatest feeling of freedom ever’ ... Charlene Swankie and her van.
Photograph: Todd Williamson/January Images/Rex/Shutterstock

How long-term successful is the nomad’s existence? Eventually you run out of gas, out of money. Your health starts to suffer. You can’t work like you did. This is the question that still nags at Bruder. “A lot of people seemed sanguine about the future and I was not,” she says. “I kept thinking: where does this go? From a selfish narrative standpoint, one of the reasons I decided to follow Linda May [in the book] was because she was reaching towards something, and that something was the earthship. Linda had a story, a direction. She wasn’t spacewalking. A lot of the others, they wanted to drive until they couldn’t drive any more, drive into the desert; they didn’t have a long-term plan. I worried about that a lot more than they did.”

Nomadland is on the last leg of its Oscar journey. Some of the main players are still on board. Others have jumped ship, moving on to fresh adventures. May used her acting fee to buy a plot in New Mexico and is reportedly laying the ground for her earthship. Swankie is on the road in Arizona; she sees no reason to quit. She tells me that she likes to think of her van as a big backpack on wheels. Living in nature, she adds, has restored her physical and mental health.

Over email, I ask Swankie to look into the future and describe her ideal life. She scoffs at the idea that such a thing exists. “If my van and my body hold up, I’ll continue as I am now,” she writes. “NOW. I basically live in the NOW. Seldom make plans for tomorrow. Get up in the morning, check the sunrise and weather, then do what seems to be the most important thing ... It’s the greatest feeling of freedom ever.”

As they circle back across the US, Swankie, Wells and their fellow nomads run across people and places they have encountered before. Their work is seasonal, but regular. They materialise and disperse to the same loose annual schedule. Experience has taught these people to mistrust the clearcut finality of any separation or resolution. In the film, Wells explains that a real nomad never says goodbye. Instead they will always say: “I’ll see you down the road.” They figure that there are good odds they will bump into each other at the next packing gig or the next beet harvest, next month or next year, somewhere beyond the next sunset.

Nomadland is released on Disney+ on 30 April. The Baftas and the Oscars take place on 11 April and 25 April respectively.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/apr/09/its-an-utter-myth-how-nomadland-exposes-the-cult-of-the-western>

Race

‘My full name is Tanyaradzwa’: the stars reclaiming their names

Thandiwe Newton’s much-lauded decision has inspired others and drawn attention to the power of names



Thandiwe Newton (L) and Tanyaradzwa Fear (R), who tweeted: ‘My full name is Tanyaradzwa ~ which means ‘we have been comforted’.’

Composite: Vera Anderson/WireImage/Michael Buckner/Variety/Rex/Shutterstock

Thandiwe Newton (L) and Tanyaradzwa Fear (R), who tweeted: ‘My full name is Tanyaradzwa ~ which means ‘we have been comforted’.’

Composite: Vera Anderson/WireImage/Michael Buckner/Variety/Rex/Shutterstock

[Lucy Campbell](#)

Fri 9 Apr 2021 05.29 EDT

When the director of her earliest film asked Thandiwe Newton if they could use her “authentic and beautiful” first name for her character, the young actor [felt flattered](#) and agreed.

They later dropped the “w” from her acting credit without proper consultation, using her anglicised “nickname” to differentiate her from the character, and she thus became established professionally as “Thandie” for the next three decades.

But decades on and in greater control of her work and public profile, Newton felt it was important to professionally restore her name. This week, the Emmy-winning actor received praise and admiration when she declared that, after 30 years, her name would be credited in all future projects with [its original Zulu-derived spelling](#).

“That’s my name. It’s always been my name. I’m taking back what’s mine,” she said.



Newton has reclaimed the original spelling of her first name. Photograph: Kyle Grillot/Reuters

Her stand prompted a conversation about the power of names and has inspired others to reclaim theirs. The actor previously known as Tanya Fear [tweeted](#): “My full name is Tanyaradzwa~ which means ‘we have been

comforted’, I was named this because I was born the year my grandfather died.”

Over the years, others have publicly restored their birth names after reaching a certain stage of their careers. In 2017, the Tonga-born rugby player Taulupe Faletau, who grew up in [Wales](#) with the nickname Toby after school friends struggled to pronounce his name, requested that his squad name be recorded accurately.

He [told the BBC](#): “Since my first cap it’s been ‘Toby Faletau’ and ‘Toby’ is not really anything to do with me, it’s just a name I kind of made up. So I just wanted ‘Taulupe’ on my jersey, because it’s my name.”

Another player, who went by Willis Halaholo, recently [changed his name on the Wales team-sheet](#) for the Six Nations to Uilisi Halaholo in recognition of his full name, Sean Alfred Uilisi Halaholo.

He [told the Cardiff Blues Podcast](#): “I know the international games are seen worldwide, so I just wanted to pay respect to my family and my Tongan heritage, using my name properly.”



Uilisi Halaholo. Photograph: Ben Evans/Huw Evans/Rex/Shutterstock

Earlier this year, the BBC presenter formerly known as Ben Bland changed his surname to Boulos to celebrate his maternal Sudanese-Egyptian heritage, as well as distinguishing himself from another journalist of the same name.

The Bland name had masked important aspects of his identity that he had downplayed as a child, not wanting to be seen as in any way “different”, including his Coptic faith, Boulos said. “Every name tells a story – and I want mine to give a more complete picture of who I am.”

Boulos’s grandparents, who came to Britain in the 1920s, had chosen the surname Bland because they feared using the Jewish-Germanic family name “Blumenthal”. “They decided on the blandest name possible – literally – to ensure their survival,” [he wrote](#).

Names are important and they have meaning, said the cultural historian and campaigner Patrick Vernon, whether that is familial significance or the time or day someone was born, for example. “The fact that people still feel they have to change or anglicise their names, and water down their heritage to fit in or succeed within the dominant culture, says we’ve still got a long way to go.”

He said people made a conscious effort to learn the names of those in positions of power but did not apply this enough in day-to-day life. “If you’re a prime minister or a royal, that’s your name, people have to respect it. That should apply to all of us.”

[Actor Thandiwe Newton reclaims original spelling of her name](#)
[Read more](#)

People changing their name to reclaim identities was nothing new, Vernon added. At the height of the [black power movement](#) in the 1960s, many made a political statement by rejecting European names.

“Reclaiming names is about power,” said Hakim Adi, a professor of African history, highlighting that during the period of slavery, names were taken away to dehumanise people. “With that comes a long history of people rejecting their Christian names, such as Muhammad Ali,” Adi said.

The popularity of the book and show [Roots](#) also influenced many in the 1970s to research their family histories and trace their lineage back to the African continent, Vernon said. “Through that process, they’ve then been adopted by a tribe or changed their name as part of the impact of remaking that connection to their mother country.”

The artistic director of the Young Vic theatre, Kwame Kwei-Armah, chose an ancestral name for himself at the age of 19 after researching his ancestry. Born Ian Roberts in London, he was influenced by *Roots* and the autobiography of Malcolm X to trace his family history through the slave trade back to Ghana.

“I decided I could no longer carry the name of someone who once owned my family,” [he wrote](#).

Reclaiming a name was an act of resistance, said the educationalist Pranav Patel, but the responsibility should ultimately lie with people to ask others how they would like to be addressed.

Schools had a key role to play in building safe environments for this to happen, Patel said, and teachers must consciously build a culture of value and belonging by taking the time to learn names.

“If teachers don’t offer that validation, children feel they have to acquiesce and assimilate to make others comfortable, and that becomes the norm,” he said. “So when you ask someone how to say or spell their name, it has an impact. It says to them: your name matters, you matter. It’s simple.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/09/my-full-name--tanyaradzwa-stars-reclaiming-names-thandiwe-newton>

Books that made meEmma Cline

Emma Cline: ‘Reading anything because you “should” doesn’t make sense to me’

The author on books that inspire a ‘slight hallucinatory vibe’ in her own writing, the wonders of Richard Scarry, and rereading Jeffrey Eugenides



‘I wish *Problems* by Jade Sharma was more widely known’ ... Emma Cline.
Photograph: Brad Torchia/The Guardian

‘I wish *Problems* by Jade Sharma was more widely known’ ... Emma Cline.
Photograph: Brad Torchia/The Guardian

Emma Cline

Fri 9 Apr 2021 05.00 EDT

The book I am currently reading

I’m halfway through [A Way of Life, Like Any Other](#) by Darcy O’Brien, a

demented and perfect novel from the late 70s about the mythology of Hollywood intersecting with the mythology of family. It's insanely good, and the tone is so sparky and bizarre and deadpan. I just finished a Beach Boys biography – a book about fathers as the great villains, which paired in interesting ways with the documentary [Crumb](#) [about underground cartoonist Robert Crumb]. In both cases, brothers are psychologically destroyed by their fathers in an era when fathers were held up as the ultimate god/daddy figures. And then the brothers go on, in their art, to pervert these seemingly innocent forms of the culture: comics and pop music.

The book I wish I'd written

Maybe *Sweet Days of Discipline* by [Fleur Jaeggy](#). Sometimes a heightened world can be hard to keep up for the length of a novel, but this is slim and totally successful at sustaining a surreal atmosphere. Or *Sylvia* by Leonard Michaels, which has always felt like the perfect book. Oh wait, actually Norman Rush's [Mating](#).

The books that had the greatest influence on my writing

Probably the stories of Mary Gaitskill, Joy Williams and Deborah Eisenberg. I'm looking for that slight hallucinatory vibe in my own writing, a sense that the world has ever so slightly been knocked off its axis.

The book I think is most underrated

[Problems](#) by Jade Sharma is so great, and I wish it was more widely known and read. I also loved *The Sarah Book* by Scott McClanahan.

The last book that made me cry

My friend remembered a line from a [Jack Gilbert poem](#) as “it's dark in the major nation”. Which seemed to fit this current moment when so-called American exceptionalism is exposed as the fiction it always was. I looked it up in Gilbert's [The Great Fires](#) and the actual line is, “this dark is a major nation”. And then I reread his poem “[Alone](#)”, about his wife, Michiko – it always makes me cry.

The last book that made me laugh

This psychedelic and totally hilarious nonfiction book by Bett Williams called *The Wild Kindness*. There's a killer scene where the narrator is on mushrooms and having a conversation with their dog and the dog is very

calmly recounting that he's part of MKUltra [the CIA psychological warfare programme involving human experiments]. And I have been rereading Percival Everett's [*Erasure*](#): I forgot how funny that book is.

The book I couldn't finish

I got a little ways into *The Golden Bowl* by Henry James. I'll probably try again, but I'm not too worried about it.

The book I'm ashamed not to have read

I don't feel shame about reading habits. Reading anything because you think you "should" doesn't make a lot of sense to me. It seems more pleasurable and more useful to follow whatever bizarre interests and tastes are peculiar to you.

[Emma Cline: 'We are forced to imagine what's going on in the minds of men'](#)

[Read more](#)

The book I give as a gift

Leonard Koren's *Undesigning the Bath*, *The Pattern Language* by Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa and Murray Silverstein, and *Bento's Sketchbook* by John Berger.

My earliest reading memory

Probably the Busy Town books, which delighted me with their illustrations of what I assumed adult life would look like: animals wearing vests and running bookstores. I also obsessed over Sherlock Holmes.

My comfort read

Some people really like the transporting nature of experimental prose or spare autofiction, but when I want to fully peace out of reality, I like being dropped into another life entirely, one that feels as rich and detailed as possible. [The Marriage Plot](#) by Jeffrey Eugenides was a comforting reread lately, because the scenes have the quality of life. *Anywhere But Here* by Mona Simpson is comforting for the same reason, a fictional world that is so tightly woven that it blots out the actual world.

- *Daddy* by Emma Cline is published by Chatto & Windus (£14.99). To order a copy go to guardianbookshop.com. Free UK p&p over £15
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2021.04.09 - Opinion

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Taking painkillers away from those in desperate need is a cruel health policy

[Rajesh Munglani](#)

Nice's new guidelines prescribing exercise over drugs for chronic sufferers risk causing more distress



‘Many chronic pain patients desperately rely on drugs to achieve any quality of life.’ Photograph: Alamy

‘Many chronic pain patients desperately rely on drugs to achieve any quality of life.’ Photograph: Alamy

Fri 9 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

Perhaps it was inevitable that I would develop chronic pain. Both my parents were plagued for the last 20 years of their lives with severely painful knee joints. I was determined not to end up like them. I kept fit, and as a junior doctor conducted research into the molecular neurobiology of pain. But after

a walking trip in the Lake District, I noticed an ominous burning sensation in my knees.

I carried on with these walking trips, but the pain continued to flare up. Thankfully, it would disappear overnight. But in my early 50s – while directing the pain clinic at Addenbrooke’s hospital in Cambridge, and then at the West Suffolk – this knee pain became steadily worse. I wore spongy trainers all the time, but the pain increased, leading to swollen knees, an inability to deal with stairs, inactivity and eventual weight gain – and yet more pain. Like many, I avoided seeing my GP.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice) released [new guidelines](#) on chronic pain on Wednesday, recommending sufferers of chronic primary pain – pain for which there is no clear explanation, such as arthritis or nerve damage – [take exercise](#) instead of painkillers.

The logic here seems clear. We know that some pain-relieving drugs such as opioids and gabapentinoids don’t work that well for chronic pain, but are perversely associated with higher rates of addiction and the chance of overdosing and dying. This risk seems to be highest in those who are anxious or depressed, the same individuals who are least resilient to pain. Instead, for such central pain processes, Nice suggests treatment with antidepressants, talking therapies, exercise and acupuncture.

Yet despite Nice’s good intentions, I fear a foreseeable consequence of this new guidance will be the increased suffering of chronic pain patients with the indiscriminate withdrawal of powerful analgesics from many chronic pain patients by NHS commissioners.

Pain is not one thing but a complex phenomenon of many causes and processes. There are those that we can “see” – such as arthritis, soft tissue and nerve damage. We also know that the invisible processes of the mind profoundly determine our pain experience. Yet pain is not a diagnosis, rather a symptom that may represent many different pathologies. I find it difficult to accept the Nice guidelines, which categorically state, “Do not offer this or that treatment.” None of us as doctors or scientists can say that. Each patient is unique and their pain is unique.

Our bodies are, from an evolutionary perspective, perversely attuned to experience pain: it's part of our survival mechanism. In particular this applies to acute pain because it prevents further harm, prompting you, say, to remove a finger from a fire. Unfortunately, chronic pain, defined as any pain that lasts more than three months, has a profoundly life-diminishing quality.

In my pain clinic I accept that chronic pain can strike any of us at any time – [85% of us will suffer](#) a major episode of back pain in our lifetime and chronic pain is almost invariable in older life. So how then do we approach pain? First, there is no judgment: most of us have done nothing to cause us to suffer chronic pain, and certainly none *deserve* to suffer it. Pain is simply part of the human condition.

Unfortunately, all the conventional medical drugs we use for pain can cause side-effects. Opioids such as morphine, as well as causing constipation and cognitive problems, have been shown to cause a long-term decrease in quality of life in those who take the drugs regularly, with onset of cravings and addiction.

But many chronic pain patients rely on such drugs to achieve any quality of life. I know chronic pain is torture, dominating every moment of the day. People like me will at times need powerful drugs, sometimes morphine and gabapentin, to control arthritic joint pain, nerve pain, or more widespread pain and associated anxiety and depression.

In my own case, painkillers have at times proved vital but at others created more problems. Anti-inflammatory drugs such as diclofenac and ibuprofen gave me a sore stomach and chronic diarrhoea, and the consumption of too many opioids such as tramadol and codeine meant I would forget days at a time and became constipated. The pain was intense but I was only 55, too young for knee-replacement surgery.

An orthopaedic surgeon colleague and friend looked at my knees and said my cartilage had “worn away” and firmly blamed my genetics. He performed [bilateral intra-articular stem cell injections](#), taking special cells out of my body and reinjecting them into the joints to try to regenerate the cartilage. He also performed knee arthroscopies, a telescopic surgery to clean up the knee joint and encourage the cartilage to regrow. Unfortunately,

they only provided temporary relief. I soon developed ankle pain that left me more disconsolate. I realised, despite my best efforts, that my lot was to suffer painful joints just like so many of the UK adult population.

In the end, after much trial and error, I had to lose a lot of weight to take the pressure off my knees. I now regularly take natural food supplements, such as [curcumin and boswellia](#), which act as gentle versions of anti-inflammatories with many fewer side-effects. I occasionally take more powerful painkillers when necessary. I walk and garden but don't run. Through counselling, I learned acceptance: that none of us have the right to good health, but that we should do all we can to promote it.

Patients in pain are not one thing. We doctors need to be compassionate and carefully talk to our patients and assess the various complexities of their pain, as it is unpredictable what will work. We need to remember our shared humanity and suffering with our patients, for it could be any one of us sitting opposite the pain doctor in the clinic room.

