

***CED Public Policy Watch
Weekly News Round-up
September 9, 2022***

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1. DEATH OF QUEEN ELIZABETH II; TRUSS BECOMES UK PRIME MINISTER

Britain mourned the death of [Queen Elizabeth II](#), the UK's longest-reigning monarch. Her Majesty's final public act was to greet incoming Prime Minister Liz Truss and give her permission to form a government. Truss is the fifteenth Prime Minister who served under HM The Queen.

Earlier this week, former Foreign Secretary Liz Truss won the election among Conservative Party members to lead the party and thus become UK Prime Minister, beating former Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak. Truss enters office with a very full plate of issues, including sharply rising energy bills, dissatisfaction with the National Health Service, and inflation. She announced a freeze on energy bills, under which most consumers will pay no more than £2,500 a year for the next two years (similar to a policy initially proposed by the opposition Labour Party) but will finance this through increased public borrowing. Truss also endorsed new natural gas development off Scotland and the reintroduction of fracking. She has also proposed but not released details of "a bold plan to cut taxes" -- her signature issue and the principal point of difference with Sunak. The next UK election must be held by 2024, forcing an aggressive agenda for change for the [self-proclaimed](#) "disrupter-in-chief." Truss enters office with low expectations among the public: in [one poll](#), only 14 percent of respondents expected her to do better than her predecessor Boris Johnson, while 27 percent expected her to do worse.

2. DEVELOPMENTS ON UKRAINE

Ukraine counteroffensive: Ukraine continued its long-awaited counteroffensive, focusing on the region of Kherson in southern Ukraine. A Ukrainian official [called](#) the counteroffensive a "planned slow operation to grind the enemy," and this appears to be the case. Prior to the counteroffensive, Ukraine

had made intensive [strikes](#) against Russian ammunition dumps. A former head of Britain's MI6 intelligence agency [said](#) that the counteroffensive showed that the two sides had "reached some kind of balance [.]" a positive development. Ukraine is claiming some success; perhaps the best [evidence](#) for this is that because of "current developments," Russia has "paused" its plans for a referendum in the Kherson region on joining Russia. In a surprise, Ukraine is also attacking near Kharkiv in the east and has [recaptured](#) perhaps as much as 400 square kilometers of territory, in an effort to cut Russian communication lines in eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian President Zelensky [said](#) the war is at a "pivotal moment" and "each success of our military in one direction or another changes the general situation along the entire frontline in favor of Ukraine."

The US [claimed](#) that Russia is preparing to buy weapons from North Korea, including rockets and artillery shells, attributing the purchases to the effect of "export controls and sanctions"; Russia has also purchased Iranian-made drones. Russia [increased](#) the size of its overall combat forces by about 10 percent, to 1.15 million but is not expected to reach this level of strength until next year.

Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant: Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) visited the nuclear plant last week; two of the six inspectors [remained](#) behind to continue monitoring the situation. Earlier, the plant had been [disconnected](#) from the Ukrainian power grid as its power lines had been damaged during Russian shelling; IAEA head Rafael Grossi said the physical integrity of the plant had been "[violated](#)." President Zelensky [said](#) that the world narrowly avoided a "radiation disaster" after Russian shelling cut off a power line supplying electricity to the plant for several hours. A Ukrainian employee at the plant [claimed](#) that Russia sought to mislead the UN's team, including through directing their route through the plant.

After the visit, the UN [released](#) a report detailing damage at the plant and said it is "gravely concerned" at the situation there; it is proposing a "nuclear safety and security protection zone" around the plant including withdrawal of Russian troops and Ukraine agreeing not to enter the zone (a proposal Ukraine has [endorsed](#)) and an immediate end to shelling nearby to reduce the risk of a radiological incident. The IAEA [noted](#) that the ongoing shelling "continues to represent a constant threat to nuclear safety and security with potential impact on critical safety functions that may lead to radiological consequences with great safety significance [.]" Ukraine is [considering](#) shutting down the plant entirely, because of the potentially low reserves of diesel fuel that can power backup generators.

