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Names in the news
Sport

Time to give those in charge of female athletics short shrift

Rebecca Nicholson



Paralympic champion Olivia Breen revealed the many hurdles that women in sport continue to face



Olivia Breen competing in the women's long jump final at the Muller British Athletics Championships at Manchester Regional Arena. Photograph: Ashley Allen/Getty Images

Olivia Breen competing in the women's long jump final at the Muller British Athletics Championships at Manchester Regional Arena. Photograph: Ashley Allen/Getty Images

Sat 24 Jul 2021 10.00 EDT

Last week, the double Paralympic world champion Olivia Breen shared a story of an [incident at the English Athletics Championships](#). When she had just finished her long jump competition, a female official said “my sprint shorts were too short and inappropriate”, [she wrote](#). “I was left speechless... they are specifically designed for competing in.” She has said she is planning to make an official complaint.

Over in Bulgaria, at the only Euros I am ready to talk about, the Norwegian women’s beach handball team were [fined €1,500](#) (£1,285), or €150 a player, for “a case of improper clothing”. In this case of improper clothing, which sounds like a lost *Murder She Wrote* episode, the Norwegian women found that their shorts were not skimpy enough. The rules stated that they should have been wearing bikini bottoms “with a close fit and cut on an upward angle toward the top of the leg”, rather than the shorts they chose to compete

in instead. The main stipulations for the men's team are shorts 10cm above the kneecap and "not too baggy".

I'm glad the bodies in charge of officiating professional sports are focusing on the important issues such as how short women's shorts should be. Up with that sort of thing or down with that sort of thing? They don't know, but they're troubled by it anyway. Breen's brilliant statement pointed out that she should not be made to feel self-conscious about how she looks while she's competing. In recent years, many famous female athletes have spoken again and again about their crippling self-consciousness, whether they are made to feel that way by the public, by the media or even by their own teams. It is hardly encouraging more young women to get into sport.

Finally to the Tokyo Olympics, which are, at the time I am writing this, still taking place, though by the time you read this, who knows, as the whole thing is starting to resemble a particularly withering Armando Iannucci script. The Spanish synchronised swimmer Ona Carbonell told Reuters that despite long negotiations, she has been unable to take her breastfeeding son to Japan with her. Carbonell explained that the strict restrictions that would be imposed on the baby and her husband were entirely impractical. The rules for women in sport, then, are clear. Don't wear revealing shorts, don't wear shorts that are not revealing, don't be a breastfeeding mother, or do, but don't. It's a Johnsonian world out there.

Eric Clapton: immunity to old rock stars is a jab bonus



Eric Clapton: axe the vax? Photograph: Gareth Cattermole/Getty Images

Eric Clapton has become the latest musician to waggle his toes in Covid-sceptic waters, [announcing last week](#) that he will not play at any venues that require people to have proof of vaccination. “I wish to say that I will not perform on any stage where there is a discriminated audience present,” he wrote, via Telegram, sharing a link to an earlier anti-lockdown collaboration song with fellow furious man Van Morrison.

I am fascinated by this petrol station Father’s Day compilation CD of older musicians who see themselves as outlaws and rebels, having cobbled together a few conspiracy theories about government control, as if this government is capable of controlling anything. Ian Brown [withdrew from a festival](#) earlier this year after claiming organisers would have required proof of vaccination as a condition of entry. Richard Ashcroft [pulled out of Tramlines](#) in Sheffield over its part in a government testing scheme, using the hashtags #naturalrebel and #theydontownme.

Immunity passports are understandably divisive, but last week, a [YouGov survey](#) found that over all age groups, 48% of people strongly support some form of vaccine passport for nightclubs, while only 12% strongly oppose it. Among over-65s, 70% show strong support for the measure, which raises the question of which clubs they’re going to, while only 3% strongly oppose.

Clapton and friends are a loud yet tiny minority. Having recently recovered from Covid, I can only heap more praise on the vaccines. Not only did they keep the illness relatively mild, but now they're inoculating me from Eric Clapton concerts too.

Peppa Pig: cartoon English takes the biscuit



Peppa Pig: a porcine pioneer. Photograph: eOne/Astley Baker Davies/PA

According to some parents in the United States, the pandemic popularity of Peppa Pig has had an unexpected effect: it has left American children with British accents. A [report in the *Wall Street Journal*](#) highlighted “the Peppa effect”, which led to one young girl asking her surprised mother if she was going to the optician, rather than the “eye doctor”.

For a while, I collected flowery English terms that had solid and practical American counterparts: tumble dryer versus the simple dryer, the medieval-sounding hayfever versus allergies, the florid agony aunt versus Dear Abby. I like the idea that a cartoon pig aimed at children may be responsible for rewilding American English by teaching toddlers to say biscuit instead of cookie.

As many have pointed out, it's about time any linguistic cultural exchange was a bit more evenly distributed. So many British kids grew up with TV and films that talked of proms that they are now an accepted part of adolescent life in the UK, an end to high school, rather than secondary school. My six-year-old niece sometimes adopts a transatlantic twang for the word "totally" thanks to a command of YouTube that terrifies me. It only seems fair to bring on the Peppa effect, biscuits, opticians and all.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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The Observer view on the urgency of tackling climate change

Observer editorial

We are losing the race to keep our planet cool



A firefighter during operations to contain the Bootleg fire, which has been raging out of control across Oregon for weeks and has spread to an area 25 times the size of Manhattan. Photograph: US Forest Service/AFP/Getty Images

A firefighter during operations to contain the Bootleg fire, which has been raging out of control across Oregon for weeks and has spread to an area 25 times the size of Manhattan. Photograph: US Forest Service/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 25 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Reminders that our planet is wilting under the impact of human-driven climate change have been hard to avoid this month. Catastrophic floods have [killed 160 in Germany](#) while more than 50 died after [massive inundations swept](#) through the central Chinese province of Henan when a year's worth of rain fell in three days last week. At the same time, forest fires have ripped

through one of the world's coldest places, [Siberia](#), after unusually hot, dry weather gripped the region. Canada and the US have also been afflicted by conflagrations that have destroyed communities and vast areas of woodland. One blaze in the [US state of Oregon](#) has spread over an area 25 times the size of Manhattan and has raged out of control for weeks. Global warming, triggered by rising levels of greenhouse gases, has been implicated in every case.

Nor will things get better. Indeed, they can only get worse. Every year, factories, power plants and vehicles pump tens of billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide into our atmosphere, trapping solar radiation that will further increase temperatures round the globe. Even if all greenhouse gas emissions were halted tomorrow the carbon dioxide already in our atmosphere will hang around for decades and continue to heat the planet, turning vegetation to tinder and allowing air to retain more moisture before releasing it with sudden and devastating consequences.

Not that there is any prospect of humanity quitting its fossil fuel addiction overnight. At best, we might reach such a goal by 2050, the date set by world leaders for achieving net-zero emissions of greenhouse gases. In other words, we are going to experience increasingly severe, devastating weather events for a further 30 years. Floods, wildfires and storms, along with shrinking icecaps, rising sea levels, bleached coral reefs and spreading deserts, will become the norm. And that is the best we can hope for over the next three decades.

The problem, say scientists, is that to halt worsening weather patterns by 2050, rises in global temperatures will have to be limited to [around 1.5C](#) from pre-industrial days. However, the world has already heated up by 1.2C since then, thanks to the greenhouse gases we have put into the atmosphere, and the prospects of limiting further rises to a fraction of a degree over the next 30 years look remote. In fact, estimates based on current pledges by nations to cut emissions suggest temperatures are likely to rise by more than 2C above preindustrial levels by the middle of the century.

In such a future, more than a quarter of the world's population would be likely to experience extreme drought for at least one month a year; rainforests would face eradication; melting ice sheets would result in

dangerous sea level rises and trigger major changes in the [behaviour of ocean currents](#) such as the Gulf Stream. In addition, loss of reflective ice from the poles would cause oceans to absorb more solar radiation, while melting permafrost in Siberia and other regions would release plumes of methane, another greenhouse gas. Inevitably, temperatures would soar even further.

This terrifying prospect has come about because politicians and business leaders have failed, for several decades, to appreciate the risks involved in massively interfering with the make-up of our atmosphere and to instigate measures to limit the damage. As a result, the world faces a climate catastrophe with little time left to act to counter the threat. We now have fewer than 100 days before the United Nations's [Cop26 climate change conference](#) opens in Glasgow, when world leaders will be given one last, clear chance to limit climatic mayhem.

The prospects do not look encouraging as was made abundantly clear on Friday in Naples, when energy and environment ministers from the [G20](#) group of rich nations, together responsible for 85% of annual emissions, could not agree on a full package of commitments to tackle climate change. The G20 meeting was viewed as a critically important staging post leading up to Cop26 and its failure to find common ground shows how difficult it will be to secure a meaningful accord in Scotland. A major point of contention last week was the refusal of India and China to agree to the early phasing out of coal power, one of the most environmentally damaging industrial processes on the planet.

Even more worrying is the fact that rich countries and developing nations are at loggerheads about how to divvy up the bill that will have to be paid to tackle global warming. The latter were supposed to receive at least \$100bn a year from public and private sources in rich nations in order to help them avoid the worst ravages of the extreme weather triggered by the oil, gas and coal burned by developed countries over the past two centuries on their route to industrial might. This was one of the cornerstones of the international climate negotiations ahead of the 2015 Paris agreement, which committed the world to trying to keep global warming below 1.5C. However, rich countries have failed to honour these commitments. Such disagreement bodes badly for Cop26 in November.

Politicians' next chance will occur in October when heads of state and leaders of the G20 nations are scheduled to meet and, hopefully, ensure the final run-up to Cop26 is put back on track. If not, the prospects for the summit achieving success look worrying. Saving the world is going to go right to the wire, it transpires.

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The Observer view on the unfolding crisis in Lebanon

[Observer editorial](#)

A new failed state in the Middle East would spell chaos for us all



Demonstrators spray the shields of riot police during a protest by the families of the Beirut blast victims. Photograph: AFP/Getty

Demonstrators spray the shields of riot police during a protest by the families of the Beirut blast victims. Photograph: AFP/Getty

Sun 25 Jul 2021 01.30 EDT

Amid so much trouble around the world, the crisis in Lebanon has received relatively little attention, especially from British politicians and media. This is a serious oversight. It's not inconceivable Lebanon could soon become a

“failed state” on a par with Libya or Yemen. That would be a [disaster for its people](#), but also, as recent history shows, for the region, Europe and the UK.

The crisis has many aspects. The most pressing is the mounting human cost. The chronic devaluation of the Lebanese pound – it has lost about 90% of its value in the past 18 months – is taking a terrible toll on ordinary families. About 30% of Lebanese children go to bed hungry, the UN says. Most households are short of food. At least half the population has slipped into poverty.

Resulting hyperinflation, caused by adverse trading conditions during the pandemic but also by grossly [irresponsible financial mismanagement](#) by Lebanon’s politicians and bankers, means subsidies of essential foodstuffs, medicine and fuel no longer cover their true cost. People with deadly diseases such as diabetes or heart conditions cannot get the help they need.

[Beirut police fire teargas at protest by relatives of blast victims](#)

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More than 30% of the workforce is unemployed. Those in work see the value of their wages plummeting. Pensioners’ savings are evaporating. To the misery caused by shortages of imported goods are added regular power blackouts. Unicef warns the [neglected public water system](#) is “on life support”. Its collapse would put 71% of the population – more than four million people – at immediate risk.

The ramifications of the crisis spread much further. Lack of security and increased lawlessness are of growing concern. The army wants \$100m just to cover the immediate needs of its 80,000 troops. A [soldier’s average monthly salary](#) before the crisis was worth the equivalent of \$800. Now it’s about \$80. The military is reportedly struggling to patrol the borders with Syria and Israel due to lack of fuel.

This in turn feeds fears that terrorists may exploit the situation through cross-border attacks and arms smuggling. Last week, [rockets were fired](#) into Israel, prompting a brief military retaliation. In calling for strengthened border defences, the Israeli army worries the Lebanese state could fracture

into sectarian fiefdoms with Hezbollah controlling Shia areas in the Bekaa valley and the south.

A Lebanese implosion could also have serious consequences for the unfinished conflict in Syria and the ongoing shadow war involving Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran. It was reported last week that some Syrian refugees are heading home, so bad has the situation in [Lebanon](#) become. A national collapse could trigger huge refugee outflows affecting Turkey, EU countries and the UK.

All these aspects of Lebanon's unfolding tragedy reinforce the case for robust political action. But if the Lebanese agree on anything, it is that their warring, corrupt and incompetent politicians are primarily to blame for the crisis. Earlier this month, amid familiar [squabbling](#) and finger-pointing, senior leaders again failed to agree on forming a new government.

Power-sharing arrangements between Lebanon's Christian Maronite, Shia Muslim and Sunni Muslim communities were once held up as a model. But this system, which kept the country's elites happy at the expense of the national interest, has not worked well for years. The lethal explosion that devastated Beirut's port area almost exactly one year ago, and the subsequent [failure to punish](#) those responsible, grimly symbolises this endemic political incapacity.

Lacking new ideas and flexibility, the politicians are hoping elections next year will provide a way out. But the crisis is now, it's urgent and it cannot wait. For the sake of the Lebanese people, and out of obvious self-interest, the international community – and that includes too-silent Britain – must take the lead. A [UN-backed conference](#) hosted by France in Paris on 4 August may be the last chance to save Lebanon from utter disaster.

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How a holiday away from it all turned into a Hitchcockian nightmare

[Rachel Cooke](#)



Miles from civilisation, our cottage became the target of an aerial bombardment – by rooks



Sun 25 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

For a few moments, the four of us were overcome with our cleverness at having found such a place, especially at such short notice. The cottage stood at the end of a long track, at the head of a secluded valley not far from Chatsworth in Derbyshire. Getting out of the car after what felt like eight years on the road, we could see nothing but fields, sheep and, etched against the sky on a hill behind the house, a rookery in a clump of tall trees. How idyllic. How well we were going to sleep!

Cut to 5am. Bang, bang. Caw. Bang, bang, bang. Caw, caw, caw. At this time of year, rooks, gregarious but also fiercely territorial, catch sight of their reflections in windows and having mistaken their inky feathers for those of another bird, attempt to attack their imaginary rivals. If this sounds charmingly rustic, believe me when I tell you that it isn't. Rooks are big and strong – their wingspans are around 90cm – and when they're feeling aggressive, their beaks are as forceful as jackhammers. Before long, the cottage windows were smeared with blood and other kinds of gunge.

Three hours later, when the bombardment was at an end, I scoured the internet for a solution. An RSPB warden suggested smearing the windows with soap or covering them with clingfilm. But in a holiday rental in the middle of nowhere, this was a task too far: no ladder, no soap, only enough clingfilm for a half-eaten tin of baked beans. Our Hitchcockian nightmare was repeated daily for the rest of our stay.

Make do and mend



Lee Miller models a Mirande suit with gloves and crocheted hat.
Photograph: George Hoyningen-Huene/Getty Images

The photographer Lee Miller is best known for her devastating images of Europe in the weeks and months after D-Day, and for that unforgettable self-portrait in which she can be seen soaping herself in Hitler's bath. But at her former home, Farleys House in East Sussex, you can now see a completely different side of her, thanks to [an exhibition](#) of the work she did for *Vogue* between 1939 and 1945.

I loved looking at these shoots. The ethos of make do and mend is there not only in the fashions, but in the styling, too; in one picture, her model poses in front of a backdrop knocked together from cardboard egg boxes. But I was struck, in a month when the weather has been unusually unpredictable, by the way that the war encouraged designers to make clothes of all kinds more versatile. Personally, I'd be very much in the market for a frock with "clever" detachable sleeves like the one Norman Hartnell created for the Girl Guides in 1944.

Kicking back with Kate



Romantic trouble: Katharine Hepburn with Rossano Brazzi in *Summertime*.
Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

One side effect of the pandemic: I'm so avid for new experiences. The other day, for instance, I amazed myself by booking tickets for David Lean's 1955 film *Summertime*, in which Katharine Hepburn gets into all kinds of romantic trouble on holiday in Venice, at the [Barbican's](#) temporary outdoor cinema in its sculpture court.

In the beforetime, I might have hesitated over this. Even if I hadn't had somewhere else to be on the August bank holiday, I would have worried about rain, or noise, or whether there would be cushions. But not now. I can scarcely imagine anything more glamorous, unless, that is, I was suddenly to be able to fly to Venice myself, in a pair of red mules just like those her character Jane kicks off when she is at last seduced by Renato (the gorgeous, pouting Rossano Brazzi).

Rachel Cooke is an Observer columnist

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Boris Johnson, in splendid self-isolation, gives nurses a measly 3% pay rise – cartoon

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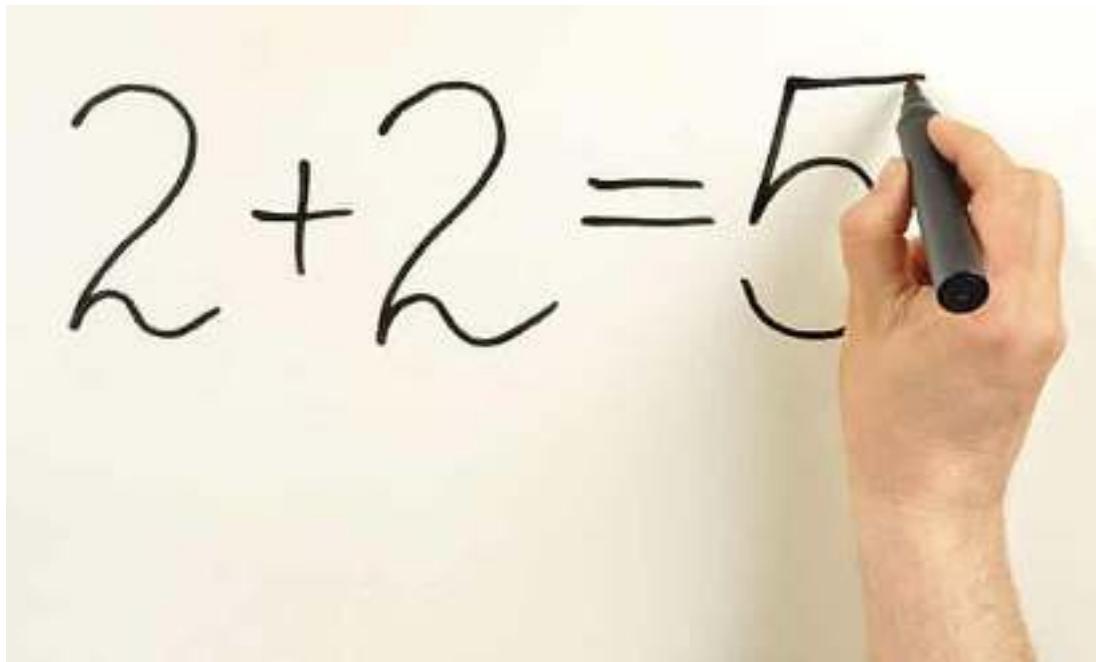
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Get Covid and live longer? No, it doesn't work like that

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

Boris Johnson's alleged comparison was inappropriate, mixes different averages and ignores rising life expectancy as we age



Boris Johnson's sums don't add up. Photograph: Alamy

Boris Johnson's sums don't add up. Photograph: Alamy

Sat 24 Jul 2021 12.30 EDT

According to [the BBC](#), on 15 October, the prime minister allegedly sent a WhatsApp message: “I must say I have been rocked by some of the data on Covid fatalities. The median age is 82 – 81 for men, 85 for women. That is above life expectancy. So get Covid and live longer.” Presumably, this was a joke, but why is the reasoning so wrong?

First, more technically, the message confuses two types of averages. As children learn at school, the median means that if you lined up the women according to the age they had died of Covid-19, the woman in the middle would be 85. But life expectancy is a mean-average – you work out how long, say, 100,000 newborns are likely to live assuming that current mortality rates continue, add them up and divide by 100,000. [Using data from the UK for 2017-19](#), life expectancy at birth is 79 for men and 83 for women, but the median age at death is slightly higher: 81 for men and 85 for women, the same as that quoted for Covid-19.

So why do [registered deaths](#) involving Covid have a similar median age to deaths from other causes? Essentially, the risk factors for dying with Covid

are remarkably similar to those for dying from something else – this bullying virus amplifies vulnerabilities and so roughly acts like a multiplication factor to background fatal risks.

Even more importantly, your life expectancy improves as you age. Once a man reaches 79, their life expectancy rises: to about 88, or nine more years. Fortunately, your death keeps on moving ahead of you and reaching the life expectancy you had at birth does not mean you are about to shift off this mortal coil. An average man reaching their 98th birthday can expect to live beyond 100.

The Health Foundation estimated a mean-average of 10 years of life lost for every Covid-19 death, with a similar figure for the US, and this holds even when allowing for pre-existing health conditions. So Covid-19 fatalities were not at death's door.

Get Covid-19 and live longer? Sadly not.

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](#)[Prince Harry](#)

Not yet published, already damned – why are people running scared of Prince Harry's memoir?

[Catherine Bennett](#)



With the help of a brilliant co-writer, a fully rounded picture may now emerge of the much-maligned royal



Prince Harry and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex: he has an interesting tale to tell. Photograph: David Harrison/AFP/Getty Images

Prince Harry and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex: he has an interesting tale to tell. Photograph: David Harrison/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 25 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

Not since criminals were [barred from profiting](#) in this way can a publisher's announcement of a memoir have united the British press in such disgust. Before that, even the gangster turned memoirist, "Mad" Frankie Fraser, was not, in his literary pomp, faulted for bringing shame upon his family. If, as a torturer for the Krays, Mr Fraser pulled out his victims' teeth with pliers, well, he never came close to embarrassing the Queen – and doing so, yet more barbarously, in a jubilee year.

Nothing, for the royal-watching guild, not even its professional interest in the benefits, can excuse Prince Harry's decision to [publish](#), with the help of an award-winning US author JR Moehringer, an "intimate and heartfelt" memoir. Defenders of cancel culture might, in fact, want to welcome this overdue acknowledgment from traditional media adversaries that free speech must have its limits. Unseen, the book has been damned as self-indulgent, superfluous, greedy, hurtful, biased, perfidious, overprivileged, hypocritical

and premature. Did the 36-year-old émigré not check the UK guidelines for memoir writing? Who did he think he was – Malala?

One biographer, the author of the 2018 title, *Harry* (“delves into his troubled childhood and the lasting effect of losing his adored mother”), has heard the prince’s version will probably delve, competitively, into the same lasting effect. “It was a terrible tragedy,” [Angela Levin allows, on Twitter](#), “but sad the man can’t move on”. The only people entitled to make money from Prince Harry’s interesting story are, you gather, people who are not Prince Harry.

It has been further explained that what may have been acceptable from Harry’s parents in, on one side, a faithfully whiny official account and, on the other, a sensationaly damaging attack on Charles and his family should be denied their younger son. The “disrespectful” jubilee timing offends, though not as much as his alleged inconsistency in believing, presumably uniquely, that memoir-publishing is compatible with the right to privacy. Queen Victoria’s *Leaves From the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands* doesn’t count, being forgotten. The *Daily Mail* notes approvingly that Edward VIII “waited 15 years” before publishing his effort, possibly the first sign since his abdication that the unlamented Nazi sympathiser could yet prove a useful role-model. In contrast, it’s the Sussexes who remind Piers Morgan of “Kim Jong-un with a dash of Vladimir Putin”; that’s when they are not designated, by the same expert, “Prince Poison and [Princess Pinocchio](#)”.

Will it be any consolation or only make it worse if, given the inspired-looking choice of ghostwriter, this turns out to be the best memoir yet produced by a British royal? What if, yet more painfully, it turns out to be as impressive as *Open* , the [autobiography Moehringer wrote with Andre Agassi](#), and as engaging as [his own memoir](#), *The Tender Bar*? Not that it should be hard to improve on a [fawning Dimbleby](#), but surely the hardest news for UK critics is that his American collaborator should appear so perfectly qualified to do something compelling with the story of an anxious boy trying to negotiate, then, as an unhappy young man, to break away from a generationally messed-up family. And it can only help, when it comes to Harry’s tricky [Bouji period](#), and enduring enthusiasm for [banter](#), that his ghostwriter, while being raised by a loving, hard-up single mother (who

“would insist that we take regular mental health breaks”) and neglected by a cold father (“an unstable mix of charm and rage”) sought out the warmth, endless chat, jokes and booze inside the bar of the title. The prodigious if sometimes lethal contribution of continual inebriation to male socialising anticipates, in Moehringer’s memoir, its recent, alluring role in [Thomas Vinterberg’s film, *Another Round*](#). “With the first taste of cold beer and Bloody Marys the men began to behave differently. Their limbs seemed looser, their laughter more lively...”

Did the 36-year-old émigré not check the UK guidelines for memoir writing? Who did he think he was – Malala?

Prominent among last week’s anonymous insults was the [prediction](#) that Harry’s memoir would really, befitting a new understanding of the military hero as pathetically emasculated, be “written by Meghan”. If so, hiring the Pulitzer-winning Moehringer, who has been admired for his insights on masculinity and male friendship, seems a complicated and expensive way of going about it. Though he does, in *The Tender Bar*, conclude: “Every virtue I associated with manhood – toughness, persistence, determination, reliability, honesty, integrity, guts – my mother exemplified.” Also likely to be frustrated, given Moehringer’s personal alertness to complacent privilege, are expectations that Harry, who recently complained of being “[cut off financially](#)”, will be unable entirely to suppress his inner Etonian. “I watched my schoolmates arrive,” Moehringer recalls, of his first day at Yale, “a flotilla of families sailing with the wind up College Street, in cars that cost three times what my mother earned in one year”.

A [poll](#) indicating limited interest in the book has been received triumphantly by anti-memoirists. But if Moehringer repeats his achievement in *Open*, of making fan-level detail fascinating to the previously indifferent, Harry’s story could engage an audience left cold until now by routine royal hagiography. When has it ever had jokes? As for the timing, it could hardly be better than as soon as possible, when this “wholly honest” book can illuminate the process whereby Prince George, costumed and on display aged eight, is being trained on behalf of a usually grooming-averse nation to accept his destiny. That is, he’s next to be, as Harry has put it, “[trapped](#)” within the family that willingly harbours Uncle Andrew; next to never leave

home, instead becoming decreasingly equipped, like some pedigree animal, to survive in the outside world.

Even if Harry has, in the unforgiving estimation of our royal authorities, come closer to regicide than the unhygienic [Boris Johnson](#), his account – or the one JR Moehringer is writing – could yet take its place among the classics of cult survival.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 25 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Editing errors led to the director of *Nitram* being named as Martin Bryant, when he is the subject of the film and the director is Justin Kurzel; and to the director Antoneta Alamat Kusijanovic being named as Antonetta Alamat

Kusjanovic ([Sex with a car bags the Palme d'Or as Cannes winds up](#), 18 July, second editions, page 11).

An article ([MoD ‘is using scare tactics’ to bar public from woodlands](#), 18 July, page 12) mistakenly referred to “military police officers”. That term is used to mean Royal Military Police, whereas the intended reference was to officers from the Ministry of Defence police force.

Location, location: a section in our “Dog days” guide to “the best of dog-friendly Britain” featured among its recommendations an eatery in Howth, near Dublin, Ireland ([A proper dog’s dinner](#), 18 July, Magazine, page 27).

Other recently amended articles include:

[‘Not in this town’: artwork about Britain’s ‘nuclear colonialism’ removed](#)

[Artangel: Afterness review – an island of secrets that’s its own work of art](#)

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

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[OpinionRadio 4](#)

Letters: why we are fighting to save Radio 4's The Film Programme

The show that for 17 years has played a vital role in the arts world is under threat



Antonia Quirke, presenter of The Film Programme. Photograph: Handout

Antonia Quirke, presenter of The Film Programme. Photograph: Handout

Sun 25 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

It seems that BBC [Radio 4](#) has taken the decision to cancel *The Film Programme* after 17 uninterrupted years on air. A year-round, weekly, half-hour show dedicated to film in all its forms ought to be considered an absolutely necessary part of Radio 4's arts coverage.

The Film Programme has always been an exemplary blend of coverage of current cinema and the film canon and an active champion of independent film. Interested in all roles in film – on screen and off – from the mainstream to more challenging or obscure work that would otherwise be completely ignored by broadcasters.

Originally presented by Francine Stock and now by Antonia Quirke, its variety and scope reflect a depth of understanding achieved only through a commitment to specialisation. A show that has continually evolved as film has evolved, it would doubtless have continued to do so. To axe such a long-standing and much-loved programme represents an unacceptable diminution of the BBC's dedication to the continuing story of film, whatever programming is intended to replace it. It is, in our opinion, short-term thinking and a mistake. *The Film Programme* should be celebrated, not cancelled.

Carol Morley, director; **Martin Scorsese**, director; **Ken Loach**, director; **Christopher Nolan**, director; **Amma Asante**, director; **Bruce Robinson**, director; **Emma Thompson**, screenwriter and actor; **Liam Neeson**, actor; **Deepa Mehta**, director; **David Oyelowo**, director and actor; **Benedict Cumberbatch**, actor; **David Puttnam**, producer; **Steve McQueen**, director; **Walter Murch**, editor; **Angela Allen**, script coordinator; **Thelma Schoonmaker**, editor; **Kleber Mendonca Filho**, director; **Joanna Hogg**, director; **Michael Winterbottom**, director; **Rosamund Pike**, actor; **Greg Wise**, actor; **Kristin Scott Thomas**, actor; **Emma Thomas**, producer; **Tracey Seaward**, producer; **Joe Wright**, director; **David Hare**, screenwriter; **Patrick Kennedy**, actor; **Ian McEwan**, screenwriter; **Mark Cousins**, director; **Daniel Landin BSC**, cinematographer; **Katherine Waterstone**, actor; **Mark Gatiss**, actor; **Bola Agbaje**, screenwriter; **Andrea Arnold**, director; **Kevin Loader**, producer; **Asif Kapadia**, director; **Eva Green**, actor; **Tony Grisoni**, screenwriter; **Dexter Fletcher**, director; **Clio Barnard**, director; **Roger Michell**, director; **Nainita Desai**, composer; **Daniel Mays**, actor; **Maria Djurkovic**, production designer; **Cairo Cannon**, producer; **Terence Davies**, director; **Rebecca Lenkiewicz**, screenwriter; **Paul Laverty**, screenwriter; **Rebecca O'Brien**, producer; **Seamus McGarvey BSC**, cinematographer; **Desiree Akhavan**, director; **Dame Joan Plowright**, actor; **Francis Lee**, director; **Stephen Frears**, director; **Maxine Peake**, actor; **John Boorman**, director; **Aneil Karia**, director; **Hadley Freeman**, columnist; **Richard E Grant**, actor; **Hong Khaou**, director; **Ronan Bennett**, screenwriter; **James Watkins**, director; **Tom Hollander**, actor; **David Edgar**, screenwriter; **Lesley Manville**, actor; **Peter Mullan**, director and actor; **Andrew Kotting**, director; **David Thewlis**, actor; **Juliet Stevenson**, actor; **Jake Polonsky BSC**, cinematographer; **Moira Buffini**, screenwriter; **Clint Mansell**, composer;

Tom Courtenay, actor; **Nasheed Qamar Faruqi**, director; **Mark Jenkin**, director; **Sean Barton**, editor; **Amanda Posey**, producer; **Finola Dwyer**, producer; **Ian Christie**, film scholar; **Richard Eyre**, director; **Shola Amoo**, director; **Paul Fegan**, director; **Suzie Davies**, production designer; **William Boyd**, writer; **Lucy Walker**, director; **Neil Brand**, composer; **Lizzie Francke**, executive producer; **Clare Binns**, joint managing director, Picturehouse cinemas; **Mark Strong**, actor; **David Thomson**, film critic; **Aleem Khan**, director; **Alison Owen**, producer; **Toby Jones**, actor; **Gillian Anderson**, actor; **David Arnold**, composer; **Iain Forsyth** and **Jane Pollard**, directors; **Tracey Scoffield**, executive producer; **Emily Mortimer**, screenwriter; **Sarah Gavron**, director; **Bukky Bakray**, actor; **Theresa Ikoko**, screenwriter; **Dominic West**, actor; **Chris Menges BSC**, cinematographer

Start healthy habits early

We commend [Henry Dimbleby's efforts](#) to tackle the nation's health crisis. However, we were sad to see that this strategy failed to deliver a clear provision for the early years. With one in five children entering school overweight, the recommendations need to focus more on prevention at the age when obesity is most likely to develop.

It's important that children are introduced to healthy food, especially fruit and vegetables, as early as possible, a critical time for them to start developing their tastes. We should be looking at ways to implement and track these processes so good habits are in place before the first day of school.

The strategy rightly identified that the education sector has a pivotal role, but parents and carers are critical too. There needs to be a sustained focus on nutritional education and we need to make certain foods more accessible. We need to increase fruit and vegetable intake for a healthy society, but also a healthier planet. If we continue to rely solely on the government we won't get there fast enough. We need industries and retailers to collaborate and put early years prevention at the heart of tackling the obesity and climate crisis.

Mark Cuddigan, CEO of Ella's Kitchen

A life less lonely

As a widow, I can attest to the impact of loneliness and Covid has exacerbated this (“[All the lonely people: coping with the gap where friends used to be](#)”, Focus). I’m gregarious, active and work part-time, but I discovered pre-Covid that widows are often marginalised by couples who were friends when I was part of a couple.

Despite the world opening up again, I am, like many others, nervous about busy places and travel. Pre-Covid, it was very obvious that society can be very isolating for people on their own; now it seems even more so. I am fortunate to have some very caring family members and friends on whom I know I can call, but there are many others who do not. Loneliness is a significant contributor to the UK’s soaring mental health crisis. If you know someone who lives alone, reach out to them; a friendly smile or a short chat could brighten their day.

Sharman Finlay

Portrush, County Antrim

South Africa's dilemma

Your optimistic leading article on South Africa in the midst of murder and mayhem is welcome (“[After the violence and despair, the ‘rainbow nation’ can rise again](#)”).

Governance missions I took to South Africa in 1990, 1994 and 1996, when prospects were much brighter, already had the seeds of troubles.

The growth of black businesses would slowly ameliorate conditions but continued massive inequalities and appalling living conditions for many bred disillusion with the ANC government.

Also, a liberation movement is not a basis for a party to govern effectively. The ANC has acknowledged the problem but elections have always inhibited the development of ideological parties. The consequences continue to be apparent.

Michael Meadowcroft
Leeds

Increased taxation is vital

All those who oppose Boris Johnson's shambolic government should agree with Phillip Inman ("[Keir, it's time we had a frank discussion about tax](#)", Business).

We might hope that the pains and losses brought by the pandemic have prompted many to re-evaluate the priorities in their lives.

Whether rich or poor, the pillars of a successful and healthy life, from cradle to grave, are a first-rate education and training programme, a well-funded NHS and a healthy adult social care system. Accumulation of material wealth pales by comparison. Once this is accepted, a ringfenced revenue stream, secured with a surcharge on property sales or from "something more modest", is likely to be more palatable to the electorate.

Gary Murrell
Braunston, Northamptonshire

Flare backfires on England

It was depressing to read that Ed Cumming considers the crass behaviour of some England football supporters acceptable because it apparently has "a part in our rich history" and is a "noble tradition" ("[Our flare players deserve a break](#)", Focus). Thanks to such selfishness and nihilism it is now unlikely that England will host the 2030 World Cup finals.

Ian G Dare
Matlock, Derbyshire

No knee for Nigel

What wonderful news! I have just read that Nigel Farage has said he would not be taking the knee "for anyone" ("[GB News seeks saviour in Nigel Farage to stop plunge in ratings](#)", News). So that rules him out of ever receiving a knighthood!

Gary Bennett
Exeter

In the dog house

Please do not print my letter if you have redressed the balance this week by filling almost the entire magazine with self-catering venues, hotels, guest houses, restaurants, pubs and, especially, beaches and swimming pools where dogs are not welcome (“[The Ruff Guide](#)”, Magazine).

Melanie White
Marazion, Cornwall

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[Opinion](#)[Official Secrets Act](#)

Who'll defend our right to a free press? Not the ex-hack in No 10

[Nick Cohen](#)



Journalists have every right to be fearful of the prime minister's proposed legislation



Keira Knightley as Katharine Gun, a whistleblower who leaked secret documents to Observer journalist Martin Bright, dramatised in the film Official Secrets.

Photograph: Ifc Films/Allstar

Keira Knightley as Katharine Gun, a whistleblower who leaked secret documents to Observer journalist Martin Bright, dramatised in the film Official Secrets.

Photograph: Ifc Films/Allstar

Sat 24 Jul 2021 14.00 EDT

Boris Johnson is an ex-journalist who wants to send working journalists to prison. [Boris Johnson](#) is an opponent of the “nanny state” who will give the courts the ability to jail anyone who reveals the abuse of state power. Judge him by the standards that are meant to have guided his life, and you find that Boris Johnson is a monumental fraud.

Yet no one contemplating the autocratic control his government is awarding itself has said that his transformation from celebrity journalist into secret policeman needs explaining. The one principle even his sternest critic would expect him to defend was a free press. Yet there he is threatening to censor and imprison like a part-time Putin.

The hypocrisy is exceptional even by the standards of this government. In 2003, the Blair administration went for the BBC for claiming that it had “sexed up” its dossier on Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction to justify invading Iraq. Johnson supported the corporation. The BBC was engaged in “justified reporting”, [he wrote](#) in the *Telegraph*, and Blair was training “his guns at exactly the wrong target”. Now, Johnson is aiming his guns at every target: civil servants, police officers, newspapers, broadcasters and any member of the public who reveals what his government wants hidden.

In its consultation for legislation to “[counter state threats](#)”, the Home Office proposes to “modernise” the Official Secrets Act. Its measure is only modern in the sense that Putin’s Kremlin or the Chinese Communist party is

modern. Johnson is showing his modernity by going with the flow of a world where states everywhere are treating accountability as treason.

If the government wanted to protect genuine secrets and was concerned solely with serious crime and hostile foreign powers, I would have no objection. Instead, it has decided there can be no public interest defence for an unauthorised disclosure. An official or reporter will not be able to escape jail by saying they had exposed an abuse of power. The requirement that the government has to prove that an unauthorised disclosure has caused damage will go, too. The leak may be in the public interest. It may not have harmed national security or interfered with an operation against organised crime. No matter. Both source and reporter are guilty.

For once in its history, the Home Office is spelling out what it believes in plain language. “We do not consider that there is necessarily a distinction in severity between espionage and the most serious unauthorised disclosures,” it says. The foreign agent and the domestic reporter are potentially equal threats.

Martin Bright, the editor of Index on Censorship, whose confrontation with the secret state when he worked at the *Observer* is shown in the Netflix film *Official Secrets*, invites you to imagine the chill that will descend on public life. Every leak and unofficial revelation will have the potential to become a criminal offence. The state will then have the political power to pick and choose which case to prosecute.