- Dr Rajesh Munglani is a consultant in pain medicine at Royal Papworth Hospital, Papworth and a council member of the British Pain Society

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OpinionChildren

After a year of Covid, a behaviour crackdown is an insult to England's children

[Carolyn Willow](#)

Gavin Williamson's plan to create 'behaviour hubs' for schools is as dispiriting as it is predictable and unimaginative



Pupils at an academy in Halifax, March 2021. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Pupils at an academy in Halifax, March 2021. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 9 Apr 2021 05.05 EDT

Having worked in children's policy for more than two decades, I found the government call this week for a crackdown on behaviour in schools as heart-

sinking as it was predictable and unimaginative. The education secretary, [Gavin Williamson](#), praised the “tremendous success” of remote learning during the pandemic but then warned that “the lack of regular structure and discipline will have inevitably had an effect on their behaviour”.

His solution? A series of so-called [behaviour hubs](#) intended to spread methods among schools and teachers, but underpinned by a philosophy of coercion and control. This signals a government disconnected from children and a lamentable lack of understanding of what helps human beings thrive, as individuals and together.

After a year like no other, the education secretary has resolved that confiscation of mobile phones and heavier threats of exclusion and detention should be top priorities for children’s return to school. The Department for Education’s launch material includes a video of a mask-wearing chief executive explaining that his school “[sweats the small stuff](#)”, such as children forgetting equipment, not paying attention 100% of the time and “perhaps talking off-task”.

Politicians using children to make themselves look hard has a tragic inevitability about it, since this is a constituency without a single vote. This latest offering is apparently the brainchild of Williamson’s lead adviser on behaviour, Tom Bennett. The groundwork started with [a review](#) Bennett completed in 2017 for a previous education secretary, and the application process for schools and multi-academy chains to apply to become behaviour hubs [opened in the month before the first lockdown](#). Williamson’s pronouncement is actually Bennett’s work programme resuming, rather than any real-life assessment of the needs of children and families. We should demand more from the minister and his advisers.

Children are living through a global pandemic and their worlds have, without doubt, been turned upside down. Many will be returning to school having endured tremendous loss and hardship. Teachers will be preparing to take care of those who have been bereaved, those who have lived in fear of their parents and grandparents succumbing to the virus, those who have been crammed into bed-and-breakfasts and other unsuitable accommodation, and those who have lived for more than a year in an atmosphere of crushing stress, conflict and mental and physical violence. Between March and June

2020, the police recorded [259,324 domestic abuse-related offences in England and Wales](#), and in the first half of the 2020-21 financial year, there were 285 incidents reported to the Department for Education [where a child had died or been seriously harmed](#) in England and abuse or neglect was known or suspected – a 27% increase on the previous year.

A month after the first lockdown, the Trussell Trust [found four in 10 households](#) reliant on food banks were families with children. In the first five months of 2020 [Childline counselled nearly 7,000](#) children and young people with concerns about coronavirus. Then there are the friendships moved to screen-time or no time at all, cordoned-off playgrounds and locked-up leisure centres, exam chaos and despair, children worried about their futures with unemployment growing and those who have dreamed of university facing great uncertainty. We have around 80,000 children in care in England, and many have gone for long periods without seeing their parents and siblings; and children have continued to enter care during lockdowns.

Despite all this, vulnerable children, and those whose parents are key workers, have been getting up each morning and going to school. While all other children have been doing their best at home. Now the top idea the minister offers to address their multitude of needs after a year of the pandemic is simply to demand discipline. It is beyond dispiriting.

Which children might this latest behaviour crackdown hurt the most? Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, children who have special educational needs, children who receive free school meals, Black Caribbean children, and children in contact with our social care system are the most likely to be [permanently excluded from school](#). Ofsted and children's services leaders anticipate that demand for help from social workers will increase once all children are back in school. The Child Poverty Action Group warns that for every classroom of 30 children, [nine are living in poverty](#). Teachers and teaching assistants have been feeding children, supporting parents, washing clothes, delivering work to homes without computers and straddling face-to-face and online education throughout the pandemic.

Last November, Gavin Williamson was found by the court of appeal to have [acted unlawfully](#) when he removed and diluted 65 safeguards for children in

care without consulting the children's commissioner or any other body concerned with children's rights. My charity brought the case to defend fundamental child safeguards and to uphold government consultation duties. That's the kind of thing we ought to be sweating over as a society – not children breaching silent corridor rules or forgetting pencils and PE kits.

This year is the 30th anniversary of the UK ratifying the UN convention on the rights of the child – a treaty forged from postwar understandings of child development and growing acknowledgment of the impact of deprivation, trauma and abuse on children's minds, bodies and behaviour. Above all, this was intended to beckon in a new age where adults respect the equal worth and integrity of children. If ever a country's political class ought to give children a break, it would be now, in the middle of a global pandemic, when they have been through so much and shown such forbearance and fortitude.

- Carolyn Willow is the founder director of [Article 39 children's rights charity](#) and a social worker

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[Opinion](#)Coronavirus

As the pandemic starts to recede, New York looks more divided than ever

[Emma Brockes](#)



The city's public finances are decimated – and though the risk of the virus is ebbing, new forms of pain are clearly on the way



A mobile Covid vaccination clinic in Brooklyn, New York, April 2021.
Photograph: Erik Pendzich/Rex/Shutterstock

A mobile Covid vaccination clinic in Brooklyn, New York, April 2021.
Photograph: Erik Pendzich/Rex/Shutterstock

Fri 9 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

I rediscovered a video this week, made by my kids' kindergarten teachers and sent to parents last June, at the end of the school year. The first half featured scenes of pre-pandemic life, outlandish shots of kids participating, unmasked, in cooking classes, field trips and fun runs. The second comprised videos and photos sent in by the kids of homeschooling. Apart from the sheer lurch at the reminder of how much had been lost, the most striking thing about the video was how definitive the line was between before and after. Things were one way; and the next day they were, emphatically, another.

The end of the pandemic won't be like this. How to measure any ending at all feels like an increasingly impossible task, even as vaccination rates soar and death rates plunge. In the US at least, infection rates remain stubbornly flat, the risk level in New York is stuck at "[very high](#)", and health officials talk of a "[fourth surge](#)" in the midwest. Things are much better than they were this time last year, but at this point, anticipating a second summer of

disruption and no full return in September, the long tail of this pandemic seems endless.

Part of the problem is that we have changed, too. There's a credible discussion going on in the US about [keeping mask mandates](#) on in schools after the threat of Covid recedes, given the impact they've had on curbing other diseases. (Little flu [this season](#), and [plunging hospitalisation rates](#) among kids with non-Covid respiratory conditions.) Friends and I have had similar conversations about the subway and, should we ever fly anywhere again, airports; Covid or not, who wouldn't, at this stage, throw on a mask before passing through a busy transit hub?

The downside to these considerations is, as they say, the depressing optics. For many of us, a fear of returning to normal, with all the social energy it will entail, surges alongside the equally grim anxiety that nothing will ever be normal again. This isn't entirely a public health issue, either. In New York, as across the globe, [public finances](#) have been decimated by the cost of the pandemic, and new forms of pain are on the way.

We are only just starting to feel this. Traditionally in the US, summer, which features a parent-baiting school break of over two months, is an annual period of financial hell, with even the cheapest private summer camps costing thousands of dollars. Prior to the pandemic, public programs in the city sought make up the shortfall by offering free and subsidised alternatives. The Parks Department ran an annual lottery for an [affordable summer camp](#) running out of Central Park, and local community centres did a lot of heavy lifting.

All of that has gone. As the risk of the disease itself starts to recede, the division between public and private has never looked so stark. While private schools in [New York](#) have been back full-time for most of the pandemic, state schools in the city won't even commit to a full reopening in September. Meanwhile, private after-school programmes are up and running again, with new post-pandemic pricing – at my kids' state primary, I am invited to put them in a private three-hour after-school programme for \$500 a week for two kids – while the public alternatives remain closed.

This is in part a question of bureaucracy. Huge public institutions can't be as light on their feet as small, private ones, and there's a heel-digging cautiousness to the Department of Education that has had parents screaming all year. It's mainly, however, a question of money. Every single public summer programme in New York has been axed not because of Covid caution, but because there simply isn't the money to pay for it.

As lockdowns lift and we hit spates of almost-normality, so other changes become more sharply defined. For a long time, many of us put enormous energy into being grateful for small and big mercies. Only now, perhaps, as the initial crisis recedes, can we give ourselves licence to measure and grieve for less obvious losses, and assess how they won't be returned to us with the last dose of vaccine.

- Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist

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Opinion Gavin Williamson

While Williamson calls for discipline, our children's hopes crumble around them

[Polly Toynbee](#)



The education secretary's idea of 'behaviour hubs' to teach other schools how to keep order shows just how little he cares



‘Our abysmally unfit education secretary claims children have lacked “discipline and order” during lockdown.’ Gavin Williamson holds a Downing Street news conference in February. Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters

‘Our abysmally unfit education secretary claims children have lacked “discipline and order” during lockdown.’ Gavin Williamson holds a Downing Street news conference in February. Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters

Thu 8 Apr 2021 13.27 EDT

“There is nothing Dickensian about a classroom that is a well-ordered, disciplined environment, where firm and fair teaching gives every child the chance to learn.” So says [Wackford Squeers](#), our abysmally unfit [education secretary](#), who claims children have lacked “discipline and order” during lockdown.

“Behaviour hubs” will act as models to teach other schools how to keep order under the thumb of the minister’s adviser, zero – tolerance-toting Tom Bennett. “If they haven’t learned the importance of basic good manners, of courtesy and of respect for others, they will certainly struggle when it comes to making their way in adult society”, writes [Williamson in the Telegraph](#). But it seems to have done no harm to the education secretary himself, a [man](#)

[sacked from the cabinet](#) in 2019 over alleged leaks from the National Security Council, and recently described by [Sir Alan Duncan](#) as “a venomous, self-seeking little shit”.

Running up to local elections in May, expect plenty more such populist posing. This bring-back-the-cane-flavoured riff may be linked to Williamson’s precarious position in a possible reshuffle, though Boris Johnson’s predilection for a cabinet of venal and inadequate ministers should put the education secretary top of the staying-on list. His failures are too legion to list, but let just one stand for the rest. How did he fail on his pandemic promise of [free laptops for disadvantaged children](#) to take part in school lessons from home? They never arrived for many, and children were left “[sharing devices at home](#) and using mobile phones to complete schoolwork” often at unaffordable cost.

Needless to say, there is no sign that children’s behaviour has worsened during lockdown. [Mark Russell](#), chief executive of the Children’s Society, doesn’t find “any evidence that their behaviour is worse and our practitioners report that on the whole young people have been relieved to get back inside the classroom”. But, he says, there is strong evidence that: “The pandemic has been harmful to children and young people in so many ways. It has left many feeling isolated, missing friends and family and more exposed to risks both inside and outside the home.”

Here’s his [crucial point](#): “The secretary of state completely misses the bigger issue, which is children’s wellbeing.”

There’s nothing new in that: it’s policy. Since 2010, from the day Michael Gove took over, the approach has been [Gradgrind](#)-harsh, as he took down all signs reading Department for Children, Schools and Families and replaced them with plain Department for Education. He banned mention of [Every Child Matters](#), a wraparound programme caring for the whole child. Teachers are not social workers and schools are only for the three Rs and Stem subjects in his myopic Ebacc curriculum, which continues on long after Gove’s departure. Children going hungry is no concern of educationists. Free schools meals eligibility was ruthlessly cut to family incomes of [less than £7,400](#). Labour’s extended schools offering breakfast, tea, homework and after-school activities were dismantled too.

How has this all-too-Dickensian approach gone so far? The gap between the poorest children and the rest has stopped narrowing over the last five years. In fact, for primary school children the gap had [started to increase](#) pre-pandemic. [In 2019](#) numbers leaving schools without qualifications had risen to 18%, a 24% increase since 2015. For those on free school meals, 37% left school with no qualifications. In all, after 15 years of schooling, the system fails 98,799 children, who will not be able to apply for apprenticeships, technical courses or most jobs. The persistence of credentialism – the absolute necessity of those vital pieces of paper – widens the gap in life chances as the upper cadres clock up better results (of which the government boasts), while cutting off old routes into good jobs that used to let many who failed at school succeed later.

In her [alarming final report](#) on the state of children's mental health, worsened in the pandemic, Anne Longfield, retiring children's commissioner, found referrals for children up by 35%, but only a 4% increase in actual treatments available. In the meantime, the government merely promises to offer NHS-led counselling in schools to only 20-25% of areas by 2023. As for children at risk in vulnerable families, she estimated there were [2.3 million but only 723,000](#) are in the system to be protected

Time and again, [reports show](#) the worsened plight of children in the pandemic, the social gap widening with young people leaving school with good qualifications facing poor prospects in the post-pandemic world. They took the hardest hit to protect the lives of my generation, and they deserve the highest priority on spending now. Imagine, instead of the [8% cut in spending](#) on pupils by the Tories between 2010 and 2018, what an ambitious government could do to change children's prospects – and the country's.

Sure Start would be rebuilt, every family registered at their local centre at birth with midwives and health visitors, with the best nursery education and potential problems eased early in life. Imagine every school with wraparound care. Imagine the best technical and skills education, so that university is not the only route to good jobs. Imagine decent holiday schemes for every child: how are working parents expected to cope?

We could have an education system that valued every skill, beyond the rigid Ebacc: in one survey of England's secondary schools, [nine in 10 said](#) they

had had to cut art, drama, textiles, music and dance, with [20% fewer taking music GCSE](#) – subjects bringing joy, and a boost to Britain’s vital arts future. Why have so many school playing fields been sold off when sport binds children to schools too? Teachers should be as respected by the government as they are by the public, who [rank them high for trust](#). Instead, they [have lost 15% in pay](#) against inflation in the last decade, with wages effectively frozen.

The prime minister talks about “[build back better](#)”, but an authentic pandemic recovery begins with children, not with bridges and tunnels. Imagine a national mission to make life as good as it can be for children: in parks and play spaces; through traffic-calming measures and clean-air policies; with fine schools, leisure centres and libraries. That would be a country better for everyone of every age, and older generations should accept that children come first. But instead we live in the political realm of Gavin Williamson, a planet away from those imaginings.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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2021.04.09 - Around the world

- [US gun control Biden announces first steps to curb 'epidemic' of violence](#)
- [US Biden proposes global reforms to end 'profit shifting' to tax havens](#)
- ['Lost golden city' 3,000-year-old ancient Egyptian city of Aten discovered](#)
- [China Death sentences handed to Uyghur former officials](#)

[Joe Biden](#)

Joe Biden announces first steps to curb ‘epidemic’ of US gun violence

President condemned gun violence as an ‘international embarrassment’ after series of recent shootings around the US

- [US politics – live updates](#)

01:53

Biden condemns US gun violence as 'international embarrassment' – video

[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Thu 8 Apr 2021 14.11 EDT

Joe Biden, under pressure to act after a slew of mass shootings, has announced his first steps to curb the “epidemic” and “international embarrassment” of gun violence in America.

The president has prioritised the coronavirus pandemic and economic recovery during the first two and half months of his presidency. But a series of recent shooting tragedies in Georgia, Colorado and California led to renewed calls for urgent action on guns.

[Biden administration plans historic \\$5bn investment to combat gun violence in hard-hit areas](#)

[Read more](#)

Biden said he is directing the justice department to tighten regulations on sales of so-called “ghost guns”, which are untraceable firearms assembled from kits.

Other executive actions include a state-level push of “red-flag laws” that allow courts and local law enforcement to remove guns from people deemed a risk to communities.

On Thursday Biden was joined in the sunshine of the White House Rose Garden by Kamala Harris, the vice-president, Merrick Garland, the attorney general, as well as members of Congress steeped in the issue.

“Gun violence in this country is an epidemic and it’s an international embarrassment,” said Biden, pointing out that on Wednesday five people were killed – including young children – in a shooting at a home near Rock Hill in South Carolina.

About 316 people are shot every day in America and 106 of them die, he noted, “hitting Black and brown communities the hardest”. Gun violence is estimated to cost the nation \$280bn a year, according to the Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund. “This is an epidemic, for God’s sake, and it has to stop,” an emotional Biden said.

The White House event included parents family members who have lost loved ones to the scourge. “They know what it’s like to bury a piece of their soul deep in the earth,” remarked Biden, who has endured his own measure of loss. “They understand that.”

Seeking to break a Washington paralysis that confounded former president Barack Obama, even after horrific mass shootings, Biden said he was announcing immediate concrete actions that he can take now without Congress. Republicans have long resisted fundamental reform, citing the second amendment to the constitution that protects the right to bear arms.

“Nothing I’m about to recommend in any way impinges on the second amendment,” Biden insisted. “They’re phony arguments, suggesting that these are second amendment rights at stake, what we’re talking about. But no amendment to the constitution is absolute. You can’t shout ‘Fire!’ in a crowded movie theatre and call it freedom of speech.”

Biden said regulations on the purchase of “ghost guns” would be tightened. More than 30% of the illegal weapons confiscated in some areas of

California are “ghost guns”, according to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

“You can go buy the kit,” said Biden. “They have no serial numbers so when they show up at a crime scene they can’t be traced, and the buyers aren’t required to pass background checks to buy the kit to make the gun.