Russia stops NordStream 1 pipeline deliveries to Germany: Russia has [stopped](#) sending gas to Europe via the NordStream 1 pipeline, claiming maintenance issues, which Germany denies. Russia has previously cut off gas supplies to Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, and Poland. Germany had already [reduced](#) its dependence on Russian gas from about 55 percent to about 26 percent now. However, the German gas regulator also announced that Germany had reached about 83 percent of its goal to fill gas storage facilities in advance of winter; raising storage levels further would require cuts of about 15 percent in current gas usage. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz [revealed](#) that he had already decided to stop deliveries of Russian gas in December and [noted](#) that "[b]ecause we started so early, when it wasn't even such a big awareness of the problem in Germany, we are now in a situation that we can head into the winter courageously and bravely." Belgium and France are expected to expand their LNG terminals and pipelines to deliver additional gas to Germany. Britain [announced](#) that it is no longer

importing energy from Russia, six months ahead of its planned December target date; imports had already fallen 97 percent to June. Russia also [reduced](#) its gas shipment to Engie, a French company.

Oil price cap: The G7 countries [agreed to adopt](#) a price cap on Russian oil; in response, Russia has said it will stop oil and gas sales to countries that adopt it. Russia is also [demanding](#) that the West lift sanctions for gas supplies to resume at pre-war levels. Former Russian President Dmitri Medvedev [said](#) that Russian will cut all oil and gas supplies to Europe if the West continues with a price cap on Russian gas, a statement echoed by President Putin in a speech in Vladivostok at which he [said](#) Russia “will not supply anything at all if it contradicts our interests ... We will not supply gas, oil, coal, heating oil – we will not supply anything.” In an implicit warning to China, India, and other purchasers of Russian oil, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov [warned](#) that “[c]ompanies that impose a price cap will not be among the recipients of Russian oil. We simply will not cooperate with them on non-market principles.” In response, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen [said](#) that the EU would persist with both the oil price cap and a similar gas price cap, calling Russia an “unreliable supplier” which is “actively manipulating the gas market.” Von der Leyen announced that the EU had reduced Russian gas pipeline imports to 9 percent of total gas imports, a sharp reduction from 40 percent in February.

Ukraine official raises possible Russian nuclear attack: Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, commander-in-chief of Ukraine’s armed forces, [wrote](#) an article in which he stated that “[t]here is a direct threat of the use, under certain circumstances, of tactical nuclear weapons by the Russian Armed forces. It is also impossible to completely rule out the possibility of the world’s leading countries in a ‘limited’ nuclear conflict, in which the prospect of World War III is already directly visible.” Zaluzhnyi continued that Ukraine’s goal as the war likely extends into 2023 is that the war becomes “even sharper and more tangible for the Russians and for other occupied regions, despite the massive distance to the targets [.]” Zaluzhnyi pleaded for longer-range weapons; Western countries have not wished to give weapons that would permit Ukraine to attack easily in Russia itself, for fear of widening the conflict.

Increased US and EU aid: Secretary of State Anthony Blinken visited Kyiv on Thursday and [announced](#) \$2.6 billion in new security assistance, including a \$675 million package of weapons and \$2 billion in military financing for Ukraine and vulnerable regional countries “who are most potentially at risk for future Russian aggression [.]” Total US security assistance for Ukraine has now reached \$13.5 billion. A senior US official was [quoted](#) as saying that “[a]ll of the security assistance is trying to help ensure that Ukraine is successful in the counter-offensive [.]” The EU [agreed](#) to release an extra €500 million in planned aid, focused on humanitarian needs. EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell [regretted](#) that the EU had not begun to train Ukraine’s armed forces a year ago, as several EU member states had requested; had the EU done so, “we would be in a better situation.”

Political developments: Russian President Putin will [hold](#) a “serious” meeting with China’s leader Xi Jinping on the margins of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting in Uzbekistan next week. Xi will also travel to Kazakhstan. Germany announced it has [received](#) almost one million Ukrainian refugees this year, of whom 36 percent are children, 155,000 of whom have enrolled at German schools.

Grain exports sharply decline: Ukraine’s agriculture ministry [reported](#) that grain exports declined 54.5 percent so far year-on-year and totaled only 4.16 million tonnes by the end of August. The ministry also estimated that total grain harvests would be at least 50 million tonnes this year -- a sharp decline from

last year's record 86 million tonnes, as the country has lost grain lands to Russian forces. However, for August, the Food and Agriculture Organisation's food price index [fell](#) 1.9 percent in August and has now fallen for a fifth consecutive month, after its all-time high in March. Much of the decline represents price falls in vegetable oils, although cereals fell 1.4 percent based on "improved production prospects in North America and Russia as well as the resumption of exports from the Black Sea ports in Ukraine [.]"