The National Union of Journalists – my union, to declare an interest – has gone through official secrets cases the government could not successfully prosecute under existing law to show the danger we face. They include the police harassing Channel 4 for reporting on how undercover police officers had spied on Stephen Lawrence’s family. The Met going for the Guardian for revealing that officers thought the phone of the murdered teenager Milly Dowler had been hacked and Belfast reporters facing prosecution for revealing links between the police and loyalist murderers. These were not attempts to protect national security but to close down legitimate investigations.

Johnson, like too many commentators of the left as well as the right, was a canny marketer who gave his customer base what it wanted. The resultant hypocrisy is depressing but all too common: the progressive columnist deplores racism on the right but ignores antisemitism on the left; the Conservative pundit deplores abuses of power by leftwing governments and endorses them when their side is in power. Both would rather keep their foot on their enemies' throats than defend basic standards of truth telling and the integrity of the democratic system.

The celebrity journalist will turn on real journalists rather than risk admitting reality into his never-never land

The Johnson government has gone for everyone who might weaken its control, from the BBC to the judiciary. But there is more to today's expansion of police powers than the simple determination of the power-hungry to avoid accountability. Johnson is a stranger man than many realise, with a psychological need to repress. The Tory press in the shape of the [Daily Mail](#) and the [Sun](#) senses it and is not giving its government a free pass. It has reported condemnations of Johnson for "criminalising public interest journalism" and "treating journalists like foreign spies".

Johnson was not just a Conservative columnist. He was (and is) a fantasist who convinced himself of his fantasies before selling them on to his audience. He was fired for telling lies by the *Times*, invented fables about the European Union for the *Telegraph* and helped persuade 52% of voters that we could tear up our relationship with the EU without feeling any pain.

Maybe it was his miserable childhood that pushed him into make-believe. His father had affairs. His mother had a nervous breakdown. The family [moved home](#) 32 times in his first 14 years. Maybe it was just a shrewd appreciation of the yearning for illusions in Britain. In either event, hard news is hard for this illusionist to bear. It threatens his story that lost greatness can be restored by wishing for it, and that we should indulge him as he joshes and clowns his way through office because government is just a game.

The celebrity journalist will turn on real journalists, threatening them with jail, rather than risk admitting reality into his never-never land.

The police, the Home Office, the security services and everyone else in government who will exploit the new official secrets act may not want to be loved in the manner of our needy prime minister. But they do not want their mistakes exposed either. The hard-faced chief constable and the back-covering bureaucrat have more in common with the Downing Street dilettante than you would expect. The desire of a narcissistic personality to shield himself from criticism neatly joints with the desire of an unaccountable bureaucracy to protect itself from scrutiny.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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OpinionInequality

Levelling up should take many forms. And don't forget London's poorest need it too

[Kenan Malik](#)



Without more nuanced regional and national planning, this laudable ambition will fail



Illustration: Dom Mckenzie/The Observer

Illustration: Dom Mckenzie/The Observer

Sun 25 Jul 2021 02.30 EDT

Levelling up is hard to do. Well, in one sense it is. Providing new opportunities for people and places that most need but have least access to them requires strategic vision and political will. Boris Johnson's recent word salad of [a speech](#), supposedly the latest launch of the government's levelling-up programme, exposed only that it possesses neither.

In a more basic sense, though, what needs to be done is not difficult to grasp. Just as doctors have drummed into them "First, do no harm", so the equivalent of the Hippocratic Oath for policymakers attempting to level up might be "First, do not aggravate inequality". Yet the government has spawned policy after policy that does just that.

Take last week. First, ministers raised the possibility of a rise in national insurance contributions (NICs) as a means of paying for [improvements in social care](#). (The government subsequently hinted that the same pot of money could be used to pay for nurses' 3% wage rise, creating more confusion.)

Politically, increasing NICs might be a smart move, the best way to hide a tax rise. In terms of levelling up, however, it would be a retrograde step because, as the [Resolution Foundation](#) has pointed out, it “asks younger and lower-paid workers to contribute more than older and wealthier people, compared to a fairer rise in income tax”.

Also last week, the government [published its response](#) to the consultation on “proposals to reduce ill-health related job loss”. In 2019, the government promised to attend to one of the most absurd anomalies of the benefits system: two million people earning less than £120 a week are not eligible for statutory sick pay. Those who most need sick pay are barred from receiving it – because they are too poor. Two years ago, the [government proposed](#) “extending protection to those earning less than the lower earnings limit”. Of those who took part in the consultation, three-quarters agreed this was essential. The government, however, seems to have changed its mind and [quietly shelved](#) the plan.

These are not quirks of the system. They are features of an approach that has consistently betrayed the poorest. The problem with sick pay is not just that it is denied to the lowest paid, but that even those who are eligible receive a risible amount. The average mandatory paid sick pay among OECD countries stands at about 70% of an employee’s wage; in Britain, it is [about 10%](#). Even in the midst of a pandemic, in which low-paid “essential workers” are most likely to have to self-isolate, the chancellor has obstinately refused to budge. Similarly, the decision not to make permanent the £20 Covid uplift in universal credit will have a [devastating impact](#) on the poorest. Levelling up? More like hammering down.

There is far more to levelling up, of course, than alleviating poverty and keeping inequality in check. But that surely must be the minimum. The inability of the government to meet even such a low threshold exposes the void behind the rhetoric.

If the government has failed to support individuals in need, it has also failed to protect vital social infrastructure

If the government has failed to support individuals in need, it has equally failed to protect and develop the social infrastructure essential to any levelling-up policy. People don't live as isolated individuals, but in communities and collectives. For these to flourish, we need the places and spaces, the organisations and institutions, which allow people to meet, organise and build commonalities.

Many such organisations have to be created through our own efforts without any input or interference from the state – trade unions, for instance, or solidarity groups. Nevertheless, much social infrastructure, from libraries to youth clubs, from art galleries to public parks, needs government funding and resources.

There is considerable evidence that stronger social infrastructure helps foster collective action and nurtures solidarity, such as the creation of [mutual aid groups](#). Yet it is an issue largely ignored by policymakers. According to one estimate, of the £172bn so far allocated to levelling up, just £9bn has been set aside for [social infrastructure projects](#). It is not that improving physical infrastructure – from transport to housing – is not vital. It is, rather, that the significance of libraries, pubs and parks to people's lives is too often ignored at the top.

The problem is not simply that public policy ignores the significance of social infrastructure. It is also that these are the very places and spaces that have been most damaged by a decade of austerity.

Between 2010 and 2019, 760 youth clubs closed in England and Wales, as local authority expenditure on [youth services](#) dropped by 70%. Almost two-thirds of smaller youth clubs still open face the [risk of closure](#). Libraries are what [Benjamin Zephaniah](#) has called “universities of the streets”, allowing reading, and all the treasures that come with it, to be not just a private pleasure but a social possibility. Yet in the decade leading up to the pandemic, almost [800 public libraries](#) closed because of funding cuts; last year, [public funding](#) for libraries fell by another £20m.

Levelling up is often seen as a means of tackling the “[geography of discontent](#)”, the cynicism and disillusionment found in the “[places that don't matter](#)”, mainly English towns beyond the large conurbations that feel

abandoned by mainstream institutions. This has been a particular focus for this government. There is some merit to such an approach, for these are often places that have been forgotten in recent decades. Areas where the social fabric has eroded the most are, unsurprisingly, also often the areas with highest levels of [pessimism](#) and alienation.

Inequality, though, does not cleave as neatly as this. Two London boroughs (Barking & Dagenham and Hackney) rank within the 10 [most deprived](#) authorities in England and another three (Islington, Newham and Tower Hamlets) within the top 32. The capital also has the highest [child poverty rate](#) of any English region. The north/south or city/town divides are not as straightforward as sometimes claimed.

Levelling up requires a nuanced eye that can see beyond simplistic divisions. It also requires a determination to tackle the real problems as opposed to playing to the political gallery. Currently, we have neither. Government policy ignores individuals facing poverty or hunger and the burden of inequality crushing them. It also ignores the community, eroding the social fabric necessary for us to live as more than simply a collection of individuals. Enough of the word salads, we need policy with real meat.

Kenan Malik is an Observer columnist

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Food & drink industry

Minister rules out wider use of Covid isolation exemption in England

George Eustice says new rule for food sector will not extend to other areas, despite industry concerns

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A delivery to a Waitrose supermarket in Maidenhead, Berkshire. Supply chain employees will be exempt from the isolation rules but retail staff in supermarkets will not. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

A delivery to a Waitrose supermarket in Maidenhead, Berkshire. Supply chain employees will be exempt from the isolation rules but retail staff in supermarkets will not. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

[Ben Quinn](#) and [Jasper Jolly](#)

Fri 23 Jul 2021 05.01 EDT

Exemptions enabling more than 10,000 people in England's food sector to avoid self-isolation will not be extended to other sectors, a minister has said, despite industry concerns that "cumbersome" new rules will cause confusion.

The current wave of the pandemic sweeping across Britain was also likely to get worse before it gets better, said George Eustice, the environment secretary, who added that the government was "most worried" about when the two- to three-week lag in hospitalisations kicked in after infections.

Some workers in England from 16 key sectors, including health, transport and energy, [will not have to isolate](#) after being pinged by the Covid app, as it was revealed that more than 600,000 people in England and Wales were sent self-isolation alerts last week.

Eustice also ruled out the possibility of the exemption being extended to the hospitality industry before the planned date of 16 August. "The reason we've made a special exception for food is for very obvious reasons – we need to make sure that we maintain our food supply, we will never take risks with our food supply," he told Sky News.

"You also have to bear in mind why we're doing this and we are trying to still just dampen the pace and the velocity at which this infection is spreading because we have to keep a very close eye on those hospitalisations," he said.

"We know that the most important thing is to ensure that those main arteries in our food supply chain keep working, that the lorries keep going from depots to get goods to store and that the food manufacturers can continue to manufacture the goods to get it to the depots."

An email to those affected by the new rules on Friday made clear that food wholesalers distribution centres and food processing plants as well as manufacturing sites would be included among those able to exempt workers from isolating. It said supermarkets' distribution centres would be the first to be able to take advantage of the new regime this week with other sites planned to start next week.

Industry insiders said the latest apparent change in the detail of the rules was good news but only added to widespread confusion.

James Bielby, the chief executive of the Federation of Wholesale Distributors, said that the email from Defra officials made clear that the new testing regime would be extended to other food supply chain workplaces “over the coming weeks”.

He said this indicated that the 16 August deadline for lifting the requirement for isolation for those who have been double vaccinated could be under threat. “It looks as though they might extend the pingdemic,” he said, adding that it appeared the government was planning to rely on the new testing regime to reduce the impact of the extension of the isolation rules.

But with [companies across the economy](#) struggling with worker absences, representatives of Britain’s manufacturers expressed disappointment that “huge swathes of the sector” were not included in the simplified rules for self-isolation brought forward by the government.

“The new rules do allow for exceptions in critical cases in sectors not specifically named, but this will just add an extra layer of confusion on top of the complex rules the industry is already struggling to understand,” said Stephen Phipson, the CEO of Make UK.

He described the process of requiring companies to liaise with government departments to sign off each named employee as “cumbersome and time consuming”, and said the “sensible course of action would be to bring forward the 16 August date”. Phipson contrasted allowing people to mingle in nightclubs with companies being unable to make “sensible adjustments” for vaccinated employees.

Kate Nicholls, the chief executive of UKHospitality, said the sector faced “a summer of venue closures and reduced service, when we should be at our peak”.

Shops and supermarkets have meanwhile committed to giving the government regular data on how many workers are absent. One retail source

said the industry hoped that the government would act to alleviate the problems once it had studied further data showing the impact.

Leading retailers and their suppliers said there had been pockets of temporary food shortages in stores as the rise in number of Covid cases, and the associated need for workers to self-isolate after coming into contact with someone with the virus, added to existing staffing and supply issues caused by Brexit and this week's heatwave.

Helen Dickinson, the chief executive of the British Retail Consortium, which counts most of the UK's supermarket chains among its members, said the government may have to take further action in the next few days if the situation worsened.

Eustice, asked if the government had been concerned about food shortages, told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that it had become aware last week of late deliveries and "order fulfilment" problems.

As shoppers shared images of empty shelves blamed on a shortage of workers, the government also announced on Thursday that a pilot daily testing programme would be expanded to up to 500 food and drink supply chain employers, though retail staff in supermarkets will not qualify.

It was easier to manage staff shortages on a store level, Eustice said when asked why supermarkets were not included in exemptions, adding that it would involve thousands of different shops and many more people.

01:27

Two jabs mandatory for English nightclubs from end of September, says PM – video

In terms of how the exemptions would apply to the food sector, Eustice said the government had identified close to 500 key sites, including about 170 supermarket depots and a couple of hundred manufacturers such as bread makers and dairy companies. "All of the people working in those key strategic sites, distribution depots and those manufacturing facilities will be able to use this scheme, and probably well over 10,000 people," he said.

Asked whether the coronavirus situation was likely to get worse before it gets better, he replied: “Absolutely.” He told Sky News: “It is likely to because hospitalisations do follow the infection rate by two to three weeks and so that’s why we’re doing this.”

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Vaccinate all UK university students by September, says union

UCU urges government to prevent universities being ‘incubators for Covid-19 all over again’

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University staff say masks should be compulsory on campus. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

University staff say masks should be compulsory on campus. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

[Sally Weale](#) Education correspondent

Fri 23 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

University staff are demanding the full vaccination of all students by September and compulsory face masks on campus to stop the Delta variant from ripping through universities in the new academic year.

The University and College Union (UCU) has written to the education secretary, [Gavin Williamson](#), warning that the Covid chaos seen in universities last year will be repeated unless strict measures are in place to protect staff and students.

The union wants all students to be double vaccinated before the start of term in September, with jabs made available to younger students in further education once approved by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

It is also calling on universities to “provide and mandate” the wearing of high-quality face masks by both staff and students, access to free PCR tests, and funding from the government to support education recovery.

It wants robust health and safety risk assessments ahead of the new academic year, modifications to buildings to improve ventilation, measures to allow for effective social distancing, and improved mental health provision for students.

At the peak of the pandemic last winter, at least 45 universities reported serious Covid outbreaks, with thousands of [students](#) – many away from home for the first time – forced to isolate in halls, often sick with the virus and sometimes without enough food.

With high infection rates and Covid restrictions lifted across [England](#) this week, the union warned that universities are especially vulnerable to further outbreaks, with more than 1 million students travelling across the country to live and study away from home.

The UCU described the dropping of social distancing and mask wearing in England, and the reopening of nightclubs, as “reckless” and a “recipe for disaster”.

The letter to the education secretary said: “Last year, ministers green-lit the mass movement of students across the country and failed to recognise the effect this would have on infections, on those working and studying in the sector, and on the wider communities of which they become a part.

“As the Westminster government removes all restrictions and the associated public health guidance, there is a real danger that unless we learn key lessons from last year, our education settings become incubators for Covid-19 all over again.” Letters have also been sent to the Scottish government and the Northern Ireland executive.

Covid jabs have been approved for young people up to three months before their 18th birthday, but the UCU says students should be treated as a priority group to ensure they are fully vaccinated before September, in time for the start of term.

The UCU general secretary, Jo Grady, said: “Students and staff endured totally avoidable chaos in the last academic year, and rightly want to put that behind them, but at present there is a real danger that the disruption could return as cases surge and restrictions are eased across the UK.

“To protect students’ education, it is vital that governments and providers work with trade unions to ensure vital health and safety measures are in place on campus, including the provision and mandated wearing of masks. A return to the level of disruption experienced last year would be unforgivable.”

A Department for Education spokesperson said: “We strongly encourage all students to take up the offer of both vaccine doses as soon as they become eligible. We also recommend that face coverings are worn in enclosed and crowded spaces where people may come into contact with people they do not normally meet, or in the event of a local outbreak.”

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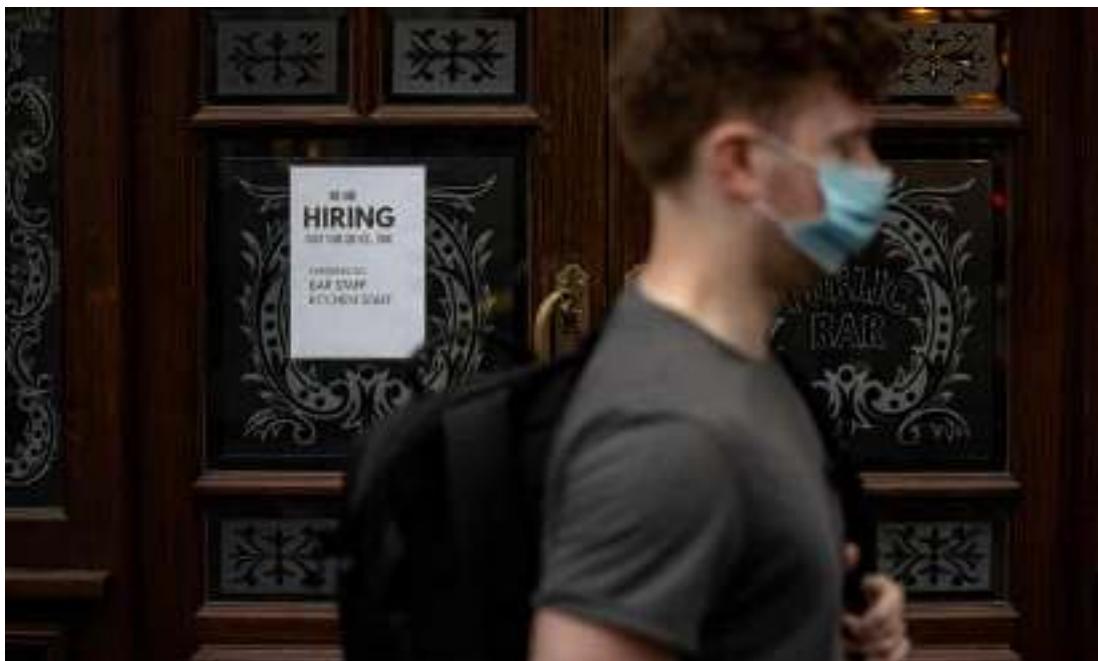
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Coronavirus

‘Pingdemic’ effect: how different sectors in England have been hit

Businesses, transports and councils are dealing with staff shortages due to NHS app-enforced Covid isolations

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A recruitment sign in the window of a pub in Westminster, London.
Photograph: Rob Pinney/Getty Images

A recruitment sign in the window of a pub in Westminster, London.
Photograph: Rob Pinney/Getty Images

[Richard Partington](#) and [Caroline Davies](#)
Thu 22 Jul 2021 10.17 EDT

Transport

Some mainline railway signal locations are at “critical levels” in terms of staff shortages, according to the RMT union. Its general secretary told the BBC that four out of five “very important” signal locations on the mainline were at critical levels and there was one location where 17 signallers had been told to isolate.

Trains and buses across England have been cancelled at short notice and several tube lines were forced to close earlier this week due to staff in control rooms and signalling stations needing to self-isolate.

Temporary bus timetables have been put in place in parts of Yorkshire, while the number of staff self-isolating at West Midlands Railway has quadrupled in recent weeks.

Councils

Garden waste collections have been hit hard in parts of England as councils struggle. Liverpool city council [suspended garden waste](#) collections for a fortnight after one in four staff reported absent for reasons related to coronavirus. Bristol Waste [suspended garden waste](#) collections for 10 weeks after reporting a “significant reduction in drivers” due to a national shortage and the impact of the pandemic. Councils in Norfolk, Sandwell, Coventry and Lancashire also reported problems.

Healthcare

Hospital bosses have said staff isolations are affecting their ability to deliver care, according to Chris Hopson of NHS Providers, who has called for a solution “as a matter of urgency”. NHS attempts to deal with a huge backlog of routine care at the same time as treating rising numbers of Covid patients was becoming increasingly difficult, he added. Last week, managers at South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS foundation trust asked staff to [postpone holidays](#) owing to the area having one of the highest infection rates in the country.

Schools

More than 1 million state school pupils in England [missed classes last week](#) because of coronavirus-related reasons, according to figures released by the Department for Education. The estimated number of 1.05 million school pupils not in class on 15 July was a record high since all children returned to school in March, and up 11.2% on figures from the previous week. It represented 14.3% of state school pupils not attending school for Covid-related reasons, or about one in every seven students.

Retail

Retailers are warning of severe staff shortages, with at least 10% of workers, and up to 30% in some shops, away from their jobs. With disruption to deliveries and thousands of shelf stackers and other staff isolating, some supermarkets are running short of supplies. Marks & Spencer has said it may need to [reduce its opening hours](#), while other retailers, including Iceland, have been forced to temporarily close some stores.

Manufacturing

Factories across the UK are struggling to operate due to hundreds of staff being off at once, with some plants on the verge of shutting and others cutting output. The carmaker Stellantis' Vauxhall van factory in Luton is moving from [three shifts to two](#), while Nissan has adjusted production in some areas of its Sunderland plant. More than three-quarters of manufacturers have been disrupted by test and trace, according to the industry body Make UK, with some plants suffering absences of up to 25% of staff.

Hospitality

Industry leaders believe as many as 20% of all staff in the [hospitality sector](#) – which employs more than 3 million people nationwide – are being forced to isolate at any one time. With whole teams being “pinged” at once, pubs, restaurants and hotels have been forced to temporarily close. The pub chain Greene King said it had to shut 33 of its pubs last week. Venues were already struggling to find staff amid a fall in overseas workers coming to Britain due to Covid and Brexit.

Logistics

[Shortages of lorry drivers](#) due to self-isolation are causing disruption for supermarkets and petrol stations, with BP forced to close some of its forecourts due to shortages of fuel deliveries. A Food and Drink Federation survey found three-quarters of its members had driver shortages, exacerbating a lack of available staff in the logistics industry across the UK this year. Royal Mail has warned of disruption in 12 regions of the UK – including Bath, Enfield, and Southport – as thousands of postal workers are forced to isolate. The baker Warburtons has also warned it is struggling to maintain local deliveries.

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[Coronavirus](#)

Rates of double-jabbed people in hospital will grow – but that does not mean Covid vaccines are failing

Several factors, including the portion of those at highest risk among the double-vaccinated and antibody levels, account for the data

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Queue for Covid jabs, London, June 2021. All adults in the UK aged 18 can now receive a vaccine, with walk-in clinics requiring no appointments often available. Photograph: Maciek Musialek/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Queue for Covid jabs, London, June 2021. All adults in the UK aged 18 can now receive a vaccine, with walk-in clinics requiring no appointments often

available. Photograph: Maciek Musialek/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Ian Sample Science editor

@iansample

Thu 22 Jul 2021 11.34 EDT

The next wave of Covid will be different. When cases soared in spring and winter last year lockdowns rapidly brought them back under control. This time it will be vaccines that do the hard work.

But Covid jabs are not a perfect shield. They slow the spread of the virus, help prevent disease, and reduce the risk of dying. They do not bring all this to an end.

In the months ahead many thousands of people will be in hospital with Covid. What may seem more troubling is that ever more will have received two vaccination doses.

This does not mean the immunisations are not doing their job. Real-world data from Public Health England show that two shots of the Oxford/AstraZeneca or of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine are 92% and 96% effective, respectively, against hospital admission.

On Thursday, the vaccines minister, Nadhim Zahawi, said the vaccine programme had prevented an estimated 52,000 hospitalisations.

So why will the majority of those in hospital with Covid be double jabbed? There are several factors at work. First of all, who has and has not been vaccinated matters. Across the UK about 30% of adults are not fully vaccinated. While some are vulnerable people who for some reason have not been jabbed, the majority are young, and healthy enough not to be considered at particular risk: these are people who would very rarely get sick enough with Covid-19 to need hospital care.

Looked at another way, the 70% of the population that has been doubled jabbed include the most vulnerable in society. Because the vaccines are not perfect even a small percentage of what scientists call “breakthrough

infections” can lead to a large number of hospitalisations – predominantly in this older group.

The total number of Covid hospitalisations will be dramatically lower than in a world without vaccines, but those who are admitted are increasingly likely to have had both shots.

“Imagine if all adults had already been fully vaccinated,” says Kevin McConway, emeritus professor of applied statistics at The Open University. “We know there would still be some hospitalisations, because the vaccines aren’t perfect, but for adults all those hospitalisations would be in vaccinated people. That wouldn’t mean the vaccines don’t help, just that they don’t provide perfect protection – and nobody ever said that they did.”

[Public Health England data](#) from early July bears this out. Of 257 deaths from confirmed Delta variant infections between February and late June, only two of the 26 deaths in those under 50 were double jabbed. That compares with 116, or more than half, of the 231 deaths in the over 50s.

“If fully vaccinated, the risk of being hospitalised falls by about 90%,” said Prof David Spiegelhalter, chair of the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication, at Cambridge University. “But it doesn’t disappear, and as a large proportion of the highest risk people are now vaccinated it’s inevitable they will start to form the majority of the people with Covid in hospital, particularly as most of the unvaccinated people are young and therefore at low risk. Indeed, being young reduces the risk even more than being vaccinated.”

Another big factor at play is age. McConway says the risk of an infected person being hospitalised is at least 10 times, and as much as 25 times greater, for a 75-year-old than a 25-year-old. If the latter risk is on the mark, then a vaccine that prevents 96% of hospitalisations would slash admissions among 75-year-olds to that seen in those 50 years younger.

When it comes to deaths from Covid a fully vaccinated 80-year-old has a similar risk to an unvaccinated 50-year-old.

Future twists and turns in the pandemic may yet change the mathematics. Having a large wave of infections with roughly half the UK population vaccinated provides ripe conditions for a variant that can better evade the protection of vaccines.

Another concern is how soon vaccines wear off. Several [studies](#) have shown that antibody levels fall over time, but it is unclear what the declines mean for immunity and protection against infection, hospitalisation and death. The answer [could become clear](#) in the months ahead. As hospitals brace for another wave of patients, health officials will watch closely to see if more beds are needed for those jabbed first.

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US in ‘another pivotal moment’ as Delta variant drives surge in Covid cases

- Hospitals are filling up, especially in areas with low vaccinations
- CDC offers no change in guidance on mask wearing

01:09

US 'not of the woods yet', says CDC chief, as Delta variant drives Covid surge – video

[Joanna Walters in New York](#)

[@Joannawalters13](#)

Thu 22 Jul 2021 22.35 EDT

The US is “at another pivotal moment in this pandemic” as rising Covid-19 cases show no signs of abating, driven by the Delta variant, and some hospitals are filling up, especially in areas with low vaccination rates, government officials warned on Thursday.

The US government did not change its guidance on mask wearing, [despite debates](#) going on in the White House and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) about whether those who have been vaccinated should once again be officially advised to wear masks indoors to prevent the spread.

Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC, said that the Delta variant of coronavirus “is now spreading with incredible efficiency” in the US and that, compared with the original coronavirus strain that broke out in the US in early 2020, this variant is “more aggressive”.

“It is one of the most infectious respiratory viruses we know of and that I have seen in my 20-year career,” [she said](#) at a White House briefing on Thursday, noting that the US is “not out of the woods”.

Walensky warned: “We are at another pivotal moment in this pandemic, with cases rising again and some hospitals reaching their capacity in some areas.”

The US is far from the dire situation before the vaccines were widely available, when repeated surges of infections in 2020 drove the US death toll in the pandemic above 600,000, the [highest in the world](#).

But officials are becoming concerned as new cases have continued to rise fast in the last two weeks and vaccination rates are stuck stubbornly just below [Joe Biden’s 4 July goal](#) of 70% of American adults having had at least one shot.

The Delta variant now accounts for more than 83% of new coronavirus cases in the US. And Dr Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the chief medical adviser to the president, said there are some areas of the country where Delta accounts for more than 90% of new infections.

“And if you look at the recent seven-day or 14-day averages of cases, for example, the cases are up by, like, 195%. The hospitalizations are up 46%. And the 14-day average for deaths are up 42% … it’s not the direction we want it to be,” Fauci [told NPR News](#), adding: “We’ve got to do much better.”

A smiling and unmasked Biden in May [hailed a “great day”](#) and said that “if you are fully vaccinated, you no longer need to wear a mask” or practice social distancing.

But the US president is now almost daily urging eligible Americans who have not been vaccinated to get the shot, saying on Wednesday night that it was [“gigantically important”](#).

On Thursday, when Walensky was asked if official mask guidance had changed she said it had not.

“Fully vaccinated people are protected from severe illness,” she said but added that in areas with high numbers of cases, low vaccination rates and where the Delta variant is rising “you should be wearing a mask if you are unvaccinated. If you are vaccinated you get exceptional protection from the vaccine but you have the opportunity to make the personal choice to add extra layers of protection if you so choose.”

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[Coronavirus](#)

California sees a sharp increase in Covid cases and a return to mask mandates

Los Angeles infections have increased twentyfold and San Francisco positive cases have almost tripled in two weeks



A tourist poses for a photo in Hollywood, California, as Los Angeles county returns to an indoor mask mandate due to a surge in Covid cases.
Photograph: Robyn Beck/AFP/Getty Images

A tourist poses for a photo in Hollywood, California, as Los Angeles county returns to an indoor mask mandate due to a surge in Covid cases.
Photograph: Robyn Beck/AFP/Getty Images

[Erin McCormick in San Francisco](#)

Thu 22 Jul 2021 18.08 EDT

Just over a month after the Golden state dropped all its coronavirus safety restrictions, numerous parts of [California](#) are seeing a dramatic increases in Covid-19 infections that have prompted counties to reinstate masking requirements and heightened calls for reaching the unvaccinated.

In Los Angeles, [county figures show](#) that Covid-19 infections have increased twentyfold in a month. In San Francisco, they've almost tripled in two weeks and, overall, California's hospitalization numbers have increased by 58%, [according to New York Times data](#).

Despite the fact that California is one of the country's most vaccinated states, experts blame the highly contagious Delta variant for a new surge that has disrupted businesses' and politicians' plans to celebrate the state's reopening.

[Covid cases rise in all 50 US states as Delta variant spreads](#)

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"Primarily we're seeing infections in the unvaccinated," said George Rutherford, an epidemiologist at the University of California, [San Francisco](#), citing earlier statistics from Los Angeles which found 99.6% of new cases there were in the unvaccinated. "We're seeing the Delta variant's extra strength."

Even with [New York Times figures](#) showing nearly 77% of the state's adults having gotten at least one shot of vaccine, that leaves plenty of unprotected people to transmit the virus, Rutherford said.

Although the percentages of state's residents with the virus aren't as high as in less densely populated hotspots around the country, such as in Arkansas, Missouri and Louisiana, the 5,577 recent California cases counted by the [state health department](#) still add up to a worrying figure. Meanwhile, the 13% case rate per 100,000 residents, [shown by the New York Times](#), is now comparable to the rate that kept counties in lockdown just a few months ago.

Los Angeles county officials announced 2,551 new cases and seven deaths on Wednesday. The county's test positivity rate jumped to 5.2%, up from 0.7% a month ago, according to [a release](#) from the county health department.

“Because of the more infectious Delta variant and the intermingling of unmasked individuals where vaccination status is unknown, unfortunately, we are seeing a surge in cases in LA county that looks somewhat similar to last summer,” said Dr Barbara Ferrer, the director of public health for [Los Angeles](#) county.



A clinic at the Los Angeles Dodgers stadium offers free tickets for each vaccine taken before a game. Photograph: Jayne Kamin-Oncea/USA Today Sports

However, she said she was hopeful that a huge surge in deaths, similar to last summer’s, would be avoided. “An important difference this summer is that with millions of people vaccinated, we are hopeful we will avoid similar increases in deaths that were experienced last year,” she said.

Local analyses by the [Sacramento Bee](#) and the [San Francisco Chronicle](#) have shown that Black and Latino communities are suffering higher Covid-19 case rates where vaccination rates have also lagged.

“It has nothing to do with what color you are or how old you are,” said Rutherford. “It’s whether you’ve been vaccinated. And those who are unvaccinated tend to cluster together.”

The California state capitol re-instituted its mask requirements two weeks ago, after nine legislative aides were detected with Covid infections in screenings. Four of them were fully vaccinated, according to [reporting by the Chronicle](#).

Rutherford said that as the overall case rates increased, the chance of vaccinated residents coming down with “breakthrough” infections also increased, even in areas that had only recently thought that they had hit herd immunity: the point at which enough people have immunity to the virus it can no longer easily spread. But most hospitalizations, deaths and severe cases would still occur among the unvaccinated, he said.

“With more people walking around with infections, the probability of being exposed is greater,” he said. And, he said, the transmissibility of the Delta variant raised the threshold for herd immunity.

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- A new start after 60 I was sick, tired and had lost myself – until I began lifting weights at 71
- 'There are no rules now' How gen Z reinvented pop punk
- Limbo star Amir El-Masry I sat on Omar Sharif's lap! It was like I was with my granddad



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Soul

Interview

Leon Bridges: ‘My transition was dishwasher one day, star the next’

Max Bell



‘I want to inch my way toward more transparency’ ... Leon Bridges.

Photograph: Justin Hardiman

‘I want to inch my way toward more transparency’ ... Leon Bridges.

Photograph: Justin Hardiman

The speed of the soul singer’s stardom left him reeling. As he releases his best album yet, he explains how he shook off his insecurities – and confronted love, loss and a racist US

Fri 23 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

Leon Bridges leans back on a gold velvet couch at [Gold-Diggers](#), a compound in east Hollywood that includes a hotel, nine recording studios, a bar and a live music venue. Here in Studio 2, sunlight streams down from a skylight, bathing Bridges’ sky-blue madras shirt and buttery-brown leather

loafers in a soft glow. His sartorial combination places him somewhere between a soul singer and country star circa 1970.

Now 32, Bridges was working as a dishwasher just seven years ago, vying for attention at open mic nights in his home town of Fort Worth, Texas. In 2015, he released his debut album, the Grammy-nominated Coming Home, and soon the sheltered Christian found himself performing his spiritual, gospel-imbued song [River](#) on Saturday Night Live and [covering Ray Charles for the Obamas at the White House](#). Music journalists hailed this soul singer/songwriter as the second coming of Sam Cooke.

More accolades were to come, but Bridges says he's spent much of his six-year career "coming to grips with my reality. My transition was dishwasher one day and being somewhat of a star [the next]. It's so weird that this is my life now. Sometimes it can be overwhelming."

Though Bridges is generally in a "healthy mental space today", there was a period between Coming Home and his second album, Good Thing, released in 2018, when the speed of his success led to depression. "This was just an accumulation of all of these feelings – feeling like I don't deserve to be here or I'm not handsome enough or a good enough singer. I would randomly just burst out in tears in front of my friends, and I'm grateful [they] helped me work through it."

There's a solitude and weight that comes with gaining success. Initially, it was rough for me

Blue Mesas, the song that closes his new album, Gold-Diggers Sound, reflects on that period over sombre violin. "There's a solitude and weight that comes with gaining a little bit of success and notoriety. Initially, it was rough for me," he says. "Number one, losing my anonymity in my home town was tough. And then, as someone with insecurities about my physical appearance, being thrown in the limelight, and having to deal with that. Blue Mesas was that feeling of loneliness even in the midst of people that love me."

At the beginning of our conversation, Bridges struggles to answer questions at length, having just done several telephone interviews. When he picks up an acoustic guitar, however, he becomes talkative and relaxed, lightly plucking the strings between words. Although Bridges plans to remain in Fort Worth, his body language suggests he feels at home here in California. And for several months in 2019, this was home. He slept in the hotel, drank and socialised at the bar, and composed Gold-Diggers Sound in these studios.

A remarkable and progressive R&B album, Gold-Diggers Sound has the most eclectic compositions of Bridges' career, as well as his most emotionally transparent songwriting. Every song seems to answer critics who claimed his early work lacked originality and suffered from emotional naivety. On Why Don't You Touch Me, its music walking a forlorn line across country and contemporary R&B, Bridges agonises over a lack of physical touch that seems to foreshadow the end of a relationship. Lead single Motorbike, however, is a tender, sensual ballad that coasts on ethereal guitar, Bridges' honeyed vocals shining. With Magnolias, Bridges offers a thumping spin on late-90s and early-00s R&B, his lyrics dripping with carnality.

'I had a hard time doing the relationship thing' ... Leon Bridges' Motorbike.

He has previously described his Christian faith as salvation – "I had little hope and couldn't see a road out of my reality," he once said of his dishwashing days pre-fame, "the only thing I could cling to in the midst of all that was my faith in God" – but the fear of offending his fellow congregants was creatively stifling. "When you look at my first album, I was still in the Christian bubble," he admits now. "I was a little apprehensive even writing love songs around that time, just out of fear that the community I was in wouldn't accept the more secular route that I was going. A lot of those songs were definitely surface level." For Gold-Diggers Sound, though, "it was finding ways to be more transparent without being super direct. Every album, I want to inch my way toward more transparency about some of my relationships and some of my struggles."

He elaborates a little. "During the pandemic, I was able to build a relationship with a girl. It's so weird saying that, because my life has always

been just casual encounters, to the point that I had a hard time doing the relationship thing. It's funny, because I write so much about love. But that's the beauty of songwriting. Sometimes those things aren't always derived from life experiences. I know that this story or concept can resonate with someone else."

After finishing Good Thing, Bridges, Grammy-winning producer [Ricky Reed](#) (Halsey, Lizzo) and guitarist Nate Mercereau decided to make a third record that better reflected the broad range of Bridges' influences – everything from Ginuwine's irrepressibly sexual R&B to Townes Van Zandt's despondent country. Moreover, Bridges hoped that in doing so, he would challenge some people's myopic notions about the kind of music he should be making.

"One thing I've noticed is that fans tend to want to put boundaries on Black expression. If I wear a grill or dance to some hip-hop with my homies, people are in the comments like, 'What happened to ...?' 'I wish you were ...' They want me to play it safe," Bridges says. "I can get down on some Marvin Gaye shit and some Young Thug shit, and it's all us. This is our culture."



Night-time Leon ... 'can we get this guy in the studio?' Photograph: Justin Hardiman

To make the record, he, Reed and Mercereau drank tequila in the afternoon and coffee at night, piecing together songs from extensive jam sessions. Reed pushed Bridges to reveal more of his personal life on record. “Our sessions were like noon to five,” the producer explains. “Then every night Leon goes out, does his thing, and comes back the next day: ‘Ah, it was crazy, man. We started here, then went there, and had dinner with so-and-so.’ And I’m like: can I get that guy in the studio? Can we get night-time Leon on record?”

Gold-Diggers Sound offers sides of “night-time Leon” – the aforementioned Magnolias or the southern blues-soul-gospel hybrid Sho Nuff – but it also shows Leon at his most vulnerable and political. Sweeter finds Bridges yearning for peace for Black people, an escape from “those judging eyes”. Though the pandemic stalled his plans to release Gold-Diggers Sound in 2020, Bridges released Sweeter at the height of last year’s protests against police brutality. He couldn’t remain silent.