“Consequently, anyone from a criminal to a terrorist can buy this kit and in as little as 30 minutes put together a weapon. I want to see these kits treated as firearms under the gun control act which is going to require that the seller and manufacturers make the key parts with serial numbers and run background checks on the buyers when they walk in to buy the package.”

The justice department is also publishing model legislation within 60 days that is intended to make it easier for states to adopt their own “red-flag” laws. Such laws allow for individuals to petition a court to allow police to confiscate weapons from a person deemed to be a danger to themselves or others.

“Red-flag laws can stop mass shooters before they can act out their violent plan,” Biden said.

The department will also issue, within 60 days, proposed rules that make clear that devices marketed as “stabilising braces”, effectively turning pistols into rifles, will be subject to the National Firearms Act, which requires the registration of firearms. Other measures include a justice department report on arms trafficking for the first time since 2000.

In addition, the White House will provide more than \$1bn in funding for evidence-based community intervention and prevention. And Biden nominated a gun control advocate, David Chipman, to lead the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

But many of his election campaign promises – such as banning assault weapons altogether and requiring background checks for most gun sales – require congressional action. He urged the Senate to pass bills to close loopholes that allow gun buyers to avoid background checks, and curb firearms access for people found by courts to be abusers.

“They’ve offered plenty of thoughts and prayers, members of Congress, but they’ve passed not a single new federal law to reduce gun violence. Enough prayers. Time for some action.”

Thursday’s executive actions were praised by gun violence prevention campaigners as a promising start. Shannon Watts, founder of Moms Demand Action for Sense in America, told the MSNBC network: “We are thrilled about what happened today. This is a huge victory for the gun safety movement. We applaud President Biden for his strong leadership.”

Brian Lemek, executive director of the Brady political action committee, which is focused on gun violence, added: “What couldn’t be more clear today is that elections matter. Joe Biden has been a gun-violence-prevention champion for decades and today he continues to be one ... Now he needs a partner, and we urge Congress to come to the table and pass the bipartisan, common sense solutions that will keep our children and our families safe.”

But the top Republican in the House, Kevin McCarthy, raised instant objections. “President Biden plans to announce his attempts to trample over our constitutional 2A rights by executive fiat,” McCarthy tweeted. “He is soft on crime, but infringes on the rights of law-abiding citizens.”

And the National Rifle Association vowed to fight Biden’s moves. Amy Hunter, a spokeswoman, said: “Biden has made clear his sights are set on restricting the rights of law-abiding gun owners while ignoring criminals and foregoing substantive measures that will actually keep Americans safe.”

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Tax avoidance

Biden proposes global reforms to end ‘profit shifting’ to tax havens

‘Seismic’ plan to get big tech and multinationals to pay their fair share could be in place by mid-2021



Biden has sent his plan to 135 OECD countries, but faces formidable opposition at home. Photograph: Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty

Biden has sent his plan to 135 OECD countries, but faces formidable opposition at home. Photograph: Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty

[Richard Partington](#)

[@RJPartington](#)

Thu 8 Apr 2021 14.10 EDT

President [Joe Biden](#) has proposed sweeping global tax reforms that would limit the ability of multinational corporations to shift profits overseas, while

taking steps to forge a landmark agreement on a worldwide minimum tax rate.

The proposals are designed to tackle the very low rates of tax paid by the digital giants Google, Facebook and Apple, and major brands like Nike and Starbucks, which have become adept at using complicated webs of companies to shift profits out of major markets like the UK, where most of their revenues are earned, and into low-tax jurisdictions like Ireland and the Caribbean. Economists estimate that the sums lost to exchequers around the world from profit-shifting have [risen as high as \\$427bn \(£311bn\) annually](#).

[The Guardian view on taxing the tech giants: time to pay up | Editorial](#)
[Read more](#)

The Biden plan, described as “seismic” in its potential impact, is seen as a dramatic shift, distancing the US from decades of prioritising the tax sovereignty of nations. The world’s largest economy has long resisted calls for the global treaties that tax reformers argued were needed to ensure that powerful multinational companies pay their fair share of taxes.

Under the plan promoted by Washington, set out in a document sent to 135 countries negotiating tax reforms at the [OECD](#) on Wednesday, tech companies and large conglomerates would be forced to pay taxes to national governments based on the sales they generate in each country, irrespective of where they are based.

The Biden administration also threw its weight behind work to establish a global minimum tax rate, which would see some of the world’s biggest economies agree on a minimum rate of tax on company profits. The current rate of corporation tax in the US is 21%, compared with 19% in the UK and 12.5% in Ireland, one of the lowest among EU nations.

Countries could impose higher corporation tax rates, but not go below the agreed threshold. The agreement is designed to stop countries luring businesses by offering tax discounts.



The OECD director of the Center for Tax Policy, Pascal Saint-Amans, said: 'The game is over. Let's move to a minimum agreed level' Photograph: Patrícia de Melo Moreira/AFP/Getty

Pascal Saint-Amans, head of tax administration at the OECD, told the Guardian the Biden plan had the potential to be transformative, although several stages of negotiations still remained. "What the US has put on the table ... [is saying] we want the rest of the world to follow, we kill tax havens. The game is over. Let's move to a minimum agreed level.

"Countries want a solution. They want to get out of controversies and want to move on."

The plan comes as the White House seeks to launch a \$2tn (£1.5tn) infrastructure programme to cement its economic recovery from Covid, funded with plans to increase the US corporate tax rate from 21% to 28%. The increase would reverse cuts pushed through by [Donald Trump](#). Officials estimate that the increase would raise \$2.5tn over 15-years.

[G20 takes step towards global minimum corporate tax rate](#)
[Read more](#)

Biden however, is expected to face stiff [opposition from Republicans and would need cross-party support](#) to steer the plan through a Congress that is split 50-50. In a sign of the challenge facing the president, the centrist Democrat senator Joe Manchin has already said he would favour a 25% corporate tax rate, rather than 28%.

The proposals to the OECD came after [G20 finance ministers](#) agreed on Wednesday to make progress on seeking an international consensus on tackling tax avoidance. They intend to work towards a deal through the forum of the OECD, with hopes of an agreement to overhaul the global tax system in time for a July summit of G20 finance ministers. Biden's plans support the core reforms already drafted by the OECD.

Saint-Amans said the US plan would affect about 100 of the world's biggest companies, including tech giants such as [Google](#), Apple and Amazon. The exact threshold for company profits, and the rate of corporate tax that would be levied, has yet to be agreed.

Tax campaigners said the US intervention marked a dramatic shift in Washington and raised the prospect of the most substantial tax reforms for more than a century being agreed by world leaders as early as this summer.



Protesters in New York on a Tax the Rich march. Photograph: Jason Szenes/EPA

Paul Monaghan, chief executive of the Fair Tax Mark campaign group, said: “The impact on the likes of Amazon, Apple, [Facebook](#) and Google would be seismic ... with billions of additional taxes paid in both the US and across Europe.”

Frustrated by a lack of progress after years of negotiations, several countries including the UK and France have launched unilateral digital services taxes in response to rising public anger over the taxes paid by multinationals and tech firms – while promising to drop them should a global agreement be reached.

Anneliese Dodds, the shadow chancellor, said the move by Biden was welcome and that the UK government now needed to play its part. She said a deal on global tax reforms was long overdue and was especially necessary “to level the playing field between businesses based on bricks and businesses based on clicks to help deliver a brighter future for our high streets”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/apr/08/biden-proposes-global-reforms-to-end-profit-shifting-to-tax-havens>

[Egypt](#)

3,000-year-old ‘lost golden city’ of ancient Egypt discovered

Experts say Aten is the largest such city ever found and one of the most important finds since unearthing Tutankhamun’s tomb

01:47

'Lost golden city' of 3,000 years unearthed in Egypt – video

Agence France-Presse

Thu 8 Apr 2021 20.47 EDT

Archaeologists have hailed the discovery of what is believed to be the largest ancient city found in [Egypt](#), buried under sand for millennia, which experts said was one of the most important finds since the unearthing of Tutankhamun’s tomb.

The famed Egyptologist Zahi Hawass announced the discovery of the “lost golden city”, saying the site was uncovered near Luxor, home of the Valley of the Kings.

“The Egyptian mission under Dr Zahi Hawass found the city that was lost under the sands,” the archeology team said. “The city is 3,000 years old, dates to the reign of Amenhotep III, and continued to be used by Tutankhamun and Ay.”

It called the find the largest ancient city, known as Aten, ever uncovered in Egypt.

[Ancient Christian ruins discovered in Egypt reveal 'nature of monastic life'](#)
[Read more](#)

Betsy Bryan, Professor of Egyptian art and archaeology at Johns Hopkins University, said the find was the “second most important archeological discovery since the tomb of Tutankhamun”, according to the team’s statement.

Items of jewellery such as rings have been unearthed, along with coloured pottery vessels, scarab beetle amulets and mud bricks bearing the seals of Amenhotep III.

Hawass, a former antiquities minister, said: “Many foreign missions searched for this city and never found it.”



A skeletal human remain is seen near Luxor, Egypt. Photograph: Zahi Hawass Center for Egyptology/Reuters

The team began excavations in September 2020, between the temples of Ramses III and Amenhotep III near Luxor, 500km (300 miles) south of the capital, Cairo.

“Within weeks, to the team’s great surprise, formations of mud bricks began to appear in all directions,” the statement read. “What they unearthed was the site of a large city in a good condition of preservation, with almost complete walls, and with rooms filled with tools of daily life.”

After seven months of excavations, several neighbourhoods have been uncovered, including a bakery complete with ovens and storage pottery, as well as administrative and residential districts.

Amenhotep III inherited an empire that stretched from the Euphrates to Sudan, archaeologists say, and died around 1354 BC.

He ruled for nearly four decades, a reign known for its opulence and the grandeur of its monuments, including the Colossi of Memnon – two massive stone statues near Luxor that represent him and his wife.

“The archaeological layers have laid untouched for thousands of years, left by the ancient residents as if it were yesterday,” the team’s statement said.

Bryan said the city “will give us a rare glimpse into the life of the Ancient Egyptians at the time where the empire was at his wealthiest”.



Egyptologists said they found ‘rooms filled with tools of daily life’.
Photograph: Zahi Hawass Center for Egyptology/Reuters

The team said it was optimistic that further important finds would be revealed, noting it had discovered groups of tombs it reached through “stairs carved into the rock”, a similar construction to those found in the Valley of the Kings.

“The mission expects to uncover untouched tombs filled with treasures,” the statement added.

After years of political instability linked to a popular revolt in 2011, which dealt a severe blow to Egypt’s key tourism sector, the country is seeking to bring back visitors, in particular by promoting its ancient heritage.

Last week, Egypt transported the mummified remains of 18 ancient kings and four queens across Cairo from the Egyptian Museum to the new National Museum of Egyptian Civilisation, a procession dubbed the “Pharaohs’ Golden Parade”.

Among the 22 bodies were those of Amenhotep III and his wife Queen Tiye.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/09/lost-golden-city-ancient-egypt-aten-discovered>

[China](#)

China hands death sentences to Uyghur former officials

Two who led Xinjiang education department get suspended penalty for publishing school textbooks



Uyghur literary critic and writer Yalqun Rozi, seen on a visit to New York in 2014, was given a lengthy jail term. Photograph: AFP/Getty

Uyghur literary critic and writer Yalqun Rozi, seen on a visit to New York in 2014, was given a lengthy jail term. Photograph: AFP/Getty

[*Helen Davidson*](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Fri 9 Apr 2021 05.14 EDT

A Chinese court has issued a suspended death sentence to the former directors of the [Xinjiang](#) education department for charges including writing and publishing school textbooks it said were designed to “split the country”.

Sattar Sawut and his deputy, Shirzat Bawudun, were given death sentences with a two-year reprieve, while five other Uyghur men, including editors, were given lengthy jail terms, according to state media.

The date of the convictions and sentences are unknown but were revealed in a state media film released in the last week, amid a PR offensive by the Chinese government pushing back on international criticism of its abuses in the Xinjiang region.

In the Chinese judicial system, a death sentence with reprieve can be commuted to 25 years, or life in prison, pending good behaviour.

Sattar was accused of building a team and planning with his deputy to incorporate “bloody, violent, terrorist and separatist ideas” in primary and secondary school textbooks dating back 13 years, the state news agency Xinhua said.

The books in question date back as far as 2003, but in 2016 the content was deemed by Xinjiang authorities to be “separatist” in nature and inciting ethnic hatred.

The son of [Yalqun Rozi](#), one of the editors sentenced, and who was first arrested in 2016, said the charges were “absurd”.

“These textbooks were sanctioned by the state,” Kamaltürk Yalqun [told the Associated Press](#). “China is trying to erase history and write a new narrative.”

The court has not published its ruling or other documents, and state media did not detail what problems it saw in the texts. A People’s Daily article on Wednesday said a total of 84 texts in a 2003 and a 2009 edition in ethnic languages had been found to have influenced several named individuals to take part in the 2009 Urumqi riots, and a 2014 bombing at the Urumqi railway station.

The People’s Daily report said: “By changing and distorting history, [Sattar and his co-accused] tried to instil separatist ideas into students, increase national hatred and achieve the purpose of splitting the motherland.”

[South China Morning Post](#) cited the CGTN film to describe some sections and images in the textbook that referred to a 1940s chapter of Xinjiang history and the short-lived East Turkestan Republic government, or that depicted clashes between Uyghur fighters and Han-looking soldiers during the same period.

Yalqun told the AP the passages were about historical tales that had nothing to do with terrorism, and the prosecutions were aimed at cultural destruction and assimilation.

“Because these textbooks are rich in Uyghur culture, [China](#) targeted them,” Yalqun said. “They’re moving toward the direction of eliminating Uyghur language education and culture altogether.”

Sattar, who was also convicted of offences related to bribery allegations, was deprived of political rights for life, and had his property confiscated.

The prosecution comes amid a deepening crackdown on Uyghur and other ethnic minority Muslims in the Xinjiang region. More than 1 million people are believed to have been interned in reeducation camps, and there is evidence of authorities running enforce labour transfer programmes, as well as systemic rape and torture, [forced sterilisation](#) of women, child separation and mass surveillance and intimidation. Leading Uyghur academics and other public figures have been arrested.

[The US government](#) and [some law groups](#) have declared the actions of the Chinese government against the group to be a genocide.

As international outrage mounts and becomes increasingly coordinated in the [implementation of sanctions](#) and other measures against the perpetrators, Beijing has ratcheted up its denials of mistreatment and abuses, launching multi-platform PR campaigns ranging from [choreographed press conferences](#) in foreign countries to a [domestically released musical](#) depicting a wonderful life in Xinjiang.

Chinese diplomats have engaged in hostile communications online and with foreign counterparts, and individually targeted and smeared Uyghur women who have spoken publicly about their ordeals.

Headlines

- [Northern Ireland Taoiseach warns against 'spiralling back to dark place'](#)
- [Belfast Children 'encouraged to commit criminal acts'](#)
- [Brexit 'Spectacular failure' to understand anger, say loyalists](#)

[Northern Ireland](#)

Taoiseach says Northern Ireland must not ‘spiral back to dark place’

On 23rd anniversary of Good Friday agreement, Martin says onus on political leaders ‘to step forward’



Nationalists and loyalists clash at Lanark Way in west Belfast, Northern Ireland. Photograph: Peter Morrison/AP

Nationalists and loyalists clash at Lanark Way in west Belfast, Northern Ireland. Photograph: Peter Morrison/AP

[*Lisa O'Carroll*](#)

[*@lisaocarroll*](#)

Sat 10 Apr 2021 09.50 EDT

The Irish taoiseach Micheál Martin has said that political leaders must not allow Northern Ireland to “spiral back to that dark place of sectarian murders

and political discord” after the region was marred by another night of disorder.

On the anniversary of the Good Friday agreement 23 years ago, the taoiseach said there was “a particular onus on those of us who currently hold the responsibility of political leadership to step forward and play our part and ensure that this cannot happen”.

A number of police officers were injured as they came under attack in the loyalist Tiger’s Bay area in north Belfast on the eighth consecutive night of violence.

A burning car was rammed against a police vehicle, and bins were set alight in the middle of the road, sparking fears that the violence would continue into the weekend.

Deputy first minister Michelle O’Neill said on Friday evening: “I’m worried about the weekend ahead. We all need to be very careful and very consciously try to do all we can to prevent this happening.

[Living in Northern Ireland: share your reaction to the current situation](#)
[Read more](#)

“I think there’s a strong role here for the two governments, as co-guarantors of the Good Friday agreement. I made that point to Brandon Lewis this morning.”

The Northern Ireland secretary flew to Belfast for urgent talks with the five party leaders on the Northern Ireland executive on Friday but no statement was issued because of protocols surrounding the death of Prince Philip.

O’Neill said: “It’s really, really important that we stand shoulder to shoulder and say no to this type of criminal behaviour, and that we don’t allow our children to be sucked in by criminal gangs who are orchestrating some of what we see on our streets.”