Putin complains about grain agreement: Russian President Putin [complained](#) about the deal permitting Ukrainian grain shipments through the Black Sea, claiming (with no evidence) that most of the grain was going to the EU rather than to the developing world and saying that grain shipments to the EU should end, a claim that Ukraine [described](#) as "flabbergasting." Putin [added](#) that "Maybe we should think about restricting that route for grain and trade food? I'll definitely consult with the Turkish president." (Turkey is a signatory to and guarantor of the agreement.)

Negative report on Russian economy: Bloomberg [reported](#) that it had seen a Russian document assessing the impact of sanctions which painted a gloomy picture of the Russian economy. The document estimates the fall in the Russian economy by the end of next year at between 8.3 and 11.9 percent. Significantly, the report also suggest that Russia expects greater pressure on sanctions and that as sales of oil and gas to Europe fall, Russia may face challenges to maintain its own production with negative impacts on the domestic market and "the inability to repair imported equipment could permanently limit growth." In the event of a recession, the report argues that Russia could become a "swing supplier" on global markets, with demand for its products falling first. However, in his speech in Vladivostok, President Putin [claimed](#) that "Russia is coping with the economic, financial and technological aggression of the West. We have passed the peak of the most difficulties, and the situation is normalizing."

3. US TRADE DEFICIT CONTINUES TO DECLINE

The US trade deficit [fell](#) 12.6% in July to \$70.6 billion, a nine month low. July exports were \$259.3 billion, \$0.5 billion more than June exports. Higher exports were driven by capital goods (\$2.1 billion increase from June) and the automotive sector (\$0.9 billion increase), even as food and natural gas exports declined. July imports were \$329.9 billion, \$9.7 billion less than June imports. Lower imports were driven by a substantial (\$7.4 billion) decline in purchases of foreign consumer goods. July's trade deficit was considerably lower than the \$106.9 billion deficit reported in March 2022, a record, and July marked the fourth consecutive monthly decline in the trade deficit. Monetary policy and fiscal policy have tightened in recent months, working to slow US demand.

4. CBO ESTIMATES DEFICIT REDUCTION FROM INFLATION REDUCTION ACT

On Wednesday, the Congressional Budget Office released an updated [estimate](#) of the budgetary effects of the recently-passed Inflation Reduction Act. The analysis shows that the Act will reduce deficits by a cumulative \$238 billion from 2022 to 2031. The Act contributes \$26 billion to deficits through 2026 but begins to reduce them substantially, by \$264 billion, from 2027 to 2031. Among the major factors contributing to the score are the new 15 percent corporate minimum tax (estimated to raise \$222 billion); revenue from increased IRS enforcement (net \$101 billion), which will take time to materialize as new employees are hired and trained; repeal of a rule on drug rebates from the Trump



Administration which was never implemented (\$122 billion), and giving Medicare authority to negotiate drug prices (\$96 billion), balanced by new spending on climate, health, and other priorities.

While the Inflation Reduction Act will reduce deficits, a number of significant new policy actions, including the student debt relief initiatives announced by the President, will have a negative impact on the deficit.

5. INITIAL UNEMPLOYMENT CLAIMS CONTINUE TO FALL

The [advance](#) figure for seasonally adjusted initial unemployment claims in the week ending September 3 was 222,000, a decrease of 6,000 from the previous week's revised level, and a decrease of 10,000 from the previous week's advance figure. Claims had generally risen from March through July, and have fallen again since then, a bullish indicator for the labor market. Initial claims are now 15 percent below the high set in mid-July, but 34 percent above the lows set in mid-March.

6. PROPOSED FTC DATA COLLECTION RULE; WORKPLACE IMPLICATIONS

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) published an [advance notice of proposed rulemaking](#) (ANPR) on the "prevalence of commercial surveillance and data security practices that harm consumers," inviting comment on whether the FTC should implement new rules "concerning the ways in which companies collect, aggregate, protect, use, analyze, and retain consumer data, as well as transfer, share, sell, or otherwise monetize that data in ways that are unfair or deceptive." The ANPR focuses in particular on the collection, retention, and monetization of consumer data in ordinary transactions such as purchases of groceries, Web browsing, and online sales in which consumer consent is not meaningful or truly informed; "as networked devices and online services become essential to navigating daily life, consumers may have little choice but to accept the terms that firms offer." The FTC notes that "[w]hile, in theory, these personalization practices have the potential to benefit consumers . . . they have facilitated consumer harms that can be difficult if not impossible for any one person to avoid." This includes companies' ability to set prices based on this consumer information.