“One of the positive things that transpired out of the pandemic was people having the time and stillness to pay attention to the horrors of police brutality,” he says. “If it weren’t for the pandemic, a song like Sweeter wouldn’t have had the impact that it did. I wrote that well before all the riots and everything with [George Floyd](#). That’s just a testament to the perpetual narrative of unarmed Black men dying at the hands of police. Hopefully, in a minuscule way, Sweeter was a beacon of hope and light for the Black community.”

Sweeter isn’t the end of Bridges’ activism. In 2020, he co-founded [The Big Good](#), a philanthropic organisation giving back to his community in Fort Worth. In addition to holding a turkey drive last Thanksgiving, Bridges hosted and performed at a Big Good-organised dinner that raised more than \$200,000 (£145,000).

While he deliberates over where to allocate the funds and prepares for his Gold-Diggers Sound tour, he is considering a move that could increase the intensity of the once uncomfortable spotlight.

“I honestly want to make a country album. There aren’t too many Black artists making country music today,” he says. “All I need is time.”

Gold-Diggers Sound is released on 23 July on Columbia Records

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A new start after 60: ‘I was sick, tired and had lost myself – until I began lifting weights at 71’

Joan Macdonald faced growing health problems before she began lifting weights, shattering preconceptions about what's possible in your eighth decade



Joan MacDonald: ‘People need to know that you are not finished at 50 or 60 or 70.’ Photograph: @trainwithjoan/Instagram

Joan MacDonald: ‘People need to know that you are not finished at 50 or 60 or 70.’ Photograph: @trainwithjoan/Instagram

[Paula Cocozza](#)

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Fri 23 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Joan Macdonald has not always looked like a bodybuilder. At 71, she weighed 90kg (14st 4lb), and had rising blood pressure and kidney troubles. She was also on medication for cholesterol and acid reflux, and her doctor wanted to double the dose.

Her daughter, Michelle, expressed Macdonald's dilemma bluntly. "You're going to end up like your mother did in a nursing home!" she told Macdonald. "And people are going to have to look after you. Do you want that?"

"Of course I didn't want it," Macdonald says now. "I was sick and tired of being sick and tired."

Macdonald's thoughts swirled for two weeks. She thought: "I want to earn Michelle's respect. I mean, she loves me, but you can love a person without even liking them."

She left her home in Ontario, Canada, to join Michelle and her husband, both fitness coaches, in Tulum, Mexico. Macdonald learned to make protein shakes. She visited the gym. She followed Michelle's workout programme, using the machines, then light weights – 2.5lb (1kg) – working up to heavier ones. She mimes raising a barbell and lowering it behind her head. She can do this with 25lb (11kg).

"Wow! Your back!" people in the gym told her. "It's so defined!" They took photos. "I'm going: 'Wooh! That looks pretty good! I've got some muscles here.'" Within nine months, she was off all medication.

"There is a misconception that people over 65 cannot produce hypertrophy [growth] of the muscle," says Mark Peterson, an associate professor of physical medicine and rehabilitation at the University of Michigan. "Muscle is a tissue that can adapt with stimulus." The key is to check with a doctor first, and start slowly.

On [Instagram](#), Macdonald posts photos of herself in sports tops, or jumping waves in beachwear. She has 1.4m followers and a partnership with the retailer [Women's Best](#). "I have a tendency to do things that anyone else would say: 'Oh my God! What's she doing now?'"

Macdonald celebrated her 75th birthday this year by zip lining. She has always liked a challenge, always liked “building something”. In DIY projects, her husband is supervisor and Macdonald “dogsbody”. But now, she says: “I’m building me instead.”



‘I’m building me.’ Photograph: @trainwithjoan/Instagram

Macdonald has lived a lot of her adult life in a medicated body with a variable weight. So why was she able to make the change at 71? “I think I’d met a new low in my life. I’d maybe touched bottom.

“I was busy with my family. You forget about yourself. I wish I’d known what I know now. I would have been a healthier me most of my life ... You’re fighting yourself really, because you’re constantly in this yo-yo state.”

She sounds as if she is holding back tears when she says: “I don’t want to go back to what I was.” She is “90% secure” that she won’t. “My body is where it wants to be.”

Of course, there is an emotional adjustment to fitting a new physical form. She is more outgoing, happier, less angry. “I still have to come to terms with myself, that I have changed that much. People say: ‘Gotta learn to love

yourself!' When you first start out, you go: 'What's there to love?' That's how I felt. But I can look in the mirror now and not turn my head."

Does Macdonald feel compassion for her old self? "Some," she says. "But it was unnecessary to go this whole route before I finally coined on to 'you can change'."

I can't help thinking that her desire for a transformation started long before she was 71. "In my teens, in high school, that's when I started to struggle with weight. I thought I was really dumpy and fat, and yet I knew I wore clothes smaller than some of my friends who put me down," she says.

[Bodybuilding blind: 'Anything's possible with a bit of ingenuity'](#)

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Why did decades pass before she found what she needed to take her younger self in hand? "It took that many years to wake up," she says. "Fifty-five years!" But maybe there is equilibrium in the way she came to these changes late.

As a girl, she says, she had an uneasy body image "because my development was really early. I resented losing my childhood. At 10 years old, you don't want to not be a child any more."

As a mature woman, she is powering her own rejuvenation. "People need to know, especially women, that you are not finished at 40, definitely not finished at 50 or 60 or 70. You can go on and on until the day there is no more," she says. "And you should be able to do it with pizzazz."

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Punk

‘There are no rules now’: how gen Z reinvented pop punk



The new wave ... Willow (*left*) and Olivia Rodrigo. Composite: Dana Trippe
The new wave ... Willow (*left*) and Olivia Rodrigo. Composite: Dana Trippe

Twenty years ago, it was made by juvenile men in shorts. Now, from *Meet Me @ the Altar* to Olivia Rodrigo, diverse young women have reclaimed the genre – and made it the sound of the summer

[Hannah Ewens](#)

Fri 23 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

A white man whining about high school, his mediocre hometown or a faceless girl: that is what most people picture when they think of pop punk. In the 90s and 00s, all-male bands such as Green Day, Blink-182, New Found Glory and Sum 41 ruled the charts, looking like Jackass extras in Dickies pants and wallet chains and sounding – albeit mildly – like rebellion. Now, though, a diverse group of women are emerging who have kept the genre’s sense of belligerence and fun, but are developing it to create

something youthful that also has a quality those older bands eschewed – emotional maturity.

Today's pop punks go to therapy ([I'm Gonna Tell My Therapist On You by Pinkshift](#)) and sing self-reflectively about relationships. Their vocals recall the soprano gymnastics of the genre's 00s matriarch, [Paramore's Hayley Williams](#) more than her nasal male contemporaries. Pop punk has become a defining sound of 2021: Olivia Rodrigo's splenetic [Good 4 U](#) recently spent five weeks at No 1 in the UK, the longest stretch for a rock song for 25 years, while Willow, the daughter of Will Smith, released a pop punk album last week that discusses her personal growth and confronts the fake people in her life.

"I'm not really your regular white, male pop punk vocalist. I'm very girly; no one looks like me," says a grinning Edith Johnson of [Meet Me @ the Altar](#), a pop punk trio comprising women of colour. While Johnson embraces a feminine neo-punk aesthetic, with long, neon braids of changing colours, it is not a prerequisite for the new pop punk bands. "We can be feminine, masculine – there are really no rules now."

'If swear words stop brown girls and little girls listening to our music, then we won't do it' ... [Feel a Thing](#) by Meet Me @ the Altar.

Johnson's voice has a soulful dimension, while Ashrita Kumar of Pinkshift has a lilt and pouty quality that is not unlike that of Gwen Stefani. "Black and brown women have a different vocal range and abilities and take inspiration from different places," says [Yasmine Summan](#), an alternative culture journalist and the co-host of the lifestyle podcast [On Wednesdays We Wear Black](#). "Pop punk isn't just a guy who sounds like [former Blink-182 singer] Tom DeLonge, it's a woman who sounds like Ashrita."

From the outside, it might seem as if these women have emerged from nowhere. For pop punk, the 2010s were a relative dead zone. Despite retaining and gaining fans, the legacy bands struggled to remain relevant while newer bands such as State Champs and [Neck Deep](#), still majority white and male, largely trod the same water. As the writer Dan Ozzi [asked of artists and fans in a 2013 article for Vice](#): "If pop punk is inherently this juvenile, is it meant to graduate into adulthood?"

It seemed not. Adrian Choa, a 32-year-old pop punk fan, recalls returning to the UK at the start of the 2010s after a long stint in California, one of the genre's spiritual homes, to find that pop punk was mocked and indie had taken over. "There's something really at odds with British culture – and British male bravado especially – about squeaky voices singing about 'going to the mall' and skateboarding," he says. "Pop punk is so easy to satirise."



'Maybe it's not great that a bunch of straight white guys run this scene' ...
Pinkshift. Photograph: Leigh Ann Rodgers

More gravely, abuse of power against fans was rife. [Austin Jones](#), a YouTuber who recorded pop punk cover versions, was given a 10-year prison sentence in 2019 for receiving indecent images of children. Jake McElfresh, AKA [Front Porch Step](#), admitted sexting girls and was dropped by his label. Kenny Harris, Panic! at the Disco's touring guitarist, [left the band after being accused of inappropriate behaviour](#). Brand New's Jesse Lacey apologised after [women and a 15-year-old girl accused him of sexual misconduct](#). There are numerous other cases. Warped Tour festival, a bastion of pop punk, closed at the height of the #MeToo movement because, [according to the organiser, Kevin Lyman](#), some bands didn't want to be associated with Warped Tour artists.

During the pandemic, members of other bands affiliated with pop punk – [Joey Armstrong of Sum 41](#) and [Simple Plan's David Desrosiers](#) – were accused of sexual misconduct, while the California-based label [Burger Records shut down after allegations of sexual abuse were made against several musicians associated with it](#). In a statement, the label apologised “to anyone who has suffered irreparable harm from any experience that occurred in the Burger and indie/DIY music scene”. Interest among gen Z – those born between the mid-90s and early 2010s – in how abuse had affected the genre grew. “People actually started saying we shouldn’t support these bands any more,” says Kumar. “Maybe it’s not great that a bunch of straight white guys run this scene.”

Meanwhile, a 20-year fashion cycle combined with gen Z’s predilection for nostalgia has pointed the dial back towards pop punk. The vast majority of these artists were too young to have been part of the 00s scene, but [Olivia O'Brien](#), an R&B and pop artist who has dabbled recently in pop punk, echoes the other women when she tells me: “When I was a kid, I saw all these teenagers who were so cool. That’s everything I wanted to be: a teenager in the early 00s.”



‘Punk was the next thing to come around for pop to try on’ ... Jim Shaw and Han Mee of Hot Milk. Photograph: Paul Harries

What makes this new era unique is that the young women involved are influenced by a corner of 00s pop culture that repelled most boys and men. Throughout the decade, Disney and Nickelodeon stars such as Demi Lovato, Miley Cyrus and Hilary Duff released pop rock albums with guitars and abrasive – but cute – visuals. [Daisy Rock](#) guitars were coveted for their supposedly girl-friendly designs, while the film [Freaky Friday](#), released a year after Avril Lavigne's 2002 debut, starred Lindsay Lohan in an all-girl rock band (Lohan rode this wave of tween love with a Disney rock-style album the following year). “Someone complimented me the other day, like: ‘Your voice is so sweet, it’s almost Disney,’” says Johnson. “All of us are so collectively, kinda subconsciously, influenced by Disney rock.”

Johnson’s search for female representation took her to Disney rock and Lavigne, a significant influence on this wave of bands; Willow Smith has collaborated with her. Bonnie Fraser of the pop punk band [Stand Atlantic](#) is old enough to remember Lavigne’s 2002 heyday and says it didn’t matter that she was a manufactured pop star: “As a kid, you don’t know about marketing; you take everything at face value. As manipulative as that sounds, the ends justify the means, because she was there as someone to look up to.”

Younger artists came of age in the late 00s, by which time Lavigne had abandoned her tomboy image and started wearing more conventionally feminine pink and black attire. “People clowned on Avril for being a girly woman in pop punk and doing her own thing and now they’re so heavily praised for doing that,” says the pop singer [Chloe Moriondo](#). “I always was kind of hoping for more bands with women. But I took what I could get.” This included Paramore’s Williams, lovingly name-checked on Moriondo’s track Favorite Band (“Hayley just gets me the way you never did”).



‘My label didn’t know who I was’ ... Fefe Dobson. Photograph: Mathew Guido for Spoke Entertainment

Times have changed even within this girl-led sphere. The black female rocker [Fefe Dobson](#) emerged amid the Disney rock trend, but her impact was dampened by Lavigne’s ubiquity. When Dobson first saw Lavigne’s video for Complicated, she panicked. “I’m this black girl, my hair’s curly, I can’t get it as straight as hers, I have a booty, I didn’t fit into my Dickies like that. I knew in that moment it’s gonna be a tough road.” Her second album was shelved by her label, who dropped her shortly afterwards. “They thought it was ‘too dark’ and that I didn’t know who I was. *They* didn’t know who I was.” In the following years, songs co-written for that album appeared as singles on Disney rock albums by Miley Cyrus and Selena Gomez. “Why was it not too dark for them, then?”

The male artist [DeWayne](#), who is influenced by pop punk, says: “As POC [people of colour] artists in alternative music, you have to be 20 times as good-looking, 20 times as nice; you gotta walk the line, you can’t be too feisty or too straight-edged. You have to be perfect. I really hope we can break that soon.” Dobson is now cited by music journalists – and artists – as an influence on the new wave, from Willow to Rodrigo.

The pop punk rebirth is happening in two strains: within alternative rock, and in the mainstream by non-rock artists. “Punk was the next thing to come around for pop to try on,” says Han Mee, the frontwoman of the Manchester pop punkers [Hot Milk](#). “Olivia Rodrigo hasn’t been loading amps or playing empty rooms and selling merch. There’s a difference between [Jxdn](#) [a TikToker who has released pop punk with Blink-182’s Travis Barker] and a band like Hot Milk. He’s sat in a studio in LA and never played a show.”

It is uncertain whether money or attention will trickle down to the DIY artists, but from [Tramp Stamps being accused of being an “industry plant”](#) to [accusations of plagiarism being aimed at Rodrigo](#), the message is clear: nod to the genre if you will, but respect it.

Rodrigo’s popularity notwithstanding, many still see pop punk as male-led, by figures including the rapper turned punk [Machine Gun Kelly](#) and the social media star [Lil Huddy](#). Sophie K, a co-host of On Wednesdays We Wear Black, thinks that record labels did a “dick test” to check whether pop punk was sellable again. “When they experimented in this movement, they experimented with Yungblud, Machine Gun Kelly, loads of white males, before they went to a light-skinned Filipina [Rodrigo] and now a light-skinned black woman, Willow.”

Regardless, mainstream acts such as Rodrigo will inspire young women, just as Disney rock artists did a generation earlier. Meet Me @ the Altar have banned swear words from their songs to entice parents – something that would horrify male punks who write songs called Dirty Rotten Bastards and Dick Lips – but the band aren’t bothered by the old bro codes. “If a little girl wasn’t allowed to go to our show because her mum was like: ‘It’s a bit inappropriate for you,’ we just lost an important girl,” says Johnson. “We want our fans to be able to sing to our music. If swear words stop brown girls and little girls listening to our music, then we won’t do it.”

With a new album out this year, the pop punk timeline has matched up with an excited Dobson: “It’s reignited a fire in me, for sure.” This time, it feels as if no one will be left behind.

Meet Me @ the Altar’s EP Model Citizen is released on 13 August on Fueled By Ramen. Chloe Moriondo’s EP Blood Bunny (Acoustic) is out

now on Fueled By Ramen/Public Consumption

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Movies

Interview

Limbo star Amir El-Masry: ‘I sat on Omar Sharif’s lap! It was like I was with my granddad’

[Ryan Gilbey](#)



Amir El-Masry, star of Limbo. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Amir El-Masry, star of Limbo. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

A familiar face from TV roles in *The Night Manager* and *Industry*, the Cairo-born actor is spellbinding in the upcoming independent film about asylum seekers in the Outer Hebrides. But does he owe his career to the *Lawrence of Arabia* star?

Fri 23 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

Amir El-Masry has a gravely handsome face and a forehead that goes on for ever: he is like an Easter Island statue with matinee-idol looks. Audiences will have a lot of time to study that face in *Limbo*, a bittersweet British

comedy about asylum seekers dispatched to a far corner of the Outer Hebrides (the film was shot in Uist) while their claims are processed.

[Limbo review – heart-rending portrait of refugees stranded in Scotland](#)

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Masry plays Omar, who is estranged from his family: his brother is fighting back home in Syria; his parents have fled to Istanbul. He and his housemates divide their time between waiting for the post, attending behavioural classes at the community centre (“Sex: Is a Smile an Invitation?”) and bingeing on episodes of Friends. Nobody told them life was going to be this way.

It is a rare lead role for the 30-year-old actor, who was born in Cairo and raised in London. He has been in demand for several years now: he played a hotel chef opposite Tom Hiddleston in [The Night Manager](#) before becoming a regular cast member on the Amazon espionage series Tom Clancy’s [Jack Ryan](#), the futuristic Netflix thriller [The One](#), and last year’s superb BBC banking drama [Industry](#). He also has a brief role as a military commander in [Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker](#).



Amir El-Masry as Omar and Vikash Bhai as Farhad in Limbo. Photograph: Courtesy of Focus Features/AP

The new film, though, deserves to catapult him out of his own limbo of supporting parts and walk-ons. This is Ken Loach subject matter shot in the deadpan style of Aki Kaurismäki or Elia Suleiman, but it wouldn't work without Masry's minimalist performance, which was good enough to earn him a best actor nomination alongside Riz Ahmed and Anthony Hopkins (the eventual winner) at [last year's British Independent film awards](#).

As Omar, he barely speaks, rarely smiles, hardly even moves. He couldn't be more different in person – or, in this case, via video call from Morocco, where he has been in the Sahara all morning alongside Dominic West and Jack O'Connell shooting [SAS: Rogue Heroes](#), a BBC series from the creator of Peaky Blinders. “Hence the ’tache,” he grins, sitting in a nondescript room and touching the black stripe on his upper lip.

When we meet Omar, he's been stripped of his identity: he's numb, he's holding everything inside him

It turns out that the stillness required to play Omar did not come naturally. “I gesticulate a lot,” he says, “so it was a challenge to be expressive on the inside rather than the outside.” During one of the scenes in which Omar is shown in extreme closeup while he calls his parents from a telephone box, Masry had to learn to dial it back. “Early on, Amir was maybe doing too much,” the film’s writer-director, Ben Sharrock, tells me later. “We’re so close to him that every expression looks huge. I was asking him to do less, do nothing, and he said: ‘Buster Keaton?’ I was like: ‘Exactly!’”

Actor and director used that hangdog genius as a constant touchstone. “Ben would tell me: ‘We’re going in tight: this is a Buster shot,’” he says. “There were a few moments where I broke down because of the emotion and gravity of the scene, but he said: ‘Imagine you’re carrying two buckets of water. If you let them spill, we have nowhere else to go. Choose your moment.’ When we meet Omar, he's been stripped of his identity: he's numb, waiting to be reinvigorated. He's holding everything inside him.”

Sharrock likens Masry’s work to method acting. “It wasn’t that he couldn’t break character between takes,” he says. “But because everything had to be internalised, you could see the weight of the emotion he was carrying. It was

almost overflowing.” In preparation for the part, the actor spent several months learning to play the oud, and met with asylum seekers in the UK. “You see this incredible strength in their eyes,” he says. “One or two of them were even able to joke about their situation.”

The director had been in the middle of an international search for the right actor several years ago when he saw a still from [The Night Manager](#) online. “Immediately I was convinced that he was our man,” he says. “Amir has a look that can hold the camera and the audience. I went to bed that night dreaming of him as Omar.”

At that point, Masry had already been acting for 10 years after a lucky break. On a business trip to Paris, his father, an accountant, bumped into Omar Sharif and introduced himself as a fellow Egyptian, then began talking up his son’s acting dreams. “My father has zero social inhibitions,” he laughs. At that moment, he is distracted by a beeping on his phone. “There he is, calling me now! That’s so funny.” Answer the call, I tell him: we can get his side of the story. But he demurs. “He would take over the conversation, I tell you!”

Masry Sr introduced his son to Sharif on the phone and urged the boy to come to Paris immediately to meet him in person. “It was around my 18th birthday so my brother bought me a Eurostar ticket. I was petrified but when I got there, he took me in his arms.” In a photo of their meeting, Masry appears to be sitting on Sharif’s lap. “I was!” he hoots, as though it still hasn’t quite sunk in. “I really was. It was like I was with my grandad.”

Sitting with Omar Sharif- moments before I got my big break after he kindly gave me his seat to his premiere. RIP
pic.twitter.com/CySge8zHOJ

— Amir El-masry (@AmirMasry) [July 10, 2015](#)

The esteemed star of Lawrence of Arabia, who was then 76, gave Masry a ticket for the premiere of his latest film. It was there that he met its screenwriter, Youssef Maaty, who happened to be looking for an Anglo-

Egyptian teenager to star in his comedy [Ramadan Mabrouk Abo El Alamein Hammouda](#). As a cocky rich kid who causes chaos at his new school, Masry struts and swaggers through his scenes with the aplomb of a young Travolta.

I have a problem with representation. I like to sit down with film-makers to find out why they've chosen a subject

Returning to the UK and training at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (Lamda), he got a rude awakening once he started going up for auditions. “When I was at drama school I could play anything,” he says. “But the reality soon hits you once you’re out. I would find myself in the room for really cool jobs, then afterwards you find out who got the part and you think: ‘Oh, so this is a pattern.’ Sometimes I’ll say to my agent: ‘Why am I not being seen for this role? A few of my friends in my age group are up for it.’ The answer is always: ‘They want to go a different way.’ Which means white. But then you think: ‘It’s not Downton Abbey, it’s modern, so where’s the argument?’”

He shakes his head. “That’s been a regular occurrence. I feel like I’m still trying to fight a narrative that I became aware of straight out of drama school.”

Like many Muslim actors, the roles that do come his way often reflect a larger cultural bias. But whenever he has agreed to portray terrorists – in Jack Ryan, or in the 2019 Danish film [Daniel](#), in which he played the Isis killer Mohammed Emwazi, known as Jihadi John – he has insisted on nuance, complexity, empathy.

[‘We have more in common than what separates us’: refugee stories, told by refugees](#)

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“Of course, being a Muslim myself, I have a problem with the representation on film and television,” he says. “But what I like to do is sit down with the film-makers and find out why they’ve chosen to tackle this subject.” He had reservations initially about making Daniel. “I knew people who went to school with Jihadi John, and the way they described him wasn’t the person

in the script. He wasn't born a villain. He became a monster, and an abhorrent individual, but what led him to that? That's the big question. It wasn't Islam. That was only used as a tool. Having a director receptive to those things, as we did on Daniel, means that you can make those sorts of changes."

Sometimes he even breaks with industry etiquette by writing to casting directors to question their choices and request opportunities. "Not to stick it to them, but just in the spirit of: 'Well, why not me? Why can't I be that person?' Some may deem it cheeky but my dad always told me: 'If you don't ask, you don't get.'" His father must be proud. Time to say goodbye, so that Masry can call him back for his latest piece of career advice.

Limbo is in cinemas from 30 July.

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Labour's local successes show there's a path forward – if the national party dares to take it

[Andy Beckett](#)

A Westminster leadership that often appears timid or lost should learn from bold, innovative municipal government



Market Square, Preston, Lancashire. Photograph: Ian G Dagnall/Alamy

Market Square, Preston, Lancashire. Photograph: Ian G Dagnall/Alamy

Fri 23 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

As Labour's general [election defeats](#) have mounted, it's become common to fear that the party will never hold office again. There are reasons to think that this pessimism is overdone: the volatility of our electoral system, the government's accumulating problems, and the [ageing voters](#) whom it increasingly relies on.

But another reason not to despair quite yet is rarely introduced into the

panicky debate about Labour's future. Away from Westminster, in regions such as northern England where its crisis is supposed to be deepest, the party is still in office in lots of places, in both traditional local government institutions and new ones created by devolution. And rather than just clinging on, in a small but growing number of these places Labour is doing innovative and popular things with what power it still has.

Some of these islands of radicalism are relatively well known, such as “the [Preston model](#)”, a Labour council’s revival of the once-struggling Lancashire city by getting its main institutions to spend a lot more of their money locally. Other ambitious Labour administrations such as Salford, North Ayrshire and the North of Tyne combined authority are also beginning to attract attention beyond their localities, by pursuing expansive policies such as opening more public libraries, building large numbers of council homes and investing in new green businesses.

Meanwhile, already high-profile but previously quite cautious Labour mayors such as Andy Burnham and Sadiq Khan have become bolder, particularly in their policies to [reduce air pollution](#) and improve public transport. Despite Labour’s sagging national popularity since 2017, in all these local strongholds its support has been resilient or even increased. Is this the beginning of something important – or just a few minor fightbacks by a declining party?

Sceptics about [Labour’s prospects](#) have plenty of reasons to think the latter. In centralised Britain, local government has been losing power and funding for decades, and particularly since 2010, as it has suffered the worst of [Conservative austerity](#). And under Keir Starmer, Labour hasn’t been able – or willing – to use its local successes as evidence of its ability to run the country. A party that is damagingly short of national policies, and which recently launched a [policy review](#) to find some, appears largely uninterested in the promising experiments of its municipal wing. In statements by Starmer and his shadow ministers, the achievements of these innovators rarely feature.

This disconnect tells us important things about the state of the party, and also about our wider politics. Starmer’s vulnerable position as leader makes it risky for him to publicise the achievements of currently more effective local

Labour politicians, such as the ambitious Burnham. Many of the party's mayors and council leaders are also to the left of Starmer, or at least to the version of Starmer permitted by his centrist advisers. They are more interested in redistributing power and resources locally than in looking respectable for the Tory press, or trying to appease increasingly rightwing ex-Labour voters.

This boldness partly explains what happened to the many new ideas generated by the left during Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. Some of that energy has either lingered in, or been transferred to, Britain's town and city halls. Yet with Corbynism now increasingly treated by Labour as an aberration, its ideas – however successful they may be locally – appear to be largely off-limits to Starmer.

The municipal radicals seem undeterred. The leader of Preston council, Matthew Brown, and the mayor of Salford, Paul Dennett, have written occasional articles about what Labour nationally could learn from their work. But they also have a strong air of independence. In a recent book co-authored by Brown and the leftwing writer Rhian E Jones, [Paint Your Town Red](#), which makes modern municipal socialism seem seductively achievable, there is a section titled “Solving problems from below without permission from above”. In some ways, these local leaders have seceded from mainstream politics, with its Westminster fixation. That may be their most radical step of all.

Yet they have also learned to exploit the Conservatives' careless lawmaking. Brown and Jones argue that the new mayoralties and combined authorities, “cynically introduced” by the Tories since 2010 as an attempt to devolve the blame for austerity, have inadvertently “proved amenable” to leftwing politicians. The new structures have prompted them to form new regional alliances and to think afresh.

This picture of a kind of guerrilla government by the local left is very appealing in an era of Tory domination and general Labour toothlessness. But as a long-term strategy it may have limits. A similar but larger-scale leftwing experiment took place at the Greater London Council (GLC) between 1981 and 1986, during Margaret Thatcher's premiership. The GLC

had originally been created by the Tories to loosen Labour's hold on the capital by extending London's boundaries to include its more rightwing suburbs. Yet during the 80s a leftwing Labour administration led by Ken Livingstone took control, and found legislative loopholes that enabled it to increase and redirect the GLC's spending in radical directions.

With little help from a cautious Labour leadership, rather like today's, the GLC supported multiculturalism and minority rights in pioneering and eventually very influential ways. But its radicalism also so enraged and threatened the Conservatives that they abolished it. The current government is not yet suggesting that today's leftwing mayoralties and councils be abolished. But days after Labour's successes in this year's mayoral elections, the Tories confirmed their plans to change the voting system for electing mayors, to the probable disadvantage of Labour candidates. Even more than Thatcher, this government is intolerant of rival centres of power.

For anyone wanting the city hall radicals to rescue Labour, there are also potential problems of scale. It's relatively easy for bold politicians to win control locally in elections when turnouts tend to be low, and more politicised voters are influential. It's also not that difficult to get a good press for shaking up a town from local newspapers that may welcome the excitement, and are often fairly neutral. But national politics, with its ferocious media bias towards Conservatism and fickle swing voters, is a different business.

Yet for Labour to recover nationally, and to remain usefully in power locally, closer cooperation between these two sides of the party may be one of the few viable strategies. Labour's recent announcement that in government it "would ask public bodies to give more contracts to British businesses", on the condition that those businesses improve their "social, environmental and labour" practices – both policies echoing parts of the Preston model – may be a sign that Starmer is finally beginning to pay attention to the municipal revolutions taking place under his nose. If not, the lives of those revolutions may be short and lonely.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Britney Spears](#)

Britney Spears is our generation's mirror: We owe it to ourselves to free her

[Van Badham](#)



Spears is trapped in a state of legal adolescence, but since her plea for freedom to a Californian court, her tone has become more hopeful



A Britney Spears tattoo on the arm of a '#FreeBritney' activist. The star's own Instagram account reminds us that solidarity is not only our human instinct, it's our moral duty. Photograph: Robyn Beck/AFP/Getty Images

A Britney Spears tattoo on the arm of a '#FreeBritney' activist. The star's own Instagram account reminds us that solidarity is not only our human instinct, it's our moral duty. Photograph: Robyn Beck/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 22 Jul 2021 20.43 EDT

Amid the bleak horrors of endless lockdown there is presently one certain source of joy. It's Britney Spears' Instagram account.

Inspirational quotes, cute selfies and objects of material desire are a consistent theme across many accounts on the platform, especially among the "30-something western white girl" demographic the pop star Spears inhabits.

Yet since Spears' [chilling 24-minute statement](#) to a California court on 22 June, pleading for the "conservatorship" she's lived under for 13 years to end, there's a vaguely perceptible shift in tone. From the kind of content that you can imagine her narrating "I'm fierce, I'm a fierce woman, I can do this" like a pre-breakfast exercise affirmation, since her courtroom speech the vibe has more ... hope? There are favourite desserts, a cat in sunglasses

and a sweet note of thanks to Selena Gomez for a girly gift. More significantly, there's a pastel drawing of a young woman with a third eye, quotes like "She wore wild flowers in her hair" and a video of Spears doing an endless parade of cartwheels around a lake.

[Britney Spears: US House of Representatives introduces bill to end conservatorship abuse](#)

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This last is captioned with "I feel GRATITUDE and BLESSED !!!!". She thanks her fans for supporting her through her ordeals in court. "Coming along, folks," she writes. "Coming along!!!!!"

I admit, this might be me wilfully creating an Instagram narrative out of my own hopefulness; I really like Britney Spears. I was just a smidge too much older, too drunk, and haughtily obsessed with Bob Dylan to be much interested in her music when her teen pop anthem Baby, One More Time appeared in 1999. By the release of her Blackout album in 2007, though, I was struggling to manage my expectations of becoming an adult with the responsibilities that "growing up" entailed. There was something painfully relatable in the lyrics of Piece of Me. When Spears sang "Another day another drama / Guess I can't see no harm / In working and being a mama / And with a kid on my arm / I'm still an exceptional earner / You want a piece of me?" ... it sounded so worldly, so disappointed. The empathy flowed. I became an instant fan.

What makes pop stars into pop stars is the dark, precious magic that enables them to sing a simple tune in a way that encapsulates a complex, otherwise inexpressible generational feeling. Some acts only manage this for a [small window of years](#) or even [a single song](#). Rarities like Spears manage it for far longer, becoming an avatar not just of a cultural moment, but of that moment's people. As a human mirror to a vast collective self, it's unsurprising that the same loyalty that motivated so many fans to buy her albums has also mobilised them to paste #FreeBritney on placards and march for her liberation."

It's hard not to be reminded of the Piece of Me lyrics given the latest revelations. Until recently, the conservatorship legally empowered Spears's

father alone to control [major decisions of his daughter's life](#), "from business to health, to voting and marriage". Now, he still oversees the money and business dealings, while Jodi Montgomery, a care professional, oversees Spears's personal decisions. She said she's prohibited from driving a car as well as removing an IUD, and has been forced to take physically [punishing](#) lithium. California law typically assigns a conservatorship to enable care for someone who can't "care for himself or herself or manage his or her own finances"; it's more commonly applied to people with severe developmental disabilities or dementia.

There's a lot we don't know about Spears' mental health diagnoses in the wake of her nervous breakdown and substance abuse struggles of 2008 – but what the whole world knows is that the woman considered too unwell to look after her own money somehow wasn't considered too unwell to keep working. Since she lost control of her own decisions, someone has decided that she should release several albums, host a television show and tour relentlessly. An "exceptional earner", indeed.

[Britney Spears speaks out after testimony: 'Sorry for pretending I've been OK'](#)

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We also know that Spears was only 26 when the conservatorship began. It's an age not typically associated with making brilliant life choices, even when most 26-year-olds are not also burdened with vast fame, wealth, constant pursuit by the paparazzi, two small children and an ex-husband. Her treatment since provokes unsettling questions about how pop stars are punished for their success by becoming the targets of other people's opportunism. I can't face watching the episode of [Black Mirror](#) in which Spears' real-life friend, Miley Cyrus, portrayed a pop star sanitised and controlled into insensibility so the parasites around her may continue to feed on the wealth she creates. Part of the relatability of pop icons used to be that they could make bad decisions like the rest of us – blow fortunes, love dickheads, sing "regrets, I've had a few" and remind us all that money's only money and the paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Instead, Britney Spears lives trapped in a state of permanent legal adolescence, personally traumatised by other people's decisions to keep the

human pop star enterprise that she was at 26 permanently intact. As our generational mirror, Britney Spears currently reflects back to us a miserable capitalist world where all relationships are transactional and everything else an asset-management calculation.

As the star's own [Instagram reminds us](#); solidarity is not only our human instinct, it's our moral duty. #FreeBritney!

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Why is the Northern Ireland protocol still an issue? Actions have consequences

[Fintan O'Toole](#)



Someone tell Boris Johnson: you can't bake your 'oven-ready deal' and then remove a key ingredient (even if it's a sausage)



A protest against the Northern Ireland protocol in Belfast, July 2021.
Photograph: Jason Cairnduff/Reuters

A protest against the Northern Ireland protocol in Belfast, July 2021.
Photograph: Jason Cairnduff/Reuters

Fri 23 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

Ask a stupid question and you get a stupid answer. The [Northern Ireland](#) protocol is a stupid answer: it imposes a complex bureaucracy on the movement of ordinary goods across the Irish Sea. But it is the only possible response to a problem created by Boris Johnson. The reason it keeps coming around again and again, like a ghoul on a ghost train, is that it requires Johnson and his government to do something that goes against the grain of the whole Brexit project: to acknowledge that choices have costs.

There used to be a gameshow on American radio and TV called Truth or Consequences. It was so popular that a [whole city in New Mexico](#) is named after it. It's where we live now. In each episode, the contestant was asked a deliberately daft question – and when they failed to answer it, they had to perform a zany or embarrassing stunt.

We've reached that point in the Brexit show. The question is: why did you divide one part of the UK from the rest, creating a chimerical country in

which most of the body is outside the EU's single market while one foot is still inside? Since it is unanswerable, we get the embarrassing stunt: the demand that the EU should tear up a crucial part of the Brexit withdrawal agreement – or else.

Or else what? Britain will unilaterally suspend the operation of the protocol, force-feed the people of Northern Ireland with good English sausage, trigger retaliatory trade sanctions from the EU, destroy Britain's reputation as a trustworthy partner for any sane country and deeply antagonise the Biden administration in Washington with whom it is hoping to do a landmark trade deal. Good luck with all that.

Speaking on Wednesday, after he published his wildly unrealistic set of demands on the Northern Ireland protocol, which were flatly rejected on Thursday by the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, the Brexit minister, David Frost, said negotiations with the EU "have not got to the heart of the problem". That is about the only truth he uttered.

So what is the heart of the problem? It is not the great Ulster sausage famine. It does not lie in the complexities of phytosanitary standards or the mechanisms of legal interpretation – all of which could be solved with pragmatism and mutual trust. When this problem is dissected, the message written on its heart will be: Boris Johnson is constitutionally incapable of accepting the relationship between cause and effect.

The protocol itself may be complicated, both in its dense technocratic language and in its practical operation. But behind it lies a stark and simple reality. Johnson and the rest of the Brexiteers had a choice to make. They could cut the UK off from the EU's single market and customs union. Or they could prioritise the integrity of the UK itself.

They could not do both – and they still can't. The dreary soap opera of the protocol is driven by their need to wish away this unpleasant fact. You can't bake your "oven-ready" Brexit deal and then remove one of the main ingredients from the final dish. The EU has far better things to be doing than making a return trip to the hellish tedium of Brexternity. But for Frost and Johnson, impossible is nothing. Performative belligerence is not bounded by

the limits of what can be achieved. Its main function, indeed, is the denial of reality.

Reality, in this case, is the existence within the UK of a very complex, ambiguous, troubled and fragile place: Northern Ireland. There is a good reason why, in the run-up to the 2016 referendum, the Vote Leave campaign assiduously avoided the question of what would happen to this awkward polity if the UK left the EU. If you're offering a three-word slogan as your proposition to voters, you really don't want to start mapping the future of a border with [more crossings](#) than the entire eastern flank of the EU and a history that is every bit as entangled as its geography.

But the repressed returns. Theresa May, for all her haplessness, at least had the honesty to face two truths. One was that there could not be a return to a hard border on the island of Ireland. The other was that, in order to avoid it, Britain would have to choose between equally unpalatable alternatives.

Because it is inextricably entwined with the rest of Ireland, and therefore with the EU, Northern Ireland was always going to have to stay very closely aligned to the single market. The British government could deal with this fact in one of two ways. It could put the union first and decide that the same regime of alignment would apply to the whole of the UK. Or it could put a hard Brexit first and accept that separating Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK was a price worth paying for it.

May decided that the integrity of the union mattered most. Hence the [infamous backstop](#), which shaped Brexit around the need to have the same rules for Northern Ireland as for Britain. Johnson and the ERG took the opposite decision. They traded the integrity of the union for the freedom of Britain to cut its ties to the European trading system.

It is worth recalling how quickly and nonchalantly Johnson made this choice. He did it in [90 minutes](#), during a meeting with the then taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, [in the Wirral](#) in October 2019. He grasped it as a lifeline to save himself – without that deal, his prime ministership might have been the shortest on record.