Martin said the island of Ireland had “truly become a completely different place in the last 23 years, because of the Good Friday agreement” after a

sustained “period of building trust, developing relationships, [and] changing attitudes”.

“We owe it to the ‘agreement generation’ and indeed future generations not to spiral back to that dark place of sectarian murders and political discord,” he said.

There were also reports of disorder in the nationalist area of New Lodge in Belfast and in a loyalist area Coleraine.

PSNI Ch Supt Muir Clarke appealed for calm and asked for “anyone who has any influence in communities [to] please use that influence to ensure young people do not get caught up in criminality and that they are kept safe and away from harm tonight”.

[Northern Ireland police say paramilitaries not behind recent violence](#)
[Read more](#)

The appeal came as the Northern Ireland’s children’s commissioner told how children [were being coerced into violence](#) in a similar fashion to county lines drug distribution operations in Britain.

Loyalist leaders had urged the community not to participate in protests on Friday after the death of the Duke of Edinburgh.

Signs posted in Lanark Way in west Belfast, the scene of the violence, on Wednesday read: “We would ask all PUL [Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist] protests are postponed as a mark of respect to the Queen and the royal family.

“The continued opposition to the NI protocol and all other injustices against the PUL community will take place again after the period of mourning.”

Two men are due to appear in court on Saturday after being charged in connection with the rioting that took place in Lanark Way on Thursday night.

Detectives investigating the disorder have charged a 24-year-old man and a 32-year-old man with rioting.

The 32-year-old was also charged with possession of a petrol bomb in suspicious circumstances.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/apr/10/taoiseach-warns-northern-ireland-must-not-spiral-back-to-dark-place>

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[Northern Ireland](#)

Northern Ireland: children are being 'encouraged to commit criminal acts'

After a week of unrest police and politicians voice fears that gangs are coercing children to take part in violence



Police officers using water cannon as they clashed with nationalist youths in the Springfield Road area of Belfast on Thursday. Photograph: Paul Faith/AFP/Getty Images

Police officers using water cannon as they clashed with nationalist youths in the Springfield Road area of Belfast on Thursday. Photograph: Paul Faith/AFP/Getty Images

[Lisa O'Carroll](#) and [Rory Carroll](#) in Belfast

Sat 10 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

After a turbulent week in [Northern Ireland](#) which raised questions about law and order and political stability, arguably the most disheartening sight was

that of children as young as 12 and 13 being sucked into violence against the police.

Naomi Long, the justice minister, said she felt “ill” watching footage showing adults “standing by cheering and goading and encouraging young people on as they wreaked havoc in their own community”. It was, she said, “nothing short of child abuse”.

In a briefing to reporters, assistant chief constable Jonathan Roberts said young people were “being encouraged to commit criminal acts by adults”.

Northern Ireland’s commissioner for children and young people, Koulla Yiasouma, told the Guardian the children there were often victims of the equivalent of the drugs operations that have blighted many towns in Britain – gangs who, in Northern Ireland, have links to sectarian paramilitaries.

“What we were talking about is criminal exploitation and criminal coercion. Although it’s not a direct comparison, for a UK wide audience, the closest comparison is county lines.

“What we have is criminals controlling or coercing young people to deal drugs, to take part in criminal activities and in that I would include rioting in the streets,” she said.

She said gangs were using children to “destabilise the political process to push the UK government to change something” – be that Brexit or pressuring them to give more resource to local interests – but also critically “to let those communities know how much they control them”.

Some on the streets on Shankill Road which, on Wednesday, [saw the worst of the rioting](#), put the problem down to lack of facilities for children, others blamed the parents.

One woman said a dearth of youth clubs, trips and other activities left children restless and liable to follow bad examples. “An older one does something and the younger follow. Peer pressure.”

A 57-year-old grandmother who asked not to be named accused some neighbouring parents of instilling sectarianism. “They’re drumming it into

the children.”

[‘The fear is that this will get bigger’: six nights of rioting in Northern Ireland](#)

[Read more](#)

Yiasouma said it was unhelpful to link it to poor parental discipline as research showed a high degree of post-conflict trauma and “intergenerational mental ill health” in communities where children were being coerced into crime.

“We don’t necessarily have the highest levels of child poverty in the UK in Northern Ireland but what we have is the same types of communities in poverty, a correlation between communities affected by the conflict and those who are the poorest.

“Parents may have had parents or siblings murdered during the Troubles and their experience and years of answered questions gets baked into family history and folklore with devastating consequences for the children of the 1998 peace deal.

“They may be born into peace, but they might hear that Uncle John witnessed a murder or a grandparent was killed and that causes a trauma, anxiety, stress,” she said.

A recent survey showed that numbers of children diagnosed with mental ill health in Northern Ireland are 20% higher than the rest of the UK and criminal gangs exploit that by luring them into criminal activity.

“Do these children have a choice? No, these children probably do not, particularly when we know that shootings, beatings, and ostracisation in their communities by young paramilitary and armed groups still continues in Northern Ireland,” said the commissioner.

Earlier this week the police said the youngest arrest was just 13 years old, leading to concerns, expressed by many local and national political leaders, over the impact criminalisation would have on their future paths.

Yiasouma said she could “paper her house with the number of action plans” produced for families but what they needed was permanent resourced practical support.

“What we need is a sustainable plan to help our children and our families in these communities that are blighted by the aftermath of the conflict.” She spoke of how politicised the children were, how they wanted their views heard about Brexit, about climate change about LGBT rights. “We want to reset their potential because they are resilient, vibrant communities. They just need a little bit of help.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/apr/10/northern-ireland-children-are-being-encouraged-to-commit-criminal-acts>

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland police say paramilitaries not behind recent violence

Loyalist umbrella group denies involvement, as missiles thrown at police and car set on fire in eighth night of unrest



Northern Ireland police faced a seventh night of unrest on Thursday, this time from nationalists. Photograph: Paul Faith/AFP/Getty Images

Northern Ireland police faced a seventh night of unrest on Thursday, this time from nationalists. Photograph: Paul Faith/AFP/Getty Images

[Lisa O'Carroll](#)

[@lisaocarroll](#)

Fri 9 Apr 2021 19.54 EDT

The involvement of loyalist paramilitary groups in orchestrating the violence in [Northern Ireland](#) has been ruled out by police as the number of officers injured rose to 74.

On Friday night, police were again attacked with missiles and a car was set on fire as small pockets of unrest flared.

The latest assessment by the [Police](#) Service of Northern Ireland came after a statement issued by the Loyalist Communities Council (LCC), an umbrella group representing loyalist paramilitaries seeking an end to the violence.

“The LCC can confirm that none of their associated groups have been involved either directly or indirectly in the violence witnessed in recent days,” it said.

But the LCC said there had been a “spectacular collective failure” to understand their anger over Brexit and other issues, and the border protocol must be renegotiated. Critics of the departure deal’s Northern Ireland protocol say a border is in effect in the Irish Sea, leaving unionists feeling betrayed.

“We have repeatedly urged HM Government, political leaders and Institutions to take seriously our warnings of the dangerous consequences of imposing this hard border on us and the need for earnest dialogue to resolve matters. We reiterate that message now,” the LCC said.

In a detailed update on the tumultuous week, Northern Ireland’s assistant chief constable, Jonathan Roberts, revealed that a further 19 officers and one of the service’s dogs had been hurt during disturbances on Thursday, the seventh night of unrest.

Police used water cannon for the first time in six years after dozens of young people on the nationalist side of the peace line ignored a warning to disperse and continued to throw stones, bottles and fireworks.

00:56

Belfast police use water cannon on Northern Ireland rioters – video

On Friday night, PSNI officers at Tiger Bay, a loyalist area in north Belfast came under attack, with missiles such as stones and bottles thrown at them. A car was set on fire and there were reports of petrol bombs being used. There were also reports that stones were also thrown at police in the nearby, nationalist area New Lodge.

PSNI Ch Supt Muir Clarke said: “We would appeal for calm in the area and ask anyone who has any influence in communities, please use that influence to ensure young people do not get caught up in criminality and that they are kept safe and away from harm tonight.”

There were sporadic incidents of unrest elsewhere in Northern Ireland on Friday evening, with reports of a road blocked off with a barricade which was then set alight in Coleraine, Co Derry.

The police’s assessment that paramilitaries were not involved marks a shift in opinion from earlier in the week when there were suspicions that loyalist extremists could be operating behind the scenes. On Thursday, Roberts said it was “clear there was a degree of organisation” to the violence.

However, the PSNI appeared to backtrack on that position when asked on Friday about the LCC statement. “It’s our overall assessment that the violence that has taken place over the last few nights is not orchestrated by a group, in the name of that group,” it said.

“We feel that there may be some people who could have connection to proscribed organisations, who have been present on the scenes of violence. But we don’t believe it’s been sanctioned and organised by proscribed organisations for peaceful protests,” Roberts said.

Hopes were raised that the worst of the violence was over with social media reports that protests were being cancelled over the weekend as a mark of respect for the [Duke of Edinburgh](#).

The Democratic Unionist MP for Belfast East, Gavin Robinson, said he was encouraged to see calls for planned protests to be cancelled as “even with peaceful intent ... nothing should besmirch his memory”.

Greatly encouraged to see sentiments expressed already that any planned protests / parades should be cancelled as a mark of respect for the late Duke of Edinburgh. I trust all Unionists & Loyalists will agree, that even with peaceful intent, that nothing should besmirch his memory

— Gavin Robinson (@GRobinsonDUP) [April 9, 2021](#)

Meanwhile, moves to bridge the political gap that has opened up in recent months over Brexit and policing continued when the Northern Ireland secretary, Brandon Lewis, met Stormont political parties in emergency talks.

No statement was expected because of the death of Prince Philip. One source said it was a “listening exercise” but nothing more had been expected.

Meanwhile, two men are due to appear in court on Saturday after being charged in connection with the rioting that took place in Lanark Way, west Belfast on Thursday night. Detectives investigating the disorder have charged a 24-year-old man and a 32-year-old man with riot. The 32-year-old was also charged with possession of a petrol bomb in suspicious circumstances. They are due to appear before Belfast magistrates court at about 10.30am.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/apr/09/northern-ireland-police-say-paramilitaries-not-behind-recent-violence>

2021.04.10 - Coronavirus

- [Ale fresco England's pubs gear up for outdoor reopening on 12 April](#)
- [Grand reopening Retailers ready for return of shoppers in England and Wales](#)
- ['We survived recessions and a bomb. Covid is harder' Can the UK's independent shops bounce back?](#)
- [Retail industry Lockdowns have cost £22bn in lost sales, say British retailers](#)

Hospitality industry.

Ale fresco: England's pubs gear up for outdoor reopening on 12 April

From Wakefield to Peckham, pubs with gardens are hiring extra staff and buying more furniture to quench demand



The Hare & Hounds pub in West Ardsley, near Wakefield, West Yorkshire has redesigned and rebuilt their outdoor garden seating. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

The Hare & Hounds pub in West Ardsley, near Wakefield, West Yorkshire has redesigned and rebuilt their outdoor garden seating. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer



[Rupert Neate](#)

[@RupertNeate](#)

Sat 10 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

Jackie Fairburn, the licensee of The Hare & Hounds pub in West Ardsley near Wakefield, is more excited about reopening on Monday when lockdown restrictions are eased than when she was handed the keys to the pub five years ago.

“We are all systems go,” Fairburn says. “I just can’t wait to open, it’s been so long. This relaunch is like starting a new business all over again, but actually this is a much bigger deal – it has to work.”

Fairburn has gone “all out” for the reopening. She has used scaffolding planks to build a replica of the pub’s bar in the garden, complete with bar stools, and moved all the tables and chairs from inside outdoors.



The redesigned outdoor areas of The Hare & Hounds pub in West Ardsley, near Wakefield. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

“It’ll be the first time they’ve been to the pub since it closed on 4 November, so I thought they’d like to see all its familiar furniture,” she says. “Sitting down at picnic benches is hard for those with mobility issues; having the pub’s chairs makes it easy and comfortable.

“We are building new tables now as we speak, we are going to have 65 to 70 tables outside – it is a massive space. We are going to be a bigger pub in the garden than we were in total before the lockdown.”

The tables are spread out in a socially distanced formation across three marquees, with more scattered across the garden. Fairburn has rigged up four TVs outside, a lot of heaters, and promises surprise entertainment.

“It was a wilderness out there really, we never utilised it,” says Fairburn, who gave up a job as a logistics director for a manufacturing company to take on the pub five years ago. “But now we’ve really gone to town and it will pay dividends, fingers crossed.

“We’ve gone for an après ski-type vibe with throws and hot drinks. I think people will quickly get acclimatised to more outdoor socialising.”

Fairburn has adapted the pub's menu too. She will be serving pizzas from a wood-fired oven, hot roast beef sandwiches, jacket potatoes and sharing platters while also serving roast dinners on Sundays.



Jackie Fairburn, the landlady of The Hare & Hounds pub in West Ardsley.
Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

The Hare & Hounds, like thousands of other pubs, was forced to close in early November as a second national lockdown was brought in to reduce the spread of coronavirus. While some in tier 1 and 2 areas were able to reopen in late November as long as customers ordered a [“substantial meal”](#) alongside drinks, the Hare & Hounds was prevented from reopening as Yorkshire was a high-risk area. The current national lockdown began on 6 January.

Under the [roadmap to a reopening of businesses and society](#), hospitality venues can begin to serve customers outdoors from Monday 12 April. This time there will be no requirement to order a substantial meal alongside the drinks, and no curfew – although customers must order, eat and drink while seated.

Fairburn and other publicans say the table service requirement means they are having to hire a lot more staff. Normally she employs one member of

staff in the daytime and another at night. On Monday there will be eight in the day and another eight in the evening to help serve some of the 38 barrels of beer – or 3,344 pints – freshly delivered on Thursday.

The Prince of Peckham, in south London, is also hiring a lot of new staff to cope with an expected rush on Monday and all of next week. “We’re actually recruiting quite a lot of new staff,” says Rohie Njie, the pub’s events manager. “Normally a lot of our staff are students, but the reopening falls right when there are lots of essays and final exams, so we are having to get in new people.”



Signs at The Hare & Hounds pub in West Ardsley, near Wakefield.
Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

The Prince is ready for the rush. The pub has extended its patio area into the pavement of Peckham High St with the permission of the council and erected a temporary roof with scaffolding. “So if it does rain or snow we can have people happily outside,” Njie says. “There’s space for 60, most of it is booked up, but we have kept space for regulars who turn up.”

When Njie opens the gates at 4pm on Monday, one of the first people to walk through is expected to be a local called Lacey. “She made one of the

first bookings, and the pub is very important to her, she had her wedding ceremony and reception here just before lockdown.”

Njie is also looking forward to welcoming back Kev, one the pub’s longest-standing regulars, who has stuck with the pub during its transition from traditional boozier to studenty hangout. “He always sits at the same place at the bar, so we’ve made sure we will have space for him outside. We’re really excited to welcome him back for the first time since January, we’ve waved at him walking down the street so we know he’s still around. We’re just so excited to see all our customers really, and to pull that first pint.”

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Njie worries that some of the younger clientele might get quite carried away. “People haven’t been out for so long, some of them are going to forget their limits. I just hope it stays safe, but I do think people will go a lot crazier than normal.”

While those pubs fortunate enough to have gardens to serve customers are looking forward to a return to something approaching normality on Monday, hundreds of others that do not have outdoor space are frustrated at having to wait until 17 May to welcome people inside.

The British Beer and Pub Association expects only about 40% of pubs in England to reopen on Monday. The trade body reckons about 15m pints will be sold next week, which is just a quarter of normal April trading.

Dawn Hopkins, who runs Norwich’s Rose Inn and is vice-chair of the Campaign for [Pubs](#), says her pub has only a small garden that could fit just six people socially distanced. “So I decided there wasn’t much point opening, and I know that there are a lot of other pubs in our sort of situation. We will just have to wait even longer. It has been an incredibly difficult, frustrating, anxious and at times a heartbreaking year for us, and for publicans across the country.”

Fairburn agrees, and says the last few months have been the most difficult of her life. “People think we’ve had so much time off, but it’s not been time off,” she says. “It’s been time stressing about money. It’s been frankly awful,

but you've got to stay positive. There are too many people down, it's our role to gee people up. It's our role to listen to the people coming in; they don't need to know our problems, we are here to listen to them."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/apr/10/ale-fresco-englands-pubs-gear-up-for-outdoor-reopening-on-12-april>

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Retail industry

Grand reopening: retailers ready for return of shoppers



A member of staff at the John Lewis Partnership's Peter Jones store in central London cleans makeup items ahead of its Monday reopening. Photograph: Kirsty O'Connor/PA

A member of staff at the John Lewis Partnership's Peter Jones store in central London cleans makeup items ahead of its Monday reopening. Photograph: Kirsty O'Connor/PA

Staff are going all out to welcome customers back as Covid lockdown eases in England and Wales

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



[Sarah Butler](#)

[@whatbutlersaw](#)

Sat 10 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

At Hamleys they are unboxing the teddies, vacuuming the Frozen castle and practising dance routines. [John Lewis](#) is cleaning its fitting rooms and beauty counters, while Debenhams is preparing for its closing down sale.