Beyond this, the FTC also notes that "[s]ome employers, for example, reportedly collect an assortment of worker data to evaluate productivity, among other reasons -- a practice that has become far more pervasive since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic." Signaling that any new rules might also include the workplace, the FTC notes that "the term 'consumer' as used in this ANPR includes businesses and workers, not just individuals who buy or exchange data for retail goods and services. This approach is consistent with the Commission's longstanding practice The FTC has frequently used Section 5 of the FTC Act to protect small businesses or individuals in contexts involving their employment or independent contractor status." The ANPR poses 95 questions to which commenters may respond and also invites comments beyond those questions. Comments are due no later than October 21.

7. EXECUTIVE ORDER ON IMPLEMENTATION OF CHIPS ACT

The President signed an [Executive Order](#) on implementation of the CHIPS Act ("Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors") laying out goals for "protecting taxpayer resources," including accountability for those receiving funding from the Act; "meeting economic, sustainability, and national

security needs” for semiconductors of all types; “ensuring long-term leadership in the microelectronics sector” including through research and innovation; “catalyzing private-sector investment”; “generating benefits” for “a broad range of stakeholders and communities,” including “well-paying, high-skilled union jobs” and “investing in disadvantaged communities; and “strengthening and expanding regional manufacturing and innovation ecosystems [.]” The Executive Order sets up a CHIPS Implementation Steering Council at the White House to coordinate policy development on implementation of the Act.

8. DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS (DACA) FINAL RULE

The Department of Homeland Security published a [final rule](#) which continues a policy that immigrants who arrived in the United States as children of undocumented immigrants “should not be a priority for removal based on humanitarian concerns and other considerations” and reaffirming that, on a case-by-case basis, they may receive authorizations to work in the US, to “enable them to support themselves and their families, and to contribute to our economy [.]” The rule also reflects ongoing litigation on the Department’s powers in this area and concentrates removal efforts on “higher priority noncitizens” while “emphasizing that individual grants of deferred action are an act of enforcement discretion to which recipients do not have a substantive right.” In practice, virtually all people in this category who do not have a substantial criminal history will be able to obtain or retain a work authorization.

9. PROPOSED RULE ON JOINT-EMPLOYER STATUS

The National Labor Relations Board [issued](#) a proposed rule on the standard for determining when two employers serve as a “joint employer” of an employee under the National Labor Relations Act. The proposed rule would overturn a rule from late 2020 and restore the Board’s traditional practice “to explicitly ground the joint-employer standard in established common-law agency principles” and use case-by-case adjudication to address questions regarding joint-employers, arguing that the question of joint-employment is “highly fact-specific” and thus better decided on a case-by-case basis rather than through a regulatory standard and better suited to “complex and fact-specific scenarios presented by sophisticated contracting arrangements in the modern workplace.” In practice, the Board believes the change “would restore the Board’s focus on whether a putative joint employer possesses the authority to control or exercises the power to control particular employees’ essential terms and conditions of employment [.]” Comments on the proposed rule are due November 7.

10. EU DRAFT CYBERSECURITY LEGISLATION

The *Financial Times* [reports](#) that EU is [proposing](#) legislation to fine companies up to 2.5 percent of their turnover if they do not possess certificates proving they have implemented basic cybersecurity requirements and to recall or ban products that do not implement adequate cybersecurity. The EU is acting because of concerns about “smart” devices that will be connected through the Internet of Things and a desire to encourage consumers to purchase products with strong cybersecurity features.

11. ALBANIA CUTS TIES WITH IRAN OVER CYBERATTACK

Albania, a NATO member, was the victim of a serious cyberattack in July targeting government agencies that destroyed some government data. In response, Albania [severed](#) diplomatic relations with Iran -- the first time a government has taken this action in response to a cyberattack. National Security Council

spokesperson Adrienne Watson [said](#) that the US has concluded that the government of Iran conducted the attack and later hacking operations and “will take further action to hold Iran accountable for actions that threaten the security of a U.S. ally and set a troubling precedent for cyberspace.” NATO’s principal cyber threat analyst [called](#) the Albanian move a “remarkable statement.”