Remember, too, that the ERG made the same choice. Over the wails of betrayal from the DUP, the hardline Brexiters all decided that having the same rules for the whole of the UK was less important than achieving their version of freedom.

This would be fair enough, were it not for the great cloud of unknowing that hangs over everything to do with Brexit. What refuses to be known is the connection between choices and outcomes. The basic proposition that the way you make your bed is the way you lie has never been accepted by the British government.

That government is now effectively blaming remainers for the protocol – if they hadn't caused so much trouble in parliament, poor Johnson would never have signed up to it. The argument is that the political chaos unleashed by Brexit frees the very people who created it from any responsibility for their own decisions. It is the excuse familiar to magistrates: sorry, guv, but we were awfully drunk at the time.

The choices, in this pitiful pleading, were never really made at all. They have vanished. But the same, alas, cannot be said for the consequences – especially for the people of Northern Ireland. They have to live with effects that, in Johnson's retelling of the story, were accidental and unintended. The three-word slogan of Brexit has been replaced by a four-letter word: oops.

- Fintan O'Toole is a columnist with the Irish Times
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[OpinionChildren](#)

Violence against Africa's children is rising. It stains our collective conscience

[Graça Machel](#)

We must apply our own home-grown initiatives if we are to curb abuses of Africa's most vulnerable



Children surround a UN soldier patrolling a camp for internally displaced people in Goma, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photograph: Pascal Guyot/AFP/Getty

Children surround a UN soldier patrolling a camp for internally displaced people in Goma, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photograph: Pascal Guyot/AFP/Getty

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Fri 23 Jul 2021 02.01 EDT

Of all the unspeakable injustices suffered by Africa's children – and I've witnessed many – violence is surely the worst because it is almost entirely preventable. Africa's children suffer many hardships, including poverty, hunger and disease. Violence against children is avoidable, yet young people in [Africa](#), especially girls, continue to live with sexual violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, forced labour, corporal punishment and countless other forms of abuse.

After decades spent trying to improve young people's life chances, I had hoped to see at the very least a significant reduction in violence that threatens children. It is now 31 years since the adoption of the [African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child](#) and we have seen some governments putting into place laws and policies aimed at ending violence against children. There have also been efforts, though insufficient, towards eradicating female genital mutilation and child marriage, which cause untold lifelong suffering.

Progress is uneven, fragmented and slow. Violence against children is once more on the rise driven partly by online sexual exploitation and child sexual

abuse tourism and recently by lockdowns and school closures. These have pushed violence behind closed doors where it goes unseen and unreported. Armed conflicts by groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, al-Shabaab in Somalia and Amba separatists in Cameroon, frequently target children, making them the most common victims of abductions, rape, forced marriages and murder.

Regrettably, many African governments lack the political will to tackle these gross violations. This week, in an attempt to galvanise action, the [African Partnership to End Violence against Children](#) (Apevac) convened [a high-level virtual conference](#) to present its new research findings confirming worrying levels of violence and slow government responses. Thankfully, there are also some good, African solutions that can be successfully applied across the continent.

In some parts of Africa, four in 10 girls suffer sexual violence before the age of 15

I have witnessed the worst, as well as the best, of humanity. Yet the brutality revealed in these findings plumb new depths. [Children](#) still face unacceptable levels and forms of physical, psychological and sexual violence. In some parts of Africa, four in 10 girls suffer sexual violence before the age of 15. Even worse is that children in most need – those in residential care or used as child labour, with disabilities, living on the streets, or in armed conflict and refugee situations – are not protected.

Violence against children is not a uniquely African phenomenon. The World Health Organization estimated last year that globally up to a billion children aged 2-17 had experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence or neglect. Many African children enjoy peaceful lives, but it is clear the continent faces an urgent problem, fuelled by complex social and economic drivers. Increasing urbanisation, armed conflict, forced displacement, humanitarian and climate-related disasters all play a part.

Evidence shows that in the long term violence against children leads to poor health, higher school dropout rates and worse job prospects, with consequences for the cost of health and social care, and economic

productivity. In South Africa, for example, the [economic losses resulting from violence against children in 2015](#) were estimated at \$13.5bn (£9.8bn), or 4.3% of GDP. The reduced earnings attributable to physical and emotional violence in childhood were \$2bn and \$750m respectively. If these costs were replicated across sub-Saharan Africa, they would exceed the total official development assistance from the 38-member country Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

[My story proves Rwanda's lack of respect for good governance and human rights | Victoire Ingabire Umuhiza](#)

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African governments are storing up problems for the future. By 2050, the continent will be [home to about a billion young people](#). These children must be given the right life chances now. It is they who will drive Africa into the future and power a social and economic renaissance. The violence these children encounter today threatens to derail Africa's ambitions.

Ending violence against children is one of the most important priorities of our time, and it will not happen without strong political leadership. I applaud Apevac and its call to the African Union to adopt a regional action plan and to political leaders to massively scale up investment in their countries. It is important that political and financial investment is given to Africa's homegrown initiatives to end violence against children. Studies show such initiatives can be successful in addressing the interplay between schools and societies, law and culture, patriarchy and child rights.

Violence against children is preventable. We must redouble our efforts to stop it and remove the stain on our collective conscience. The United Nation's sustainable development goal 16.2 aims to end all forms of [violence against children by 2030](#). Achieving this will unlock multiple wins in gender equality, education, health and a more peaceful and inclusive Africa, where every child grows up safe and secure.

- Graça Machel is chair of the [African Child Policy Forum](#)'s international board of trustees.
-

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[China](#)

China floods: thousands trapped without fresh water as rain moves north

Extreme rainstorms are continuing their path of destruction, dumping 260mm on the city of Xinxiang in just two hours



Flood water in Huangzhuang village in Xinxiang, Henan province, China.
Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Flood water in Huangzhuang village in Xinxiang, Henan province, China.
Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

*[Helen Davidson](#) and agencies
[@heldavidson](#)*

Fri 23 Jul 2021 01.49 EDT

Thousands of people remain trapped in central [China](#) as floods continue to batter the region, killing at least 51, a number that is expected to rise again sharply as recovery crews access previously submerged roads and tunnels in the capital city.

Record-breaking rainstorms – [which dumped a year's worth of rain](#) on and around the capital of Henan province, Zhengzhou, earlier this week – have since moved north, affecting outer cities and regional areas, trapping people without electricity or fresh water, including at hospitals.

On Friday afternoon state media reported the death toll had risen from 33 to 51, citing local authorities, and a financial toll of more than 65 billion yuan (£7.3bn). More than a million people had been relocated, half of them having lost their homes.

[‘I might not make it’: passengers tell of horror as Chinese subway floods](#)
[Read more](#)

“We couldn’t evacuate in time because my elderly disabled grandma couldn’t leave the house,” one 16-year-old school student surnamed Zhang, who said their house in Gongyi was completely flooded, told AFP. “I was pretty scared I’d drown.”

Local reports suggested the city of Xinxiang, home to 5.8 million people, had been hardest hit, with more than 260mm falling in a two-hour window. State media reported the Wei river had burst its banks and flooded villages near Hebi. Local authorities [pushed at least half a dozen trucks into the breach](#) in an attempt to block it, without success.



Residents of Huangzhuang village in, Xinxiang, China are evacuated in the bucket of a digger. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Tens of thousands were being rescued or evacuated from villages and farmlands, some by makeshift bridges, other by inflatable boat or in [the buckets of construction diggers](#).

“Presently, nearly 9,000 people have been safely transferred,” state broadcaster CCTV said, adding authorities were evacuating “the remaining 19,000 people.”

heenan

On Friday afternoon Henan authorities sought to emphasise a strong emergency response and the return of utilities to some neighbourhoods. They kept the death toll at 33, apparently contradicting state media, saying assessment was ongoing.

But the true scale of the disaster is not yet clear, and the press conference prompted some scepticism from residents online. Many areas of Henan remained cut off, without power, fresh water or mobile phone signal. A massive recovery effort had begun in areas where the rain has passed, including the capital Zhengzhou, where at least 12 people died when the subway system flooded.

Focus is on the entrance to a major cross-city tunnel in the city, which was completely submerged in up to 13 metres of water. More than 100 trapped cars were counted after the water was drained on Friday morning. Authorities confirmed just two bodies recovered, but a heavy police presence and reports from media on the ground suggested the toll was unlikely to stay so low.

As the waters have receded from the 4km tunnel running along Zhengzhou City's JingGuang Ave. [#京广路隧道](#)—people ↑ wonder how many ppl were likely trapped & killed in that underground traffic tunnel. [#ChinaFloods](#) [#郑州大雨](#) pic.twitter.com/ipMz6LZ0iz

— Wes Andrews (@Wes_Andrews) [July 22, 2021](#)

Local media reported there were still people missing, with The Paper [identifying at least 25 individuals](#), the youngest just 12 years old. One woman named Ms Ma said she had lost contact with her 14-year-old son and his two friends who had been playing near the tunnel.

On Chinese social media some journalists also noted there was little information yet from affected rural areas.

On Friday 29 of the region's 30 reservoirs had overflowed, local authorities said, and 65 others were at full capacity. At least two major reservoirs near Zhengzhou were also damaged or at risk of collapse earlier this week, but authorities have refuted suggestions the dams have played a role in subverting the regular water flow.

China's leader, president Xi Jinping, said there had been a "significant loss of life and damage to property". Xi has not yet visited the affected areas. On Friday morning state media reported Xi had instead made a surprise visit to Tibet, the first such visit to the politically sensitive area by a Chinese leader in more than three decades.



Damaged cars at the entrance of an expressway tunnel after extreme flooding in Zhengzhou, Henan province, China. Photograph: VCG/Getty Images

Chinese social media was also full of community support coordination, and tales of rescue. One Xinxiang resident described the ground floor of her house going underwater in a matter of hours, prompting her to send an SOS out on social media.

“Around 40 or 50-something calls flooded in, from the local and other provinces from Jiangsu and Jiangxi. They asked for our details and help to contact rescue teams. I saw some lights through my window around 1130pm, it was the rescue team. That was so unreal to hear their voice.”

[US seeks cooperation with China on climate but not at any price](#)
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Another widely shared story recounted the efforts of a young doctor, Yu Yifei, who was credited with saving more than a dozen lives while giving CPR to people caught in the flooded Zhengzhou subway.

As Henan’s disaster continues, eyes are already moving to China’s east coast and an approaching typhoon. Typhoon In-fa has brought heavy rain to

northern Taiwan and Japan's southern islands, and is predicted to make landfall near Shanghai over the weekend. In-fa was credited with partly driving Henan's rainstorm even while hundreds of kilometres to the east of Taiwan.

During Saturday and Sunday's high tides "coastal areas should guard against the combined impact of wind, rain and tides," the National Meteorological Center said, warning the public to prepare for a major weather event.

Additional reporting by Jason Lu

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[Xi Jinping](#)

Chinese leader Xi Jinping makes first visit to Tibet as president

Visit comes as China tightens control over region's Buddhist culture and invests heavily in infrastructure



Xi Jinping's visit is thought to be the first by a Chinese president in more than 30 years. Photograph: Jason Lee/Reuters

Xi Jinping's visit is thought to be the first by a Chinese president in more than 30 years. Photograph: Jason Lee/Reuters

Agencies

Fri 23 Jul 2021 05.19 EDT

The Chinese leader has made his first visit to [Tibet](#) as president as authorities tighten controls over the Himalayan region's traditional Buddhist

culture, accompanied by an accelerated drive for economic development and modernised infrastructure.

State media reported on Friday that [Xi Jinping](#) had visited sites in the capital, Lhasa, including the Drepung monastery, Barkhor Street and the public square at the base of the Potala Palace that was home to the Dalai Lamas, Tibet's traditional spiritual and temporal leaders.

Xi's visit was previously unannounced publicly and it was not clear whether he had already returned to Beijing.

He visited in 2011 before being promoted to president. The latest visit is thought to be the first by the country's leader in more than three decades.

China has in recent years stepped up controls over Buddhist monasteries and expanded education in the Chinese rather than Tibetan language. Critics of such policies are routinely detained and can receive long prison sentences, especially if they have been convicted of association with the 86-year-old Dalai Lama, who has lived in exile in India since fleeing Tibet during an abortive uprising against Chinese rule in 1959.

China does not recognise the self-declared Tibetan government-in-exile based in the hillside town of Dharamshala, and accuses the Dalai Lama of seeking to separate Tibet from China.

Meanwhile, domestic tourism has expanded massively in the region during Xi's nine years in office and new airports, rail lines and highways have been constructed.

China's official Xinhua news agency said that while in Lhasa on Thursday, Xi had sought to "learn about the work on ethnic and religious affairs, the conservation of the ancient city, as well as the inheritance and protection of Tibetan culture".

On Wednesday, he visited the city of Nyingchi to inspect ecological preservation work on the basin of the Yarlung Zangbo River, the upper course of the Brahmaputra, on which China is [building a controversial dam](#).

He also visited a bridge and inspected a project to build a railway from Sichuan province in south-western China to Tibet, before travelling on Tibet's first electrified rail line, from Nyingchi to Lhasa, which went into service last month.

Xi's visit may be timed to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the 17-point agreement that firmly established Chinese control over Tibet. The Dalai Lama says he was forced into signing the document and has since repudiated it.

It also comes amid deteriorating relations between China and India, which share a lengthy, disputed border with Tibet.

Deadly encounters [last year](#) between Indian and Chinese troops along their high-altitude border dramatically altered the already fraught relationship between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

That appears to have prompted the Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, to wish the Dalai Lama well on his birthday this month on Twitter and say he also spoke to him by phone. That was the first time Modi has publicly confirmed speaking with the Dalai Lama since becoming prime minister in 2014.

In a statement, the advocacy group International Campaign for Tibet called Xi's visit "an indication of how high Tibet continues to figure in Chinese policy considerations".

The way in which the visit was organised and the "complete absence of any immediate state media coverage of the visit indicate that Tibet continues to be a sensitive issue and that the Chinese authorities do not have confidence in their legitimacy among the Tibetan people," said the group based in Washington DC.

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[Alaska](#)

Man who endured weeklong attacks by grizzly bear rescued after SOS spotted

Alaska man injured by bear that kept returning to his isolated hut in the wilderness



A remote mining camp near Nome, Alaska, where a Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak aircrew rescued the survivor of a bear attack, on 16 July.
Photograph: US coast guard/AFP/Getty Images

A remote mining camp near Nome, Alaska, where a Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak aircrew rescued the survivor of a bear attack, on 16 July.
Photograph: US coast guard/AFP/Getty Images

Guardian staff
Fri 23 Jul 2021 10.07 EDT

It reads like the plot of a page-turning novel or a thriller or adventure film – a sequel to [The Revenant](#), even, perhaps, the 2016 film where Leonardo DiCaprio plays an American frontiersman and fur trapper left for dead after being mauled by a bear in the early 19th century.

But this was real life in 2021. A man in [Alaska](#) was rescued, injured but alive, after enduring repeated attacks by a grizzly bear that kept on returning to his isolated hut in the wilderness, from which he had no way of contacting the outside world.

The unnamed man's ordeal could well not have ended safely, as he was injured and sleep-deprived and only had two bullets left in his pistol, while staying in a tiny tin shack, according to [an account](#) of his ordeal in the New York Times.

The man was finally rescued in a piece of random good fortune when a passing coast guard helicopter that was off its normal course spotted him desperately waving for help and having written SOS and "Help me" on the roof of the flimsy shack.

The man was reported to be in his 50s or 60s and had been alone at a mining camp about 40 miles from the isolated town of Nome on the coast of western Alaska. Nome is the destination of the annual Iditarod dog-sled race, almost 1,000 miles from Anchorage, the US state's largest city. While at the remote camp, he encountered the bear, which attacked him and dragged him down to the adjacent river.

[alaskkka](#)

The man escaped but then endured repeated attacks over about a week. "He said that the bear kept coming back every night and he hadn't slept in a few days," Lt Cmdr Jared Carbajal, one of the pilots of the coast guard helicopter, [told the New York Times](#).

He was only spotted when the helicopter had changed its course slightly to avoid some clouds. The chopper spotted the man's distress and swiftly landed to find him with a bandaged leg and waving a white flag of some kind. The door of his tin shack had also been torn off.

“We don’t really come across people in the middle of nowhere,” said co-pilot Lt AJ Hammac. “He was kind of struggling. When we came around, he was on his hands and knees waving a white flag.

“He definitely looked like he had been out there for a while,” he said.

The helicopter was on its way from Kotzebue to Nome on a mission to take some scientists to search for dead whales, walruses and seals along the coast.

“If we would have been in the next river valley over,” Cdr Carbajal said, “we would have totally missed him.”

The man is now recovering from his ordeal.

Grizzly bears have been coming into an increasing number of conflicts with humans in the American west as the federally protected animals expand into new areas and the number of people living and recreating in the region grows. A person [was killed by a bear in Montana](#) in July, and a guide was killed in April while fishing along the Yellowstone national park border in south-western Montana.

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Samoa's political crisis ends and first female prime minister installed after court ruling

Fiame Naomi Mata'afa was confirmed by Samoa's court of appeal to be the country's first female prime minister, ending the 22-year reign of the former leader



Fiame Naomi Mata'afa has been ruled by the court of appeal to be Samoa's new, and first female, prime minister. Photograph: Anetone Sagaga/AP

Fiame Naomi Mata'afa has been ruled by the court of appeal to be Samoa's new, and first female, prime minister. Photograph: Anetone Sagaga/AP

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Fri 23 Jul 2021 02.09 EDT

Samoa's months-long political crisis has been brought to a close and the Pacific nation has its first female prime minister after a ruling of the country's court of appeal this afternoon.

The Samoan court of appeal ruled that the Faatuatua ile Atua Samoa ua Tasi (FAST) party was the official winner of the national election in April and the ad hoc swearing-in ceremony held by the party out the front of parliament, when FAST MPs were denied entry to the building, was legitimate.

Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, the leader of FAST, was confirmed by the court to be the [country's first female prime minister](#). She was previously the country's deputy prime minister and last year defected from the Human Rights Protection party (HRPP), which had ruled Samoa for 39 years, to join the FAST party, which was founded in June 2020.

[Accusations of treason as Samoan MPs hold swearing-in ceremony outside parliament and declare new PM](#)

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The court's decision sees the official end of the reign of Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, who served as the country's prime minister for more than 22 years and at the time of the election was the world's second-longest serving prime minister.

In its ruling, the court said that the FAST party was "entitled to take power on the 24th May", when the party held their ad-hoc swearing-in ceremony and said that "from this point, the court does not recognise [Tuilaepa's caretaker government] as the government of the Independent State of Samoa, because of the fact that there is a new government".

Outside the court house in Mulinu'u, FAST party members and supporters sang hymns of gratitude and a prayer expressing their delight at the outcome.

"The road we have walked has been filled with obstacles. We feel humbled, and are grateful to God that our mission has been accomplished, we have made it. Despite the obstacles in our pathway, this is our moment, let us move forward from here," said Laaulialemalietoa Polataivao Schmidt, the founder of FAST and an MP for the party.



Samoa's prime minister, Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, took her oath at an unofficial ceremony outside Parliament House in Apia, Samoa on 24 May.

Photograph: Anetone Sagaga/AP

A source in the police service who did not want to be named told the Guardian that he was awaiting orders from his superiors to act.

“All we need is a court order to act on the decision or direction from Fiame about the way forward.” Asked if his superiors would respond to orders from former prime minister Tuilaepa, who has previously refused to admit defeat, he said: “No, we respect the courts, and that is what we were told by our commissioner before he left for New Zealand.”

The Samoan police commissioner left for New Zealand two weeks ago for a medical emergency and told his officers to take orders from the court once they handed down a ruling.

The news of the new prime minister has been received with elation by many on the ground.

“There’s definitely a feeling of relief and joy around us now,” said Maina Vai, editor of Nofilo Samoa Media.

Samoa endured months of political turmoil after FAST presented an unexpectedly strong challenge to HRPP during the May election, which resulted the two parties winning 25 votes apiece, and one remaining seat going to an independent.

[Samoa’s democracy in crisis](#)

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The independent threw his support behind FAST, giving them a majority, but the result was thrown up into the air when HRPP appointed an additional MP for their party, saying this was due to the country’s 10% quota for female MPs not having been met. The move was denounced by FAST and legal experts [as a “bloodless coup”](#).

The country’s supreme court declared the use of the gender quota provision to be improper and ordered the parliament to convene and allow the new

parliament to be sworn in, which would have ended the country's electoral drama.

Instead, in [dramatic scenes at the end of May](#), the caretaker government refused to convene parliament to allow a transition of power, locking the prime minister-elect and her supporters out of the parliament building.

FAST MPs then held an ad hoc swearing-in ceremony outside parliament, declaring Fiame to be the new prime minister, a move that Tuilaepa denounced as "treason and the highest form of illegal conduct".

Tuilaepa is yet to comment on the court's ruling but has previously questioned the decisions of the court and has refused to concede defeat.

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[CIA](#)

About 100 CIA officers and family have been sickened by Havana syndrome

Director William Burns has initiated a taskforce to investigate the syndrome and tripled the size of the medical team involved



William Burns, director of the CIA, has bolstered efforts to determine the cause of Havana syndrome. Photograph: Al Drago/AFP/Getty Images

William Burns, director of the CIA, has bolstered efforts to determine the cause of Havana syndrome. Photograph: Al Drago/AFP/Getty Images

Reuters

Thu 22 Jul 2021 19.48 EDT

About 100 CIA officers and family members are among about [200 US officials and kin](#) sickened by “Havana syndrome”, the CIA director, William

Burns, said on Thursday, referring to the mysterious set of ailments that include migraines and dizziness.

Burns, tapped by Joe Biden as the first career diplomat to serve as [CIA](#) chief, said in a National Public Radio interview that he had bolstered his agency's efforts to determine the cause of the syndrome and what is responsible.

[Microwave weapons that could cause Havana Syndrome exist, experts say](#)

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He confirmed that among other steps, he had tapped a senior officer who once led the hunt for Osama bin Laden to head a taskforce investigating the syndrome, and said he had tripled the size of the medical team involved in the investigation.

The agency also had shortened from eight weeks to two weeks the time that CIA-affiliated people must wait for admission to Walter Reed national military medical center, he said.

“It’s a profound obligation, I think, of any leader to take care of your people and that is what I am determined to do,” Burns told NPR in his first interview since becoming CIA director in March.

Havana syndrome, with symptoms such as dizziness, nausea, migraines and memory lapses, is so named because it first was reported by US officials based in the US embassy in [Cuba](#) in 2016.

Burns noted that a US National Academy of Sciences panel in December found that [a plausible theory](#) was that “directed energy” beams caused the syndrome.

There was a “very strong possibility” that the syndrome was intentionally caused, and that [Russia](#) could be responsible, he said, adding that he was withholding definitive conclusions pending further investigation.

Moscow denies involvement.

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Public consent for test and trace in England at risk, says Jeremy Hunt

Scrap self-isolation for people fully vaccinated, former health secretary urges amid ‘pingdemic’ chaos

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00:39

‘Pingdemic’: critical worker list to be released, says business secretary – video

[Aubrey Allegretti, Jessica Elgot and Kevin Rawlinson](#)

Thu 22 Jul 2021 05.46 EDT

The government “risks losing social consent” for its test-and-trace programme if it does not immediately allow fully vaccinated people to avoid isolation, the former health secretary Jeremy Hunt has said. His comments came as it was revealed that a record 618,903 people in [England](#) and Wales were sent self-isolation alerts in the week to 15 July.

Conservative MPs were in open revolt on Thursday as reports and pictures emerged of empty supermarket shelves, blamed on the hundreds of thousands of people “pinged” or contacted by NHS test and trace and told to stay at home because of the rapidly rising number of Covid cases, which are at their highest level since January.

Businesses are to be told on Thursday whether their staff qualify for “critical worker” status, enabling them to leave self-isolation in England if they are fully vaccinated to avert major disruption to food supplies. Industries from petrol stations to the postal service have also reported being affected by absences.

Speaking in the Commons after a statement from the vaccines minister, Nadhim Zahawi, and amid reports of people deleting the NHS Covid app in droves to avoid being alerted, Hunt said: “Does he not think it’s time for the government to listen to public opinion and scrap the 10-day isolation requirement immediately for people who have been double jabbed in favour of having to isolate until they have done a negative PCR test? Otherwise we risk losing social consent for this very, very important weapon against the virus.”

Mark Harper, who chairs the Covid Recovery Group of Tory backbenchers, backed the plan to allow fully vaccinated people who are alerted to take a PCR test rather than self-isolate, to be moved forward from 16 August. “The danger is, large numbers of people will either delete or stop listening to the app, and then when we get to 16 August they won’t be getting the advice to get a PCR test, and we will actually have made ourselves less safe,” he said.

Kwasi Kwarteng, the business secretary, said he was “very concerned” by some of the scenes inside shops. He told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “It’s not a universal thing. I don’t want people to get the impression that every shelf in every supermarket is bare, that’s not the case. But we are certainly concerned about instances of shortages.”

The government has promised for days to publish further guidance about which firms can ask workers to leave isolation if they are fully inoculated to prevent chaos to councils and companies, given the rapidly dwindling workforce they are able to draw on.

The “narrow” list would be released on Thursday, Kwarteng said, suggesting it would not be a list of professions or companies eligible to apply to the government, but rather a breakdown of which sectors would be affected and which among them “might be exempt”.

He did not rule out workers in the food industry, including supermarkets, being eligible, urging people not to panic buy and saying: “I’m not panicking, I’m looking at the evidence.”

Current isolation rules for most the population were not scrapped on 19 July as some expected, meaning those who have had both Covid jabs must still quarantine if they are identified as a “close contact” of someone who has tested positive for the virus. This has recently included Boris Johnson and the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, after the double-vaccinated health secretary, Sajid Javid, tested positive for Covid.

Kwarteng said that when the rules changed [on 16 August](#) that would make an “enormous” difference, helping restore more of people’s freedoms and unlocking parts of the economy.

Downing Street [said on Tuesday](#) that companies would have to apply directly to the relevant Whitehall department that covers them for authorisation to bring staff back to work, but gave no indication of how long this process would take.

Make UK – the manufacturers’ association – said more than one in 10 businesses were saying some production had stopped. Almost a quarter of businesses reported up to 10% of staff were isolating, and almost one in 10 said it was up to 25%.

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Stephen Phipson, Make UK's chief executive, said: "The impact on manufacturing continues to rapidly increase and there remains an inconsistency of government policy that allows non-vaccinated people in nightclubs, while those who have had both jabs are asked to isolate. We would urge government to address this by bringing forward the planned August date in order to keep the economy open."

The delay in giving businesses certainty about which workers will qualify for critical worker status has been [criticised by industry leaders](#), including the managing director of the supermarket chain Iceland, Richard Walker. He said his company and others were seeing an "exponential" increase in workers taking time off since 19 July, telling the BBC: "We are taking matters into our own hands in terms of recruitment because we simply don't have time to wait for the government to sort this out."

Walker said that while there was not currently a crisis in supply and "dramatic pictures" in the media represented isolated incidents, a crisis could arise if ministers did not act fast.

"The people who should be panicking are the government, and the sooner they clear up this mess and get retail workers and HGV drivers on to the key worker list, the better," he said.

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Retail industry

Supermarkets struggle to stock shelves as ‘pingdemic’ havoc spreads

Ministers urged to include retail staff and lorry drivers in exemption as self-isolating workers causes shortages



Empty salad shelves at Tesco in Greenfield, Glasgow. Photograph: Katielee Arrowsmith/SWNS

Empty salad shelves at Tesco in Greenfield, Glasgow. Photograph: Katielee Arrowsmith/SWNS

[Sarah Butler](#) and [Lucy Campbell](#)

Wed 21 Jul 2021 18.41 EDT

Supermarkets are under “increasing pressure” to keep shelves fully stocked, retail industry leaders have warned as the growing havoc wreaked by the “pingdemic” continues to [force thousands of workers to self-isolate](#).

With shops in some areas suffering shortages, and firms in sectors from petrol stations to the postal service affected by absences, the government is

being urged to include supermarket staff, lorry drivers and other frontline workers on a list of those exempted from self-isolation rules.

The government has announced that certain industries will be able to apply for staff exemptions, allowing critical workers who are “pinged” by the NHS test-and-trace app to return to work after a PCR test and undertake daily lateral flow tests, rather than self-isolating for 10 days.



Empty shelves in a Co-op store. Photograph: @HapG86/PA

But it has yet to publish a list of which sectors can take part in the scheme and there will not be a list of critical workers exempt from automatic self-isolation; instead, exemptions will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

With the number of those expected to be granted exemptions relatively small, bosses are concerned and frustrated that thousands of workers will continue to have to self-isolate when pinged.

Andrew Opie, director of food at the British Retail Consortium trade body, said staff shortages could have an impact on opening hours and shelf stacking.

“The ongoing ‘pingdemic’ is putting increasing pressure on retailers’ ability to maintain opening hours and keep shelves stocked. Government needs to

act fast,” said Opie. “Retail workers and suppliers, who have played a vital role throughout this pandemic, should be allowed to work provided they are double vaccinated or can show a negative Covid test, to ensure there is no disruption to the public’s ability to get food and other goods.”

[UK business leaders criticise government’s handling of ‘pingdemic’](#)

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Grocery chain [Iceland](#) is aiming to recruit 2,000 spare staff to help cover absences. The retailer said it had been forced to reduce trading hours and even shut some stores as it experienced staff shortages caused by workers receiving notifications from the NHS test-and-trace app.

Richard Walker, the head of Iceland, said that a handful of outlets had been forced to close after more than 1,000 workers – just over 3% of the group’s total – had been asked to self-isolate after being pinged by the app.

He said the problems were patchy – with some stores experiencing much higher vacancy rates than others – while the number of people having to isolate was “growing about 50% week on week, and that was really alarming”.

Walker called on the government to adjust the app or self-isolation rules urgently, ahead of planned changes on 16 August. “Supermarkets need to focus on feeding the nation not writing to government departments,” he said. He said that about 96% of those alerted by the NHS app who worked for Iceland did not test positive for Covid-19.

There were also reports on social media of supermarkets in some areas running out of basic supplies including milk, eggs, bread and rice.

Tesco said it had run out of bottled water in its warehouses, while the Co-op said supplies at “a large majority” of its stores had been disrupted to “due to the impact of Covid/isolation of colleagues”.

A spokesperson said: “This is a short-term but significant impact and has impacted our ability to supply stores. These issues are impacting a large majority of Co-op stores.”

The Daily Telegraph also reported that police forces across the country were being affected. In Dorset, a third of control room staff were off work after being pinged or having tested positive for Covid.

The Cleveland police and crime commissioner, Steve Turner, warned the public to expect longer response times to calls. He said: “We suddenly find ourselves cancelling rest days and cancelling leave and bringing officers in from other shifts to cover where we have got the gaps. However, our call times will go up, we will miss some calls we would normally pick up because we have less resilience in the call centre.”

The warnings come as the British Meat Processors’ Association (BMPA) said some plants had already been hit by staff shortages of up to 16% even without the impact of the pingdemic.

“On top of the underlying worker shortage, we’re also hearing from some members that between 5% and 10% of their workforce have been ‘pinged’ by the [health service] app and asked to self-isolate,” said the chief executive of BMPA, Nick Allen.

The shortage of workers affected the meat products that require more labour to produce, he said, meaning those lines would be the first to be cut.

The self-isolation problem is adding to shortages of delivery workers, especially HGV lorry drivers, caused by a mix of Brexit, Covid and changes to tax rules.

Pinging hell: NHS Covid app causing widespread staff shortages

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BP said industry-wide lorry driver shortages were causing temporary fuel supply issues which saw a “handful” of its UK sites close temporarily. The oil giant’s supply chain had also been affected by the closure of a fuel distribution terminal because of Covid isolations among staff last week.

However, BP told the BBC the “vast majority” of shortages were “resolved within a day”.

Royal Mail said that, in a “limited number of areas”, services were being disrupted due to Covid-related absences.

Leading retailers say absence rates are currently at about 10%, which is far lower than at the peak of the pandemic last spring, but difficult to manage as certain stores and product categories are more heavily affected.

Some stores have absence rates as high as 30%, with the north-east and north-west of England worst affected, while key deliveries in certain parts of the country have also been affected.

Surges in demand for fresh fruit, salad and other hot weather staples brought on by the sudden heatwave have also added to difficulties. Unusually high demand in holiday destination areas has also led to shortages as delivery systems struggle to keep up.

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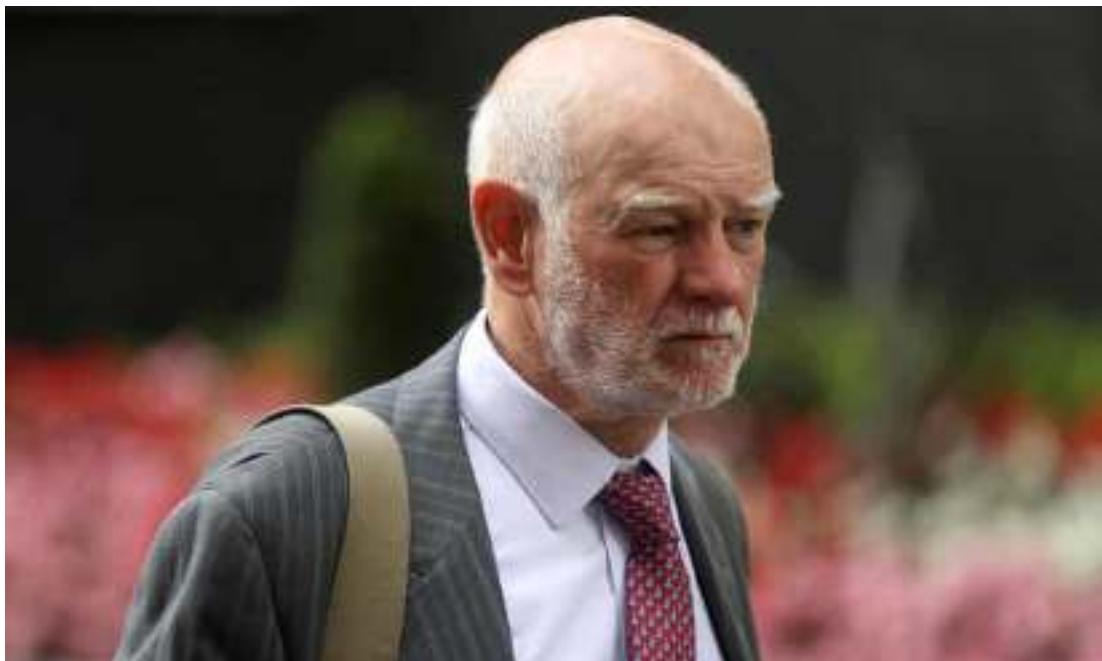
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Working from home

London office life not likely to return to pre-Covid practices, NatWest chair says

Howard Davies says he expects lasting cultural changes after end of pandemic



Davies said many of NatWest's employees would probably continue to work from home part-time after restriction eased. Photograph: Simon Dawson/Reuters

Davies said many of NatWest's employees would probably continue to work from home part-time after restriction eased. Photograph: Simon Dawson/Reuters

Jasper Jolly

@jjpjolly

Wed 21 Jul 2021 13.50 EDT

The chair of NatWest, one of Britain's biggest banks, has said office life in London is unlikely ever to return to how things were before the coronavirus

pandemic.

Howard Davies said he expected lasting cultural changes even after the danger from the virus receded. “The days when 2,500 people walked in through our office door on Bishopsgate at 8:30 and then walked out again at 6 o’clock, I think that is gone. I suspect there won’t be that many people who will be doing five long days in the office.”

In a Bloomberg TV [interview](#), Davies said that many of NatWest’s office-based employees would probably continue to work from home part-time after pandemic restrictions eased, in the latest sign of big business [reassessing working practices](#).

“Central London will not go back to as much footfall as we had before. I don’t think there’s much appetite for that, because people are concerned about the risks of travelling and also they’ve discovered that they can do things in a different way, and that wasting all that time on the Northern line is not necessarily the best way of spending your life.”

The Westminster government on Monday removed all restrictions on public mixing in England, including [guidance that people should work from home](#) when possible. Many businesses have been wary of allowing all workers to return because of rising infection rates.

Davies said that businesses in the UK and elsewhere would probably be “cautious” about trying to return to pre-pandemic practices, in part because of the continued threat of infection by the coronavirus.

His comments put him at odds with Goldman Sachs chief executive, David Solomon, who has called [working from home an “aberration”](#), but in line with bank bosses at HSBC and JP Morgan who [expect more home working for office workers](#).

Some [business leaders have criticised the government](#) for its advice on handling increasing absences as workers are advised to self-isolate following contact with someone who later tested positive for the virus. Davies said government messaging around the issue had been “a bit complicated”.

NatWest is experiencing some difficulties in keeping branches open with worker absences because of self-isolation guidance, although central operations have coped so far.

Davies said there were some “worry areas” in the UK economy, particularly among the most pandemic-affected sectors in which companies had taken on relatively high debt burdens to see them through the crisis. However, he said he was not worried overall about the UK economy, in part because consumers have increased savings after staying at home for large periods of the last 18 months.

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[Coronavirus](#)

‘Covid has ripped the family apart’: the lives lost in the UK’s third wave

More than 1,000 people have died of the virus since June, and their loved ones don’t want them to be forgotten

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A woman writes a message on the Covid Memorial Wall in Westminster, London, following the the lifting of almost all coronavirus restrictions on 19 July. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

A woman writes a message on the Covid Memorial Wall in Westminster, London, following the the lifting of almost all coronavirus restrictions on 19 July. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA



[Sarah Marsh](#)

[@sloumarsh](#)

Thu 22 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Ninety-six deaths; ninety-six lives lost. This week, the UK's daily reported coronavirus death toll rose to its [highest number since March](#). Now grieving families are speaking out to remind the public that these are not just statistics, and to urge people to get vaccinated and keep taking precautions.

Since the UK [announced zero coronavirus deaths on 1 June](#) for the first time in nearly a year, a further [1,114 deaths](#) have been reported including 73 on Wednesday, signifying amid soaring cases that the vaccination programme has weakened but not broken the link between infections and fatalities. The total number of those who have lost their lives to the pandemic now stands at 128,823.

Jo Goodman, co-founder of Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice, said that for families who had lost people to the virus “the last few weeks have been some of the most distressing” as restrictions have been lifted across England.

“Bereaved families know all too well that those who are continuing to die from the pandemic are not just statistics but people who leave behind them a world of grief, misery, and pain for their loved ones. We must not allow them to be forgotten,” she said.

Carla Hodges, 35, said the [new wave](#) of [Covid](#) has ripped her family apart. Her stepfather Leslie Lawrenson, 58, died at home from the virus on 2 July and her mother ended up in hospital.

Leslie, a musician who played in bands, had no underlying health conditions and thought he could survive Covid because the death rate was so low. He had not been vaccinated.