After at least 15 weeks of lockdown – more in many parts of the UK – high streets are preparing to [reopen on Monday](#). Retailers in England and Wales are hoping to lure shoppers away from the internet and out of their homes with entertainment, children's parties, services such as personal styling advice for adults and professional shoe fitting for children – and some hefty discounts.

For the first time in a year, after a change in government Covid-19 guidelines, retailers will be able to [open fitting rooms](#) and advise on applying beauty treatments.

Timeline

How England's Covid lockdown will be lifted

Show
8 March 2021
Step 1, part 1

In effect from 8 March, all pupils and college students returned fully. Care home residents can receive one regular, named visitor.

29 March 2021
Step 1, part 2

In effect from 29 March, outdoor gatherings allowed of up to six people, or two households if this is larger, not just in parks but also gardens. Outdoor sport for children and adults allowed. The official stay at home order ends, but people will be encouraged to stay local. People will still be asked to work from home where possible, with no overseas travel allowed beyond the current small number of exceptions.

12 April 2021
Step 2

The official outline plan states that the next steps will rely on data, and the dates given mean "no earlier than". In step two, there will be a reopening of non-essential retail, hair and nail salons, and public buildings such as libraries and museums. Most outdoor venues can open, including pubs and restaurants but only for outdoor tables and beer gardens. Customers will have to be seated but there will be no need to have a meal with alcohol.

Also reopening will be settings such as zoos and theme parks. However, social contact rules will apply here, so no indoor mixing between households and limits on outdoor mixing. Indoor leisure facilities such as gyms and pools can also open but again people can only go alone or with their own household. Reopening of holiday lets with no shared facilities, but only for one household. Funerals can have up to 30 attendees, while weddings, receptions and wakes can have 15.

17 May 2021
Step 3

Again with the caveat "no earlier than 17 May", depending on data, vaccination levels and current transmission rates.

Step 3 entails that most mixing rules are lifted outdoors, with a limit of 30 people meeting in parks or gardens. Indoor mixing will be allowed, up to six people or, if it is more people, two households. Indoor venues such as the inside of pubs and restaurants, hotels and B&Bs, play centres, cinemas and group exercise classes will reopen. The new indoor and outdoor mixing limits will remain for pubs and other hospitality venues.

For sport, indoor venues can have up to 1,000 spectators or half capacity, whichever is lower; outdoors the limit will be 4,000 people or half capacity, whichever is lower. Very large outdoor seated venues, such as big football stadiums, where crowds can be spread out, will have a limit of 10,000 people, or a quarter full, whichever is fewer. Weddings will be allowed a limit of 30 people, with other events such as christenings and barmitzvahs also permitted.

This will be the earliest date at which international holidays could resume, subject to a separate review.

21 June 2021

Step 4

No earlier than 21 June, all legal limits will be removed on mixing, and the last sectors to remain closed, such as nightclubs, will reopen. Large events can take place.

Peter Walker *Political correspondent*

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Tony Wheeler, the head of the Peter Jones branch of [John Lewis](#) on Sloane Square in central London, says it has taken about four weeks to prepare to reopen the store, which closed its doors on 19 December. The team of 600 staff, most of whom have been working in the group's Waitrose supermarkets or dealing with customers online, have all been retrained in the

latest safety measures and product information while cleaning down shelves and putting out fresh product.

“The shop was in a time warp with Christmas stuff and the preparations for the [January] sale. During the lockdown we sent a lot of stock to support online sales, so it was like a swarm of locusts had been through,” he says. “Staff are genuinely excited and delighted at having customers back for face-to-face interaction.”

While the final closure of chains including Topshop, Dorothy Perkins, J Crew, Oasis, Warehouse and Laura Ashley, as well as some [Debenhams](#), John Lewis, House of Fraser and Marks & Spencer stores, will leave big gaps in town centres and shopping malls, those stores reopening their doors believe British shoppers are keen to hit the streets again.



Pippa Wicks, executive director of John Lewis: ‘People are going to be excited to come back.’ Photograph: Kirsty O’Connor/PA

Pippa Wicks, an executive director at John Lewis – which has 34 outlets after [closing 16](#) in the past year – is expecting queues outside stores. “People are going to be excited to come back. When we reopened before we saw a lot of emotion. We are an important part of people lives if they have got a store nearby.”

She expects the fashion floors, children's footwear department and beauty counters to be the busiest, but is also hopeful that shoppers will be keen to make more considered purchases on big-ticket items such as sofas, beds and fridges now that they can try them out in the shop.

In the past few weeks the group has seen a surge in sales of dresses, handbags and makeup online – up 200%, 100% and 50% respectively – as shoppers prepare for a more social time once more.

John Lewis has used the closure time to rejig some stores, bringing in new brands based on what has sold well online. It is also braced for more price-conscious shoppers, with a new range of home and baby items being sold under the Anyday brand – with prices 20% cheaper than its other ranges.

Wicks says some shoppers will be more price conscious with concerns about the economy, but she also expects that some people will have more spare cash to spend, having not spent on travelling to work or gone on holiday for months. “I think there will be a bit of an uplift over the summer,” she says.

Sumeet Yadav, the chief executive of Hamleys, the world's oldest toy shop, also thinks shoppers will be keen to return to stores and has planned a menu of activities including a Pokémon treasure hunt, an appearance by Spider-Man and Harry Potter wand training. Yadav says the store has also adapted activities – such as its Marvin's Magic show – so that entertainment can be enjoyed in a more socially distanced way.



A member of staff at Hamleys in central London prepares to reopen after the third lockdown. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

“Our big focus is on giving a warm family welcome back with a lot of activities. We have thought carefully about how to make kids feel life is getting back to normal. Sales have been tough because our stores have been shut, but it’s also been a time to reflect and invest and prepare for our future growth,” he says.

Wicks reckons it could take 18 months for high streets and shopping malls to fully recover, assuming there are no further lockdowns to control the virus. She says she believes city centre stores will take longer to bounce back than will those on retail parks or out of town because of the switch towards working from home and the decline in tourism as a result of restraints on international travel.

With habits changing, John Lewis is putting more goods in Waitrose stores and is also aiming to open at least one or two small neighbourhood outlets, with cafes and seasonal products, by the end of the year.

“Neighbourhoods could see a new lease of life,” she says. “People are wanting to shop more locally, for convenience and to support local businesses. There could be positive aspects for those high streets. They may

serve a different function. What's in those stores on the high street is likely to change."

[What are the new Covid rules in England from 12 April?](#)

[Read more](#)

While some established chains are disappearing, others are taking advantage of the space that has become available and the resultant dive in rents to add new stores or launch in the UK.

At the Trafford Centre in Greater Manchester, the closure of stores including Topshop, Burton, Karen Millen and Thorntons has made way for other brands. New stores in the complex include the Irish athleisure brand Gym+Coffee's second UK outlet, a Polestar electric car showroom, the fast-growing noodle bar Chopstix, the online glasses brand Pop Specs and the first store for the Real Housewives of Cheshire star Seema Malhotra's Forever Unique label.

The health and beauty retailer Superdrug is opening 15 stores this year, Kurt Geiger will open nine new stores on Monday, PureGym will launch 10 new gyms next week and Mike Ashley's [Frasers Group](#) (formerly Sports Direct) is moving into a former Debenhams outlet in Wolverhampton, which has been divided to house an upmarket Flannels outlet, a Sports Direct shop and a Frasers department store.

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[Shops and shopping](#)

‘We survived recessions and an IRA bomb. Covid has been harder’: can the UK’s independent shops bounce back?



Danny Rogers at his cobblers in Liverpool Street, London: ‘People complain about City bonuses, but that money filter feeds businesses like mine. It disappeared overnight.’ Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian

Danny Rogers at his cobblers in Liverpool Street, London: ‘People complain about City bonuses, but that money filter feeds businesses like mine. It disappeared overnight.’ Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian

As stores reopen, one city cobbler is optimistic, while at the hairdresser’s, the waitlist is growing

Introduction by [Sarah Butler](#) Interviews by [Deborah Linton](#)

Sat 10 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

When [Primark opened its biggest ever store](#) in Birmingham two years ago, more than 300 people queued to check out the Disney-themed cafe, beauty salons and fashion bargains. The launch seemed to mark a resurgence of the city centre: here was a new kind of department store, to sit alongside the established Debenhams and a swanky architect-designed John Lewis, which had opened less than four years earlier.

When Birmingham city centre stores reopen on Monday, there will be a very different atmosphere. John Lewis is empty, [one of 16 shops the chain has closed](#) in the past year; Debenhams will reopen only to clear stock, as its remaining 124 outlets [permanently disappear](#) from high streets and shopping centres. Some of Debenhams' biggest neighbours in the Bullring shopping centre, including Topshop and Gap, will not reopen. Meanwhile, the Primark chain [lost £1.5bn of sales](#) in 2020 after months of enforced closure.

Birmingham provides just a snapshot of what is happening in British towns and cities. The rapid expansion of shopping centres and retail space over the last 20 years, many built on the outskirts, has cranked into reverse. Town centres were already suffering from that over-exuberant growth, as people switched from spending money on stuff to experiences and technology: holidays, nights out or nights in with Netflix. Shopping was already less of a fun day out and more of a chore, one that could be done more efficiently online. The pandemic has supercharged these trends.

Alongside Debenhams and Topshop (and its sister chains, Dorothy Perkins and Miss Selfridge), the likes of [Oasis and Warehouse](#) have disappeared permanently. There will be at least [11,000 fewer retail outlets](#) in operation than a year ago, according to the latest report from analysts at the Local Data Company (LDC). More closures are on the way.

Most analysts believe these changes are permanent: more than a third of total retail sales were online [in January](#), 36%, according to the Office for National Statistics, up from 20% a year before and 14% five years ago. Town centres are being reinvented to include alternatives to shops – from entertainment and leisure, to community services such as healthcare and education spaces, as well as more homes and offices. Some towns and cities, including [Nottingham](#), [Stockton-on-Tees](#) and [Stretford](#) in Greater Manchester, are planning to raze moribund shopping centres in order to

replace them with parks, wildlife spaces and public squares. Both [John Lewis](#) and [Marks & Spencer](#) have applied for planning permission to switch large parts of their flagship London stores on Oxford Street to office space. Coventry's plans for [redevelopment of its Upper Precinct](#) shopping mall include a medical centre, cinema and hotel. Around the country, department stores are being transformed into housing and hotels, indoor markets, bowling alleys or crazy golf – even university [lecture halls](#).

“The high street that existed in most people’s eyes is dead, dead, dead,” says Bill Grimsey, a former executive at Iceland, Wickes and Tesco, who has backed three reports into the future of the high street. “It started when retailers like me moved out of town in the 1980s. We cannot rely on shops any more – we need to change and be a community hub.”

All of this is not necessarily bad news for neighbourhoods that have longed for high streets with character. After the scorched-earth closures of recent years, Grimsey says local communities are coming together to decide how their town centres should be revived. Millions of pounds of government funding, via the High Streets Task Force, is supporting ideas for local needs, rather than projects developers are prepared to pay for.

Independent businesses will be an important part of that change.

While most of the big chains have suffered, with 4.5% of their outlets disappearing, independent shops, restaurants and bars have fared much better, with the number of stores down just 0.4% year on year, according to LDC. Government support measures, including business rates relief, furlough pay and a moratorium on evictions for those who are struggling to pay rent, have all helped to keep small businesses afloat. Villages and commuter towns, many of which are filled with independents, have outperformed city centres, reviving hopes for a reversal of years of decline.

Within cities, meanwhile, the pandemic has seen a surge in the development of infrastructure to enable walking and cycling, laying the groundwork for more people-centred, less polluted environments. Anne Hidalgo, the mayor of Paris, has popularised the idea of creating “15-minute cities”, where all the facilities we need are close at hand – so there is less need to use a car. Different interpretations of the concept are being tried in Barcelona, Milan

and Melbourne, while the London mayor, Sadiq Khan, has introduced the [Streetspace programme](#) to encourage cycling and walking.

After months stuck at home, with few holidays or nights out, the [Bank of England](#) is predicting that Britons will go on a [spending spree](#) once restrictions are lifted. The chances are that more independent local shops will ring up a good proportion of those sales. The clone high street is dead: long live the neighbourhood.

Sarah Butler is the Guardian's retail correspondent

‘People complain about City bonuses, but that money feeds businesses like mine’: [J Rogers & Sons shoe repairs](#), London



Danny Rogers inside his shop in the City of London. Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian

On the first day of the first lockdown last March, rents were due on Danny Rogers' City of [London](#) cobblers – a family business, established by his father, John, 35 years ago.

“When the money came out of my bank account that day, I wondered where the next lot would come from,” says the 49-year-old, who employs nine staff across several London branches. Their original London Bridge shop closed its doors for good last February, before the chain’s weekly takings dropped from £22,000 to less than £3,000. Their largest shop, at Liverpool Street, sits among the coffee and sandwich shops that serve the Square Mile. It all fell silent. “People complain about City bonuses,” says Rogers, “but that money feeds businesses like mine. It disappeared overnight.” For now, his shoe repair and key-cutting machines are in storage.

Rogers has worked for the business since he was 18. Last year he attempted, briefly, to reopen the neighbourhood branches between lockdowns, but slow trade and the dip in commuters made it unsustainable; they closed again after a month. “We weren’t in touch with many of our customers, although one did complain that his shoes were locked in the store.”

Rent negotiations with more accommodating landlords have allowed them to keep bills down. “They’ve been the difference between surviving or not,” Rogers says. He has bounce-back loans and an overdraft to pay back, but his biggest concern was staff; he had to make someone redundant for the first time.

“We’ve stayed in touch over WhatsApp. Some live alone, so I’ve called to check in. Before Covid, our morning rush started at 8am, then we’d be nonstop. It’s hard when that’s taken away from you. I’ve had sleepless nights. Bigger businesses have folded, but this is my money, my family’s house on the line,” says the father of two.

While he remains optimistic about the future (“Some businesses benefit from a downturn: if people don’t have money to buy new stuff, they get old things repaired”), the past year is not one he hopes to revisit. “The City is a resilient place, but it will be among the last to return.” Rogers says that over the decades his customers “have gone from stilettoed ladies in typing pools and Scotland Yard, to solicitors and bankers. We’ve survived recessions and an IRA bomb blast. But this has been the hardest time in working memory.”

‘The last luxury women want to give up is their hair – it’s part of feeling good’: Mayrees hair salon, Aberdeen



Mariam Campbell in her salon in Aberdeen. Photograph: Robert Ormerod/The Guardian

“As the weeks went by, the phone started pinging,” says Mariam Campbell, of the hundreds of women who usually keep her appointment-only salon busy. As an afro hair stylist, Campbell’s clients usually book in every four to eight weeks; when lockdown hit they needed her help. “I had constant messages from customers wanting advice on how to treat their hair or take braids out. When I first closed the doors, there were definitely a few hoping I’d let them in through the back, or go to their homes.” But she didn’t.

Sitting in her empty salon, nestled among a dozen shops on King Street, the 38-year-old remembers the panic that set in last March. “I had a waiting list of people trying to fit in appointments. The last luxury women want to give up is their hair – it’s part of feeling good about yourself.” At home, Campbell was looking after her children, aged four and nearly two, alone for weeks at a time while her husband worked on an offshore oil rig. “Clients

reached out to see how I was coping. People have been kind, offering help or support. But everyone was struggling. When I reopened in August, the biggest change was the toll it had taken on my customers' mental health – even my most cheerful lady.”

Campbell moved to the UK from Ghana when she was 18, to study biomedicine and join her mother, a midwife, in London. Her mother asked her to learn basic hairdressing skills, because she couldn't find a good black hairdresser, so she got a job as a stylist on Tottenham High Road. She opened her Aberdeen salon (where she is the sole stylist) in 2012, and works long hours. So while extra time with her children has been a silver lining, the worry over her business has been horrendous, she says. While Aberdeen's death rate was slightly below the Scottish average in the first wave, she grieved the loss of a favourite 70-year-old customer. “She was like a mum to me.”

When Campbell reopened last summer, there were not enough months to catch up on lost trade. “Every client had to be seen. By Christmas, I had waiting lists. People were getting frustrated.” Her takings were down 80% over the year, and yet she is accepting. “No grants will make up for what businesses have lost. But it has also been a reminder of how much our customers value us.”

‘Our high street has a nostalgic feel. You can’t replicate that online’: [St Ives Bookseller](#), Cornwall



Alice Harandon, manager of the St Ives Bookseller in Cornwall. Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian

The pretty little shops packed into the higgledy-piggledy buildings of Fore Street usually throng with tourists, second homeowners and locals. But the onslaught of British holidaymakers when travel restrictions eased last July (but social distancing did not) was a challenge for dozens of shop owners on the narrow stretch.

“High summer is always our busiest time,” says Alice Harandon, 34, manager of St Ives Bookseller. “After three months with our doors closed, it was wonderful to feel that buzz again, but it was scary. It felt like the whole of the UK was in our town. I was squeezing past customers to replenish books, stock was toppling over. There was no browsing and people were queueing outside. We’d largely kept the virus out of St Ives, so thousands of people during a pandemic was a worry. I was happy to be open, but it was a lot of responsibility.”