12. MONKEYPOX UPDATES

As of September 6, 20,733 cases of monkeypox have been [reported in the US](#). States with the highest number of cases include California (3,833), New York (3,526), Florida (2,126), Texas (1,859), and Georgia (1,512). [Globally](#), 54,911 cases have been reported, with 54,400 of those cases reported in locations that have not historically reported monkeypox. Countries with the highest number of cases include the US (20,733), Spain (6,749), Brazil (5,409), France (3,646), and Germany (3,505).

Scientists tracked COVID-19 outbreaks using wastewater testing and are now doing the same for monkeypox. A program led by researchers at Emory University, Stanford, and Verily is monitoring cases by [analyzing sewage](#) from 41 communities in 10 states. So far, the virus has been detected in 22 of those sites. “We have now detected monkeypox DNA in sewersheds before any cases were reported in those counties,” said Bradley White, senior staff scientist at Verily. The data are shared publicly on a [website](#) hosted by Stanford and with CDC.

On Tuesday, the US Department of Health and Human Services [announced](#) that it will significantly expand its distribution locations for monkeypox vaccines and treatments through a \$19.8 million contract with AmerisourceBergen Corp. The [deal](#) will expand the number of weekly shipments of Bavarian Nordic’s [JYNNEOS](#) vaccine and Sigla’s TYPOXX, a medicine originally approved for smallpox but now also used for treatment of those infected with monkeypox. AmerisourceBergen is expected to provide up to 2,500 shipments per week of both the vaccine and treatment.

13. PANDEMIC NEWS

On August 31, [FDA authorized](#) the first major update to COVID-19 vaccines since their rollout in late 2020. FDA amended the emergency use authorizations (EUAs) of both the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines. The bivalent vaccines contain two mRNA components of SARS-CoV-2 virus: one of the original strain of the virus and the other targeting a strain shared by the BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron lineages. With winter approaching and the BA.5 variant of Omicron still widely circulating, officials hope the redesigned boosters will [curtail the upcoming winter spike](#) in case numbers. Millions of doses are expected to [become available](#) over the coming days and weeks.

Both the Moderna and Pfizer bivalent boosters are authorized as a single booster dose in individuals if it has been at least two months since completing the primary vaccination series or since receiving their most recent booster dose. The Moderna shot is authorized for use in individuals aged 18 years and older, while the Pfizer shot is authorized for use in individuals aged 12 years and older. Pfizer said in a news release it expects to submit an application for authorization of its updated booster for [children](#) aged 5 years through 11 years in early October, and is working to prepare an application for children aged 6 months through 4 years. The FDA said it will work quickly to evaluate future submissions for authorization of bivalent boosters.

The National Medical Products Administration of China granted Chinese pharmaceutical company CanSino Biologics approval for its [inhaled vaccine](#) to be used as a booster dose, making China the first country to approve an inhaled vaccine. The product, Convidecia Air, delivers a vaccine dose through a [puff of air](#) from a nebulizer that is then inhaled. CanSino's injected Convidecia Covid-19 vaccine is already in use in China and has been approved in several other countries. Research teams in the US and UK have been investigating nasal sprays, as scientists say they may give additional immunity in the lining of the nose and upper airways, where the virus typically enters the body. Regulators in India granted Bharat Biotech's INCOVACC emergency use authorization (EUA), making it the [world's first intranasal](#) COVID-19 vaccine. Bharat Biotech's INCOVACC has been approved for a two-dose primary immunization for those aged 18 years and older. The company is seeking clearance for the nasal spray to be [used as a booster](#) for the two-thirds of India's population who have already completed the primary vaccination series.