Leslie, who grew up in Hertfordshire and moved to Dorset, first met his wife in school and reunited with her later in life, and the couple have an 11-year-old son. “He did not believe in vaccinations,” Carla said. “My mother did not have the vaccine either, although she had underlying health conditions such as diabetes.” She said her mother was now looking to get a jab, adding: “She is very lucky to still be here.”

About [60%](#) of people being admitted to hospital with Covid are unvaccinated, the government’s chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, said this week. While more [younger people are catching Covid and being hospitalised](#) than in the first wave, 3% of deaths between 28 May and 9 July were among the under-40s, 17% were aged 40-59 and 80% were 60 and over.

“Covid has ripped the family apart,” Carla said. “The nurses and doctors said to my mum: ‘With Covid, there is no textbook illness and everyone reacts differently.’

“I know not getting vaccinated is a massive regret of my mother’s. She was embarrassed to tell hospital staff she had not had the jab.” She said her mother is now struggling with rental payments and funeral costs, and a crowdfunding [page has been launched](#). “A message to everyone: get jabbed,” Carla said.



Brendon Jones, 33, died from Covid on 13 July. Photograph: gofundme

British Airways pilot Nicholas Synnott was elated when he left intensive care in the US after 243 days and headed home to Surrey thinking he had won his battle with Covid. He punched the air and hugged medical staff as he left.

But [Synnott died](#) in June, 15 months after he first contracted the virus flying to Houston in Texas from Heathrow. Synnott, 60, reportedly experienced multi-organ failures in hospital and his wife, Nicola, 54, spent every day by his bedside.

Brendon Jones died from Covid aged 33 on 13 July after a short battle with the illness. He had also not been vaccinated as he experienced agoraphobia and had struggled to organise transport to get the jab.

Brendon, who lived with his parents, woke up one day looking unwell. “He started with a cough initially. He did not normally get ill but with this, he became poorly so rapidly, his mother, Hayley Jones, said. “It started with vomiting and diarrhoea and then he had chest pains and his breathing went downhill. His throat was closing.”

[‘Hell on earth’: bereaved families on the battle for a Covid inquiry](#)

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She called 111 and spoke to an ambulance crew but despite her son gasping for air, he was told he did not need paramedics, she said. He stayed at home for the next few days unable to move until he started drifting in and out of consciousness and an ambulance was called again. This time he ended up in intensive care. A few days later he died.

His mother described her son as a “mild and shy boy outside his family”. His world came alive online and he had a passion for video games. When he died his mother said she was touched by people who told her how much his family had meant to Brendon.

“His death will leave a massive hole … Brendon led a different kind of life to the norm but it was his life. He accepted everybody as they were and friends and family accepted him. For this, he will always be remembered.”

Hayley said her son had no other health conditions and that people should realise that young people can also get the virus and die from it. “Brendon did not believe in forcing the vaccine on people and that everyone had a choice but he did believe in it and had wanted it himself,” she said.

Additional reporting by Niamh McIntyre

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Australia PM says sorry for vaccine failures amid bleak outlook for Sydney lockdown

Scott Morrison apologises for missing vaccine targets as New South Wales reports record cases during fourth week of stay-at-home order

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An empty street in the central Sydney, which is in its fourth week of coronavirus lockdown. Australia's prime minister has apologised for vaccine failures. Photograph: Joel Carrett/AAP

An empty street in the central Sydney, which is in its fourth week of coronavirus lockdown. Australia's prime minister has apologised for vaccine failures. Photograph: Joel Carrett/AAP

[Elias Visontay](#) in Sydney

[@EliasVisontay](#)

Thu 22 Jul 2021 01.38 EDT

Australia's prime minister has apologised for failures in the disastrous coronavirus vaccine rollout as cases in the states of New South Wales and Victoria grew further despite millions living in lockdown.

One day after notably [refusing to apologise](#) for a rollout that has fully vaccinated just 12% of the population since February, Scott Morrison said on Thursday: "I'm certainly sorry we haven't been able to achieve the marks we had hoped for at the beginning of the year. Of course I am."

However, as the prime minister spoke of a new daily record of 184,000 doses administered in one day, NSW premier Gladys Berejiklian delivered the bleak message that the Delta outbreak shows a contagiousness "like nothing we've seen before", and warned of low vaccination numbers and the limits of lockdown measures, now in their fourth week across the Sydney region.

"Our real key to freedom is having a high percentage of vaccination," Berejiklian said. She had previously set an 80% vaccination target for life in the state to return to normal and avoid future lockdowns. As of Thursday, about 3.2m vaccine doses have been administered in a state that will ultimately require about 16m doses to be fully vaccinated.

"The last thing we want is to be in a stage where we keep going in and out of harsh lockdown," she said.

NSW set several new daily records on Thursday, with 124 new cases in the community, detected from a record 85,000 tests. As many as 87 of the new cases could have been infectious in the community. Among the new cases were outbreaks at two residential aged care facilities where staff were unvaccinated.

Victoria recorded 26 new local cases, the highest figure this year and taking the total number linked to the latest outbreak to 133. However, the vast

majority were in isolation while infectious. The state is due to come out of lockdown next week. By then, people in Melbourne will have spent about six months in lockdown since the beginning of the pandemic.

South Australia, which began a week-long lockdown on Tuesday has a total of 14 cases, adding two in the past day.

In a stark admission, Berejiklian said the majority of the cases that were infectious in the community were “derived from critical activity” – either essential workers or people buying groceries and medicines – and said further restrictions were unlikely to reduce these types of transmissions.

The greater Sydney lockdown is due to end on 31 July, but she said that date was unlikely to include the freedom to gather with people from different areas or in indoor settings.

“It is spreading like we’ve never seen before,” the premier said. “We’re finding transmission in areas where people have to be where they’re at and that’s why it’s important to make sure that if you’ve been asked to have a test every three days, you do so. If you have the mildest of symptoms, do not come to work,” Berejiklian said.

“I think people are quite shocked as to how different and contagious the Delta strain is. It’s like nothing we’ve seen before,” she said.

Despite progressively tightening restrictions across Sydney, Berejiklian warned she expected case numbers to rise further. She has consistently said the lockdown can be eased only when the number of cases who are infectious while in the community falls as close to zero as possible

Echoing Morrison, state health minister Brad Hazzard raised particular concern about hesitancy towards the AstraZeneca vaccine, noting that at the vaccination hub at Sydney Olympic Park on Wednesday, 9,000 Pfizer doses were administered, compared with just 50 for AstraZeneca.

“I just think we need to take a step back and say ... most of us can’t afford the luxury of sitting back and saying I don’t want to have the vaccine that

has actually been taken by almost every country in the world and kept other countries safe,” Hazard said.

Australia has administered 6.1m doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, and five rare blood-clotting deaths were related to the first dose, federal health officials have said.

In addition, Berejiklian said contact tracers were now recommending that all positive cases send a text to everyone in their phone contact lists, irrespective of whether they’d had contact with them in recent days, to alert them “to say someone you know has tested positive to Covid”.

There are currently 118 Covid cases in hospitals in NSW, with 28 people in intensive care and 14 of them requiring ventilators.

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Labour opposition may scupper Boris Johnson vaccine passport plan

Rebel Tory MPs set to be joined in no lobby by Labour, which is calling for testing to gain access to nightclubs

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Clubbers take to the dance floor in Brighton in the early hours of 19 July after England dropped most of its remaining Covid-19 restrictions.
Photograph: Chris Eades/Getty Images

Clubbers take to the dance floor in Brighton in the early hours of 19 July after England dropped most of its remaining Covid-19 restrictions.
Photograph: Chris Eades/Getty Images

[Heather Stewart](#) Political editor

Wed 21 Jul 2021 11.35 EDT

Boris Johnson faces a tight vote over plans to make Covid certificates compulsory for nightclubs, after [Labour](#) said it was prepared to vote against the proposal unless testing status was also accepted.

The prime minister announced this week that the government planned to make it mandatory for members of the public to prove they had been double-jabbed before entering crowded indoor venues from the end of September.

The move, aimed at boosting vaccine uptake among younger adults over the summer, sparked a furious response from some Conservative MPs, who are expected to be joined in the no lobby by Labour.

A spokesperson for the Labour leader, Keir Starmer, said: “We oppose the use of Covid vaccination status for everyday access to venues and services. It’s costly, open to fraud and is impractical.

“Being double-jabbed doesn’t prove you aren’t carrying the virus. Testing for access to venues would be more efficient, and would give people and businesses more certainty.”

With the Lib Dems also vehemently opposed to the plans, Labour’s opposition could deprive the prime minister of his Commons majority, and make it impossible for the government to go ahead.

At least 42 Tory MPs have signed a cross-party [Big Brother Watch declaration](#) against “Covid status certification to deny individuals access to general services, businesses or jobs” in recent months.

It is understood that Labour would be keen to have mandatory testing introduced immediately.

A Labour source said: “We’ll have to see what the government puts on the table, but we’re saying if you go to a nightclub, there should be a testing policy, and that should be in place now.”

Pointing to the case of the health secretary, who has received both doses of the vaccine but tested positive for Covid last weekend, the source added: “Sajid Javid shows you cannot just rely on being double-jabbed.”

Johnson unexpectedly announced the vaccine passport plan on Monday in a press release broadcast from Chequers, saying he had particular concerns about the risks posed by nightclubs.

But the government has subsequently not ruled out introducing mandatory Covid passports for other crowded indoor venues such as pubs – something the prime minister said he was keen to avoid if possible.

The government had previously backed away from the idea of compulsory Covid certificates, in part because of fears about lack of backbench support.

The idea was examined by Michael Gove’s Cabinet Office for several months, as part of one of the reviews launched when Johnson’s Covid roadmap was announced in February.

Showing testing status was originally envisaged as part of the plan – but Johnson said that once all adults had been offered the opportunity to have two jabs, it was reasonable to bar those who had not taken up the offer from crowded venues.

“I should serve notice now that by the end of September, when all over-18s will have had their chance to be double-jabbed, we are planning to make full vaccination the condition of entry to nightclubs and other venues where large crowds gather,” the prime minister said.

Nightclubs were allowed to reopen on Monday – dubbed “Freedom Day” – as almost all Covid restrictions were lifted. But the government’s language has become increasingly cautious in recent weeks in the face of rapidly rising cases and hospitalisations.

Ministers have noticeably stopped using the word “irreversible” to describe the changes in recent days.

Johnson’s spokesperson insisted on Wednesday that hospitalisations remained within the range projected by the government’s scientific advisers,

but said the government would keep “backstop measures” in reserve in case the situation deteriorated.

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Biden says children under 12 could be eligible for Covid vaccines within months

President urges Americans to take ‘gigantically important’ step of getting vaccinated amid surging cases



Joe Biden at the town hall, where he said approval for vaccines for young children could come ‘at the beginning of the school year’. Photograph: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

Joe Biden at the town hall, where he said approval for vaccines for young children could come ‘at the beginning of the school year’. Photograph: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

*[Maanvi Singh](#)
[@maanvissingh](#)*

Wed 21 Jul 2021 22.09 EDT

Joe Biden has expressed optimism that young children would soon become eligible for Covid-19 inoculations, while urging unvaccinated Americans to take the “gigantically important” step of getting their shots as the virus surges across the US.

Speaking at a televised town hall in Cincinnati on Wednesday, hosted by CNN, Biden said that children under 12, who are currently ineligible for the three coronavirus vaccines available in the US, could get shots by August or later in the fall.

Last week, an FDA official told NBC News that Covid-19 vaccine approval for younger children could come by midwinter. [Moderna](#) and [Pfizer-BioNTech](#) both launched trials of their Covid-19 vaccines for kids under 12 in March, with results expected in the fall.

[‘A systemic failure’: vaccine misinformation remains rampant on Facebook, experts say](#)

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“They’re not promising me any specific date, but my expectation, talking to the scientists,” Biden said at the town hall, “is that some time, maybe in the beginning of the school year, at the end of August, beginning of September, October, you’ll get a final approval” for vaccinating kids. But, he added, the ultimate decision lay with officials at the FDA and CDC. “I do not tell any scientists what they should do. I do not interfere,” Biden said.

Meanwhile, he said, the CDC would probably recommend that “everyone under the age of 12 should probably be wearing masks in school”.

Responding to a question posed by a Democrat running for school board, Biden said: “That’s probably what’s going to happen. Secondly, those over the age of 12 who are able to get vaccinated – if you’re vaccinated, you shouldn’t wear a mask, if you aren’t vaccinated, you should be wearing a mask.” The CDC currently recommends that “masks should be worn indoors by all individuals (age 2 and older) who are not fully vaccinated”.

Covid-19 cases have nearly tripled in the US over the past two weeks, and the seven-day rolling average for daily new cases rose to more than 37,000 on Tuesday, up from less than 13,700 on 6 July, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. Only 56.2% of Americans have gotten at least one dose of the vaccine, according to the CDC.

The president expressed frustration that many Americans who were eligible for vaccines were not getting them. “We have a pandemic for those who haven’t gotten the vaccination – it’s that basic, that simple,” Biden said. “If you’re vaccinated, you’re not going to be hospitalized, you’re not going to be in the IC unit, and you’re not going to die.”

Some public health experts pointed out that Biden’s statement was not quite true: although the majority of coronavirus cases and hospitalizations are among unvaccinated individuals and “breakthrough” infections among the vaccinated are rare, the virus can still pose a deadly risk to them, especially for the many immunocompromised people for whom vaccines don’t provide adequate protection.

“So it’s gigantically important that we all act like Americans who care about our fellow Americans,” and get vaccinated, Biden said.

The flagging vaccination rates come as vaccine misinformation remains a major issue. [Biden recently said](#) that tech giants like Facebook were “killing people” by failing to [curb rampant online misinformation](#) about the safety and efficacy of the Covid-19 vaccine.

At the town hall, Biden also made an indirect reference to high-profile conservative personalities at Fox News who are now more openly speaking to their skeptical guests and viewers about the benefits of getting vaccinated. [Sean Hannity recently told viewers](#): “I believe in the science of vaccination” and urged them to take the disease seriously. Steve Doocy, who co-hosts Fox & Friends, this week told viewers that vaccination “will save your life”.

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Television

The best thing Jeremy's done: why I can't wait for more Clarkson's Farm



A bombastic brigadier no more ... Clarkson's Farm. Photograph: Amazon Prime Video

A bombastic brigadier no more ... Clarkson's Farm. Photograph: Amazon Prime Video

Amazon has renewed Jeremy Clarkson's farming show after rumours it had been axed. It pains me to say it but ... I hope it runs and runs. It's the real deal



[Stuart Heritage](#)

[@stuheritage](#)

Thu 22 Jul 2021 05.15 EDT

There was a whiff of manufactured outrage about Amazon's recent renewal of Jeremy Clarkson's cleverly named farming show Clarkson's Farm. At the start of the month, Clarkson tweeted: "There has been some speculation that a second series of our farming programme has been commissioned. It hasn't but we are hopeful." This quickly led to rumours that it had been axed.

A week and a bit later, further itchiness had set in. When asked if series two was filming, he replied: "We aren't. Write to Amazon, it's their decision." Then this week, shortly after Jeff Bezos had ridden his rocket-powered overcompensation to the edge of space, desperation set in. "Well done @JeffBezos, really well done," he tweeted, before adding: "Can I do my farming show now?"

Then, just 14 hours later, Clarkson was officially announcing a second series of Clarkson's Farm. Apparently, "Amazon were just as keen as us to get cracking" all along. The illusion of jeopardy where no actual jeopardy existed. How very Clarkson. Still, regardless of the slightly tedious hoopla that led to the announcement, the fact that Clarkson's Farm is returning

should be cause for celebration. It is, by some distance, the best thing Clarkson has done in 15 years.

There is a sense that Clarkson's Farm was initially conceived as Top Gear with tractors. Funny old Clarkson driving a combine harvester over a pile of geese and into the side of a petrol station while making tedious locker-room banter with whichever poor sap got saddled as his co-host. What larks.

Fortunately, though, Clarkson's Farm is a much richer and better series than that. Unlike his motoring shows, where his stock reaction to any problem was to blast out of it in an orgy of explosive cluelessness, the Clarkson we meet here is actively willing to learn. Better yet, he isn't the in-your-face alpha of this show, because everyone else knows so much more than him. Had the duo of Charlie Ireland and Kaleb Cooper, who act as Clarkson's closest advisers, been cackling Richard Hammond types, the show would be intolerable. But they are clever and quiet and capable, and know to stop Clarkson from indulging in his whimsy. Clarkson's name might be in the title, but he's very much the student here. The role suits him.



In his element ... Clarkson at his farm shop. Photograph: Amazon Prime Video

More than anything, though, Clarkson's Farm works because you actually believe him. On Top Gear and The Grand Tour, for instance, Clarkson had a habit of presenting himself as a shambling, untucked buffoon who permanently teetered on the verge of developing all-out gout. Set him a challenge and he'd bodge it up, then things would blow up, and in the middle of it all he'd bark out the sort of xenophobic non sequitur that would keep him in the headlines for yet another week. He was like some concussed retired brigadier, which he obviously wasn't because concussed retired brigadiers wouldn't be able to handle the complexity of creating, writing, filming and editing a globally popular television series.

But on Clarkson's Farm, at least to my eyes, we are getting closer to who Jeremy Clarkson actually is. Yes, he is oafish and opinionated, but he's also quieter and more thoughtful than the man we had grown familiar with. We watch him fret about the permanent loss of agriculture due to chemical topsoil erosion. We see him grappling with regulations, and trying to understand tiny variables that could ruin entire crops.

Countryfile remains a fine show, although it does increasingly resemble a computer-designed countryside sex fantasy for people who haven't left the city for a decade. The sun is always setting, the walls are always dry-stone, and the sum total of Britain's agriculture industry appears to consist of a single bearded man stroking the leaves of a heritage tomato plant in a pristine polytunnel.

But Clarkson's Farm is more concerned with the impossible demands that face the modern farmer. The cost. The scale. The logistics. I'm saying this as someone who genuinely ended up in hospital the last time I picked up a shovel, but it feels like the real deal. To watch Clarkson's Farm is to watch a man realise that the hobby he seemingly picked up for a lark is exhausting and all-consuming and increasingly unlikely to bring any real rewards. The show, like the job, has all the hallmarks of a labour of love. It pains me to say this, but I hope Amazon lets Clarkson's Farm run and run.

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[Cats](#)

The hidden world of cats: what our feline friends are doing when we're not looking

In Britain, most pet cats are free to roam, but where do they go and what do they get up to? We fitted six cats with GPS trackers and found out



Sirin Kale and her cat, Larry. Where does he go all day? Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

Sirin Kale and her cat, Larry. Where does he go all day? Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian



Sirin Kale

Thu 22 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

As I prepared to write this piece, my three-year-old cat, Larry, had been missing for 24 hours. I had checked under the bins, posted in a community Facebook group and Googled variations of “Lost cat how long normal before come home?” all day.

Larry was a house cat when we took him in, but my boyfriend and I had recently moved to a house with a garden so had started letting him out. Just like that, our adorable, loving, docile cat turned into the neighbourhood bruiser. He stopped snuggling with us in the morning, instead impatiently pawing at the door even before we had put down his breakfast.

At night, we would search the house for him, before giving up and going to bed. “I’m sure he’ll be back … soon,” I said to my boyfriend, with all the confidence of a mother whose teenager was out after curfew. All night, I would toss and turn, wondering if I would see his little pink nose again.

Cats demand our love freely, on their own terms, which means with no expectation of long-term commitment. The average outdoor cat may visit multiple homes assessing each on the quality of their cuddles and treats.

Some experts believe that cats are, [at best, semi-domesticated](#), meaning that at any moment, they could flounce off and do just fine.

I grapple with this reality. I watch Larry sometimes and think: “I love you so much, and one day, you might leave me.” Any cat-owner knows the exquisite torture of having a free-roaming pet. Their travels remain a mystery, hinted at only by a clump of dust in their whiskers, or a streak of paint in their fur.

Eventually, of course, Larry swaggered home, weary from another adventure on the savannah (Lewisham, south London). Where had he been? What was he doing out there? What do our cats get up to, when their humans are not around?

To answer this, I contacted [Tractive](#), manufacturers of GPS trackers for cats and dogs. It kindly volunteered to provide me with some units. Next, I recruited five cat owners, all curious to know about what their charges are up to when out and about.

Meet the cats

(Feel free here to imagine a slow-motion montage from a Guy Ritchie film, voiced by Ray Winstone):

Pablo: a bossy, two-year-old shorthair from Brixworth, Northamptonshire. Pablo is owned by Andrea Franklin, a 52-year-old sales manager.

Bluebell: a British shorthair blue from Buckfastleigh, Devon, who purrs like an engine, loves frozen Lick-e-Lix treats, and went missing for three days last year, leaving her owner, 70-year-old retired personal assistant Diane Powell, distraught. “She’s never naughty on purpose,” Powell says.

Marina: a vocal, four-year-old tabby from Acton, west London, who is the terror of the neighbourhood. “Sometimes the neighbours say on Facebook that Marina is bullying the other cats,” says her owner, Ahmed el Bouhy, a 17-year-old student.



Ndah Tatani Mbawa, her three daughters and their cat, Zaki. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

Zaki: a free-spirited, two-year-old ragdoll, who three times has got stuck up a tree in the garden of his owner, Ndah Tatani Mbawa, 43, a business analyst from Northampton. “The first time the tree surgeon charged £180 to get him down,” sighs Mbawa. “The second time was £160. The third time my husband climbed the tree himself.”

Pisi: a muscular serial killer from Hartwell, Northamptonshire. He once disappeared for three months, before turning up alive and well in a nearby forest. “Most days he catches something,” says his owner, Will Benzie, a 49-year-old IT manager. “Mice, birds. Once a pretty sizable rabbit.”

And finally, **Larry:** the most phenomenally handsome cat in existence, and a good boy at that.

It's time to see what they get up to.

Monday

“He’s crossing the track,” I text my boyfriend with the green vomit-face emoji. I live behind a busy railway track – trains run pretty much constantly

into central London, including high-speed freight trains – but the track is about 30ft up from ground level. I didn't think Larry could climb that high. He can.

"The prime cause of death in cats under one is being run over," warns John Bradshaw, the author of [Cat Sense: The Feline Enigma Revealed](#). Larry is also crossing streets around my house, although he does not go further than a few hundred metres in each direction, endlessly looping my home like a security guard patrolling a shopping centre. This is likely to be because I live in a densely populated neighbourhood with other cats. "Many cats will self-limit how far they go," says Bradshaw. "They don't like challenging other cats or being challenged."

Cats are territorial, with established patches they defend. "Territory is *the* most important thing to cats," says cat behaviourist [Anita Kelsey](#). "Some will chase off other cats, and some can live peacefully. Cats learn to share space and avoid one another to make it work, as it can be damaging to be fighting all the time."

By limiting himself to the area directly around my house, Larry, it seems, is a lover, rather than a fighter. The same, however, cannot be said for Pablo. "He's travelled four and a half miles," says a flabbergasted Franklin. "I genuinely thought he'd just be sitting in some old lady's living room all day." Far from it. "There's an allotment near our house," she says. "He's in there a lot. And then he goes into different gardens. He seems to have a few hang-out spots. I think he has a crew."

Tuesday

Pablo is getting more brazen, crossing a busy A-road into a country park. "It's notorious for speeding there," Franklin says.



Brazen ... Pablo.

Franklin believes it's wrong to keep Pablo indoors. "It's important for him to be able to go and do what comes naturally to him," she says. "Not to judge people who don't let their cats out. With that comes the anxiety of losing him. I know this sounds ridiculous, but it's like letting your kids get more independent. You have to let them go at some point."

In this view, in the UK, Franklin is in the majority. Unlike in the US, where domesticated cats typically stay indoors, in the UK [just 26% of British cats are indoor-only](#), according to the animal charity PDSA.

Not everyone is enamoured of this. "There is an anti-cat lobby," says Bradshaw. "They are very vocal people. People who enjoy their gardens and allotments get seriously fed up with cat crap everywhere," he says.

Then there's the hunting. "Predation and hunting are natural attributes of cats," says Prof Robbie McDonald, an expert in companion animal ecology at the University of Exeter. "Although a lot of individual cats don't go anywhere near wildlife; it's a minority." (Larry won't even kill a spider, much to my chagrin.)

The RSPB [says there](#) is "no clear scientific evidence" that cats are causing bird populations to decline, but there is a perception among some British

bird-lovers that cats are a menace and should be kept indoors. (In countries where cats are [not a native species](#), such as Australia and New Zealand, they can have a devastating impact on wildlife.)

“I do feel that cats are an easy target,” says Bradshaw. “Skyscrapers kill more birds than cats do. But you don’t see people standing outside the factories where glass is made, saying: ‘You’re bird-killers.’”

Wednesday

Marina has been on rambunctious form. “She’s been harassing a few neighbours for food,” says El Bouhy. “Then went to a nearby construction site, and spent the night there.” El Bouhy, seeing her location on the Tractive app, went to collect her. “There was a guy on his break, petting her,” he says. “It took a bit of time to get her back.”



Rambunctious ... Marina.

Over in Brixworth, Pablo’s hunting has ramped up. “This morning he went out without breakfast,” says Franklin. “He’s obviously getting his food somewhere else.” She watched in real time as Pablo spent the morning hunting in the allotments near her house. “He nipped home at lunch and brought a dormouse with him.”

There are ways to mitigate a cat's impact on the local bird and small-mammal population. "If the cat is under your management – I hesitate to say control, because no one really controls a cat – you can work out ways to reduce the propensity of the cat to kill," says McDonald. Bells on collars work, as does [switching cats on to a premium, high-protein food diet](#), and giving them mental stimulation by playing with them in the morning. "Changing the cat's food can reduce the amount of wildlife they kill by over a third," says McDonald. "And playing with your cat, more than a quarter. These are positive actions for the cat that also have a positive outcome on their behaviour."

In Buckfastleigh, Powell watches as Bluebell patrols a supermarket car park a few hundred metres from her house. "Like the car park attendant," Powell says, amused. Shift finished, Bluebell prowls the streets looking for attention. "She's spending a lot of time mooching around the back of houses," says Powell. "Sometimes she goes in, to have a sleep on their sofa. And there's a wall along the back of the houses where she spends a lot of time sitting, waiting for people to stroke her."

Thursday

One wily cat has slipped his collar. "I came out of the house and her collar was on the gate post," says Benzie. "I feel like that's a message from Pisi. Stop tracking me."

All the cat-owners, or "guardians", as Kelsey calls them, have rapidly become addicted to following their cats on the app, myself included. "It's so time-consuming," Franklin complains. "I'll be trying to work and then I think: 'Ooh, I wonder what he's doing.'"

Knowing where Pablo will be at any given time of the day is reassuring. "The allotments are clearly his mainstay," Franklin says. "Now, when we drive past the allotments, I look in and see him. I never worry about him, because I know where he'll be."



Will Benzie and his cat Pisi. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

Benzie has long suspected that Pisi frequents a working coal yard about 100 metres from his house, “because his legs were black when he came back”. But the app shows that Pisi is also rifling around the coal sheds. “I don’t know if there are mice in there,” says Benzie.

Powell has been analysing Bluebell’s tracking data and noticed something unexpected. “If we go out of the house,” she says, referring to herself and her partner, “she comes in. It’s almost like she’s looking after the house for us.”

Mbawa is using her newfound knowledge of Zaki’s whereabouts to steal a march on her wayward pet. After seeing on the tracker that Zaki often visited the grounds of a local care home, she decided to walk down. “I saw him between some bushes and he looked at me and was shocked,” she says. “We looked at each other for a while, and he was embarrassed. He was scratching on a little tree and then he walked off … he looked as if he’d been found out.”

Friday

In Hartwell, Benzie has observed Pisi spending an unlikely amount of time in his neighbour's back garden. "I went and asked her: 'Have you been putting food out?'" Benzie says. "She smiled and said: 'Yes, I've been putting it out back, so you can't see it.'" Benzie also suspects that Pisi is getting a third, or even fourth, daily meal from the occupants of a row of houses about a mile away – after his morning visit to the coal yard, Pisi tends to wind up there in the afternoon.



'Never naughty on purpose' ... Bluebell.

In the trade, [pet detectives](#) refer to the act of neighbours feeding your pet cat as "cat seduction" – because they are seducing the cat away with extra food and treats. Cats, for their part, welcome this attention. "Friendly, confident cats will explore other people's homes and might beg for food from various houses on a set route," says Kelsey. When Bradshaw was consulted on a pioneering 2012 [Horizon documentary](#) that tracked cats, he found it was commonplace for cats to be fed multiple times a day. "There was one cat that had four owners," he says. "Cats are opportunists."

But what makes perfect strangers so inclined to feed other people's cats?

"We tend to look at ourselves in very recent contexts," says McDonald. "But our relationship with cats goes back to the dawn of civilisation really. When

humans started farming, we created surpluses of grain and stored them, and cats were used to protect the grain stores from rodents. The inclination to live closely with, accommodate and, in some cases, admire and befriend these animals is part of what makes people social. It's a very profound relationship between people and this sort of animal."

No one is seducing my cat today. It's raining, so Larry doesn't leave my side.

All of the cat owners have come to realise the adorable pets that sleep at the foot of their beds and snuggle on their laps during films are actually independent beings with habits and routines of their own. In short, they are autonomous creatures, with personalities, fears, preferences, needs and, dare I say it, souls.

"She gets up to a lot more than I thought she does," says El Bouhy of Marina. "I knew she went to the neighbours occasionally, but I didn't think she spent the whole day going into their gardens, harassing them for food, and even crossing the railway by my house. I thought she spent half an hour going around, and then slept the rest of the day."

Benzie has been so intrigued by Pisi's behaviour, he plans to fit a miniature camera to her collar. "You think it's kind of lovely that they're going so far and doing all this stuff," he says. "But now it makes me want to delve a bit deeper to see why."

As I write this, Larry is sitting next to me, watching me type. His nose rests on his paw. Although I have loved watching him perambulate around my south London home like a dowager countess, I've relegated Larry's tracking device to a drawer.

Let him go. If he wants to come back to me, he will.

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‘Something’s not right’: Northern Irish townland has its 31.2C day in the sun

Ballywatticock was country’s hottest ever spot last week – but its reign had ended within days



The altered Battywatticock speed sign. Photograph: Paul McErlane/The Guardian

The altered Battywatticock speed sign. Photograph: Paul McErlane/The Guardian



Rory Carroll Ireland correspondent

@rorycarroll72

Thu 22 Jul 2021 05.30 EDT

In the annals of climate change it will be remembered, if at all, as a diverting footnote: the brief reign of Ballywatticock.

Few people in [Northern Ireland](#) had heard of this townland on the shores of Strangford Lough in County Down until its weather station recorded the hottest temperature for the UK [last Saturday](#): 31.2C (88.16F).

The measurement set a new record for [Northern Ireland](#) and unleashed a slew of jokes about an enigmatic name that possibly originated from the Irish *baile Uaiteacoc*, or Watticock's townland.

“Ballywatticock of course being adapted from the Irish: *baile* meaning ‘townland’, *Uaiteacoc* meaning ‘with a big thermometer’,” said one.

[map](#)

Someone changed the local speed limit sign from 30 to 31.2, delighting TV crews that used it as a backdrop to crown this previously anonymous patchwork of fields and houses the hottest place in Northern Ireland.

Residents enjoyed the attention. “It’s good to have a bit of excitement, some craic,” said Donald Crowe, 77, a retired farmer who has hosted the weather station in his garden since 1961.



Donald Crowe, owner of the garden that hosts the weather station.
Photograph: Paul McErlane/The Guardian

“It’s excellent. A wee bit of publicity,” said Chris Holmes, 58, who has spent a lifetime assuring outsiders that Ballywatticock is a real place.

Now it had a place in the record books, he said. “Last Saturday was like walking off a plane in a really hot country.” He indicated a landscape of yellowing grass, the product of weeks of heat. “All those fields are burned to a crisp.”



Chris Holmes in his garden in Ballywatticcock, County Down. Photograph: Paul McErlane/The Guardian

Brian Jameson, 56, said last Saturday was windless, with not a zephyr coming from the sea just down the road. “It was unbelievable – a dry, searing heat. I came out of the house and I thought: wow, something’s not right.”

It is possible the multiple thermometers in Crowe’s garden – some sit in Met Office boxes, others rest on grass, some are in tubes in the soil – were not right. The Met Office dispatched a technician to verify the readings and is expected to give a verdict in coming days.

Meanwhile, dramatic footage from the US, [Germany](#), Russia, [China](#) and elsewhere this week delivered their own stark judgment: the planet is not right.

[Northern Ireland records its highest ever temperature as UK bakes](#)

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Smoke from forest fires in the western US travelled thousands of miles and polluted New York’s air. A heatwave in Siberia, one of the world’s coldest regions, sparked wildfires that smothered the city of Yakutsk with an

“[airpocalypse](#)” of toxic smoke. Researchers said the catastrophic floods that killed more than 200 people in western Europe may become [more common](#) because of global heating.

Such disasters felt remote from Ballywatticock, where residents expressed hope the heatwave would endure and let this usually wet, windy corner of the British Isles feel Sicilian a while longer.

Yet images of extreme weather beyond their shores, and their own sense that Northern Ireland’s climate is changing, nagged residents. It was fun to be famous, but what if that fame reflected unfolding global calamity?

“I believe the climate is changing. There’s too much evidence all around,” said Patrina Jameson, 57. Her son Ryan, 29, worried about what awaited his generation. “I believe the damage has already been done. Something has changed big time.”



Brian and Patrina Jameson. Photograph: Paul McErlane/The Guardian

Once upon a time weather records might last years, even decades. Ballywatticock’s reign as Northern Ireland’s hottest ever spot had ended in less than a week. On Wednesday a weather station in Castlederg, a County Tyrone village 80 miles (130km) to the west, recorded 31.3C (88.34F).

“Northern Ireland has for the second time in five days provisionally broken its all-time temperature record,” said the Met Office. The measurement will also need verification before becoming official.

Northern Ireland has for the second time in 5 days provisionally broken it's all-time temperature record □

Castlederg in County Tyrone recorded a temperature of 31.3 °C at 1437 this afternoon □

This exceeds the 31.2 °C that Ballywatticock recorded last Saturday
[#heatwave pic.twitter.com/M4viWndTEi](#)

— Met Office (@metoffice) [July 21, 2021](#)

Castlederg also holds the record for Northern Ireland’s lowest temperature: -18.7C (-1.66F) during the [winter of 2010](#).

Ballywatticock could not compete with a song of ice and fire. Northern Ireland had a new extreme weather celebrity.

Castlederg’s reign proved even more fleeting. On Thursday a weather station in Armagh recorded 31.4C.

Northern Ireland has once again provisionally broken its highest [#temperature](#) on record □

Armagh reached 31.4 °C at 1520 this afternoon□

This beats the 31.2 °C that Ballywatticock recorded on Saturday and the 31.3 °C that Castlederg recorded yesterday [#UKHeatwave](#)
[#heatwave pic.twitter.com/lItf4fwt8Z](#)

— Met Office (@metoffice) [July 22, 2021](#)

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Menopause

There will be blood: women on the shocking truth about periods and perimenopause



‘It’s that constant fear that you might have a stain on the back of your skirt that you don’t know about’. Illustration: Silja Goetz/Illustration Division/The Guardian

‘It’s that constant fear that you might have a stain on the back of your skirt that you don’t know about’. Illustration: Silja Goetz/Illustration Division/The Guardian

The menopause brings an end to menstruation – but in the lead-up, many women experience periods that can disrupt their lives and careers



Gaby Hinsliff

Thu 22 Jul 2021 05.00 EDT

If Emma Pickett needs to make a long journey, she checks her calendar very carefully. She will often take an emergency change of clothes when she goes out, and if giving a lecture for work, has to ensure it is no longer than half an hour. Yet she rarely hears anyone talk about the reason so many older women secretly go to all this trouble; why they've started to stick to black trousers, give up the sports they loved, or plan days out – especially with children – meticulously.

"If you have a bunch of 12-year-olds in the car, you can't say: 'Sorry chaps, I'm just bleeding heavily today,'" says Pickett, a 48-year-old breastfeeding counsellor and author of *The Breast Book*, who also happens to be among the one in five British women who suffer from heavy periods in the run-up to menopause (or perimenopause). "You can talk about hot flushes, make a joke about it. But because menstrual blood is gross in our society, there's no conversation about it. There must be women round the world just pretending they need to dash off for some other reason."

Michelle Obama has spoken frankly about coping with hot flushes in the White House, and the Countess of Wessex recently confessed to having

suffered menopausal brain fog. But it takes a different level of courage to talk publicly about wearing three pairs of knickers – just in case, or to cope with what the US gynaecologist and author of [The Menopause Manifesto](#) Dr Jen Gunter calls a “supersoaker event” – the kind of bleeding that can flood through clothes, defeat even a combination of super-plus tampons and maternity towels, and leave women needing iron supplements or in some cases stop them leaving the house. All at a time when many assumed their periods would be politely fading away. (Menopause is defined as the point of not having menstruated for a year.) Given about 13 million British women are either peri- or postmenopausal, with some trans and non-binary people on similar journeys, the silence seems oddly deafening.

Today younger women are increasingly upfront about their cycles, thanks to activist campaigns, taboo-busting books and such groundbreaking television moments as the [period sex scene](#) in Michaela Coel’s award-winning drama *I May Destroy You*. But there are few midlife equivalents, the notable exception being a scene in Allison Pearson’s 2017 novel *How Hard Can It Be?* where her 49-year-old heroine is caught out during a high-powered work event and ends up barricaded in the loo, bleeding all over the hotel’s fancy towels.

“I read that book and thought: ‘Oh my God, this has happened to someone else,’” recalls Pickett. But even Pearson, who based the scene loosely on something that happened to her at an awards dinner, wrote afterwards that she still felt mortified discussing it; the shame of losing control, of feeling “my body, usually so reliable, in open mutiny against me”, runs deep.

“It’s that constant fear that you might have a stain on the back of your skirt that you don’t know about,” says Helen Clare, a former biology teacher who retrained as a menopause educator after a difficult menopause herself, and now coaches other teachers on coping strategies. “You’ve reached the point where you think you know how to manage a female body, and suddenly it starts to wrongfoot you.” In extreme cases, a difficult menopause may even push women to consider dropping out of hard-earned careers, just when they should be reaching their professional prime.

No one says erectile dysfunction is ‘just part of men’s lives’. We say this is a typical thing – and there’s treatment

Dr Jen Gunter

For some women, the end of reproductive life can mean little more than a few missed periods. But a callout to Guardian readers asking about experiences in the run-up to menopause suggests that, for others, heavier, longer, more frequent or unpredictable bleeding has left them feeling vulnerable, anxious and exhausted.

“Menopause has brought my life crashing down around me,” reported Joy, a 48-year-old nurse whose irregular and heavy periods can now last for weeks. “I’m no longer the same person I was two years ago. I’m frequently exhausted and feel unable to cope at work and at home.” Despite her professional training she was, she says, “completely unprepared”. “If men went through menopause and the hormonal rollercoaster that accompanies it, there would be more research done and attention paid.”