Harandon has managed the store (one of three in a family-owned group across Cornwall) for 11 years. She says the whole year was about “finding a route back” to normal trade. “Before the first lockdown, some shopkeepers started to close. There was no social distancing and having to decide for

ourselves what was safe wasn't working." It was painful, but there was some relief at closing and taking a break from that juggle.

The shop furloughed four staff, built a website and joined bookshop.org, an Amazon alternative that sells only from independent stores. Harandon took part in local online events, and joined a Facebook group established by a neighbouring shop owner. "That's been great for a friendly hand-hold," she says, but adds: "Our high street has a nostalgic feel. People spend a day wandering. You can't replicate that online."

Across the UK, book sales [defied the pandemic to hit an eight-year high](#), as people made time for reading. But while click and collect allowed Harandon to make up for some of the sales lost to November's lockdown, the year's takings dropped by a third. "We won't make that money back, but we're excited to open again. Last time, we didn't know if people would come back, but they did. And they will again."

'It was no longer just about selling groceries. We served a purpose': [Fresh Save Fruit & Veg, Manchester](#)



Mohammed Shafiq and his son Hammaad at Freshsave greengrocery in Didsbury. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

“Before the pandemic, our biggest problem was the weather,” says greengrocer Mohammed Shafiq, 59, his store stacked floor to ceiling with produce. “If it was chucking it down, people drove to the supermarket instead.” But for a period the supermarkets couldn’t cope. “Their shelves were empty. There was panic. A local shop offered security and availability – I even started stocking toilet paper for the first time. The Saturday before lockdown, you couldn’t move in the shop.”

Shafiq, who has run the business on the 500m shopping stretch in Didsbury for 16 years, has [pulmonary fibrosis](#). “Covid was around, but restrictions weren’t. It was frightening,” he says. In the early weeks, he limited the time he spent in the store. His son, Hammaad, 22, helped run the store alongside his pharmaceutical studies. While the high street felt “eerie”, demand shot up. “People would be outside at 7.30am, waiting for us to open. It was no longer just about selling fruit and veg. We served a purpose. Our customers are our friends; I know their families, what job they do.”

Not all their neighbours did so well. “It was humbling to stay open while shopkeepers, like one of the nearby cafes that did better than us before, closed their doors. There was a sense of mutual respect, that we’d each played our part, when everyone returned.”

Across the year, their takings have more than doubled. “People were at home, cooking three meals a day. They weren’t buying lunch in the city centre, or dinner on their way home. Financially, it was the best year I’ve had.” Only Christmas was quieter than usual, with people cooking for smaller numbers.

It was the first year he hadn’t had to ask for a rent deferral, paying every month on time, and he was able to invest in the business. “Ever since I’ve been here, I’ve struggled to pay bills. Tens of thousands in rent is a lot to claw back from carrots. I bought a storage fridge and a new van. It’s been a strange but welcome boost.”

‘People sent gifts in a different way this year: in place of a hug’: [Wonder Stuff gift shop](#), Treorchy, Rhondda Valley



Alison Chapman at Wonder Stuff in Treorchy, south Wales. Photograph: Gareth Iwan Jones/The Guardian

At the start of 2020, this stretch in the former mining town of Treorchy, south Wales, was named [Britain's best high street](#). By the end of the same year, the surrounding area of Rhondda Cynon Taf had [more Covid deaths per capita than anywhere else in the UK](#).

“Most people I spoke to had either had the virus or knew someone who had it or died,” says Alison Chapman, 52, who has run her Bute Street gift shop for 20 years. “They’ve been looking for the light at the end of the tunnel – the moment they get back out and shop, work and socialise like they used to.”

Wonder Stuff (named after Chapman’s favourite alt-rock band) is staffed by her, her twin children and her mother, all furloughed in lockdown. “I had a tea room at the back, serving my mother’s cakes. People have always gathered here, and business was pretty good.”

The town fell quiet before lockdown even arrived. “By early March, there was a difference in the air. Customers began saying, ‘I don’t know when I’ll next see you.’ The week before lockdown, there was no one around. I shut early for the first time in 20 years.”

She built an online shop and introduced delivery, then click and collect. “The only reason the past year has been manageable, financially, is because I have loyal customers, and I own the building we are in.” Chapman went to her store every day, to occupy herself with small tasks. “I wanted to keep going. I’ve missed the busyness, the routine. The dark nights and uncertainty about when it would end made the winter particularly hard.”

But a busy summer, early Christmas shopping and a demand for sentimental gifts have helped her retain 80% of her trade. “People sent gifts in a different way this year: in place of a hug.”

‘I’m normally in the shop seven days a week. It was nice to have time off, a chance to reflect’: Silly Billy’s toyshop, Hebden Bridge



Bill Deakin, owner of Silly Billy’s toyshop in Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

“We’re the kind of community where everyone knows one another by name,” says Bill Deakin, whose traditional toyshop has felt the warmth of a tight-knit market town over the past year. “Shopkeepers have checked on each other in the street, or called in when they reopened last June. Like the town itself, there’s been a lot of camaraderie. People look after each other here, like the community effort in the cleanup after the floods.” Deakin’s original premises were wiped out by the [2015 floods that devastated the area](#); there was further flooding last summer.

Hebden Bridge’s Old Gate is made up almost entirely of independents. “Customers were sad to see us close. There were lots of good wishes,” says the 62-year-old, who opened the town’s only toy store in 1997. Its shelves are packed with Lego, Playmobil and the pocket-money toys popular with the town’s families and visitors. “When we reopened in the summer, locals happily turned out to support us, despite their own fears about the virus – although we suffered from people being less able to travel across county borders.”

When the pandemic hit, Deakin’s priority was staying solvent; trade halved over the year. “I squared away my finances, paid off creditors, then sat in the sun for three months and read the papers. I’m normally in the shop seven days a week. It’s been tough for many, but it was nice to have time off, a chance to reflect.”

He put his one employee on furlough and started selling online. It helped, but was no substitute for having the doors open. “In business, you’re always short- and long-term planning. Not knowing how long closures would last has been the hardest part. The government support has been a token gesture.” The decision to shut shops the week before Christmas, following a November lockdown, was a huge blow: “We usually do two-thirds of our annual takings during those months.”

But the town has recovered from testing times before. “Like everything else Hebden Bridge has been through, this is not insurmountable. I’m an eternal optimist. Running a business isn’t about luck. It’s about being able to change. Shit happens. The sun always comes out.”

‘I’m already getting orders. There are going to be a lot of weddings in a short time’: Stephanie Moran Couture bridal shop, Tadcaster



Stephanie Moran at her bridal boutique in Tadcaster, North Yorkshire.
Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

“My business has not taken a penny for over a year,” says bridal designer Moran, who has had seven custom-made white and ivory dresses hanging in her North Yorkshire shop since she closed last March. “I cried the whole way home that day.”

While other businesses found ways to adapt, the wedding industry was left with no options. “I have a WhatsApp group with the ladies who own the florist and dress agency on either side of me, and talk immediately turned to how we would manage financially. I had 12 orders for 2020, each costing upwards of £3,000. All those weddings were cancelled.

“The first thing I did was ring all my brides. It wasn’t about keeping their business. I put myself in their shoes, and they were equally concerned about me. Those conversations continued, over phone and email, all year.” All of them decided to postpone.

[‘Covid is an opportunity’: Pret a Manger’s CEO on its fight for survival](#)
[Read more](#)

Moran suffers from [Crohn’s disease](#) and shielded through the first wave. As a relatively new business, her access to government support was limited. “The money I got was purely to keep the shop. I couldn’t pay myself.” She earned a small income writing for a wedding blog, did clothes alterations, and helped out in friends’ shops that reopened while hers stayed closed. “I relied on any penny I could bring in.”

None of her brides opted for smaller weddings, as government rules on guest numbers fluctuated through the year. “I would book brides back in [for fittings] and then have to cancel them again. It was stressful and upsetting for us all. At Christmas, I made the decision not to rebook appointments until there was a clearer way out.”

It wasn’t only the income she missed. “I work with brides for more than 18 months. I get to know them and their families. Some become friends and I go to their weddings. That meaningful contact time was a big loss, emotionally.”

Big weddings with big dresses will not return before 21 June. When Moran reopens, she will be in demand. “I’m already getting new orders, as people begin to book in wedding dates for later this year. There are going to be a lot in a short space of time.

“For some wedding businesses there has been a grieving stage. Many are small like mine, and suppliers I work with have closed. My brides were so supportive. No one asked for any payments back – they even offered to continue paying instalments, although I didn’t take them up on it. Not everyone had that. I feel proud that we made it through.” □

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Retail industry

Lockdowns have cost £22bn in lost sales, say British retailers

Shops are ready with greeters and special offers to make in-person shopping an ‘experience’

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Lauren Cochrane

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Selfridges advertises its sustainability initiative, Project Earth, in 2020. Photograph: Matt Writtle

The British Retail Consortium estimated that lockdowns across 2020 cost non-essential retail [£22bn in lost sales](#). So with non-essential shops allowed

to open again on Monday after nearly four months, retailers have concocted plans to make real-life shopping trips a pastime once again.

Marks & Spencer will instigate ‘greeters’ at the doors of its stores, and contact-free bra fittings. There will be edits designed for current lifestyles, from barbecues in the garden, to working from home.

At [John Lewis](#), Beautycycle will be in place from 19 April. For every five items of beauty packaging returned, customers will get £10 off their next beauty purchase until the end of April.

Gap will be offering free masks with a purchase to those with their Gap+ app, and Primark will be open two more hours every day next week.

Other retailers are taking a playful approach. River Island, which will launch stores in Coventry and Swindon next week, has a “shop like it’s 2019” campaign; one sign in store says “In 2019 pyjamas were not acceptable work attire”. Anyone who makes a purchase in April will receive a voucher for 20.19% off their next purchase.

“Shopping again will feel both novel and nostalgic,” says River Island’s chief executive, Will Kernan. “We think 12th April may prove quite poignant for a lot of shoppers.”

Saisangeeth Daswani, the head of advisory for fashion and beauty at the trends agency Stylus, predicts a flood of shoppers initially. “There’s this huge sentiment of consumers feeling very fed up,” she says. “I just think everything is going to be very anti-domestic moving forward.”

“Experience”, a way to bring back the shopping trip and make retail part of a day out, is a buzzword. “Consumers have shopped from home for a long time now, they have really experienced the convenience,” says Daswani. “There needs to be a really compelling reason for them to get dressed up, and take transportation to the store.”

At Selfridges there will be SoulCycle classes, live DJ sets and a new concession from the athleisure brand Pangaia. There will also be an

“experience concierge” to arrange everything from skateboarding classes to beauty treatments.

“It’s our job to make the world brighter,” says Sebastian Manes, the executive buying and merchandising director. “For us, it all starts with the joy of experience and the extraordinary experiences we can offer in Selfridges stores in the heart of our cities.”

Restrictions will still be in place: masks remain mandatory, and shoppers can only shop alone, with their household or in their support bubble.

Most stores will now have fitting rooms open, although M&S and Primark will not reopen theirs next week.

Trying on will take longer, with fewer customers admitted to preserve social distancing. Stores predict customers will brave the queues in pursuit of items such as a well-fitting pair of jeans or a bra.

Instore technology will also be more convenient and up to date. John Lewis has increased its contactless payment limit from £30 to £45, and M&S will add its Pay With Me service to lingerie, meaning people can buy women’s underwear straight after trying it on, rather than heading to a till. Customers can also book a time slot to avoid queues.

M&S’s stores director, Helen Milford, predicts the uplift in online shoppers will remain but may be supplemented by physical stores.

“It all depends on people’s lifestyles now doesn’t it?” she says. “I think we’ll see the blend online and instore continuing.”

Kernan agrees. “A high street shopping spree one week, a quick purchase online the next is fine with us,” he says. “We want to make it easy for customers to enjoy our fashion wherever and whenever they choose.”

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- Science finally admits that it's a myth that we fall off a fertility cliff at 35
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[Opinion](#) **Coronavirus**

Are Covid passports a threat to liberty? It depends on how you define freedom

[Maria Alvarez](#)

The pandemic is once again causing governments to pit incompatible ideas of freedom against each other



Conceptual design of possible UK Covid vaccination passport. ‘Covid passports are reminiscent of compulsory ID cards, the absence of which many regard as a hallmark of British freedoms.’ Photograph: Iain Masterton/Alamy

Conceptual design of possible UK Covid vaccination passport. ‘Covid passports are reminiscent of compulsory ID cards, the absence of which many regard as a hallmark of British freedoms.’ Photograph: Iain Masterton/Alamy

Sat 10 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

Now that the UK's vaccination programme is beginning to offer an escape route out of lockdown restrictions, despite some hitches, attention is focusing on so-called [domestic vaccine passports](#). [Important details](#) remain uncertain but the idea has already [been criticised](#) as potentially “divisive and discriminatory”, as well as going against “British instinct” – presumably because Covid passports are reminiscent of compulsory ID cards, the absence of which many regard as a hallmark of British liberty. The desire for freedom is, of course, pretty universal – but there are many, and incompatible, ideas of freedom.

The British philosopher Isaiah Berlin famously distinguished two from more than 200 senses of the word he claimed had been recorded by historians of ideas: “negative liberty”, or freedom from interference; and “positive liberty”, or freedom understood as self-mastery and self-determination. The former ensures that others don't hinder your choices, while the latter aims to create conditions that give you options and make your choices truly yours and genuinely free.

Although they may seem like two sides of a coin, Berlin was suspicious of the idea of positive liberty, especially as a social or political aim. He argued that, historically, it had tended to spawn oppressive institutions and regimes: through twisted reasoning, these regimes ended up justifying not merely the suppression of most negative liberties but even arbitrary incarceration, killings and torture as lesser evils needed to bring about true individual or collective liberation.

Berlin was right about the dangers of distorted ideas of positive liberty. But it would be a mistake to conclude, as some libertarians do, that we could or should think about political freedom without it. The value of negative liberty, of freedom from interference is, at least partly, that it allows me to choose for myself the projects, relationships and pursuits that will shape my life. But if lack of access to education, healthcare and so on means that I don't really have any worthwhile alternatives to pursue, negative liberty alone surely isn't worth having.

Negative liberty is freedom from the kinds of interference that – by whatever means – prevent or compel action. Having it doesn't mean that you are free to do whatever you want, however unimpeachable. Your lack of talent may

prevent you from becoming a great singer. But when *others* coerce you to do things or not to do things, then they curtail your negative liberty. And that is precisely what governments everywhere, and in many cases to an extraordinary degree, have done during the current pandemic.

Often using emergency legislation, they have imposed curfews and lockdowns of varying stringency that interfere with freedom of movement and of association in every aspect of life: from family and friendship to work and religious practices. They have impeded or restricted access to trade and commerce, as well as entertainment, culture and sports. They have mandated the use of face coverings. Lockdown and related measures haven't taken away our *ability* to do all the things that constitute ordinary life but have deprived us of the opportunities to do them, whether by the threat of sanctions or by active prevention. Some people have questioned whether this massive curtailment of negative liberty is justified.

More than 160 years ago John Stuart Mill argued that in a "civilised community", the only justification for government coercion is the prevention of harm to others. In the UK, and many other countries, long before Covid, coercive state measures, from taxes to car seatbelts, were pervasive and accepted on grounds that go beyond Mill's justification, or at least involve a very broad interpretation of his harm principle. The extensions include harm to oneself, justified possibly on the grounds that where there is a welfare state, certain harms to yourself indirectly harm others – and the idea that harm can be caused by omission as well as by commission. And freedom from interference is often sacrificed for the sake of other values, such as equality, prosperity, fairness and security – which may in turn enhance positive liberty. But coercive lockdown and related Covid measures can be justified on Mill's terms – the prevention of harm to others – without much stretching. Of course, in some countries, the situation has been opportunistically exploited to concentrate unchecked power in the government, and for the long term. But in most, including the UK, measures are confined to reducing the spread of the virus, thus preventing many more deaths and acute cases, and the ensuing collapse of health services.

Some have questioned whether the restrictions have been proportionate, given the demographic of actual and potential deaths, the long-term costs to the economy, which will affect the young disproportionately, and to the

physical and mental health of the whole population – to say nothing of future burdens building up for health services. Those are important considerations but it matters that the Covid threat is, by the consensus of experts, grave, credible and imminent.

No doubt there have been mistakes, inconsistencies and exaggerations in the details in different places, some due to unavoidable ignorance or uncertainty, others to ineptitude, political expedience and opportunism. The proper assessment of these will take time, and the assembly and analysis of much complex information. It is currently far from clear how Covid domestic passports could help achieve significant protective aims. If it turns out that they can, measures to mitigate risks of unfairness or invasions of privacy will be needed. Are they, in themselves, a threat to freedom? It is hard to see why – but perhaps it depends on which of those 200 concepts one has in mind.