The structure of the COVID-19 virus and its continued mutation poses challenges to researchers. The major variants and subvariants of SARS-CoV-2, such as Delta, Omicron, and their subvariants, have piled up mutations on the spike protein, the part of the virus that allows it to grab onto and infect cells. Mutations in the spike protein have caused the COVID-19 vaccines to become less effective, causing more breakthrough infections among vaccinated people. Now, scientists are realizing that there are hints that [non-spike mutations](#) are becoming a bigger factor – Omicron BA.5 does not only have mutations along its spike but also features changes all across its structure. Matthew Frieman, a University of Maryland School of Medicine immunologist and microbiologist, and his team cloned SARS-CoV-2 and deleted the spike proteins and tested the resulting “deletion viruses” on mice, assessing how contagious the viruses were. The team discovered that mutations outside the spike may be driving critical phenotypes of SARS-CoV-2 infection and disease; in other words, changes beyond the spike are beginning to define the virus.

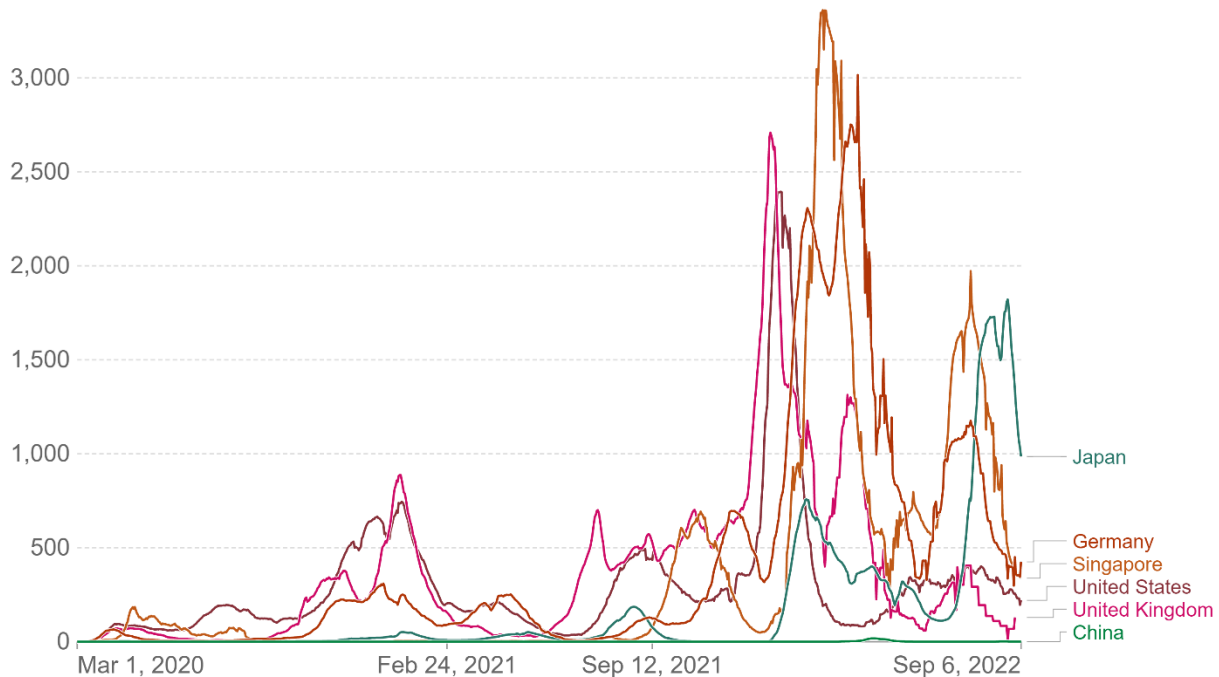
14. COUNTRY SPOTLIGHT: CHINA

On Monday, a 6.6-magnitude [earthquake](#) hit the Chinese city of Chengdu killing at least 65 people. Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan, is home to 21 million people and has been under a strict COVID-19 [lockdown](#) since last week, which has since been extended after authorities reported 140 cases on Sunday. Videos shared on Douyin, China's TikTok platform, show panicked residents behind chained gates shouting to be let out. There have been no formal reports linking any fatalities from the quake to the restrictions on compounds, yet the videos have sparked overwhelming criticism from users of Chinese microblogging site Weibo. The Chengdu Health Commission later posted on its official WeChat account that "priority should be given to safeguarding the lives of the public in the event of earthquakes, fires, floods and other disasters." The city reported 121 cases on [Wednesday](#). An outbreak beginning in late August prompted the city of [Shenzhen into lockdown](#) this past weekend. The technology hub of 17.7 million people, which borders Hong Kong, ordered its residents to remain largely at home and receive two rounds of tests. By Monday, some restrictions on dining and recreation were eased and many subway stations resumed operations in an effort to minimize financial strain while the country continues to adhere to its “dynamic COVID-zero” policy that aims to contain every outbreak.

Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases per million people

7-day rolling average. Due to limited testing, the number of confirmed cases is lower than the true number of infections.

Our World
in Data



Source: Johns Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data

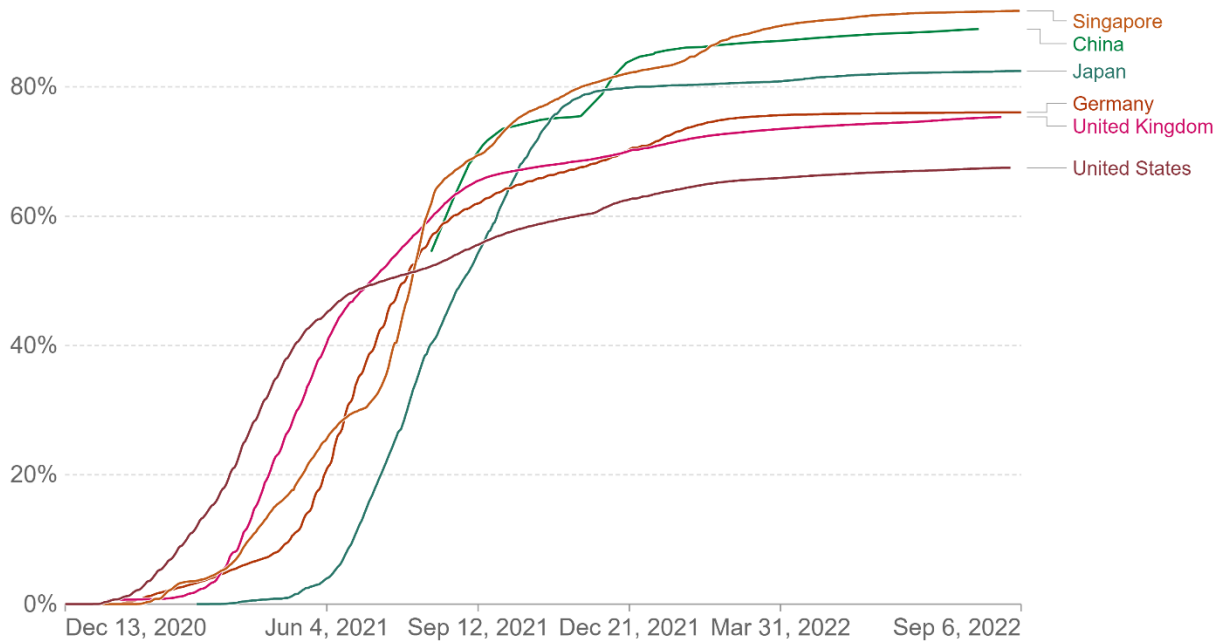
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China has been fighting a [flare-up in outbreaks](#) since early August, with strains of the Omicron variant spreading to all of China's 31 provincial-level regions in recent weeks. Fourteen-day averages for new locally transmitted cases across the country have fallen to about 1,600 cases, well below the outbreak's peak of 3,392 recorded on August 17. The spike in case numbers has hit China at a troubling time, with the Communist Party congress scheduled for October 16. The lockdown of Chengdu has the potential to [either validate or discredit](#) President Xi Jinping's "dynamic COVID-zero." If authorities rapidly put an end to virus spread by shutting down, Xi can claim that his policy saves lives and is worth the economic cost. If Chengdu suffers great economic loss, food shortages, and civil unrest, Xi would be heading into the congress under scrutiny. "This is one of his signature policies, so walking back or abandoning it right after the party congress will make it look like Xi is not totally in control," said Andy Chen, a senior analyst with Beijing-based consulting firm Trivium China.

Share of people who completed the initial COVID-19 vaccination protocol

Total number of people who received all doses prescribed by the initial vaccination protocol, divided by the total population of the country.

Our World
in Data



Source: Official data collated by Our World in Data

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Note: Alternative definitions of a full vaccination, e.g. having been infected with SARS-CoV-2 and having 1 dose of a 2-dose protocol, are ignored to maximize comparability between countries.