Dawn, now 53, was in the middle of a stressful divorce when, to her horror, she began to bleed non-stop. “I couldn’t countenance building a new life with this happening as well. I knew it would severely affect my mental health and wellbeing at a fragile time for me.”

Sonia, a 50-year-old university lecturer, was out running in the park when a sudden deluge of blood covered her shorts and legs: “I had to call my partner to pick me up in the car. Fortunately this has never happened to me at work, but I often think about what I would do if it did.”

It has left others dreading a post-pandemic return to the office. Mona, a 46-year-old NHS worker, is relieved her heaviest days have, so far, fallen at weekends: “I think I’d have to call in sick otherwise. I work with quite a lot of men. I couldn’t be in a meeting that would go on for an hour and think: have I leaked? I’m office-based but God knows how people manage through a 12-hour shift.”

Some remain reluctant to seek treatment for what Nicola, 52, still considers “an inconvenience rather than an illness”, despite being forced to sit on blankets to protect her sofa. But others describe battling with unsympathetic doctors. “I often see people who have been left to feel there wasn’t anything to be done,” says Gunter, whose book includes an entire chapter on midlife

periods aimed at demystifying the problem. “But no one ever says erectile dysfunction is ‘just a part of men’s lives’, do they? We can say this is a typical thing that happens – *and* there’s treatment if you want it.”

Official guidance from the National Institute for [Health](#) and Care Excellence (Nice) is that changes in bleeding patterns over the age of 45 should be investigated to rule out conditions including fibroids (non-cancerous growths in the womb), polyps and, in some rare cases, cancer. (Bleeding in postmenopausal women whose periods had previously stopped should also be checked out, as it can be a symptom of more serious illness.) But Dr Paula Briggs, a consultant in reproductive and sexual health at Southport and Ormskirk NHS hospital trust, says for perimenopausal women suffering heavy periods, a common culprit is fluctuating hormones.

“It’s probably one of the commonest presenting symptoms in menopause transition and there’s a logical reason for it,” she says. As the body tries to prod faltering ovaries into releasing an egg, oestrogen levels rise, causing the womb lining to thicken; but women who are no longer ovulating regularly don’t always produce enough progesterone to balance out that oestrogen. The result is an unusually thick womb lining which sheds chaotically. [Women](#) may pass large clots or sudden gushes of blood, forcing them to double up on sanitary protection, or change it hourly or even more often.

Treatment options include regulating hormones with a Mirena coil, or the combined or mini contraceptive pill, but there are also non-hormonal alternatives including endometrial ablation (surgically removing the womb lining) or the drug tranexamic acid, says Briggs. Some women also find HRT useful. But the first step, she says, is helping older women realise that “it’s not taboo, it’s perfectly OK to talk about it”. Arguably, that same openness could help in the workplace, too.

I’ve come across women who are having extended sick leave because they didn’t feel able to manage their bleeding

Helen Clare

Helen Clare encourages her teacher clients to consider practical solutions if they fear getting caught short mid-lesson, such as buddying up with a colleague they can summon for emergency cover should they need to sprint to the loo. But that relies on women being unembarrassed enough to raise it in the first place. “If women can’t talk about it, they can’t come up with solutions,” she says. “What tends to happen is women stay away until the problem resolves. I’ve come across women who are having extended periods of sick leave because they didn’t feel able to manage their bleeding.”

In a [2019 survey](#) by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, nearly a third of women experiencing menopausal and perimenopausal symptoms of all kinds, had taken sick leave as a result and most also reported feeling unable to tell their manager the real reason. “It’s not just embarrassment, it’s shame because of the social value you lose as a woman when you stop being perceived as useful and fertile,” says Clare. Older women may be reluctant to admit going through something they fear will lead to them being perceived as unreliable or past it.

“I think if you actually drilled down, there’s still a lot of women leaving employment in their 40s and 50s because they just can’t face having their menopause in front of people, so they go down the consultancy route instead,” says Anne-Marie Boyle, an employment lawyer at the Bristol-based firm Menzies Law and expert on menopause discrimination. “It’s that classic trap for women: I’ve seen it in women leaving after kids, going part-time, and then I see them coming back, and then quitting again or being forced out again. It’s a double glass ceiling that men just don’t face.” Yet, as a generation of women who fought tooth and nail to stay in full-time work through their childbearing years now approach the menopause, could something be starting to crack?

Carolyn Harris, the Labour MP and chair of the all-party parliamentary group on menopause, was 50 when she finally saw her doctor about the heavy periods she had suffered for years. “I’d be sitting in a chair and as long as I was sitting down I was fine, but when I got up it was, literally, a gush and I’d just be absolutely saturated,” says Harris, who was working as an MP’s assistant. “One of the girls working in the office was going away on holiday and I’ll never forget, she said to me: ‘I’m going now, I’ll see you when I get back, if you’re still alive.’ And I said: ‘What do you mean?’ And

she said: ‘The colour on you; you look at death’s door.’ I’d passed out in the office before.”

Heavy blood loss can cause anaemia and tests revealed that Harris’s haemoglobin levels were so low that she was admitted to hospital. There, she says, the nurse greeted her with the words: ‘Ah, you’re the woman who’s the walking dead.’ Until then, she hadn’t made the connection between her heavy periods and approaching menopause.

“A lot of women don’t realise,” says Harris, whose group has started collecting evidence from women on their experience of menopause in all its forms. “I never thought it was the menopause, I just thought it was my cycle.” She is now determined to bust taboos around the subject and optimistic that the public health minister, Nadine Dorries – currently leading a review of women’s healthcare – shares that aim, having talked openly about her own struggles with hot flushes in parliament. “Nadine has surprised me,” she says. “Like me, she believes that in women’s health there’s no such thing as [party] politics.”

[About bloody time: is cinema finally going with the flow of period sex?](#)
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Boyle, too, sees glimmers of hope in the fact some employers are now developing policies to help menopausal employees. Earlier this month, the financial services company Hargreaves Lansdown introduced a menopause and menstruation policy including free sanitary products in the office, education about common symptoms, and flexible working policies; meanwhile, the sustainable period pants brand Modibodi offers paid leave for menstruation, menopause and miscarriage symptoms that interfere with employees’ ability to work. A post-pandemic boom in working from home could also prove life-changing for some, Boyle argues: “You can regulate your own temperature, go to the loo when you want.”

But where that is not feasible, perhaps the most practical advice for employers comes from a Twitter thread that an exasperated Pickett posted back in April: if a middle-aged colleague or friend says they need the bathroom suddenly, just believe them.

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After Covid, the climate crisis will be the next thing the right says we ‘just have to live with’

[Aditya Chakrabortty](#)



The politics of this new, extreme individualism will make collective responses to social crises impossible



Floods on the Ahr River in Germany, 21 July 2021: ‘Soon, a little platoon of Tory backbenchers will respond to TV pictures of another devastating flood by complaining about ‘fearmongering’.’ Photograph: Friedemann Vogel/EPA

Floods on the Ahr River in Germany, 21 July 2021: ‘Soon, a little platoon of Tory backbenchers will respond to TV pictures of another devastating flood by complaining about ‘fearmongering’.’ Photograph: Friedemann Vogel/EPA

Thu 22 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Soon, a few of the more shameless newspaper commentators will urge the rest of us to “learn to live” with climate breakdown. Soon, a couple of especially sharp-elbowed cabinet ministers will sigh to the Spectator that, yes, carbon emissions should ideally be slashed – but we must make a trade-off between “lives and livelihoods”. Soon, a little platoon of Tory backbenchers will respond to TV pictures of another devastating flash flood or deadly heatwave by complaining about “fearmongering”. “Why is the BBC so doomy?” they’ll ask, as the death toll rises.

Soon, shockingly soon, the cheap shots, the brazen stat-bending and the coprophagic cynicism that have warped British discourse since March 2020 will migrate from Covid to an even bigger and more lethal crisis: the climate

emergency. And just as they have helped shape the self-inflicted catastrophe that England has embarked upon this week, so they will work their terrible influence on that one.

Scientists and politicians the world over have noted the strong similarities between coronavirus and climate breakdown. In papers and speeches, they have drawn lessons about some of the best ways to handle both: go early, go big, and don't pretend you can strike some special deal with a lethal force. The UK's week-long delay in locking down in March 2020 led to about 20,000 deaths, [estimates](#) Neil Ferguson. Every year wasted in reducing carbon emissions pushes us further into extreme weather, environmental destruction and the loss of human and animal lives. These lessons appeared to have been fully imbibed by Boris Johnson and his chancellor, Rishi Sunak, when they vowed last March to do "whatever it takes" to tackle the pandemic.

Goodbye to all that. Starting this week, our prime minister is no longer even pretending to keep down infections in England; instead, he is allowing more people to catch the disease, hospitals to drown amid case numbers, and thousands more Britons to die. That scenario isn't drawn from the government's critics: it is the one publicly accepted by Whitehall. It is less a policy than a white flag.

Even as global health experts unite in condemning the UK as a "[threat to the world](#)", Johnson merely shrugs and asks: "[If not now, when?](#)" It is an artless, shortsighted phrase that will come back to haunt him, that will be flung in his face at future press conferences and resurface whenever that public inquiry finally begins.

As ever with anything involving this prime minister, the fatal farce of "freedom day" will be refracted through a thousand talk-radio discussions about Johnson's fitness to govern. But the Tory leader is surfing a wave far bigger than himself. Riding forces larger than himself is what Johnson has done throughout his career, and it is what makes him such an effective political campaigner. It is also what should make us worry about the terrain on which future political battles will be fought.

What he has correctly identified is a growing extremist individualism. It is an ideology that claims to be about freedom when really it means selfishness; and it sees any curtailment of its liberties, no matter how justified or temporary, as Stalin sending in the tanks. Last weekend, the chair of the Tory 1922 backbench committee, Graham Brady, claimed that face masks were really about social control. Railing at voters for meekly accepting a measure designed to reduce the spread of infection, he accused them of suffering from Stockholm syndrome. “The line between coercion and care becomes blurred, the hostage starts to see the man with the AK-47 who holds him in a cell not as a jailer but as a protector.”



Illustration: Bill Bragg

Selfishness is hardly a new characteristic of our politics. But what is striking today is how the politicians and commentators using it sneer at those who stand in their way. There is a cruelty to this politics that is breathtaking. The rightwing commentator Douglas Murray complained in the Sun on Sunday of Britons’ “terrible fearfulness”. He didn’t trace this to the fact that the country is mourning more than 150,000 Covid deaths.

Before Covid came along, Murray had a line in rubbishing activists who have the gall to sound the alarm on the climate crisis. A “fringe eco-lobby”, he declared in the Daily Mail, was committing “an abuse of children on a

massive and unforgivable scale” by making them fearful of the future. The Covid deniers are, as often as not, also the climate deniers; who are – wouldn’t you know it? – the most extreme Brexiters. Earlier this year, Steve Baker, the MP who calls himself the “hardman of Brexit” (which does admittedly sound better than his real title of “former software consultant”), joined the Global Warming Policy Foundation, an organisation that claims to speak “common sense on climate change”. Its honorary president is the climate-change denier Nigel Lawson. The carousel goes round and round, but the faces on it never seem to change.

Lawson, as Margaret Thatcher’s chancellor, played a vital role in breaking the social contract that had underpinned postwar Britain, on everything from welfare to pay to pensions. What his successors are now doing is trying to dismantle what’s left of the ethical contract Britons still hold with each other. If they succeed, the politics of extreme individualism will make impossible the collective response essential to tackle social crises, from Covid to social care to climate.

In his new book, *Go Big*, the former Labour leader Ed Miliband writes: “If we treat the climate crisis as a technical fix or technological problem to be solved and think we can do so while leaving other injustices in place ... we will fail.” He is right. But that is exactly how the new right has dealt with the pandemic. Johnson’s government didn’t even attempt a strategy of zero Covid – instead it spent the thick end of a billion quid on making sure Nando’s was half-price for the summer. And it got lucky: Covid vaccines were in production within months. On climate, nearly every techno-fix has remained a money-sucking mirage, as with carbon capture and storage.

[Restoring our lives to normality after Covid is not the solution, it's the problem | Jeff Sparrow](#)

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And each time, cooperation is just dismissed as political impossibilism. Even when politicians nod their heads while scientists urge that “no one is safe until everyone is safe”, nothing happens. While nearly 70% of adult Britons have now been double-jabbed, only 1% of people in low-income countries have received even one dose. While the home secretary, Priti Patel, was cheering on England in the Euro finals, Ugandans in her parents’ former

home of Kampala were turning their equivalent of Wembley stadium into a Covid hospital.

This smirking ignorance is possible for as long as those people who die, whether of Covid or climate breakdown, are brown or black or poor. But even the likes of Murray and Baker and Lawson can't rely on that. Not when a flood can burst into a German care home and drown the residents. Not when a wildfire can consume one of the richest provinces in America and the world. Some bunkers you just can't buy.

- Aditya Chakrabortty is a Guardian columnist
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Witnessing England's response to Covid at first hand has profoundly shocked me

[William Hanage](#)

On a visit to the UK from the US, I have seen how incoherent government policy is allowing Delta to run rampant

- William Hanage is a Harvard epidemiology professor



‘While vaccinated mourners were not permitted to place a flower on a coffin, tens of thousands of fans crammed into Wembley to watch football.’
Photograph: WIktor Szymanowicz/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

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Photograph: WIktor Szymanowicz/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Thu 22 Jul 2021 04.36 EDT

England ended all pandemic restrictions on Monday. Nightclubs reopened, along with other large events and gatherings – with masks, testing and other

mitigation measures “encouraged” (which is another way of saying “optional”). This is against a background of skyrocketing case rates due to the Delta variant.

In January, at the height of the second wave, the daily total hit 60,000 cases, but at the current rate of increase that will be eclipsed within days – even in the absence of all the renewed super-spreading opportunities that the virus will now enjoy. Thanks to the Covid-curious policies of the past few months, the UK is already in the grip of an uncontrolled epidemic among unvaccinated people, with significant numbers of breakthrough infections among the vaccinated. And both are about to get worse.

Because of the nature of exponential spread, actions taken early pay dividends later. Israel has understood this and – despite having vaccination rates comparable to or better than the UK – responded early to the Delta variant, reintroducing indoor mask mandates while accelerating vaccination in younger age groups.

For England, on the other hand, it is not fatalistic but realistic to say that the Delta variant will not be put back in its box, because exponential spread has been permitted for months. The prime minister stated he would be guided by “data, not dates” – but, not for the first time, the reality has turned out to be the direct opposite of what he said.

Fortunately, the consequences will not be as immediately grave as at the start of the year. Vaccination protects well against hospitalisation and death, which is why it should be accelerated, so those worst consequences of the virus are not rising at the same rate. But they are rising. The UK suffered more pandemic deaths in the past 18 months than its civilian death toll for the entirety of the second world war, while a prime minister who conspicuously admires Churchill belittled the dangers on WhatsApp. It is not over yet. Daily death figures in the hundreds are far from implausible – the period of the very steepest increase in case counts has been the last few weeks, too early to be fully apparent in the fatalities. Models predict thousands more deaths.

While deaths understandably make headlines, and hospitalisations drive policy, preventing them is only the start of an effective public health

response. This stage of the pandemic is different from those preceding it, but the result of this wave will be yet further delays to other vital NHS services.

Health administrators are already warning that things are getting dicey, and even if the events of last winter are not repeated, we should not want to get anywhere near them. The damage in terms of delays to waiting lists is already serious, and the current surge will exacerbate that.

Among the other impacts, we must consider the lives that will be blighted by long Covid. More than 2 million adults in England have experienced long Covid symptoms, and the million or more infections that have happened since the latest exponential kicked off, overwhelmingly in the last month, will add to them. Because the unvaccinated are bearing the brunt of infections, that means younger people will suffer.

Though you'd never realise it from the rhetoric, only around half of the UK population are actually fully immunised and vaccine uptake has been slowing down. Close to 70% have had at least one dose, but those who have received one dose are more vulnerable than people with both doses to breakthrough Delta infections. Some will end up bedridden for days and the numbers will increase over time, because exponential growth can outpace any vaccination campaign.

Overall, it's quite simple. Yes, vaccines make it much less likely you'll get infected or ill; but if the virus isn't there, it definitely can't infect you. Tens of thousands of new cases every single day mean you are more likely to be exposed to multiple potential sources of infection, meaning more people becoming ill.

But perhaps the most serious impact of this outbreak will be on those who are, for whatever reason, unable to benefit from vaccination. This includes people with other conditions that mean it is not safe to vaccinate them, or those who are immunocompromised for whatever reason and may not be able to mount a good immune response. It includes too those who have been struggling with vaccine access and are concentrated in deprived areas where infections can spread more quickly.

Having spent the pandemic to date in the US, I travelled to south London this month and got a taste of the incoherent pandemic theatre which proved so unequal to handling the Delta variant. At a funeral, due to Covid restrictions, vaccinated mourners were not permitted to place a flower on a coffin. At the same time, masks were optional in schools, and tens of thousands of fans crammed into Wembley and pubs around the country to watch football.

People are still lining up to get vaccinated – I've seen it myself. At the chemist where I took my test, there was a steady stream queueing outside the door to get the jab. They weren't all in their 20s or 30s, either. A large uncontrolled Delta wave adds to the risk of these groups getting infected.

Of course, everyone is exhausted and wants the pandemic to be over. The English government has opted to hasten that with a massive uncontrolled exit wave. You can almost hear the anxiety in chief medical adviser Chris Whitty's voice as he gives his televised briefings. He knows that you toy with exponentials at your peril. After the last year, it is hard to imagine anyone could forget.

Various politicians are nervily muttering about voluntary mitigation measures such as masks, which would be eminently sensible in a situation where infections were low but which will do little right now.

[If Covid-19 is a seasonal virus, why is it spreading during the summer? | Francois Balloux](#)

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We test vaccines with exquisite care to ensure they are safe, and sometimes rare side-effects are found only after millions of doses have been administered. We don't need to see that number of Covid cases to know that the risks of infection are vastly greater than those of vaccination, even in the younger age groups in which the pandemic is now rampant.

Some of those people might not even get the chance to be vaccinated. Instead, the exponential growth that has been allowed for months means the virus will continue to kill people and leave others to suffer before the doses

even get to them. Because when it came down to it dates, not data, are what mattered.

- Dr William Hanage is a professor of the evolution and epidemiology of infectious disease at Harvard
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[Opinion](#)[Dominic Cummings](#)

Cummings condemns England's political 'duffers'. But our problems are structural

[Owen Jones](#)



Archaic power relations allow the Westminster elite to get away with anything – even the deaths of thousands of people



‘Cummings smirked his way through a question on the deceit of Turkey’s imminent membership of the EU.’ Photograph: Jeff Overs/BBC/AFP/Getty Images

‘Cummings smirked his way through a question on the deceit of Turkey’s imminent membership of the EU.’ Photograph: Jeff Overs/BBC/AFP/Getty Images

Wed 21 Jul 2021 13.25 EDT

Dominic Cummings’ latest utterances should not be treated as revelations, but rather as corroborating evidence of what should, in a functioning democracy, be treated as Britain’s gravest peacetime scandal. A prime minister sent tens of thousands of his own citizens to premature graves because he valued other considerations more highly than human life.

We knew Boris Johnson resisted demands from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies for a national lockdown in September, even if Johnson’s former senior adviser now [fleshes out](#) the prime minister’s reasonings: that most of those dying were in their 80s, whose disproportionate political loyalty to the Conservative party was rewarded by its leader caring not whether they lived or died. It was already clear that Johnson’s administration wanted Covid to “wash through the country”, because they [briefed favoured journalists](#) that “herd immunity” was their

official strategy more than 17 months ago. Britain has a more severe death rate [per million inhabitants](#) than the United States in part because Johnson – alongside [Rishi Sunak](#), whose reputation Cummings has sought to whitewash – wanted to prioritise the economy over life, and ended up devastating both.

[Boris Johnson's 'get Covid, live longer' quip an echo of Oxford study](#)

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What, though, to make of a democracy unable to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe that was – on such a scale – completely avoidable? One of the central frustrations of Cummings is that he such a convenient pantomime villain, clearly relishing his notoriety, that he allows liberals to believe that Britain's problems are not systemic, but the consequence of degenerate leaders who lack honesty and integrity. Consciously or otherwise, this is an audience Cummings plays to when he [repeatedly emphasises](#) Johnson's unfitness for political office, even confessing to MPs that he should not have been at the centre of power either. If only public-spirited leaders who told the truth were running the show, many liberals are left concluding, then Britain's supposed age of decency could be restored. We could all live in the 2012 Olympics' opening ceremony for ever more.

It is a logic that was taken to its extreme end by [Brexit](#), in which much of the political centre fused an abandonment of Occam's razor – that the simplest explanations are the likeliest – with conspiratorial thinking. Britain's rupture with the European Union was so obviously an act of self-harm, and an affront to liberal values that had remained intact whoever was in political office, that it must simply be treated as illegitimate: an absurd blip in the matrix won via machiavellian chicanery (enter Cummings), Facebook algorithms and foreign interference. More obvious explanations – the poisonous role of the oligarch-owned rightwing media over decades and the festering disillusionment of ex-industrial communities that was long ripe to be exploited – were largely discarded.

[In his interview](#) with the BBC's Laura Kuenssberg last night Cummings smirked his way through a question on the deceit of Turkey's imminent membership of the EU, which was a deliberate attempt by the Vote Leave campaign to exploit anti-Muslim bigotry: but that only worked because this

acceptable racism has long been fanned by newspapers ranging from broadsheets like the Times to tabloids like the Sun.

A belief in substituting the disreputable with the honourable finds its apogee in Sir Keir Starmer; yet many of those who see him as the antidote to Johnsonian skulduggery openly demand that he discard the promises he made to the Labour membership to preserve radical Corbyn-era domestic policies. In other words, to commit deceit: which, in fact, has already happened, leading to a [membership collapse](#) that has brought the opposition party to the edge of bankruptcy, despite failed attempts to court rich donors – who in any case expect influence for their buck, further corrupting our heavily caveated democracy.

A source of consternation is Cummings' confession that he and a like-minded network considered [plotting](#) to oust Johnson within days of the Tories' 2019 landslide victory. The unelected and unaccountable manipulating our treasured democracy like a chessboard – heaven forbid! Is this truly a novelty in a country in which media moguls unashamedly use their empires to secure their political ends, and where Tory MPs tell journalists that their desire to slash taxes is driven by [funding from](#) “rich City donors”?

If it is indeed the case that elite factions – whether it be the [Vote Leave cabal](#) or the court of Carrie Johnson – can easily manipulate our democracy, our beef should not be with the players but rather with the game. This is not a country where the people are understood to be sovereign, a title literally conferred on an unelected monarch. Our rulers like to boast of our “mother of all parliaments”, but ours is a democracy without a proper democratic culture. Well over half a century ago, the political essayist [Perry Anderson remarked](#) that Britain's never-ending systemic crisis was because of the nature of the state. Like, say, France, we had a revolution, but a premature one – so premature we pretend it never happened – back in the 17th century, and many of our institutions remained preserved in aspic from that era.

Things do change, of course. See the rise of the City, how big money exercises power with various levers, from donations to political parties, lobbying, the revolving door, various PR agencies, and how Thatcherism brought alternative power centres to heel, notable the trade unions and local

government. But archaic power structures can easily be manipulated, even when there is a split among our ruling elites, which is what happened throughout the Brexit drama when Johnson and Cummings shamelessly used powers conferred by our “elected dictatorship” to secure their ends.

It is not remarked upon enough that the calamities of the Covid and Brexit era could have been avoided if there had been a proper reckoning with our democratic failings after the war in Iraq. Even the very mention of Iraq provokes eye rolls and mutterings of “oh, move on will you”, often by individuals who will be cursing Brexit on their deathbeds in decades to come, because for some a crisis over British trade and liberal values is regarded as of far greater import than the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Arabs.

But how did a clique around Tony Blair and intelligence agencies railroad this country into a war judged illegal by the UN secretary general, all following a hard-right US administration on a pretext, and suffer no consequences? The only resignations were from opponents on the Labour frontbench, as well as the BBC top brass, permanently hobbling our public broadcaster as a means to hold government to account. Thirteen years after the invasion, there was some modest accountability with the [Chilcot inquiry](#), but ultimately that had no lasting consequences. Our establishment looks after its own. And if our political elites could get away with the inferno of Iraq, they could in fact get away with anything – as indeed Covid and the various Brexit debacles have now underlined.

What, then, is the legacy of Cummings’ latest intervention? It is likely to be little other than a further shot in the arm for the liberal delusion that Britain’s travails are the consequences of decisions made by wicked men. Rather than a compelling alternative vision – one that would actually transform a broken democracy – all that is needed is the appearance of integrity and honesty by rational and competent genuine public servants, however illusory. From Iraq to Brexit to Covid, nothing is learned, just more illusions, and so this country will stumble from needless disaster to self-inflicted calamity, seemingly for ever more.

- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist

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Architecture

Liverpool has been vandalising its waterfront for a decade – it's shocking Unesco didn't act sooner

Oliver Wainwright



Losing world heritage status has shone a light on the city's redevelopment from maritime metropolis to pound-shop Shanghai, plagued by allegations of bribery and corruption

- [Unesco strips Liverpool of its world heritage status](#)



The ‘three disgraces’ ... Canning dock, Liverpool. Photograph: Carl Dickinson/Alamy Stock Photo

The ‘three disgraces’ ... Canning dock, Liverpool. Photograph: Carl Dickinson/Alamy Stock Photo

Wed 21 Jul 2021 12.09 EDT

“A certificate on the wall” is how Liverpool’s former mayor Joe Anderson used to describe the city’s Unesco world heritage status. The unbridled contempt he showed for his own city’s architectural heritage has now come to its logical conclusion: the certificate has ended up in the bin, along with the reputation of this once great maritime metropolis.

Unesco’s [decision to strip Liverpool of its hallowed heritage status](#) is hardly surprising – nor will it probably affect the buoyant city a great deal. Much of the public reaction so far has been a defiant shrug. But the real shock is that it took the international watchdog quite so long to act.

[Unesco strips Liverpool of its world heritage status](#)

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Over the past decade the Labour council has trampled its historic buildings with glee, pursuing needless demolition and rubber-stamping numerous

atrocious developments, [wreaking civic vandalism on an epic scale](#). When Anderson [stepped aside](#) in December, following his arrest on suspicion of conspiracy to commit bribery and witness intimidation, which he strongly denies, he left a trail of misguided projects and half-finished building sites, monuments to mayoral hubris for which the city will pay the price for years to come.

Unesco's principal concerns were [the £5bn Liverpool Waters development](#), a 60-hectare jamboree of half-baked towers beginning to rise along the waterfront, and the now approved plans for [Everton's new £500m stadium at Bramley-Moore Dock](#). The UN agency said the plans had led to "serious deterioration and irreversible loss" to the area's outstanding universal value, along with "significant loss to its authenticity and integrity". But the rot runs much deeper than these two projects alone.



An artist's impression of Everton FC's new £500m stadium. Photograph: Everton FC/PA

One of the most visible signs that the council didn't take its heritage status seriously was the arrival in 2013 of the "three disgraces" right next to the historic Three Graces – despoiling the postcard waterfront view. This [trio of lumbering black blocks](#) was lambasted as looking like three coffins ready to dispatch their Victorian neighbours, and it set a precedent that anything goes

in the name of “regeneration”. It could have been expected from a local planning authority that had already waved through the [Carbuncle Cup-winning ferry terminal](#) nearby and [the colossal mess of the Museum of Liverpool](#), that writhes along the dock in a contorted heap, demonstrating British “value engineering” at its worst.

What first forced Unesco to act, putting the city on its danger list in 2012, was the granting of outline planning permission for the Peel group’s Liverpool Waters plan. The developer told me their vision was inspired by Shanghai, “the way the [skyscrapers of Pudong](#) stand across the water from the historic Bund”, but it was a pound-shop Pudong at best. The ambition has since been dialled down a few notches, leaving a collection of drab, faceless slabs, set to march for 2km along the waterfront. The jewel in Peel’s cut-price crown is intended to be Everton’s new stadium, sadly of much the same quality, conceived as a great silver slug marooned on top of a vaguely warehousey brick box – a strained “contextual” nod to its surroundings.



The Carbuncle Cup-winning ferry terminal. Photograph: Oliver Wainwright/the Guardian

Unesco’s critics argue that Wednesday’s decision represents a narrow “binary choice” between heritage and regeneration, but it comes down to a question of quality. Liverpool deserves world-class architecture, of a like

calibre to what has gone before, not a desperate attempt to build anything at any cost.

The consequences of a city in thrall to developers are already painfully visible beyond the Unesco boundary. On Lime Street, near the station, now stands a gargantuan hulk of student flats where [an elegant row of Georgian buildings and the beautiful ceramic facade of the 1912 Futurist cinema](#) stood until recently. Despite the building being eminently salvageable, it was flattened. Its memory has been preserved by a ghostly image etched into the facade of the new block, [like a lurid death mask](#). Elsewhere, there are [more than 30 stalled building sites scattered across the city](#), many left abandoned and dogged by allegations of criminal activity.

In March, [a damning central government inspection](#) described instances of building work starting without planning consent, as well as reports of building regulations and planning agreements being breached that were ignored. Merseyside police have opened an inquiry into allegations of bribery, corruption and misconduct in public office, [dubbed Operation Aloft](#), which has seen 12 people arrested, including the council's former director of regeneration. All remain under investigation and have not been charged.



The now-demolished Futurist cinema in Liverpool. Photograph: Rory Prior/Alamy

Whitehall commissioners have been sent in, and the new mayor, Joanne Anderson (no relation), has pledged to address the issues and “rebuild trust of our citizens”. Unesco’s decision will no doubt be shrugged off as the prissy overreaction of an unelected body and, given what has been allowed in Edinburgh, the world heritage designation seems largely ineffectual anyway. But the act of striking Liverpool off the list helps to shine a powerful international spotlight on a city that has been happy to embrace mediocre development for far too long. It is a useful reminder that the world is watching.

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[US Capitol attack](#)

McCarthy pulls five Republicans from Capitol attack panel after Pelosi rejects two

House speaker said she would veto two appointed by minority leader because they could threaten integrity of investigation



Nancy Pelosi in Washington DC on 21 July. Photograph: Shawn Thew/EPA

Nancy Pelosi in Washington DC on 21 July. Photograph: Shawn Thew/EPA

[Hugo Lowell](#) in Washington

Wed 21 Jul 2021 19.24 EDT

The House speaker, Democrat [Nancy Pelosi](#), announced on Wednesday that she would veto the two top Republicans appointed by the House minority leader, Kevin McCarthy, to the new select committee investigating the

Capitol attack, saying the Trump-allied congressmen could threaten the integrity of the investigation.

But the move triggered McCarthy to pull all five of the [Republicans](#) he had chosen off the committee if Pelosi wouldn't seat the whole cohort – and threaten to set up their own investigation into the 6 January Capitol attack.

With Pelosi refusing to back down and saying the committee would go ahead, the rejected Republicans [said they considered](#) that she had rejected all five.

The Republican House minority leader's actions also spurred Liz Cheney, the lone Republican appointed to the committee by Pelosi and therefore not one of the five effectively withdrawn by McCarthy, to stand on the steps of the Capitol on Wednesday afternoon and decry his actions as "despicable and disgraceful".

Liz Cheney on the Jan. 6 select committee: "This investigation must go forward. The idea that anybody would be playing politics with an attack on the United States Capitol is despicable and disgraceful."

— Kyle Griffin (@kylegriffin1) [July 21, 2021](#)

Cheney also accused McCarthy of trying to "prevent" Americans from knowing the truth of how the [Capitol attack](#) occurred.

"The American people deserve to know what happened. The people who did this must be held accountable, it must be an investigation that is sober and gets to the facts," she said, adding that, however "at every turn the minority leader has tried to get the people not to know what happened".

Pelosi had earlier already controversially [appointed Cheney](#) to the committee, [alongside seven Democrats](#).

[Capitol attack committee chair vows to investigate Trump: 'Nothing is off limits'](#)

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Pelosi said in a statement that she was rejecting Republicans Jim Banks and Jim Jordan from the panel because of their remarks disparaging the inquiry and their ties to Donald Trump, [who will be the subject of the select committee's investigation.](#)

Pelosi said her move was an unprecedented but necessary step given the gravity of the select committee's inquiry into 6 January, when supporters of the former president stormed the Capitol in a violent insurrection that left five people dead and nearly 140 injured.

"I must reject the recommendations of Representatives Banks and Jordan to the select committee," Pelosi said. "The unprecedented nature of January 6 demands this unprecedented decision."

The move also demonstrated Pelosi's far-reaching and unilateral authority to steer the direction of the investigation. Pelosi made her decision after deliberating with her leadership team and her picks for the panel, according to a source familiar with the matter.

McCarthy had included Banks and Jordan – both outspoken Trump allies who voted against certifying Joe Biden's election victory – among his picks on Monday, foreshadowing a bitter partisan fight over the direction of the inquiry.

The top Republican in the House slammed her move as an "egregious abuse of power" that would "irreparably damage this institution".

"This panel has lost all legitimacy and credibility and shows the speaker is more interested in playing politics than seeking the truth," McCarthy said. "Republicans will not be party to their sham process and will instead pursue our own investigation of the facts."

Still, Congresswoman Liz Cheney, the one Republican member picked by Pelosi to serve on the select committee after she castigated Jordan on the House floor on 6 January, blaming him for the attack, told reporters that she supported Pelosi's decision.

"I agree with what the speaker has done," she said.

The decision by Pelosi to block the pair from serving on the select committee came after a series of calls between Pelosi, her leadership team and the Democratic caucus on Tuesday morning, the source said.

House [Democrats](#) were outraged with Banks's appointment in part because of a statement released on Monday night in which he inexplicably blamed the Biden administration for its response to the 6 January attack, which took place during the Trump administration, the source said.

Banks also drew the ire of Pelosi and House Democrats after he arranged a trip for House Republicans to join Trump at a recent event at the southern border alongside an individual who participated in the Capitol attack itself.

Pelosi also expressed deep concern about the selection of Jordan, the source said, especially given he may have spoken to Trump as rioters stormed the Capitol and disparaged attempts to investigate the deadliest attack on the Capitol since the war of 1812.

The chairman of the select committee, Bennie Thompson, previously told the Guardian that any conversations that involved Trump on 6 January would be investigated by the panel, raising the prospect that Jordan would end up examining his own conduct.

Vivian Ho contributed reporting

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Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

AOC boss John Coates orders Annastacia Palaszczuk to attend Olympic ceremony

- ‘You are going,’ Queensland premier told in press conference
- Palaszczuk had previously said she would not attend

01:17

Annastacia Palaszczuk ordered to attend Tokyo opening ceremony by AOC boss John Coates – video

Kieran Pender in Tokyo

Thu 22 Jul 2021 01.32 EDT

The Australian Olympic Committee president, John Coates, says comments he made ordering the Queensland premier to attend the Tokyo Games opening ceremony have been “completely misinterpreted”.

At a press conference just hours after Queensland won the hosting rights for the 2032 Games on Wednesday, Coates insisted that Annastacia Palaszczuk should attend Friday's showpiece event in the Japanese capital.

[Olympics: Australia to host again after Brisbane confirmed for 2032 Games](#)
[Read more](#)

Palaszczuk had previously said she would not attend the ceremony amid growing domestic concern about her international trip. But Coates – also vice president of the International Olympic Committee – issued a stern rebuke with Palaszczuk sitting next to him.

“You are going to the opening ceremony,” Coates said. “I am still the deputy chair of the candidature leadership group [for the 2032 bid]. So far as I understand, there will be an opening and a closing ceremony in 2032, and all of you have got to get along there and understand the tradition parts of that, what’s involved in an opening ceremony.

“None of you are staying behind hiding in your rooms, all right?”

Coates issued a statement via the AOC on Thursday, confirming he expected Palaszczuk to attend the event, but also stating the premier understood the “spirit” of his remarks.

“My comments regarding the premier and the opening ceremony have been completely misinterpreted by people who weren’t in the room,” Coates said.

“Absolutely I believe the premier should come to the opening ceremony and she has accepted. I am thrilled about that. Attending the opening ceremony has always been her choice.”

Coates said he had a “long-standing and very successful relationship” with Palaszczuk. “We both know the spirit of my remarks and I have no indication that she was offended in any way. Those in doubt should ask her.”

The premier’s office has been contacted for comment.

[#AnastasiaPalaszczuk](#) in an impossible situation.

Her constituents - don’t go - why should you have all the fun when we

are in a pandemic?

Bully boys of sport - you're not in the club unless you come drink expensive wine with us....after all, that's what sport is about, right?

— Leigh Russell (@leighmrussell) [July 21, 2021](#)

At the press conference, Palaszczuk sought to laugh off Coates' comments, saying "I don't want to offend anybody".

But Coates doubled down. "You've never been to the opening ceremony of an [Olympic Games](#) have you? You don't know the protocols. I think it's a very important lesson for everyone here. The opening ceremonies cost in the order of \$75-100m – it's a major exercise for any organising committee, it puts the stamp on the Games, it's very important to the broadcasters that follow.

"I think, it's my very strong recommendation that the premier, lord mayor and minister be there and understand it."

Palaszczuk sought to further downplay the incident on Thursday morning. She said she would now attend the event, alongside the [Brisbane](#) lord mayor, Adrian Schrinner, and the federal sports minister, Richard Colbeck.

"I've known John for years," she told the ABC.

"So what's happened now is that the lord mayor and the federal minister and I are expected to go. So I will leave that to John Coates and Thomas Bach. But let me make it clear – I am not going to offend anyone now that we've just been awarded the Games."

Palaszczuk said there was no issue between her and Coates despite the press conference exchange. She said he had been "fantastic" in his role in bringing the 2032 Games to Queensland.

"If we didn't have John Coates, this would not have happened," she said. "John Coates has been the driving force behind us securing the Olympics."

Public reaction to the exchange in Australia was less forgiving of the IOC vice president.

The former chief executive officer of Swimming Australia Leigh Russell said the exchange was “disgusting” and “yet another example of how women are treated in sport”.

Former federal MP Tony Windsor said on Twitter that Coates was “an embarrassment to our country”.

Olympic email sign-up

Palaszczuk’s trip to Tokyo has generated much controversy in Australia. She has been one of the premiers to support a major cut to the travel caps that are preventing Australians stranded abroad from returning home. A petition calling on the federal government to deny Palaszczuk a travel exemption garnered 120,000 signatures.

A spokesperson for the AOC declined to comment further when approached by Guardian Australia, saying that Coates had been “accurately quoted”.