- Maria Alvarez is professor of philosophy at King's College London. She works on agency, choice and moral responsibility

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[The Week in Patriarchy](#)Women

Science finally admits that it's a myth that we fall off a fertility cliff at 35

[Arwa Mahdawi](#)



A new study has extended women's reproductive life spans to 37.1 but the earlier figure was always arbitrary and unscientific



Women in the 30s have now been granted another couple of years before being considered ‘geriatric mothers’ by doctors. Photograph: sot/Getty Images

Women in the 30s have now been granted another couple of years before being considered ‘geriatric mothers’ by doctors. Photograph: sot/Getty Images

Sat 10 Apr 2021 00.00 EDT

Sign up for the Week in Patriarchy, a newsletter on feminism and sexism sent every Saturday.

You might want to adjust your biological clock

Good news, ladies! We’ve officially been granted two more years of useful life. According to a new study published in the [Journal of the American Medical Association](#), the reproductive years for women in the United States increased from [age 35 to 37.1](#). The study looked at 60-year trends in reproductive life spans and found that the average of menopause had gone up, while the average of the first period had gone down.

This study obviously doesn’t mean that having a kid after the age of 35 is a breeze. However, I really hope it prompts us to stop treating 35 like it’s

some kind of fertility cliff. Hit that magic number and you're officially described as being of "advanced maternal age" or a "geriatric mother". You're given dire warnings about how hard it will be to get pregnant and all the problems you and your baby might face if you do. Your pregnancy is immediately labelled "high-risk" and subject to extra monitoring. Trying to get pregnant after 35 is a process that is often shrouded in stress and judgment.

[The sleazy Matt Gaetz saga grows ever more disturbing.](#) | [Arwa Mahdawi](#)
[Read more](#)

The quality of your eggs declines over time, that's very clear, but the current obsession with the age 35 as a fertility threshold is [outdated](#) and unscientific. Take, for example, the often-cited statistic that one in three women aged 35-39 will not be pregnant after a year of trying. Want to know where that statistic from? [Data from 1700s France](#). Researchers looked a bunch of church birth records from people whose life expectancy at the time was around 30, and came up with these statistics. One imagines the researchers would have been ridiculed in any other scenario. However, since this statistic serves the very useful purpose of shaming and scaring women it was parroted endlessly. There is, by the way, more modern – and significantly more cheering – data to hand. One study [published in 2004](#) that looked at 770 European women found that, with sex at least twice a week, 78% of women aged 35 to 40 conceived within a year, compared with 84% of women aged 20 to 34. [The Atlantic](#) notes that these encouraging figures were left out of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine's (ASRM) 2008 committee opinion on female age and fertility, which instead relied on "the most-ominous historical data". A few years later the ASRM also launched a [controversial ad campaign](#) reminding people that "women in their twenties and early thirties are most likely to conceive."

Our current obsession with the age 35 being a fertility cliff isn't just unscientific, it's unhelpful. As an obstetrician-gynecologist recently wrote in [Slate](#): "this monolithic thinking creates stress and a stigma." Because doctors use this cut-off point to guide the care of patients, you get a barrage of sometimes unnecessary extra testing and treatment once you're over 35. This often results in a "care cascade" that can do more harm than good.

You know who isn't treated as over-the-hill the moment they reach 35? Men. There still seems to be a pervasive idea that men don't have biological clocks and can become a dad at any age. However, I'm afraid sperm doesn't exactly age like a fine wine; sperm quality declines as men get older. Studies have shown that babies born to older fathers have been found to have an increased likelihood of health issues, psychiatric problems and cognitive disorders. Men can be solely responsible for 20-30% of infertility cases and contribute to 50% cases overall according to [one study](#). You don't get many men in their 30s stressing about freezing their sperm to preserve its quality though, do you?

I'm not trying to suggest we shame men for waiting "too long" to have a kid, by the way. It's just time we stop shaming women. If organizations like the ASRM want women to have kids earlier in life, then the focus should be on making parenthood more affordable, not on fearmongering ad campaigns. And instead of making women the culprits for infertility, we ought to be shaming the plastics industry. It's been posited that one reason [infertility rates are rising](#) is the fact that we're all consuming the equivalent of a [credit card's worth of plastic](#) every week. Fertility is complicated; it's affected by multiple things and is different for every individual. But let's just fixate on the age 35 shall we?

Utah is making men pay half of the pregnancy costs

Dads-to-be now have to pay [half the cost of a mother's medical care](#) related to pregnancy and delivery. It's the first law of its kind in the US. You know what would be better? Having universal healthcare, so that having a baby isn't [so damn expensive](#).

Pakistani PM blames rape on how women dress

There has been a rise in rape cases in Pakistan. According to the [prime minister, Imran Khan](#), this is a natural consequence in "any society where vulgarity is on the rise". His comments have incensed anyone with a brain.

Polish teen's fake beauty site helps domestic abuse victims

Domestic violence [surged during lockdown](#). In response, 18-year-old Krysia Paszko set up a website that [looked like it was selling cosmetics](#) but was actually covertly offering victims help. “I was inspired by this French idea, where by going to the pharmacy and asking for the number 19 mask, you could signal that you were a victim of abuse,” she told AFP.

Tishaura Jones elected St Louis's first black female mayor

A [historic win](#), hot on the heels of another historic win. Last year in Ferguson, Missouri, 10 miles from St Louis, [Etta Jones](#) was elected as the first Black and first female mayor.

Meet the women who really, really like meat

A Facebook group called the Women Carnivore Tribe has 27,000 members. Some of them reckon a carnivorous diet [goes against gendered stereotypes](#). Personally, I'm not entirely convinced that eating steak is a constructive way to Do Feminism.

An interview with the man who keeps uploading a journalist's feet to wikiFeet

I had no idea what wikiFeet was before I read this [disturbing_\(but also brilliant\)_piece](#) and my life was better for it.

The week in pain-triarchy

A Texas woman who had the world's longest nails – at one stage they were nearly 19 feet long – has finally [cut them after 30 years](#). Seems like a painful and disgusting way to get your name in the history books, but to each their own.

[Hadley Freeman's Weekend column](#)Life and style

A rich New York playboy with a famous surname – what if JFK Jr had lived?

[Hadley Freeman](#)



He and his wife, Carolyn Bessette, endured the cruelty of the press long before Harry and Meghan



John F Kennedy Jr and Carolyn Bessette Kennedy in March 1999. They died in a plane crash four months later. Photograph: Arnaldo Magnani/Getty Images

John F Kennedy Jr and Carolyn Bessette Kennedy in March 1999. They died in a plane crash four months later. Photograph: Arnaldo Magnani/Getty Images

Sat 10 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

Because I've been watching a lot of 90s sitcoms recently, I've been thinking about John F Kennedy Jr. [Seinfeld](#), [Sex And The City](#), [Murphy Brown](#): his name pops up in them all. It will be 22 years this summer since he died, so a lot of people have forgotten what a big deal he was back then, especially in New York. But John-John, as his parents and the media teasingly called him, remains the closest thing America will probably ever have to a prince. When his plane crashed, only two years after the death of Princess Diana, it really did feel like the cruellest fairytale: the fairest prince and princess in all the lands would not make old bones.

I have always been fascinated by Kennedy, the boy who, aged three, [saluted his murdered father's coffin](#), and then grew up to become America's most gilded of youths. That surplus of handsomeness, that burdensome name, his efforts to live up to his mother's high standards while skating around the

familial whirlpool pull of politics. The media were never sure whether to sneer or swoon, so they did both, epitomised in the headline after he failed the New York bar exam twice: “The Hunk Flunks.” He had every privilege God could bestow on a man, but had to contend with the sting of his mother’s disapproval of both his career choices (acting, founding the magazine *George*) and his girlfriends ([Daryl Hannah](#)). He was a Shakespearean character in the body of a Ken doll.

Kennedy has so far been overlooked in the current trend for 90s revisionism, in which we look back at the way we treated celebrities then (badly). This is surprising, especially with all the current focus on Harry and Meghan, and the personal and public pressure they feel, and the cruelty of the press towards them. Well, let me introduce you to Kennedy and his late wife, Carolyn Bessette, who lived all that and more.

Kennedy often spoke about the stresses endured by any woman photographed with him. These pressures were embodied by his wife; photos of Bessette, looking haunted and hunted, clutching her Calvin Klein coat protectively around her while the press pack chased behind, became as much a staple of the 90s New York tabloids as gossip about who Jerry Seinfeld was dating. Kennedy had found, somehow, a woman as beautiful as he was, who managed to make even the dreariest of clothes – beige skirts, small sunglasses – look absurdly elegant. Yet she hated the attention that came with being a Kennedy, and who could blame her? On 16 July 1999, they lived out the most Kennedy destiny of all, dying young when he crashed the plane they were flying in, with Bessette’s sister Lauren, en route to a cousin’s wedding. I watched the news coverage the next day, and the only positive thing anyone could say was, “Thank God his mother didn’t live to see this.”

Hearing his name ring through the 90s TV shows, far more so than that of any other celebrity of that era, it’s impossible not to wonder what he would have done with his life had he not been doubly cursed with so much money he could buy a plane and that absurd Kennedy confidence that [told him](#) he could fly it at night despite not having a full licence. Other names from the same period have taken unexpected paths: Seinfeld is now a near billionaire, Monica Lewinsky is an activist. And then there’s someone else.

[My sons ask if a man has ever hurt me. Not really, I lie | Hadley Freeman](#)
[Read more](#)

Two years ago, Q Anon types [were adamant](#) that Kennedy would emerge from hiding and be Donald Trump's VP pick for the 2020 election. Spoiler: didn't happen. But – and I swear this is the only time you'll hear this phrase from me – Q Anon were on to something here. Kennedy and Trump are each other's yin and yang, two sides to a very New York coin, blessed with absurd opportunities because of their families. The 2016 election will never make any sense to me, but maybe, I now think, my brain softened from a year of lockdown, it was always meant to be that a telegenic quasi-celebrity with a famous name would win the presidency that year. It's just that we got the wrong one.

I have a weakness for alternative histories that play on the idea of fixing a past wrong: Quentin Tarantino's fantasy about saving Sharon Tate in [Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood](#); or Doctor Who showing Vincent van Gogh [how beloved he would one day be](#). Preventing the Kennedy Sr assassination is the ultimate alt-history fantasy, because his murder has long been seen by many as a downward turning point in American history, a theory mined by Stephen King's novel [11/22/63](#). The Kennedy family will, to Americans, always represent a golden promise that was never realised. And what else is there to do, when you've run out of Seinfelds and can't yet go to the pub, when the present feels so much bleaker than the bright future you were promised in the past, but to sit on the sofa and think: what if, what if, what if? □

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[Opinion](#)**Housing**

Landlord power is not just bad for tenants. It harms homeowners, too

[David Renton](#)

Buy-to-let landlords hoarding properties harms the whole system. Labour would benefit from explaining this to voters



Properties to let in Selly Oak, Birmingham. Photograph: Paul Weston/Alamy Stock Photo

Properties to let in Selly Oak, Birmingham. Photograph: Paul Weston/Alamy Stock Photo

Sat 10 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

“If only under-30s [voted],” wrote the architectural historian and activist [Owen Hatherley](#), reflecting on the results of the 2019 election, “there would be no Conservative MPs anywhere in Britain.” But, if only the over-70s voted, “there would be Tory MPs in every constituency apart from south

Wales, Merseyside, the city of Manchester and inner London”. The story of British electoral politics over the past decade has been defined by the seeming replacement of class by age as the best indicator of how people vote.

The most striking explanation of why younger voters tilt so hard to the left (and older voters so hard to the right) is our system of home ownership. Housing, particularly in the populous south, is exorbitantly expensive and England’s social housing stock is at a [70-year low](#). All our lives are also shaped by the legacy of the Conservatives’ signature housing policy, [right to buy](#).

From the perspective of “generation rent”, high house prices have meant the disappearance of the prospect of ever buying their own home, and a reliance on renting in the private sector, which takes up a far higher proportion of their incomes than their parents ever had to pay. It is not surprising that they have consistently voted for leftwing candidates. Among private renters, Labour’s poll lead over the Conservatives rose from 11 percentage points to a staggering [23 percentage points](#) between 2015 and 2017. But in the same elections older voters who owned their own homes calculated that they had little to gain. What Labour seemed to offer, through policies of more social housing and greater rights for renters, was a fall in house prices: a diminution of their capital and security in retirement.

It might, therefore, look like the political age gap is unassailable. But this doesn’t have to be the case: in 2019, [Labour](#) could have had more success if its supporters had been clearer in grasping – and showing voters – that while tenants and landlords have competing interests, the same is not necessarily true of tenants and homeowners.

[How do we fix the UK housing crisis?](#)

[Read more](#)

For some time, it has been government policy to privilege the interests of private landlords over other homeowners. This process began in the mid-1990s when banks introduced buy-to-let mortgages, which assessed buyers’ creditworthiness on the rental yield from the property, rather than their

existing income. Easy finance gave landlords an advantage over first-time buyers.

Buy-to-let landlords have also enjoyed tax relief: mortgage interest relief, and a wear-and-tear allowance. The tax breaks have diminished in comparison to what they once were, but the [broad picture remains the same](#). Although the UK's 2.5 million landlords are a small minority, because the market has been loaded in their favour, they were responsible for [18% of all residential property purchases](#) by the end of 2019.

Now let's consider the situation for older homeowners who aren't landlords. Hundreds of thousands of them save money in their 70s or beyond, long after retirement, not because they want to have an extravagant lifestyle but for the sake of the generations who come after them. If their plan is to help their children buy a house then rising house prices are of no benefit – it obliges them to save more, as ever more money is going to be needed to provide a deposit for their children's first home.

For these people, the benefit of high house prices never materialises (they aren't planning to sell their own home), but the cost to their family is only too real. It compels the younger members of their family to live in cramped housing, to have less money than they should, and to spend their days working excessive hours so that they have no time for older relatives.

What the left needs to do is to get people to see that the obstacle to housing justice is not individual home ownership. The problem is the near-monopoly advantage owned by those landlords who have hoarded dozens or, in some cases, hundreds of homes. Their power needs to be broken – not just for the sake of tenants, but for the sake of individual homeowners who want the generation below to find a home of its own.

There are solutions. Take the idea of long-term renters in the private market establishing a right to buy the home in which they live. How is the policy likely to look to older homeowners? If it was directed at the single homeowner who split a two-storey house in half and rented out one floor of it, many other homeowners would find the idea objectionable.

But imagine if it was targeted at landlords owning a minimum of five properties (there are enough landlords in that position for it to make a difference). When someone is hoarding five homes, why shouldn't they be forced to allow others to have a chance of owning their own homes, not to seek profit but to simply live there?

Politicians need to be brave enough to explain to voters that the hoarding of properties by commercial landlords doesn't just hurt young renters but many homeowners too. A Labour party that forges a cross-generational alliance on this basis could reap serious rewards.

- David Renton is a campaigner and barrister. His book, *Jobs and Homes: Stories of the Law in the Lockdown* is published by [Legal Action Group](#)

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/apr/10/landlord-power-homeowners-tenants-buy-to-let-property-labour>

2021.04.10 - Around the world

- [St Vincent Island rocked by explosive eruption of La Soufrière volcano](#)
- [Portugal Former prime minister Sócrates to stand trial for money laundering](#)
- [US Biden orders commission to study supreme court expansion and reform](#)
- [Cyclone Seroja aftermath 'I prayed and prayed in the dark'](#)
- [Russia Kremlin defends military buildup on Ukraine border](#)

[St Vincent and the Grenadines](#)

St Vincent rocked by explosive eruptions at La Soufrière volcano

National Emergency Management Organisation warned residents to leave and said ash plume had reached 20,000ft

01:18

St Vincent rocked by explosive eruptions of La Soufrière volcano – video report

[*Martin Hodgson*](#)

Fri 9 Apr 2021 15.06 EDT

The [Caribbean](#) island of St Vincent has been rocked by a string of explosive eruptions at La Soufrière volcano, which spewed clouds of ash miles into the air a day and forced thousands to flee for safety.

[Saint Vincent orders evacuations as volcanic eruption appears imminent](#)
[Read more](#)

The country's National Emergency Management Organisation (Nemo) confirmed on Twitter that [the 4,049-foot volcano had erupted](#) on Friday morning and warned residents to leave the surrounding areas.

Pictures shared on social media showed towering plumes of gas and volcanic matter billowing into the sky above the volcano, and heavy ash fall was reported in the surrounding areas.

“The majesty that is [La Soufrière](#) is awake in all her terrifying glory,” [tweeted](#) Heidi Badenock, a lawyer on the island.

Nemo said that the ash plume from the first eruption reached 20,000ft and was drifting eastwards into the Atlantic Ocean.

Two more explosive eruptions on Friday afternoon spewed more clouds of ash and dust into the air.



The eruption occurred a day after a red alert was declared. Photograph: UWI Seismic Research Centre

There were no immediate reports of casualties.

The prime minister, Ralph Gonsalves, [issued a mandatory evacuation order on Thursday for about 1,600 people living in the northern part of the island.](#)

Evacuations continued on Friday, although Nemo tweeted that heavy ash fall had complicated the process as visibility was “extremely poor”.