Coates is a major powerbroker in the world of international sport and is considered the second most powerful member of the IOC movement, behind only the IOC president, Thomas Bach. A rower and lawyer by background, Coates helped secure Australia’s second Olympics in Sydney two decades ago.

The Tokyo incident is not the first time the 71-year-old has courted controversy. In 2017 he refused to shake hands with the then-chair of the Australian Sports Commission John Wylie.

Coates was [fighting off a challenge to his AOC presidency](#) for the first time in 27 years from Hockeyroos gold medallist Danielle Roche. Coates triumphed but promised to retire in 2022.

It is expected he will remain involved in the 2032 organising committee in his retirement.

- Additional reporting by Ben Smee

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Harvey Weinstein

Harvey Weinstein pleads not guilty to rape and sexual assault in LA trial

The convicted rapist is serving a 23-year prison term in New York and now faces the possibility of another sentence in California



Harvey Weinstein, the 69-year-old convicted rapist and disgraced movie mogul, appears in court in Los Angeles on Wednesday. Photograph: AP

Harvey Weinstein, the 69-year-old convicted rapist and disgraced movie mogul, appears in court in Los Angeles on Wednesday. Photograph: AP

Associated Press

Wed 21 Jul 2021 19.33 EDT

Harvey Weinstein pleaded not guilty in a Los Angeles courtroom on Wednesday to four counts of rape and seven other sexual assault counts.

The 69-year-old convicted rapist appeared in court in a wheelchair. He was wearing a brown jail jumpsuit and face mask. Attorney Mark Werksman entered the plea a day after Weinstein [was extradited](#) to California from New York, where he was serving a 23-year prison term.

Weinstein spoke only to say “thank you” to judge Sergio Tapia, who wished him good luck as the hearing ended.

He now awaits a second trial on a second coast, and the possibility of another lengthy sentence.

[Harvey Weinstein extradited to Los Angeles for sexual assault charges](#)
[Read more](#)

Weinstein’s indictment involves five women in incidents spanning from 2004 to 2013. Most are said to have taken place in the hotels in Beverly Hills and Los Angeles that the New York-based Weinstein would make his headquarters for Hollywood business. Some took place during Oscars week, when his films were perennial contenders before the [#MeToo movement](#) brought him down.

He pleaded not guilty to four counts of rape, four counts of forcible oral copulation, two counts of sexual battery by restraint and one count of sexual penetration by use of force, charges that together could bring a sentence of 140 years.

Werksman told the judge that he was filing documents requesting the dismissal of three of the counts, saying they were beyond the statute of limitations.

“They’re baseless, they’re from long, long ago, they’re uncorroborated,” Werksman said of the charges after the hearing. “We are confident that if we have a fair trial he will be acquitted.”

The women were not identified in the indictment. Attorney Gloria Allred, who represents two of them, said the age of the incidents was not a factor in their truth.

“Allegations of sexual assault and rape do take a long time to report, so the idea that they may not have disclosed to a law enforcement officer for many years does not mean that those are not credible,” Allred said.

The terms of Weinstein’s extradition require that his trial begin by November. Werksman said Weinstein had yet to waive that right. But it would be unusual for the trial to begin that quickly. Weinstein returns to court for a motions hearing next week.

A New York jury found Weinstein guilty of raping an aspiring actress in 2013 in a Manhattan hotel room and forcibly performing oral sex on a TV and film production assistant in 2006 at his Manhattan apartment.

He is appealing against that conviction, seeking a new trial. Weinstein maintains his innocence and contends that any sexual activity was consensual.

Los Angeles prosecutors first charged Weinstein in January 2020, just as jury selection was getting under way in the New York City case.

More charges were added later in the year, and in March, he was indicted by an LA county grand jury. That indictment was unsealed by the judge on Wednesday, but the allegations in it are essentially identical to those already revealed in previous criminal complaints.

The pandemic and procedural delays meant that [Weinstein’s extradition](#) took well over a year. His attorneys cited his declining health as they sought to keep him at a state prison near Buffalo, New York, until jury selection began in the Los Angeles trial.

“Anyone who abuses their power and influence to prey upon others will be brought to justice,” said the Los Angeles county district attorney, George Gascon, said in a statement on Wednesday.

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Revealed: the people who signed up to the Magacoin Trump cryptocurrency

It bills itself as the ‘digital currency for the MAGA community’ but data shows most of the magacoin is allocated to its self-styled creator



The cryptocurrency’s website says it has donated 10m Magacoins to a Super Pac supporting ‘MAGA candidates’ across the country. Photograph: Marcus Harrison - geopolitics/Alamy

The cryptocurrency’s website says it has donated 10m Magacoins to a Super Pac supporting ‘MAGA candidates’ across the country. Photograph: Marcus Harrison - geopolitics/Alamy

[Jason Wilson](#)

[@jason_a_w](#)

Thu 22 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

More than 1,000 people have so far signed up to the pro-Trump cryptocurrency magacoin, including conservative media personalities and Republican figures, the Guardian can reveal.

The news comes after poor security configuration in a website associated with [magacoin](#) exposed the email addresses, passwords, cryptocurrency wallet addresses and IP addresses of users who have bought in to what its promoters describe as the “digital currency for the MAGA community”.

The data also reveals that the lion’s share of the cryptocurrency so far produced has been allocated to the self-described creator of magacoin, a pro-Trump consultant who owns an LLC associated with the cryptocurrency, and a Super Pac associated with the same consultant.

[How bitcoin and Putin are enabling the ransomware crime spree | John Naughton](#)
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The information, provided to the Guardian by a self-described hacktivist, unveils the reality around the cryptocurrency whose creators say it is made “by America First Conservatives out of frustration with ‘Losing the Election’ and a desire to fight back by supporting MAGA candidates”.

The vast majority of those sign-ups have only 100 magacoins, the amount offered free in initial publicity to early sign-ups who can claim their share of “75 million MAGACOINS”. The website, echoing widespread rightwing falsehoods about the 2020 election result, says it chose that number “to represent the 75 million voters who were disenfranchised on November 3rd, 2020”.

Other users, however, have greater holdings, and at least some of them may have taken advantage of the cryptocurrency’s Ambassador Program, in which promoters are offering 1,000 free magacoins to approved radio hosts, media personalities, bloggers and grassroots groups who sign up to help promote the currency to their audience.

One account with 1,500 magacoins is associated with the email address of the rightwing broadcaster John Rush, whose [Rush To Reason](#) program airs

on Denver's KXL conservative talk station.

Rush recently played host on his program to Marc Zelinka, whose Littleton, Colorado-based used car company, Carmart Inc, applied in April for a trademark for magacoin. Zelinka also administers the magacoin Facebook page, and is credited in conservative social media and on Rush's show as the creator of magacoin.

Another email address is associated with the [Youth Federalist Initiative](#), a Colorado Republican party-associated effort at youth engagement. The email suggests that the cryptocurrency is in the possession of Evan Underwood, a Colorado Republican activist, podcaster and chair of the Colorado Federation of College Republicans.

Magacoin has been connected in reporting by [the Daily Dot](#) with a North Carolina-based Trumpist political operative, Reilly O'Neal, who is the principal of a North Carolina LLC, Magacoin Inc, which was registered last April.

In a telephone conversation, Zelinka, the self-described creator of the cryptocurrency, said that "I don't control it any more", and that he had passed the cryptocurrency project entirely to O'Neal.

The Guardian has discovered more extensive connections between O'Neal and the cryptocurrency.

Last month, a Super Pac called Magacoin Victory Fund was registered with the Federal Election Commission. The Super Pac's main mailing address is a post office box in Raleigh, North Carolina, which is also associated with several other O'Neal-controlled companies and political entities.

According to North Carolina state records, other companies headquartered at the PO box and solely controlled by O'Neal include Rightside Lists LLC and Mustard Seed Media LLC – part owner of Big League Politics.

On magacoin's front page and in promotional emails it announces that "10 Million MAGACOINS have been donated to the MAGACOIN Victory Fund, a SuperPAC created to support MAGA candidates across the country

who will fight for individual rights, religious liberty, protecting the unborn, the 2nd amendment, freedom of speech and the entire America First Agenda”.

The records reflect this gift, with 10 million magacoin associated with an email hosted at the domain of O’Neal’s political consultancy, Tidewater Strategies. Another Tidewater email address is associated with holdings of just over 2m magacoin.

Another 2m magacoin are associated with Zelinka’s phone number and an old email address of Zelinka’s which alludes to his used car dealing.

Previously, O’Neal worked on several North Carolina and national political campaigns, including the campaign of the pro-Trump former judge and accused paedophile Roy Moore.

His political consultancy, [Tidewater Strategies](#), received large sums from mostly Trumpist Republican candidates in the last election cycle, many of whom failed to win office.

O’Neal also reportedly has a stake in the far-right conspiracy-minded website Big League Politics (BLP) through another of his companies, Mustard Seed Media.

That publication’s editor, Patrick Howley, was [discredited on the witness stand](#) in the trial of leftwing activists about whom Howley and others fomented conspiracy theories, in order to shift blame from James Fields after he murdered Heather Heyer after the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville.

BLP recently ran a [major story](#) on magacoin, promising that the cryptocurrency would “create an ecosystem where pro-Trump individuals can support pro-Trump businesses and candidates without using a financial instrument that benefits the globalists”.

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‘I never thought this would happen in France’: day one of showing Covid vaccine pass

Showing a health pass or negative PCR test is obligatory if people want to access cultural venues

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People with health passes wait to enter the Louvre museum in front of the Louvre Pyramid in Paris. Photograph: Sarah Meyssonnier/Reuters

People with health passes wait to enter the Louvre museum in front of the Louvre Pyramid in Paris. Photograph: Sarah Meyssonnier/Reuters

[Phil Hoad](#) in Montpellier

[@phlode](#)

Wed 21 Jul 2021 10.20 EDT

There are teething troubles on day one of France's controversial health pass for accessing public places. Outside Montpellier's main art gallery, the Musée Fabre, a security guard squints at a visitor's smartphone. "I can't see your pass," he says. The visitor tries shielding it from the severe Mediterranean sun: "I don't see anything either. I can't even see whether my phone's unlocked or not."

From Wednesday, showing either a health pass, or proof of a negative PCR test dated to within 48 hours, is obligatory in France for anyone wishing to access any cultural or leisure facilities with a capacity of more than 50 people. This includes cinemas, art galleries, libraries, museums, sports centres and work-related events. Cafes, restaurants and trains will fall under the measures at the beginning of August.

The measures are part of Macron's push to reignite France's flagging vaccination drive amid a fourth wave of the pandemic. With 18,000 cases reported in the 24 hours prior to 20 July, French government spokesman Gabriel Attal described the Delta variant-driven surge as "stratospheric"; the national week-on-week infection rate has jumped 125% to 86 per 100,000, well above the national alert threshold of 50.

As holidaymakers flock to the coast, the southern Occitanie region is one of the most seriously affected. The infection rate in the Hérault department, of which Montpellier is the capital, has risen to 202.7 per 100,000, more than a 200% increase week on week.

[France coronavirus cases](#)

A calm queue has formed in the cavernous foyer of the Médiathèque Emile Zola, the city's main library – except for one grumbling pensioner. "I've had one injection," the old man protests. "I'm afraid you need two," he is told. He storms off, carping to himself.

Seham, a 26-year-old student, is also turned away, because she doesn't have the necessary certification. She thought the measures started in September. "It's wrecked my day a bit," she says.

Sipping an espresso outside the glass doors of the cinema Diagonal, manager Charlie Pereniguez, 36, points out that the new health pass has already caused a drop in advance ticket sales nationwide. "It's really dropped us in the shit having to check everyone. We're not going to buy a smartphone for each till, just for two or three months."

Perched on a wall waiting for Montpellier's MOCO contemporary art museum to open, Marc Combes, 70, says: "People have started doing whatever they liked, so we have to tighten the screws." But he's worried that they could a step on the road to some form of "dictatorship".

It's the kind of debate taking place nationwide, with some protesters who marched against the health pass last weekend wearing yellow Star of David badges, causing huge controversy. Around 5,500 people took the streets in Montpellier last weekend, one of over 130 protests that gathered just over 110,000 people across the country.

More than 3.7 million people booked a first-injection appointment in the week following Macron's 12 July address. Just over 45% of the population is now fully vaccinated.

But Macron, in the run-up to next year's presidential election, must mollify the country's deeply ingrained anti-vax contingent. Two vaccination centres have been physically attacked in recent days.

And the health pass has not yet hit the heart of French culture: cafes and restaurants. Outside L'Odyssée, a bistro near Montpellier's main station, owner Azak Attila, 41, says checking all his clientele will be unworkable: "Even many of the ones who are vaccinated, they say they'll refuse to show their pass on principle." But if he does not do it he could be subject to a penalty of up to €45,000.

"I think Macron wanted to frighten people into getting vaccinated, but without ordering them directly to do it," he says. "It's a bit dictatorial – I

know about this kind of behaviour from when I lived in Turkey. But I never thought it would happen this way in France.”

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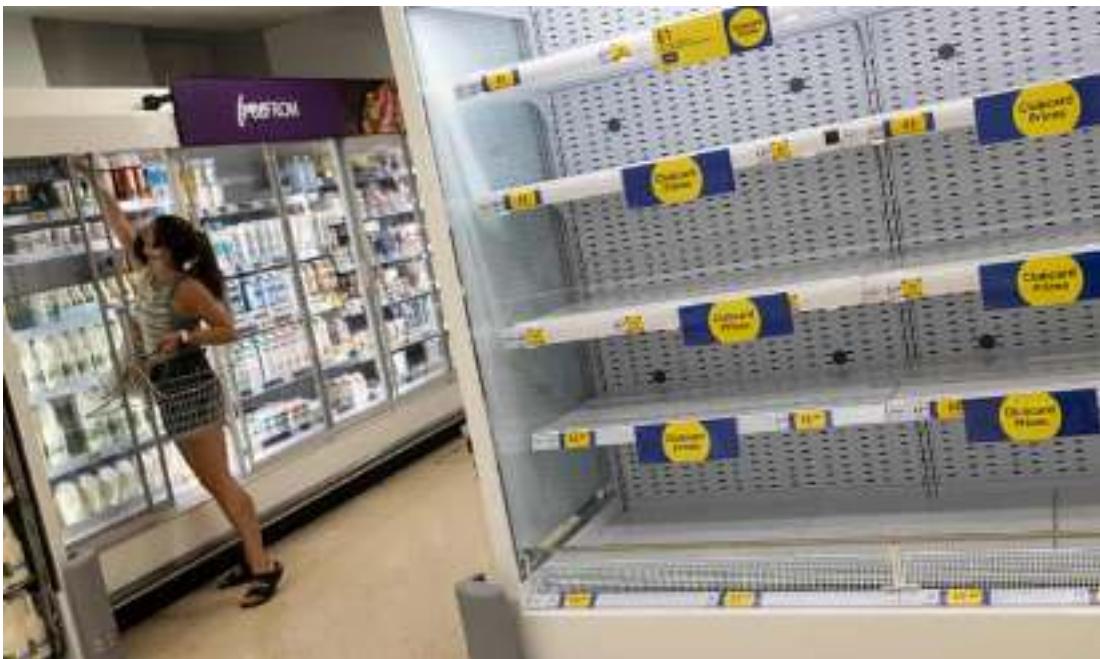
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Covid: England facing weeks of ‘pingdemic’ disruption to services and food supply

No 10 scrambles to extend self-isolation exemption scheme for critical workers as companies and councils warn of chaos

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Empty supermarket shelves are seen on 23 July in London. Luke Pollard, shadow environment secretary, said food supply security is fundamental and empty shelves ‘show the system is failing’. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

Empty supermarket shelves are seen on 23 July in London. Luke Pollard, shadow environment secretary, said food supply security is fundamental and empty shelves ‘show the system is failing’. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

Rowena Mason Deputy political editor

Sat 24 Jul 2021 05.08 EDT

England is facing weeks of disruption to bin collection, transport and food supply due to staff self-isolating, companies and councils have warned, amid concerns the 16 August date to lift quarantine for the double-vaccinated could be delayed.

No 10 was on Friday scrambling to set up a system to let more key workers take daily tests rather than isolate for 10-days, over fears that large parts of the economy could grind to a halt over the so-called “pingdemic”.

Ministers initially said there would only be a narrow definition of critical workers allowed to be routinely excused from quarantine, with about 10,000 workers at 500 food distribution sites and some NHS and social care workers permitted to take daily tests instead of isolation.

On Friday night, No 10 suggested police, fire service staff, border staff, transport and freight could also be brought into the exemption scheme with a further 200 workplace testing sites, as rail bosses and councils warned of reduced services due to high numbers of isolating staff.

It came as the London mayor, Sadiq Khan, and business leaders urged the government to immediately end self-isolation for the fully vaccinated, with the former health secretary Jeremy Hunt warning No 10 risked “losing social consent” if it did not bring the relaxation forward.

The Scottish government announced its own scheme on Friday for key workers that will allow companies to apply for permission to exempt those who work in critical roles and where staff shortages could jeopardise essential services.

Some companies are reporting 15-20% of their staff absent because workers are being required to isolate for 10 days either with Covid or as a close contact of a confirmed case. More than 800,000 people in the UK had coronavirus last week and more than 600,000 in England and Wales were required to isolate by the NHS app.

Despite being the first in line for exemptions, several food industry groups and executives said the government was not moving quickly enough to tell companies their workers were exempt, with no list published yet and many businesses not sure if they would be included in the new daily testing scheme by the end of the day on Friday.

The British Meat Processors Association said the government urgently needed to publish more information giving “clear, unambiguous guidance on which sites are exempt, which job roles qualify for exemption and exactly how these new rules will be applied”.

“Our fear is that, if infections keep rising at the current rate, there will be so many non-exempt workers taken out of the system that, regardless of those protected ‘key sites’, the rest of the supply chain around them will start failing,” the group said.

Richard Harrow, chief executive of the British Frozen Food Federation, described the current situation as “worse than useless”, with confusion “continuing to pervade”.

There was also suspicion last night among some in the food industry that the government’s critical worker exemption system would not be ready by 16 August, casting doubt on whether No 10 really intends to allow double vaccinated people to escape isolation from that date. As it stands, the new exemption system will only need to apply for the next three weeks.

[‘Pingdemic’ effect: how different sectors in England have been hit](#)
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George Eustice, the environment secretary, hinted the 16 August deadline could be delayed on Friday, as he said the government had only announced the date to give people “some kind of indication” of when rules might

change and added that it could still move “in either direction”. However, No 10 sources insisted that the government was still “working towards that date”.

The No 10 source described the four days of falling case numbers as an early encouraging sign, with 36,389 Covid cases and a further 64 deaths on Friday. But the situation was still critical in some parts of the country, with extra testing and public health support announced for seven local authorities across Tyne and Wear, Northumberland and County Durham, and five local authorities in the Tees Valley.

With most critical workers outside the health and food sectors still required to abide by isolation rules until 16 August at least, rail companies and councils warned that services would have to be cut back.

Firms with key workers in 16 sectors are also allowed to apply directly to government departments for exemptions from isolation for named individuals, but this will only be granted in serious and exceptional circumstances involving “major detrimental impact on the delivery of essential services” or “significant impact on national security, national defence, or the functioning of the state”.

The Rail Delivery Group, which represents train operators, said that while companies were working to “minimise any disruption, there may be an impact on services” and the Department for Transport said it had agreed to reduced timetables. Transport for London said London Underground’s Circle line and Hammersmith and City line will be closed this weekend due to more than 300 staff self-isolating.

The Local Government Association (LGA), representing councils across England, said some councils are already having to shut down services because of staff shortages caused by the pingdemic.

One senior local government source said bin collection, libraries, park maintenance, street cleaning and pot hole maintenance could all be affected over the next three weeks, ahead of 16 August.

James Jamieson, chairman of the LGA, called on the government to clarify urgently what councils and employers should do if they want to request exemptions for their critical workers, and whether public health directors could have some powers.

“Residents will need to bear with us if they experience disruption to some services, if councils are forced to prioritise services that protect the most vulnerable in their communities,” he said.

Luke Pollard, shadow environment secretary, said security of the food supply is fundamental and empty shelves “show the system is failing”.

“The government caused this chaos by recklessly releasing all restrictions at once in the face of the Johnson variant, hitting the accelerator while flinging off the seatbelt,” he said.

“It’s right that some critical workers in the food supply sector may be exempt if fully vaccinated and, crucially, tested daily – but we must be cautious given the surging transmission rate.

“Labour warned against removing all restrictions in one go and we want to see a return of mandatory mask wearing in shops and the continuation of workplace testing. The rushed plan ministers have now published looks like a bureaucratic nightmare for businesses, while being unlikely to be sufficient. They have a right to be furious.”

The government has told businesses that they need to get in touch with their relevant government departments if they want named key workers to be excused, with an email address supplied for them to contact. But one company involved with contacting Department of Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) said it was mired in red tape, with officials requiring hugely complicated detail before exemption requests would be considered.

A source at Defra said five major supermarkets had already been contacted to say they could start going ahead with moving to a daily Covid testing regime for staff, with testing centres in operation at 15 of the most critical sites. A spokesperson said: “We have not made the list of prioritised

businesses public at this stage to protect commercial interests. Sites are in the process of being contacted over the coming days.”

However, industry groups said many companies had not yet been contacted and the system was not due to be up and running fully until next week at the earliest, raising the prospect of more empty shelves in food shops over the weekend.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/23/england-facing-weeks-of-pingdemic-disruption-to-services-and-food-supply>.

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Consumer affairs

UK holidaymakers booked for France could lose money if they do not go

Some accommodation providers refuse to defer breaks despite Covid quarantine decision

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UK travellers returning from France must quarantine for 10 days even if they are doubly vaccinated against coronavirus. Photograph: Stephane Cardinale/Corbis/Getty Images

UK travellers returning from France must quarantine for 10 days even if they are doubly vaccinated against coronavirus. Photograph: Stephane Cardinale/Corbis/Getty Images

[Miles Brignall](#)

Sat 24 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Holidaymakers who were hoping to head to [France](#) in the coming weeks are in some cases being told by accommodation providers that they will lose their money if they do not turn up.

Last weekend's surprise decision by the UK government to require travellers [returning from France to quarantine for 10 days](#) – even those doubly vaccinated against Covid-19 – has left thousands of holiday plans in tatters, and many out of pocket as a result.

The move has left people, many of whom had bookings they had rolled over from 2020, having to cancel because they cannot afford to be off work for a further 10 days upon their return.

[UK's restrictions on travellers from France excessive, says French minister](#)
[Read more](#)

While DFDS, P&O and Eurotunnel are offering passengers the chance to defer their ferry or train bookings until September 2022, many gite and other accommodation providers appear to be declining similar requests.

In April 2020, the French government allowed holiday home and campsite owners to offer consumers an 18-month credit note, where its own Covid restrictions had halted tourism.

It was designed to save owners having to pay out large cancellation sums and to encourage guests to maintain bookings. A refund had still to be paid at the end of the 18-month credit note validity period if the credit had not been used.

However, if a replacement stay was offered for this year and agreed to, it appears the provider is free to apply the previous terms and conditions, meaning plenty of Britons will lose out if they cancel because of the change to quarantine rules at home.

Guardian Money readers have reported finding their deposits would not be rolled over for another year by their accommodation providers, as they were

deemed to have cancelled.

Canvas Holidays told Emer Glynn in June it would not be rolling over her three camping bookings that were due to start on 24 July. However, it has since decided to allow customers to make free modifications up to seven days before arrival, allowing them to rebook until 2022.

Rory Boland, the editor of Which? Travel, says some package holiday customers may be able to claim a refund but those with flights and accommodation booked separately may face a battle.

“It may be more difficult to rearrange or secure a refund from your accommodation provider, as cancellation and rebooking terms can vary significantly. Those who are unable to defer their booking or claim a refund may have some luck claiming on their insurance – though policies that offer cover for needing to quarantine on your return are hard to come by.”

Ferry companies had been gearing up for their busiest six weeks of the year but say they were given one hour’s notice that [France](#) was being put on the amber-plus list on 16 July.

Travel insurance bought after March 2020 will generally not cover such cancellations.

This week, ferry firms were telling passengers to rebook or to accept a voucher for travel next year. DFDS, which runs the routes between Newhaven and Dieppe, and Dover and Dunkirk, said passengers had to call its dedicated helpline. Passengers booked on to P&O’s Calais route can apply online. Brittany Ferries and Eurotunnel were reporting long call waits from passengers, and were encouraging them to use their respective websites to cancel trips.

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Gareth Southgate joins campaign to encourage people to get Covid vaccine

No 10 releases message from England football manager urging younger people in particular to get a jab



Gareth Southgate on 12 July 12 2021. Photograph: Eddie Keogh/The FA/Getty

Gareth Southgate on 12 July 12 2021. Photograph: Eddie Keogh/The FA/Getty

[Nadeem Badshah](#)

Fri 23 Jul 2021 17.30 EDT

The England manager [Gareth Southgate](#) has joined the campaign to encourage people to have their coronavirus vaccine, saying it will allow

them to “get your freedom back”.

Downing Street has released a message from the football manager thanking the public for their support during the team’s journey to the Euro 2020 final and urging younger people in particular to get the jab.

In the UK, only 58% of people aged 18-25 have their first dose, according to new Public Health England data, despite all adults having been offered the jab. There are also large disparities in uptake by ethnicity.

Southgate, 50, said: “Oldies like me have had both jabs, so we can crack on with our lives, but for you younger ones especially, it’s the chance for everything to open up, to get your freedom back.

“Just firstly wanted to say thank-you for the support you gave the team this summer, but also to say look, we know the last 18 months have been incredibly difficult for everybody. And there’s no doubt that the vaccination programme is our best route out of this problem, not only for us as a country, but across the world.

“So I just wanted to say how important it is, if you haven’t had your vaccine yet, to go and get it done. So much of that is going to rest on you having the vaccine. So, don’t put it off any longer, go and get it done, we can open everything up, we can protect the people we need to protect and you guys will get your freedom back. Look forward to seeing you soon.”

Southgate was widely praised prior to the tournament for saying that his England players have a “duty” to interact with the public on issues such as equality, inclusivity and racial injustice and that they would continue to take a knee before matches.

Last month the government ran a “grab a jab” campaign in which adults in England were able to turn up without an appointment at hundreds of walk-in vaccination sites which included football stadiums, theatres, supermarket car parks and shopping centres. Among the sports grounds involved were the Newcastle Eagles basketball arena, Watford’s Vicarage Road, Arsenal’s Emirates Stadium and Edgbaston cricket ground.

There have also been numerous targeted advertising campaigns. The latest involved celebrities including actors David Walliams and Jim Broadbent along with the singer Nicola Roberts encouraging everyone over 18 to get their Covid jab.

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Sage adviser claims ministers trying to get as many as possible infected with Covid

Exclusive: Prof Robert West says rhetoric about caution is ‘a way of putting blame on public’

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There are fears that the NHS will face another winter of immense pressure.
Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

There are fears that the NHS will face another winter of immense pressure.
Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

[Ian Sample](#) and [Heather Stewart](#)

Fri 23 Jul 2021 13.03 EDT

A scientist advising the government has accused ministers of allowing infections to rip through the younger population in an effort to bolster levels of immunity before the [NHS](#) faces winter pressures.

The allegation comes after England's remaining Covid restrictions were eased on Monday, with nightclubs throwing open their doors for the first time in the pandemic and [all rules on social distancing and mask wearing dropped](#) even as infections run high.

Ministers were made aware of scientists' concerns about reopening nightclubs and other crowded, close-contact and poorly ventilated venues without testing or other checks in place. On Monday Boris Johnson made the surprise announcement that [Covid passports will be required for such settings](#) – but not until the end of September, in two months' time.

“What we are seeing is a decision by the government to get as many people infected as possible, as quickly as possible, while using rhetoric about caution as a way of putting the blame on the public for the consequences,” said Prof Robert West, a health psychologist at University College London who participates in Sage’s behavioural science subgroup.

“It looks like the government judges that the damage to health and healthcare services will be worth the political capital it will gain from this approach,” West said, adding that ministers appear to believe the strategy is now sustainable – unlike last year – because of the vaccine rollout.

A large wave of infections, coupled with mass vaccination, would push the UK closer to “herd immunity”, where enough people in the population are resistant to the virus that it no longer spreads. The threshold for herd immunity with the Delta variant is unclear, but scientists estimate that transmission would need to be blocked in about 85% of the population. Ministers have repeatedly denied that achieving herd immunity by letting cases rise is the government’s goal.

Monday's easing of restrictions removed social distancing, the work-from-home order and legal requirements around mask wearing, though ministers called on the public to remain cautious. The move prompted a flurry of regional mandates to maintain masks on public transport, including the London tube, buses and trains, and Manchester Metrolink trams. Legal limits on mixing indoors lifted at the same time, allowing all businesses to reopen.

The change in rules led some clubs to open at midnight on Sunday, leading to packed bars and dancefloors across England. Similar scenes in the Netherlands in recent weeks led the Dutch premier, Mark Rutte, to reimpose curbs on bars, restaurants and nightclubs as [new cases rose sevenfold](#).

The shadow health secretary, Jon Ashworth, said: "Abandoning all precautions and allowing infections to climb not only risks further restrictions in the future, it condemns thousands to long-term illness and places huge pressure on the NHS. Rising Covid admissions are helping exacerbate a summer NHS crisis, with operations cancelled and increasing waiting times. It means we are heading into another difficult winter and high levels of virus circulating could see a vaccine-evasive variant emerge. This is an utterly reckless strategy from [Boris Johnson](#)."

Data from the Office for National Statistics show that coronavirus in England is now [largely an infection among young adults](#). Cases in 11-to-16-year-olds are nearly four times more common, and in 16-to-24-year-olds nearly six times more common, than in 50-to-69-year-olds. While generally at low risk from the disease, young people can still develop long Covid and help fuel the epidemic, which drives up cases in those who are more vulnerable.

Prof John Drury, a social psychologist at the University of Sussex, is concerned about the changes that came into force on Monday, such as dropping the mandate on mask-wearing, which "sent a very strong signal" that the Covid crisis is now less serious.

Speaking in a personal capacity, Drury, who participates in meetings of the Sage behavioural science subgroup, said recent research showed that people use government policy to make judgments on risk and how to behave. "The

overall message is that the actions by the public – not only mask-wearing, but also distancing and avoiding crowded places – are no longer required.”

This has already affected public behaviour, he said, though those ditching Covid precautions appear to be a large minority rather than the majority. “Fortunately, many people are aware of the rocketing infection rates and the risk posed to many people in society including the most vulnerable and are continuing to wear masks and keep their distance out of solidarity as much as self-protection,” Drury said.

A government spokesperson said: “Herd immunity has never been part of our pandemic strategy. Our approach has always been to protect the NHS and social care, save lives, and ensure as many people as possible are vaccinated as we learn to live with Covid-19.

“While the vaccination programme has substantially weakened the link between infection and serious illness or death, we have been clear about the need to exercise personal caution as we ease restrictions.

“We are encouraging settings to make use of the NHS Covid pass by requiring either proof of full vaccination or a negative test and we reserve the right to mandate certification if necessary to reduce transmission.”

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Anti-lockdown protests across Australia as Covid cases surge to record levels in Sydney

Chaotic scenes in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane as protesters demand end to lockdowns

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01:01

Thousands gather across Australia in anti-lockdown protests – video

Ben Smee
[@BenSmee](#)

Sat 24 Jul 2021 00.41 EDT

Anti-lockdown protesters have marched in major Australian cities, as Covid cases spiked to record numbers in Sydney and authorities warned of a “continuing and growing problem”.

Thousands of angry, unmasked people marched through the Sydney central business district on Saturday afternoon demanding an end to the city's lockdown, which is entering its fifth week.

After protesters were dispersed, the [New South Wales](#) police minister, David Elliott, announced the formation of a strike force to identify each of the 3,500 protesters at the "super spreader" event.

Elliott said 57 people were arrested and several police officers had been assaulted.

"If we don't see a [Covid] spike in the areas these protesters came from in the next week I'll be very, very surprised," Elliott said.

"It was just a whole lot of halfwits."

Demonstrators broke through barriers in the Sydney CBD and threw plastic bottles at police.

Similar scenes unfolded in Melbourne and Adelaide, which are both in lockdown, and Brisbane, which is not.

As demonstrators were gathering in Sydney, the New South Wales health minister, Brad Hazzard, revealed a record number of new coronavirus cases had been detected – 163 in the previous 24 hours – and pleaded with people to stay at home.

"We really need our community, particularly in south-western and western Sydney, to stay at home, to hear the message and stay at home," Hazzard said.

Mounted police standing by. A line of officers just walked past with purpose, holding pepper spray. This could get ugly very quickly
pic.twitter.com/7VcgjKCU88

— Georgie Mitchell (@gmitch_news) [July 24, 2021](#)

The Sydney anti-lockdown protest is a superspread event in the making. If the sheer number of people wasn't enough, everyone is also screaming at the top of their lungs (without masks) and potentially spreading droplets all over the damn place
pic.twitter.com/WI2R5Ql4kE

— Zac Crellin (@zacrellin) [July 24, 2021](#)

Crowd size at this anti-lockdown protest is no joke. Just marched past our hotel room. Lots of shouting and tonne of honking car horns.
pic.twitter.com/StG4RoPQJI

— Alyx Gorman (@AlyxG) [July 24, 2021](#)

The NSW police said officers from across central metropolitan region, assisted by specialist resources, were deployed in response to the unauthorised Sydney protest.

“The NSW police force recognises and supports the rights of individuals and groups to exercise their rights of free speech and peaceful assembly, however, today’s protest is in breach of the current Covid-19 public health orders,” it said.

“The priority for NSW police is always the safety of the wider community.”

Hazzard condemned the planned protests as “really silly” on Saturday morning.

“We live in a democracy and normally I am certainly one who supports people’s rights to protest ... but at the present time we’ve got cases going through the roof and we have people thinking that’s OK to get out there and possibly be close to each other at a demonstration.”

NSW police deputy commissioner Gary Worboys said police wanted to work with the organisers to make sure people were complying with public health orders and that it did not turn into a “disastrous” mass spreading event.

In Melbourne, thousands of protesters turned out in the central business district chanting “freedom”.

An AAP photographer on scene described the rally as initially “eerie” with the crowd maskless and verbally aggressive, but said the atmosphere later mellowed.



Protesters as Queensland police look on during the anti-lockdown rally in Brisbane. Photograph: Darren England/AAP

Some protesters lit flares as they gathered outside Victoria’s Parliament House.

Protesters held banners, including one that read: “This is not about a virus it’s about total government control of the people.”

The protest was brought to a violent end by police. An AAP photographer wearing visible press accreditation was pepper sprayed as police cleared the rally, as were other photographers.

The Victorian premier, Daniel Andrews, had labelled the idea of protesting against the lockdown as “ridiculous”.

“Protest against this virus by staying at home, following the rules and getting out of lockdown,” he said.

Victoria recorded 12 new locally acquired Covid-19 infections on Saturday, 10 of which were in quarantine throughout their entire infectious period. All infections are linked to current outbreaks. Victoria has been in lockdown since 16 July.

A car rally is also planned for locked-down Adelaide, the state capital of South Australia, with police warning they will make arrests over unlawful activity.

On Saturday, the South Australian premier, Steven Marshall, has reported one new case of Covid-19, linked to the Tenafeate winery cluster.

The state is in the middle of a seven-day lockdown, which Marshall says is on track to be lifted on Tuesday.

The slow rate of Australia’s Covid vaccine rollout has been heavily criticised, with only 12.4% of the population fully vaccinated so far.

Australia’s deputy chief medical officer, Michael Kidd, said the protests were putting lives at risk.

“I’m very concerned if people are not following those restrictions ... When that happens, there is the risk that we’ll get spread of Covid-19,” he said on Saturday.

“This is even more imperative during this outbreak with the Delta variant than it was during the times last year when we saw similar protests.”

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UK government opening floodgates to Covid variants, MPs warn

Cross-party group says proportion of positive tests analysed for variants among red list arrivals has plunged

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The analysis of test and trace data was commissioned by the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on coronavirus, Layla Moran. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

The analysis of test and trace data was commissioned by the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on coronavirus, Layla Moran. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Nicola Davis Science correspondent

@NicolaKSDavis

Fri 23 Jul 2021 12.42 EDT

The government is “opening the floodgates” to new versions of Covid, a cross-party group of MPs has warned, after revealing a steep decline in the proportion of positive tests being analysed for variants among people arriving from red list countries.

The analysis of NHS test and trace data was carried out by the [House of Commons](#) library, commissioned by the chair of the all-party parliamentary group (APPG) on coronavirus, Layla Moran.

The results suggest that in the three weeks to 17 March, there were an estimated 1,769 to 1,827 positive tests from people entering the UK from red list countries, of which somewhere between 63% and 68% were sequenced to determine the variant involved.

By contrast in the three weeks to 30 June, there were an estimated 445 to 507 positive tests from people entering the UK from red list countries, with estimates of the proportion sequenced ranging from 12% to 33%.

“These figures are truly staggering and make a mockery of the UK government’s claim to be a global leader in genome sequencing,” said Moran, adding the rise in the [Beta variant](#) in Europe should “be setting alarm bells ringing in government”.

“Yet instead ministers are dismantling our defences against the virus and opening the floodgates to new variants,” she said.

The Beta variant was first detected in South Africa, and has also been found in the UK [but did not take off](#). However, concerns about a rise in the variant in France and its territories prompted the [UK government to announce](#) even fully vaccinated people entering England from France would continue to need to quarantine for 10 days.

The analysis for the APPG also revealed that sequencing of positive test results from people entering the UK from amber list countries had fallen in the same period. In the three weeks to 17 March there were an estimated 1,641 to 1,767 positive tests from people entering the UK from amber list countries, between 57% and 71% of which were sequenced. But while numbers were between 1,388 and 1,536 in the three weeks to 30 June, only an estimated 3% to 20% were sequenced.

“It seems that vital lessons have still not been learned from the failure to prevent the Delta variant taking root in the UK,” said Moran. “The government must urgently fix this scandal and step up the sequencing of test results, before more dangerous Covid variants slip through the net.”

Prof Francois Balloux, the director of the UCL Genetics Institute, said sequencing of positive tests, and in particular those from incoming travellers, was an important tool to monitor the evolution of the viral population and flag possible new variants of concern.

“As such, I must admit I’m slightly surprised – assuming those percentages are correct – by the relatively low proportion of positive cases in incoming travellers that got sequenced in June,” he said.

However, Prof Ravi Gupta of the University of Cambridge, a co-opted member of the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (Nervtag) that advises the government, suggested that in the UK’s current situation, the decline was not a cause for worry.

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“Ideally imported infections would be sequenced,” he told the Guardian. But, he added: “In the current climate of transmission of the immune evasive and highly infectious Delta variant it seems unlikely that a new variant will threaten to overtake Delta in the coming months and therefore I believe the risk is low at present.”