Footage posted on social media showed evacuees with suitcases and bags trudging through streets carpeted with thick grey ash. Other videos showed palm trees and tin-roofed houses coated with ash.

Four cruise ships are expected to reach the island on Friday – two from Royal [Caribbean](#), and two from Carnival Cruise Line – to ferry evacuees to nearby islands or shelters elsewhere in St Vincent.

A third Royal Caribbean ship is expected to arrive in the coming days.


Gonsalves said in a press conference that evacuees will need to be vaccinated for Covid-19 before they are allowed to board a cruise ship or are granted temporary refuge in another island.


Islands that have said they would accept evacuees include St Lucia, Grenada, Barbados and Antigua.

“We are one Caribbean family,” said Gonsalves, wiping tears from his eyes. “Together we will do this well.”

About 2,000 people are staying at 20 shelters across the island, Gonsalves said.

My team and I have been working all day to set up some IMMEDIATE HELP for those in need. From tomorrow we will be working with shelters to get emergency supplies to those in need.

Pls share and donate where possible. [#LaSoufriere](#) [#prayforsvg](#) [#VolcanicEruption2021](#)  pic.twitter.com/IcPiaTGKNa

— Pray for Vincy  (@Rachie784) [April 9, 2021](#)

“Not everything is going to go perfect, but if we all cooperate ... we will come through this stronger than ever,” he said. “This is an emergency situation, and everybody understands that.”

Philmore Mullin, director of Antigua & Barbuda’s National Office of Disaster Services, told AFP the twin island nation was ready to receive evacuees from Saint Vincent.

“I know for sure they will be scared out of their wits. The question is, what will happen after they move? [Volcanoes](#) don’t tell you what they are thinking,” said Mullin.

“If it continues to erupt for a long time it will be life-changing for them. And, depending on the type of eruption, they might not be able to get back home for years.”

La Soufrière [last erupted in 1979](#), and a previous eruption in 1902 killed about 1,600 people. That occurred shortly before Martinique's Mt Pelée erupted and destroyed the town of Saint-Pierre, [killing more than 30,000 people](#).

La Soufriere Volcano erupted the second Friday in April (Friday April 13) in 1979. Four days shy of its anniversary it has again erupted on the second Friday in April (9) in 2021 [#LaSoufriereeruption2021](#) #

— NEMO SVG (@NEMOSVG) [April 9, 2021](#)

Scientists warned in December that [La Soufrière had become more active than it had been for years](#), with monitors reporting tremors, gas emissions, the formation of a new volcanic dome and changes to its crater lake.

Mt Pelée is now active once again. In early December, officials in the French Caribbean territory issued a yellow alert due to seismic activity – the first such alert since the volcano last erupted in 1932.

The Associated Press and AFP contributed to this report

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Portugal

Former Portuguese prime minister Sócrates to stand trial for money laundering

But judge rules that ex-premier does not have to face corruption charges



Former Portuguese prime minister José Sócrates arrives for court hearing in Lisbon. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Former Portuguese prime minister José Sócrates arrives for court hearing in Lisbon. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Agence France-Presse

Fri 9 Apr 2021 17.02 EDT

A Portuguese court has cleared the way for former prime minister José Sócrates to stand trial for money laundering and falsifying documents, but cleared him of corruption charges in the years-long case.

Sócrates is accused of pocketing €34m from three companies while he was in power between 2005 and 2011, but the ex-prime minister has maintained his innocence.

He is alleged to have concealed funds with the complicity of businessman and longtime friend Carlos Santos Silva.

The decision to drop corruption charges was a blow to prosecutors, who had accused a total of 19 people and nine companies of 189 crimes, a move that had sparked an uproar in [Portugal](#).

Investigating judge Ivo Rosa ultimately held up only a dozen charges as he read out a summary of his decision over the course of more than three hours, carried live on television.

Prosecutors are allowed to appeal. A trial date has not yet been set.

“All the prosecution’s big lies have fallen apart,” Sócrates said as he left the court in Lisbon, pledging to continue to fight to prove his innocence.

Besides Sócrates and Santos Silva, former banker Ricardo Salgado faces three accusations of breach of trust and ex-minister Armando Vara will be tried for money laundering.

Rosa dismantled many of the prosecutors’ conclusions almost point-by-point, speaking at time of an “absence of evidence” and “lack of rigour”.

Regarding the bribes Sócrates allegedly received from Salgado, the former head of Banco Espírito Santo, the judge said the evidence was “manifestly insufficient to support his conviction for any form of passive corruption”.

The accusations against Sócrates have served as an embarrassment for current prime minister Antonio Costa, a member of the first of his two governments.

Shortly before the hearing, Costa reiterated he had “nothing to add” since the scandal erupted with the arrest of Socrates in November 2014.

The arrest came as Costa was taking the reins of the Socialist party and calling on supporters not to confuse its interests with those of its former leader.

At the time, Sócrates' image had [already been tarnished](#) by his management of Portugal's debt crisis, which in 2011 prompted him to seek international financial assistance to avoid the country's bankruptcy, enabling the right to rise to power. Sócrates, who was placed in pre-trial detention for nine months, then under house arrest before being released six weeks later, said he was the victim of a "smear campaign".

But he admitted in interviews that he regularly borrowed money from his friend Santos Silva, a relationship he will probably be called upon to clarify during his trial.

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US politics

Biden orders commission to study supreme court expansion and reform

- Executive order fulfils campaign pledge to examine court reform
- Biden has not said if he favors expanding nine-justice court



Joe Biden's executive order directs the commission to complete its report within 180 days of its first meeting. Photograph: Andrew Harnik/AP

Joe Biden's executive order directs the commission to complete its report within 180 days of its first meeting. Photograph: Andrew Harnik/AP

[*Lauren Gambino*](#) in Washington and agencies

[@laurenegambino](#)

Fri 9 Apr 2021 15.05 EDT

Joe Biden on Friday ordered a study of adding seats to the supreme court, creating a bipartisan 36-member commission that will spend the next six

months examining the politically incendiary issues of expanding the court and instituting term limits for its justices.

The executive order fulfills a campaign promise to examine court reform, including expanding the number of justices or setting term-limits, amid growing calls from progressive activists to realign the supreme court after its composition tilted sharply to the right during Donald Trump's presidency. Biden has not said whether he supports expanding the court, also known as "court packing".

[Amy Coney Barrett confirmed to supreme court in major victory for US conservatives](#)

[Read more](#)

Trump appointed [three justices](#) to the high court. One was a seat that Republicans had blocked Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama, from filling. Despite arguing in 2016 that the seat should be filled by winner of the year's presidential election, [Republicans](#) rushed to fill the supreme court seat vacated by death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg just weeks before the 2020 election.

The result was [one of the most ideologically conservative courts in modern times](#).

Biden's executive order directs the commission to complete its report within 180 days of its first meeting. But it was not charged with making a recommendation under the White House order that created it.

The panel is composed of a "bipartisan group of experts" that includes constitutional and legal scholars; former federal judges; practitioners who have appeared before the court as well as reform advocates.

The commission co-chairs are Bob Bauer, professor of practice and distinguished scholar in residence at New York University School of Law and a former White House counsel for Obama, as well as the Yale Law School professor Cristina Rodriguez, former deputy assistant attorney general in the office of legal counsel at the US Department of Justice under Obama.

The commission will hold public meetings appraising the “merits and legality of particular reform proposals”, according to the White House.

The announcement comes after the supreme court justice Stephen Breyer [warned](#) this week that efforts to expand the court could erode public “trust that the court is guided by legal principle, not politics”.

The remarks by Breyer, 82, the court’s oldest justice and a member of its minority liberal bloc, prompted calls for his resignation from reform advocates while Democrats still control the Senate and the confirmation process. Demand Justice, a progressive group focused on the supreme court, started an online petition calling for his retirement.

“Tell Justice Breyer: put the country first. Don’t risk your legacy to an uncertain political future. Retire now,” the petition states.

If an opening should arise, Biden has promised to appoint the nation’s first ever Black female justice.

On Friday, the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, told reporters that Biden was not pushing for Breyer to retire.

“He believes that’s a decision Justice Breyer will make when he decides it’s time to no longer serve on the supreme court,” she said.

During his presidential campaign, Biden repeatedly sidestepped questions on expanding the court. A former chair of the Senate judiciary committee, Biden has asserted that the system of judicial nominations is “getting out of whack”, but has not said if he supports adding seats or making other changes to the current system of lifetime appointments, such as imposing term limits.

The size of the court has been set at nine members since just after the civil war. Any effort to alter it would be explosive, particularly at a moment when Congress is nearly evenly divided. Changing the number of justices would require congressional approval.

“With five justices appointed by presidents who lost the popular vote, it’s crucial that we consider every option for wresting back political control of

the supreme court,” said Nan Aron, president of the Alliance for Justice, a liberal judicial advocacy group.

“President Biden’s commission demonstrates a strong commitment to studying this situation and taking action.”

Associated Press contributed to this report

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[Indonesia](#)

Cyclone Seroja aftermath: ‘I prayed and prayed in the dark’

In Kupang, Indonesia, residents wait for aid after torrential rain, destructive winds and flooding forced thousands into shelters



People look for salvageable items amid debris in Kupang port, East Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia after Tropical Cyclone Seroja. Photograph: Armin Septiexan/AP

People look for salvageable items amid debris in Kupang port, East Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia after Tropical Cyclone Seroja. Photograph: Armin Septiexan/AP

[Febriana Firdaus](#) in Bali

Sat 10 Apr 2021 01.42 EDT

On Sunday at midnight, Linda Tagie, 29, rested her three-year-old baby on the bed. Linda, who lives together with her husband, 79-year-old mother-in-

law and only child in Sikumana, Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara province of [Indonesia](#), was shocked by a strong wind and heavy rain. The electricity suddenly went off.

“I prayed and prayed in the dark,” she said. The wind eventually stopped on Monday morning. She walked out of the house and found the roof gone from the back part of the house. “Electricity cables, tin roofs, and trees lie on the street in front of our house,” she said.

The rooftop of her neighbour, Yetti Lekeama, was also gone. “I didn’t know what to do and where to go. It’s completely dark. But I could hear the sound of the rooftop flying over my house, and breaking wood.”

[Death toll in Indonesia and Timor-Leste from catastrophic floods rises to 157](#)

[Read more](#)

Linda and Yetti preferred to stay at home while many Kupang citizens sought evacuation, their residences flattened by Tropical Cyclone Seroja, which hit the island of Timor and damaged thousands of houses. Many village roads were blocked by mud and fallen trees, preventing rescuers and volunteers from getting in.

Indonesia’s disaster agency, the BNPB, said 138 people were killed, with dozens more missing and thousands evacuated.

The Indonesian Forum for Environment, known as Walhi, [said](#) that while the province was prone to storms and high rainfall, environmental problems exacerbated the damage as land clearing, sugarcane plantations, mining, and illegal logging expanded.

“Landslides cut many roads,” said Dicky Senda, a food activist based in Mollo, the northern part of the province. He travelled from his village to central Kupang a day after the disaster. “I saw houses without a rooftop, dead cow carcasses lying on the street, and the rice field flooded.”

Evacuations underway after floods kill dozens in Indonesia and Timor-Leste – video

Arriving in Kupang city, Dicky described the situation: “A huge queue in the automatic teller machine, gasoline stop, and government office – they were looking to charge their phone.”

In Kupang the cyclone forced residents, most of them women, children, and elders, to stay in dire condition in 19 evacuation camps, half of them located in churches.

Priestess Linda Angga Kisek from the Protestant church in Oebufu, Kupang, said the community set up a camp for hundreds of citizens. “About 38 householders who lived in the nearby Liliba river lost their home, the house completely flattened by the flood. We are trying to relocate them to a new location or find them a boarding house.”

Affected residents have called for the local government to help them rebuild. President Joko Widodo, who visited the province on Friday, promised aid for affected residents to repair their homes. With food running short and crops damaged, Tata Yunita, a volunteer said there was panic-buying in the shops.

The disaster agency said 15 tonnes of aid [had arrived in Kupang](#) for distribution. However, Linda and Yetti, who survived by eating instant noodles and harvesting vegetables from their garden, said they were yet to receive any aid. Residents’ electricity and internet were cut by the cyclone, leaving them unable to contact family.

The state electricity company said the cyclone had damaged utility poles and network cables, and restoring the province’s electricity could take a month. As a result, candles and electricity generators were sold out.

While residents worry about food and electricity shortages, they face another problem: burglaries. “While women and children stay at the churches, men decide to return to save their house from burglars,” said Yunita.

Linda said that she would survive but worried that many of her neighbours would need more help. “I hope that the government will collect the data

correctly. That could be a good strategy. So those people who have no decent income or job, widows, widowers, people who live alone, can get the assistance immediately.”

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Russia

Kremlin defends Russian military buildup on Ukraine border

Intelligence reports show Russian tanks and short-range ballistic missiles just 150 miles from Ukraine



Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy visited the frontlines on Thursday, saying: ‘I want to be with our soldiers in the tough times in Donbas’

Photograph: UKRAINIAN PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SER/AFP/Getty Images

Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy visited the frontlines on Thursday, saying: ‘I want to be with our soldiers in the tough times in Donbas’

Photograph: UKRAINIAN PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SER/AFP/Getty Images

[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow

Fri 9 Apr 2021 12.20 EDT

Kremlin officials have said that its forces massing on the border with Ukraine could intervene if Kyiv launches an assault on Russian-backed separatists, as concerns grow about the [largest military buildup](#) since 2014.

Open source intelligence reports have shown that tanks, rocket artillery, and short-range ballistic missiles have been transported to just 150 miles from [Ukraine](#), where Russia has established a large new military staging area.

Kremlin press secretary Dmitry Peskov on Friday defended the Russian military buildup, calling the border region a “powder keg” and saying that [Russia](#) “will not stand aside” if it believes hostilities could lead to “mass civilian casualties”.

Those followed remarks by Dmitry Kozak, Putin’s deputy chief of staff, who said one day earlier that Moscow could “come to the defence” of its citizens in Russian-backed separatist territories – where it has issued more than 650,000 passports since 2019 – if Kyiv tries to retake its territory.

Two dozen Ukrainian servicemen have been killed on the frontlines of the conflict this year, including five in the last week. [Volodymyr Zelenskiy](#) visited the frontlines on Thursday, saying: “I want to be with our soldiers in the tough times in Donbas. I’m going to the locations of the escalation.” He has urged [Nato](#) to set up a [membership path for Ukraine](#) to join the military alliance.

“It all depends on the size of the fire,” said Kozak, referring to a potential uptick in fighting. Echoing remarks by [Vladimir Putin](#) in 2019, he said that Russia would intervene “if there is a Srebrenica there,” a reference to the 1995 massacre of 8,000 Muslim men by Bosnian Serb forces. There is no indication of any ethnic-cleansing campaign, although the Kremlin has used similar rhetoric to justify intervening in the past.

While it remains unclear whether Russia’s movements are just an intimidation tactic or the prelude to a major escalation, the massive troop movements and bellicose rhetoric have caused alarm in Kyiv and western capitals.

During a phone call earlier this week, German chancellor Angela Merkel demanded that Vladimir Putin reduce the Russian troop numbers near Ukraine in order to “de-escalate the situation.” Putin responded by accusing Ukraine of provoking tensions along the line of conflict.

Turkey on Friday said that [the US had given warning](#) that it would send two warships later this month through its straits into the Black Sea, where they would remain until 4 May. Russia has recently reinforced its Black Sea fleet, which is based in Crimea, with 10 landing and artillery ships from its Caspian flotilla. Analysts have called the transfer of ships and gunboats unusual, even during military exercises.

Sergei Shoigu, the Russian minister of defence, announced the start of nationwide military exercises earlier this week. More than 4,000 military drills are scheduled across the country for the month of April.

Open source investigations have shed new light on the scale of the Russian troop movements, which have brought forces from as far away as the Urals and Siberia to Crimea and Russian regions bordering Ukraine.

A [report](#) published by the information group Janes showed that at least 14 ground troop units had been moved into the region bordering Ukraine since late March. “While Russia’s intentions are still unclear, this movement stands out as possibly the largest unannounced movement of troops since Russia’s invasion of Crimea and eastern Ukraine,” the report read.

The report also said that air defence systems were being moved into the Voronezh region, which had “not been observed with prior movements”.

An earlier investigation by the Conflict Intelligence Team showed a new Russian army camp with hundreds of military vehicles, elaborate communications systems, and a field hospital had been established in the Voronezh region. Videos found on [TikTok](#) and other social media also showed railcars and trucks transporting tanks and other heavy weapons in the border region.

Also this week, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in [Europe](#) had said it had seen increased GPS jamming in the conflict zone. For the

first time since October 2014, a long-range drone was unable to take off from its base due to “dual GPS signal interference assessed as caused by jamming.” Overall, the report said, drones had been “experiencing increased levels of GPS signal interference on take-off and landing” since 21 March, the approximate start of the Russian military buildup.

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