A government spokesperson said the UK was a world leader in genomics with more than 600,000 positive Covid-19 samples having been genetically sequenced during this pandemic.

“Our top priority has always been protecting the public and the vaccine programme and our robust border regime are combining to minimise the risk of new variants coming into circulation in the UK,” they said.

“We take all concerns about our approach to defending the UK from variants very seriously and we are looking into the content of this report.”

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PHE upgrade Delta variant's risk level due to reinfection risk

Risk of reinfection with Delta may be 46% greater than with the Alpha variant, national testing data finds

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Doctors are urging people to get their second dose of the vaccine.
Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Doctors are urging people to get their second dose of the vaccine.
Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

[Ian Sample](#) Science editor

[@iansample](#)

Fri 23 Jul 2021 15.06 EDT

Public [Health](#) England has upgraded its risk assessment of the Delta variant after national testing data revealed it is more likely to cause reinfections than the Alpha variant, which was first identified in Kent.

The health agency's analysis found the risk of reinfection with Delta may be 46% greater than with the Alpha variant, with the highest risk seen six months after a first infection – when second cases caused by Delta were 2.37 times more common than with Alpha.

The finding is bolstered by new data from Public Health England's (PHE) Siren study, which monitors more than 40,000 NHS staff for Covid infections. The latest figures show that positive tests rose steadily from May to July when 1.1% had the virus. Nearly a third of the healthcare workers had Covid before enrolling on the study and more than 95% have been vaccinated.

It is unclear why Delta may be causing more reinfections, but one possibility is that immunity from infections early on in the pandemic may be waning a little and so reducing the body's defences against the variant which became dominant in the UK this year. PHE said that further work is now being undertaken to examine the risk of reinfection.

In light of the findings, PHE upgraded its risk assessment on “immunity after natural infection” from amber to red for the Delta variant. Reinfections remain a rarity though, accounting for only 1.2% of the 83,197 cases analysed.

The move came as new figures showed how many people in hospital with the Delta variant have had one or both doses of a Covid vaccine. Between 21 June and 19 July, 1,788 people were admitted to hospital after testing positive for Delta. Of these, 54% were unvaccinated while 30% had received both shots. In total, 3,692 people have so far been admitted to hospital with the Delta variant, of whom 2,152 (58%) were unvaccinated and 843 (23%) were fully vaccinated.

Dr Jenny Harries, chief executive of the UK Health Security Agency, said: “This most recent hospitalisation data shows once again just how crucial vaccination is in protecting us from severe illness and death.

“Two doses of vaccine are far more effective against Covid-19 than a single dose, so please make sure that you come forward to get your second dose as soon as you are invited.

“As we emerge from restrictions and vaccine coverage continues to rise, it is important to remember that, while the protection provided by vaccination is excellent, it is not total.”

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Opinion Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

By holding the Tokyo Olympics, Japan's government is gambling with people's lives

Kosuke Takahashi

As Covid cases rise, vaccination lags and costs soar, most Japanese people are extremely cynical about the Games



A protester with a picture of Japan's prime minister Yoshihide Suga during a demonstration against the Olympic Games in Tokyo, July 2021. Photograph: Yuichi Yamazaki/Getty Images

A protester with a picture of Japan's prime minister Yoshihide Suga during a demonstration against the Olympic Games in Tokyo, July 2021. Photograph: Yuichi Yamazaki/Getty Images

Fri 23 Jul 2021 11.12 EDT

The [Olympic Games](#) begins in Tokyo on Friday, just as Covid-19 blights the city for the fourth time – and a year after the Games were originally scheduled to begin.

Despite the latest alarming spike in coronavirus infections and hospitalisations across the city's metropolitan area, Japan's prime minister, Yoshihide Suga, has reiterated his resolve to go ahead with the Games, [declaring at a session](#) of the International Olympic Committee held on 20 July that “the Games can be held successfully, with the efforts and wisdom of the people”.

But many Japanese either disbelieve him or take his words with a pinch of salt. For one, many people are tired of hearing Suga’s overblown rhetoric stressing the Games’ significance. He has, for example, [previously said](#)

more than once that the Olympics will be held as “proof that humanity has defeated the novel coronavirus”.

Despite the pronouncements, Suga’s administration has had a hard time dealing with the coronavirus. The more infection cases rise, the more Suga’s disapproval ratings rise also. A national [Asahi-Shimbun poll](#) found his disapproval rate climbed to 49% on 17 and 18 July, the highest since the formation of his cabinet in September 2020. Correspondingly, his approval rating dropped to 31% – close to the 30% “danger zone” political observers see as an indicator of imminent government change.

One big question arises. Why has Suga pushed so hard for his plans to host the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics while the pandemic rages, and even as his approval ratings plummet? The short answer: this is a political gamble.

Suga is counting on the Tokyo Olympics to boost his approval rating ahead of the general election for the lower house and the Liberal Democratic party’s election for presidential leader, both of which will be held this autumn. Suga hopes public enthusiasm for the Games will reach fever pitch as Japanese athletes start getting gold medals.

His optimism, however, is not shared by some in his cabinet. “In terms of national security, I don’t see any cause to hold the Olympics at all as we face a national crisis now,” one of Suga’s vice-ministers told me, adding that the real problem with the Games was the question of its finance and the egotistical desire of the Suga administration to be able to say “we made the Games a success” ahead of the elections.

Nobody is sure how successful the Tokyo Olympics can be, not least in the face of the virulent Delta variant. Tokyo 2021 could become a super-spreading event. Suga is taking a dangerous political gamble, and gambling, too, with the health and lives of the people of Tokyo and Japan, as well as the tens of thousands who will travel to the Games.

The gamble so far looks like it might not pay off. The great majority of Japanese people have a very cynical view of the Games. In another [Asahi Shimbun survey](#), 55% were opposed to holding the Olympics with just 33%

in support of it. In addition, 68% said they do not believe Suga's pledge that the Olympics will be "safe and secure". Only 21% said they felt it could be.

This lack of enthusiasm is built on a series of Olympics scandals being brought to light. After Britain's Zaha Hadid Architects won the competition to build Tokyo's new [National Stadium](#), her [design was scrapped](#) over ballooning costs in July 2015. The official logo for the Games was also [scrapped in September 2015](#) after weeks of plagiarism allegations called the work of its designer Kenjiro Sano into disrepute. In 2019, [Tsunekazu Takeda resigned](#) as president of the Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC), following bribery allegations linked to the successful bid for the Games. And Yoshiro Mori, a former prime minister and then-president of the Tokyo Olympics organising committee, [resigned in February 2021](#), following backlash over sexist comments suggesting, among other things, that women talk too much in meetings. Most recently, Kentaro Kobayashi, the opening ceremony director, [was dismissed](#) the day before the ceremony due to a Holocaust joke he made during a comedy show in 1998. Both Japanese and foreign media have reported that the Tokyo Olympics are "[cursed](#)".

The Games' skyrocketing price tag has also diminished public support for the event, which has now reached more than 3tn yen (£20bn) and will become the most expensive Summer Olympics in history. Japan's government debt stands at [266% of GDP](#) – the highest in the world and twice that of the US. Many fear the cost of implementing coronavirus countermeasures to ensure the Games are safe will add to a growing national deficit. Over more than a decade, Japan has spent hundreds of trillions of yen to stimulate the economy and overcome three major national crises: the 2008 Lehman shock, the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Another big reason why many Japanese are against the Games is that Japan is lagging significantly behind numerous other countries in vaccinating its population, which is the oldest in the world. Many feel strongly that the Japanese government should put its efforts into the vaccine rollout, instead of the Olympics. As of 22 July, Japan ranks 69th in the world for those who've received two vaccines, with just [23.3% of the total population](#) fully vaccinated.

The country has simply failed to strategically prepare for the Games in terms of vaccine rollout and infection control. Instead, over the past year, Suga has sung the Games' praises while overlooking the imperative, taken more seriously in many other countries, to vaccinate the people he's charged with governing. Now, Japan must learn its lessons from the bitter experience of the Tokyo Olympics, and in doing so hopefully the nation's body politic can heal.

- Kosuke Takahashi is Tokyo correspondent for Jane's Defence Weekly and former editor-in-chief of HuffPost Japan

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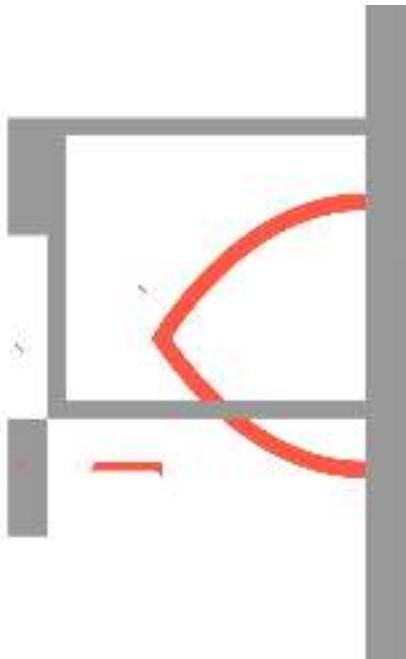
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[The Pegasus project](#)[Investigative journalism](#)

The Pegasus project: why investigations like this are at the heart of the Guardian's mission

Guardian editor-in-chief Katharine Viner reflects on our recent investigation into NSO Group, which sells hacking spyware used by governments around the world, and explains why journalism like this is so vital



From Left: Saudi women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul. Joseph Breham, lawyer of ACTED. The Indian student activist Umar Khalid, who was targeted with Pegasus in late 2018, shortly before sedition charges were filed against him Composite: Reuters/EPA/Alamy

From Left: Saudi women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul. Joseph Breham, lawyer of ACTED. The Indian student activist Umar Khalid, who was targeted with Pegasus in late 2018, shortly before sedition charges were filed against him Composite: Reuters/EPA/Alamy

Katharine Viner

Fri 23 Jul 2021 07.00 EDT

When the Guardian's head of investigations, Paul Lewis, first told me about a huge data leak suggesting authoritarian regimes were possibly using smartphone hacking software to target activists, politicians and journalists, perhaps the worst part is that I wasn't particularly surprised.

[What is Pegasus spyware and how does it hack phones?](#)

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The more we've learned about global surveillance, ever since the Guardian's Snowden revelations in 2013, the more the world has become accustomed to

the idea that governments, both democratic and otherwise, are keenly interested in using technology and the phones in our pockets to keep tabs on us.

This week's revelations, by the Guardian and 16 other media organisations working with Forbidden Stories, a Paris-based media nonprofit, illustrate the disturbing way that journalists, human rights campaigners, politicians and others can be targeted using spying software, or 'spyware'.

The phone hacking tool, Pegasus, can gather data, record video using a phone's camera, activate the microphone covertly, take screenshots and location information - all without the owner's knowledge. A phone can be infected without its owner even clicking on an incoming call or message.

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NSO sells its software to 40 governments around the world (it does not say which ones), and says its purpose is to help them investigate terrorists and criminals. But a leaked list of tens of thousands of numbers, many belonging to people with no apparent connection to criminality, and forensic analysis carried out on some of their phones, suggests some governments are spying on pro-democracy activists, journalists investigating corruption, and political opponents.

Investigations such as these are legally fraught and technically complex, involving dozens of journalists, IT experts and in-house lawyers in multiple locations. Those being investigated are often highly secretive and extremely well-resourced, financially and technologically. They don't want the scrutiny that courageous journalists subject them to. There can be great jeopardy in publishing things that powerful people do not want published.

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[Tim Dowling's Weekend column Family](#)

Tim Dowling: which courgette is the evil poisoner, yellow or green?

‘I’ll never eat another courgette in my life,’ the oldest says



‘It seems weird to me that people are even allowed to grow courgettes.’
Photograph: Maria_Castellanos/Getty Images/iStockphoto

‘It seems weird to me that people are even allowed to grow courgettes.’
Photograph: Maria_Castellanos/Getty Images/iStockphoto



[Tim Dowling](#)

[@IAmTimDowling](#)

Sat 24 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Three days after [I poisoned myself and my family](#) with homegrown toxic courgettes, I still don't feel right. I can't face pulling up six plants and disposing of them, partly because my stomach still pitches and rolls at the sight of courgettes.

The poison responsible, I have since learned, is naturally present in courgettes, but can rise to toxic levels if plants cross-pollinate with wild cucurbits or certain types of ornamental squash, causing a bitter taste, nausea, cramps, potential hospitalisation and occasionally death. Now I've experienced this poisoning first-hand, it seems weird to me that people are even allowed to grow courgettes.

"Maybe I should report it," I say.

"To who?" my wife says.

"The authorities," I say. "There are bad seeds out there." But I can't remember where I bought the seeds, and I can't find the packets. I just know I ended up with six surviving plants – five yellow, one green. The next day,

in the garden, I see the courgettes are not just surviving, but thriving. I am, it transpires, really good at growing poison veg. Perhaps I should try my hand at ricin.

As soon as I dig up the first plant, something occurs to me. Using my phone, I quickly track down an email receipt for yellow courgette seeds, from February. According to the receipt, there were only five seeds in the packet.

The oldest one, who is working in the kitchen, recoils when I dump my armful of courgettes on the table. “What are those doing in here?” he says, as if I have just set a family of snakes down in front of him.

“An experiment,” I say.

“Why do they have writing on them?” he says, moving down two seats.

“They’re coded according to bed position,” I say. “SE stands for south-east. Do you see?”

“Not interested,” he says.

“The yellow courgettes are all from the same new packet,” I say. “Whereas the green ones came from some old seed I found at the bottom of a drawer.”

The youngest one walks in, looks over my shoulder, and turns pale.

“So,” I say, slicing open the courgette marked NW, “if I can determine that the yellow courgettes are in the clear, the green one must be the culprit.” I touch the exposed courgette flesh to the tip of my tongue.

“Are you insane?” the youngest says.

“North-west is fine,” I say, marking my findings on a piece of paper.

“Have you licked a green one yet?” the oldest says.

“No, I threw that plant away already.”

“This experiment is not conclusive,” he says.

“South-west, fine,” I say. My wife walks in.

“What’s he doing with those?” she says.

“Testing them for poison content,” the youngest says.

“Why bother?” she says. “None of us will ever eat them.”

“Well, I can’t give them away,” I say, slicing the next sample. “It would be irresponsible.”

[Tim Dowling: I tell the audience I’m leaving the band – they don’t get the joke](#)

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“I’ll never eat another courgette in my life,” the oldest says.

“Central, also non-poisonous,” I say. “We can move on to the cooking test.” I fry labelled samples in oil, before salting and tasting each in turn.

“South-east, delicious,” I say, although my guts churn a little. The middle one walks in and looks at me in horror.

“Is that supper?” he says.

For the next week I pick yellow courgettes and put them in a bowl. But I don’t cook with them. It’s too soon.

On Sunday, supper is assembled from various expiring ready meals, including half a crispy duck and some frozen pancakes. I find the youngest slicing spring onions at a rakish angle.

“What about cucumber?” I say.

“There isn’t any,” he says.

“What do you mean?” I say. “I’ve got shitloads outside.”

“OK, yeah,” he says.

I run into the rain and return with the largest cucumber I can find. He slices it into neat batons, one of which I pick up and eat. A familiar bitter taste fills my mouth.

“Throw that away,” I say, spitting into the sink. “And don’t use that knife for anything else.”

I think to myself: you really have a knack for this. You could give lessons to witches.

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Xi Jinping should take the Zhengzhou floods as a warning from China's history

[Philip Ball](#)



The country's perilous waters have made or broken past leaders. The climate crisis will only make things worse



‘The flooding of Zhengzhou will cause alarm in Beijing beyond the economic damage and loss of life.’ Photograph: Noel Celis/AFP/Getty Images

‘The flooding of Zhengzhou will cause alarm in Beijing beyond the economic damage and loss of life.’ Photograph: Noel Celis/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 23 Jul 2021 12.00 EDT

The footage of a [torrent of muddy water](#) engulfing the broad thoroughfares of Zhengzhou, China, may look like a scene from an apocalyptic sci-fi movie. But for China’s leaders, these images speak not only to a dystopian future but also to the struggles of the past – and to the issue of the Chinese Communist party’s mandate to rule.

[China floods: thousands trapped without fresh water as rain moves north](#)
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Zhengzhou, a city of more than 10 million inhabitants, stands on the south bank of the Yellow River, once known as China’s Sorrow for its catastrophic and recurring floods. Spring downpours and the melting of snow upstream in remote Qinghai province regularly breached the river’s banks. For millennia,

China's rulers attempted to contain the deluge with handbuilt dykes stretching thousands of kilometres, mostly without success.

Some historians argue that the administrative demands of coordinating manual labour on such a tremendous scale are what made China such a centralised, bureaucratic and authoritarian state. To the German-American historian Karl Wittfogel, imperial China was the archetypal "[hydraulic civilisation](#)", in which the dangers created by a precarious water situation justified rigid social control.

As an account of how China came to be the way it is, Wittfogel's thesis is too simplistic. But there's surely a kernel of truth to it, as China's mythology attests. Like many cultures, China has a myth of a great flood in which a torrent of water threatens the entire civilisation. Yet in China's flood myth, this problem was solved not by divine grace, but by a feat of civil engineering.

According to the myth, an engineer called Da Yu supervised the carving of passages through mountains and the dredging of sediment from rivers to allow the flood water to drain into the sea. His success, the story goes, paved the way for him to found the Xia dynasty around 2100BC and succeed China's legendary Five Emperors, the pantheon of great rulers from prehistorical times.

The message of the flood myth was that an ability to manage China's perilous waters legitimises the state's rulers – whereas a failure to do so vindicates their expulsion. As David Pietz, a historian of China, wrote, "the sanctioning power of myths, adapted and retold to legitimise political authority, was expressed in a host of water management projects throughout history." A ruler who can command the waterways as Da Yu did has the "mandate of heaven", the divine right to rule.

No story better illustrates the hydraulic dimensions of China's political history than the efforts to control flooding of the Yellow River. Conceived during the Ming dynasty in the 15th century, the Yellow River Administration became the prototypical mandarin bureaucracy: an expensive juggernaut overburdened with minor officials and opportunistic hangers-on. When the ancient city of Kaifeng, just downstream of Zhengzhou, was

deluged by a breach in the dykes in 1841, the cost to the Qing emperor – already beleaguered by the opium wars with Great Britain – was unsupportable. A second huge flood two years later led to the dissolution of the water bureaucracy. With the dykes neglected, another great flood in 1886-87 near Zhengzhou itself killed between 1-2.5 million and left the Qing dynasty moribund. China became regarded internationally as a hopelessly backward state, ripe for exploitation by western powers.

Although Mao Zedong affected to reject all ancient beliefs and superstitions in constructing the communist state of modern China, he could not ignore the powerful message that good water management conveyed about the right to rule. His famous swims in the Yangtze were not merely Putin-style displays of machismo, but political theatre that signified mastery over the waters. That's also why Mao made flood control a priority, ordering the construction of hundreds of dams on China's unruly waterways. Many were built hastily (and badly) to impress party officials by coming in under budget and ahead of schedule. Some have since collapsed.

Controlling the Yellow River was particularly symbolic. The first large dam on the river, built in the late 1950s at Sanmenxia, 200km upstream of Zhengzhou, was emblazoned with the slogan, “When the Yellow River is at peace, the nation is at peace”. The mythical resonance is emphasised by a gigantic statue of Da Yu that stands guard on the cliff overlooking the dam.

Sanmenxia was poorly designed and never worked as it should, undermined by the heavy load of silt that gives the Yellow River its name. Today it serves as a perfect symbol of the Maoist era – neglected and unloved as massive machines slowly rust on its walls.

But China's continuing obsession with huge hydraulic projects shows that the Communist party remains as determined as ever to claim the “mandate of heaven”. The Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze, opened in 2003, is as much a showcase of state power as it is an exercise in flood control and hydroelectricity generation.

This, then, is why the flooding of Zhengzhou will cause alarm in Beijing beyond the economic damage and loss of life. It serves as a reminder to Xi Jinping's administration that the consequences of the climate crisis, which

will make extreme weather events more frequent, could shake the foundations of the Chinese state. The travails of China's past give its leaders better reason than most to appreciate how such problems could provoke deep social unrest. For the sake of the world, we must hope that they heed the warning.

- Philip Ball is a science writer. His books include [The Water Kingdom: A Secret History of China](#)
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US set for punishing temperatures as huge ‘heat dome’ to settle over country



A vehicle drives through Death Valley, California, where temperatures hit 120F earlier in July. Scientists have said the barrage of heatwaves over the past month are being fueled by climate change. Photograph: Frederic J Brown/AFP/Getty Images

A vehicle drives through Death Valley, California, where temperatures hit 120F earlier in July. Scientists have said the barrage of heatwaves over the past month are being fueled by climate change. Photograph: Frederic J Brown/AFP/Getty Images

Heatwave to next week roast areas already gripped by severe drought, plunging reservoirs and wildfires

Oliver Milman

@olliemilman

Sat 24 Jul 2021 08.45 EDT

The most extensive heatwave of a scorching summer is set to descend upon much of America in the coming week, further roasting areas already gripped

by severe drought, plunging reservoirs and wildfires.

[The Guardian view on the climate summit: 100 days to save the world | Editorial](#)

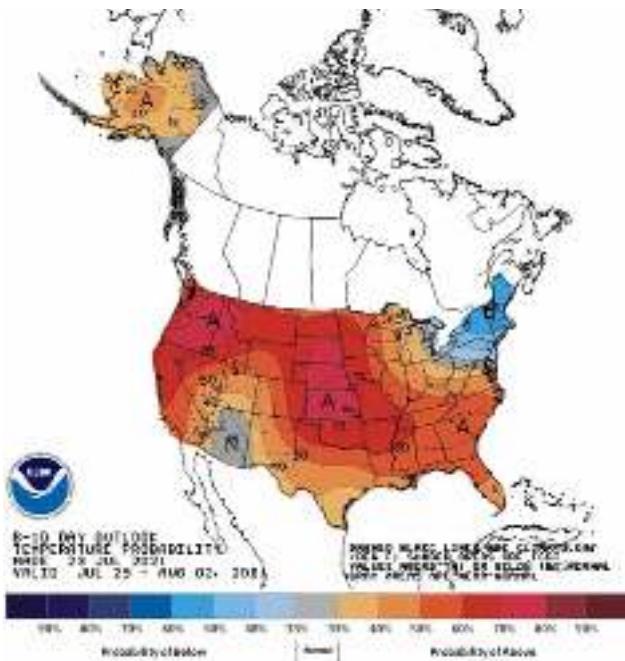
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A massive “heat dome” of excessive heat will [settle across the heart](#) of the contiguous US from Monday, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration forecast, bringing elevated temperatures to the Great Plains, the Great Lakes, the northern reaches of the Rocky Mountains, the Pacific north-west and California.

Places used to more mild summers are set for punishing heat, with temperatures expected to breach 100F (37C) in the Dakotas and Montana, a state in which the city of Billings has already experienced 12 days above 95F (35C) this month. Areas of states including Missouri, Arkansas and Oklahoma may get “sweltering” temperatures reaching 110F (43C), [Noaa said](#), while cities such as Des Moines, Minneapolis and Chicago will get significantly above-average heat.

The latest, but most expansive, in a parade of heatwaves to sweep the US is likely to bring thunderstorms and lightning to some areas, as well as worsen drought conditions [ranked as “severe” or “exceptional” that now cover two-thirds of the US west.](#)

Climate scientists have said the barrage of heatwaves over the past month, which have parched farms, caused roads to buckle and resulted in the obliteration of long-standing temperature records, are being fueled by predicted human-caused climate change – but admit to being surprised at the ferocity of the onslaught.



Heat dome over North America, showing high temperatures predicted across the continent. Photograph: NOAA

“It’s been a severe and dangerous summer, some of the heatwaves have been devastatingly hot,” said Michael Wehner, a senior scientist at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. “We certainly expected these type of temperatures as global warming continues but I don’t think anyone anticipated they would be so hot right now. I don’t think we could’ve expected so many heatwaves in the same general region in one summer.”

The most extraordinary of the recent heatwaves [occurred in the Pacific north-west in June](#) where the normally mild region was bathed in heat that broke temperature records by more than 10F (5.5C). The heat, which caused hundreds of people to die in cities including Seattle and Portland, where it reached 116F (46C), has caused several scientists to question their previous estimates of how the climate crisis will reshape heatwave severity.

“You expect hotter heatwaves with climate change but the estimates may have been overly conservative,” Wehner said. “With the Pacific north-west heatwave you’d conclude the event would be almost impossible without climate change but in a straightforward statistical analysis from before this summer you’d also include it would be impossible with climate change, too. That is problematic, because the event happened.”

Wehner said the ongoing heatwaves should prompt governments and businesses to better prepare for the health impacts of high temperatures, which range from heatstroke to breathing difficulties caused by [smoke emitted from increasingly large wildfires.](#)

“The good news is that heatwaves are now on people’s radars a bit more,” he said. “But these sort of events are completely unprecedented, you expect records to be beaten by tenths of a degree, not 5F or more.

“It’s a teachable moment in many ways for the public that climate change is here and now and dangerous. It isn’t our grandchildren’s problem, it’s our problem. But it’s been a teachable moment for climate scientists too.”

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‘I can see the industry disappearing’: US fishermen sound alarm at plans for offshore wind

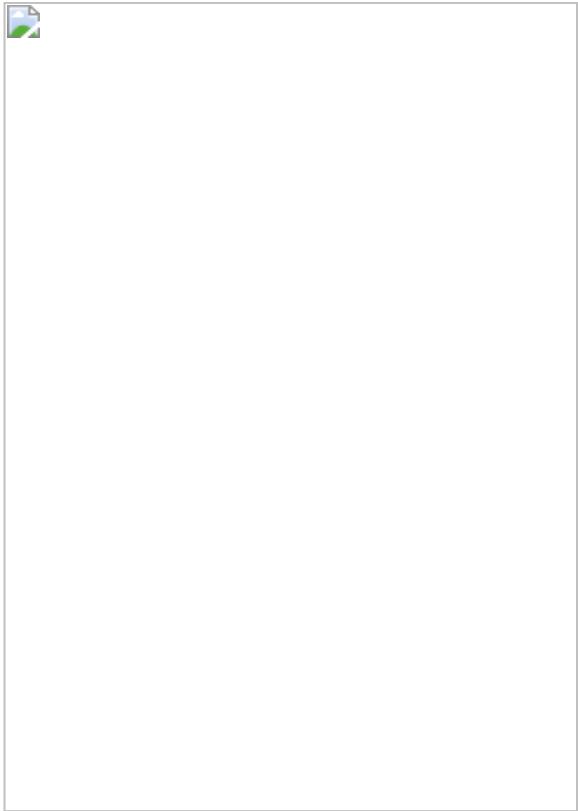
Fishermen say their concerns, from safety issues to how offshore wind will alter the ocean environment, aren’t being meaningfully considered by regulators



Offshore wind turbines near Block Island, Rhode Island. Photograph: Michael Dwyer/AP

Offshore wind turbines near Block Island, Rhode Island. Photograph: Michael Dwyer/AP

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Maddie Stone

Sat 24 Jul 2021 11.39 EDT

For the past nine years, Tom Dameron has managed government relations for [Surfside Foods](#), a New Jersey-based shellfish company. If you asked him five years ago what his biggest challenge was at work, the lifelong fisherman would have said negotiating annual harvest quotas for surf and quahog clams.

Today, he'd tell you it is surviving the arrival of the offshore wind industry, which is slated to install hundreds of turbines atop prime fishing grounds over the next decade.

[Top US scientist on melting glaciers: ‘I’ve gone from being an ecologist to a coroner’](#)

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While there isn't a single wind turbine spinning off the coast of the Garden state yet, plans are under way for new offshore wind developments that hope to power more than a million homes with carbon-free energy over the next several years.

The wind farms are expected to create thousands of new jobs, but the price tag looks steep to Dameron, who fears those jobs and climate benefits will come at the expense of his industry. If wind lease areas are fully developed across the mid-Atlantic, Dameron said clam fishermen will lose access to highly productive areas of the ocean, which could send the multimillion-dollar industry into a “downward spiral”.

“I could see the clam industry in Atlantic City disappearing,” Dameron said.

Dameron's fears are [being echoed](#) by fishermen across the country as they face the [arrival](#) of a big new energy business in waters many have fished for generations.

Offshore wind, which has long struggled to take off in the US due to high costs, regulatory uncertainty and fierce resistance from shoreside residents, is now surging forward under the Biden administration. In March, Joe Biden [committed](#) to building 30 gigawatts of offshore wind capacity by 2030, enough to power 10m homes and avoid 78m metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

With strong political pressure to accelerate offshore wind development as part of the administration's larger effort to tackle the climate crisis, fishermen feel they are being forgotten. Many say that their concerns – which range from safety issues operating around wind farms to how offshore

wind development will alter the ocean environment and affect fish stocks – aren't being meaningfully considered by regulators.

Offshore wind “is one of the most consistently cited factors as a big risk to businesses and their practices”, said Annie Hawkins, the executive director of the Responsible Offshore Development Alliance (Roda), a trade association representing commercial fishermen. “It is a huge, huge thing in the minds of fishermen right now.”

While the European offshore wind industry has grown rapidly in recent years, with [more than 5,000](#) turbines generating a combined 25 gigawatts of renewable power capacity as of earlier this year, America has lagged behind. Today, the entire US offshore wind fleet consists of [five turbines](#) in state waters off Rhode Island and [two research turbines](#) in federal waters off Virginia.

Over the coming decades, the US is expected to catch up by installing thousands of additional turbines in lease areas spanning thousands of square miles of ocean. American fishermen are bracing for the sorts of [spatial conflicts](#) that [have arisen](#) in Europe, where fishermen are often legally forbidden to operate in the vicinity of wind farms and subsea cables, or have stopped operating in their vicinity [by choice](#) due to safety and liability concerns.

In the north-eastern US and mid-Atlantic, where America's first commercial wind farms will be built, lease areas overlap with highly productive fisheries that add [billions of dollars](#) to regional economies. While the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) hasn't declared any of these wind energy areas off-limits for fishing, as in Europe fishermen worry that turbines and their associated infrastructure, including seafloor transmission cables and concrete foundations, will make it impossible to operate their vessels safely.

“What essentially this is turning into is thousands of miles of closed areas,” said Meghan Lapp, the general manager at Seafreeze Shoreside, a Rhode Island-based fish plant



The beach coastline of Ocean City, New Jersey. A large offshore wind energy project planned off the coast of New Jersey would run cables from the wind farm to potential locations including Ocean City. Photograph: Ted Shaffrey/AP

Along the US west coast, where floating offshore wind technology is expected to be deployed because of the much greater depth to seafloor, suspended transmission cables could impede fishing nets and create a “functional closure” for certain types of gear, said Mike Conroy, the executive director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations (PCFFA).

If fishing gear does become entangled with offshore wind equipment “that is an extremely dangerous situation in terms of sinking a boat or loss of life”, said Daphne Munroe, a shellfish ecologist at Rutgers University in New Jersey. Wind turbines can also [interfere](#) with the radar systems fishermen use to navigate.

Fishermen have additional concerns about how commercial-scale offshore wind development will affect fish stocks and the ocean environment. Noise from the construction and operation of wind turbines [could potentially drive fish away](#), while undersea foundations risk [becoming artificial reefs](#) that alter the distribution of species in wind lease areas. Wind turbines may also

alter ocean currents in a way that affects the mid-Atlantic “[cold pool](#)”, a vast area of cold water near the seafloor that allows numerous species, including scallops, clams and flounder, to thrive.

The large-scale, long-term environmental impacts of offshore wind have not been well researched in US waters, and the types of studies needed to address these questions are expensive, said [Aran Mooney](#), a biologist at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute.

“There is an OK amount of research funding going into this, but there certainly needs to be more to get at these bigger questions,” Mooney said.

To reach the Biden administration’s goal of expanding offshore wind development, BOEM is moving quickly to review and approve offshore wind farms in federal waters, identify new ocean areas for wind energy development, and hold lease sales. By 2025, the agency aims to have completed an environmental review of at least 16 offshore wind farm construction and operations plans.

The pace of offshore wind development is “going fast relative to the scale of research on these topics”, said Travis Miles, an oceanographer at Rutgers University who is exploring the potential impacts of offshore wind on the mid-Atlantic cold pool. “And it would be really unfortunate to leave our fishing industry behind”

BOEM marine biologist Brian Hooker said in an email that since 2009, the agency had awarded “millions of dollars” for fisheries-related research in the Atlantic on topics ranging from how fish migrate through lease areas to how they are affected by artificial sounds and electromagnetic fields. In its fiscal year 2022-2023 [research plan](#), BOEM proposed a new study to investigate the spatial needs of the commercial clam industry in the New York Bight, a heavily fished area between New Jersey and Long Island where the agency will be [holding](#) an offshore wind lease sale this year.

The agency’s [proposed sale notice](#) for the New York Bight, released in June, also contains several provisions aimed at helping fishermen. These include a proposal for 2.5-mile-wide fishing vessel transit lanes in the proposed Hudson South lease area and a requirement that wind developers coordinate

with the fishing industry and consider any “potential conflicts” when developing construction and operation plans.

Some offshore wind developers are attempting to address fishing industry concerns. Drawing on its experience working with the commercial fishing industry overseas, developer Equinor held a series of meetings with fishermen as it was planning [Empire Wind](#), a proposed offshore wind farm south of Long Island. Based on feedback it received during those meetings, Equinor redesigned the layout for the wind farm to include an open area for fishing at the western edge of the lease area.

“Equinor met us halfway and negotiated something that would work well for everybody,” said Hawkins, who co-organized the meetings and attended them on behalf of Roda.

In recent years in Europe, many spatial conflicts [have been avoided](#) by this sort of collaborative planning. But right now, Hawkins said that meaningful negotiations between offshore wind developers and fishermen in US waters the exception rather than the norm. “From our perspective we’ve seen less authentic engagement with fishermen” since the start of the Biden administration, Hawkins said. “It certainly has the appearance of [developers] thinking they’re going to be all right no matter what.”

Hooker said that BOEM will “continue to engage with commercial fishermen to avoid or reduce potential impacts from offshore wind energy development.” BOEM, he said, works with the US coast guard and others at all stages of offshore wind development to determine how navigation and fishing will be impacted, and the agency tries to avoid leasing the most heavily trafficked parts of the ocean.

But according to Hawkins: “The fishing industry feels very strongly that they still do not have a meaningful voice in the process nor an authentic seat at the table.”

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[Miami condo collapse](#)

Search for bodies in Florida condo collapse ends, with death toll at 97

Firefighters have officially ended their efforts following one of the nation's deadliest engineering failures



A portion of the Champlain Towers South condo building collapsed on 24 June, crushing those inside. Photograph: Giorgio Viera/AFP/Getty Images

A portion of the Champlain Towers South condo building collapsed on 24 June, crushing those inside. Photograph: Giorgio Viera/AFP/Getty Images

Associated Press

Fri 23 Jul 2021 21.10 EDT

Firefighters have declared the end of their search for bodies at the site of a collapsed [Florida](#) condo building, concluding a month of painstaking work

removing layers of dangerous debris that were once piled several stories high.

The collapse on 24 June at the oceanside Champlain Towers South killed 97 people, with at least one more missing person yet to be identified. The site has been mostly swept flat and the rubble moved to a Miami warehouse. Although forensic scientists are still at work, including examining the debris at the warehouse, there are no more bodies to be found where the building once stood.

Except during the early hours after the collapse, survivors never emerged. Search teams spent weeks battling the hazards of the rubble, including an unstable portion of the building that teetered above, a recurring fire and Florida's stifling summer heat and thunderstorms. They went through more than 14,000 tons of broken concrete and rebar, often working boulder by boulder, rock by rock, before finally declaring the mission complete.

[Judge approves sale of Miami condo collapse site for victims' benefit](#)
[Read more](#)

Miami-Dade Fire Rescue's urban search-and-rescue team pulled away from the disaster site on Friday in a convoy of firetrucks and other vehicles, slowly driving to their headquarters for a news conference to announce that the search was officially over.

At a ceremony, fire chief Alan Cominsky saluted the firefighters who worked 12-hour shifts while camping out at the site.

"It's obviously devastating. It's obviously a difficult situation across the board," Cominsky said. "I couldn't be prouder of the men and women that represent Miami-Dade Fire Rescue."

The disaster was one of the nation's deadliest engineering failures.



A memorial to the victims of the Champlain Towers South condo building collapse. Photograph: Rebecca Blackwell/AP

Officials have declined to clarify whether they have one additional set of human remains in hand that pathologists are struggling to identify or whether a search for that final set of remains continues. That 98th victim is believed to be Estelle Hedaya, an outgoing 54-year-old who loved to travel and was fond of striking up conversations with strangers. Her younger brother Ikey has given DNA samples and visited the site twice to see the search efforts for himself.

“As we enter month two alone, without any other families, we feel helpless,” he told the Associated Press on Friday.

The collapse also fueled a race to inspect other ageing residential towers in Florida and beyond, and it raised broader questions about the nation’s regulations governing condominium associations and building safety.

Shortly after the collapse, it became clear that warnings about Champlain Towers South, which opened in 1981, had gone unheeded. A 2018 engineering report detailed cracked and degraded concrete support beams in the underground parking garage and other problems that would cost nearly \$10m to fix. The repairs did not happen, and the estimate grew to \$15m this

year as the owners of the building's 136 units and its governing condo board squabbled over the cost, especially after a Surfside town inspector told them the building was safe.

A complete collapse was all but impossible to imagine. As many officials said in the catastrophe's first days, buildings of that size do not just collapse in the US outside of a terrorist attack. Even tornadoes, hurricanes and earthquakes rarely bring them down.

In the weeks after the collapse, a 28-story courthouse in downtown Miami, built in 1928, and two apartment buildings were closed after inspectors uncovered structural problems. They will remain shut until repairs are made.

The first calls to 911 came about 1.20am, when Champlain residents reported that the parking garage had collapsed. A woman standing on her balcony called her husband, who was on a business trip, and said the swimming pool had fallen into the garage.



Search and rescue teams remove debris during their search through rubble in Surfside, Florida. Photograph: Miami-Dade Fire Rescue/Zuma Press Wire Service/REX/Shutterstock

Then, in an instant, a section of the L-shaped building fell straight down. Eight seconds later, another section followed, leaving 35 people alive in the

standing portion. In the initial hours, a teen was rescued, and firefighters believed others might be found alive. They took hope from noises emanating from inside the pile that might have been survivors tapping, but in retrospect the sounds came from shifting debris.

The dead included members of the area's large Orthodox Jewish community, the sister of Paraguay's first lady, her family and their nanny, as well as a local salesman, his wife and their two young daughters.

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Bad Neuenahr one week after the flood

[The Guardian picture essay](#)

‘We need a lot of help’: Germans sift through debris after devastating floods

Bad Neuenahr one week after the flood

Trucks, diggers and volunteers try to clear mud and ruined belongings from wrecked homes and businesses

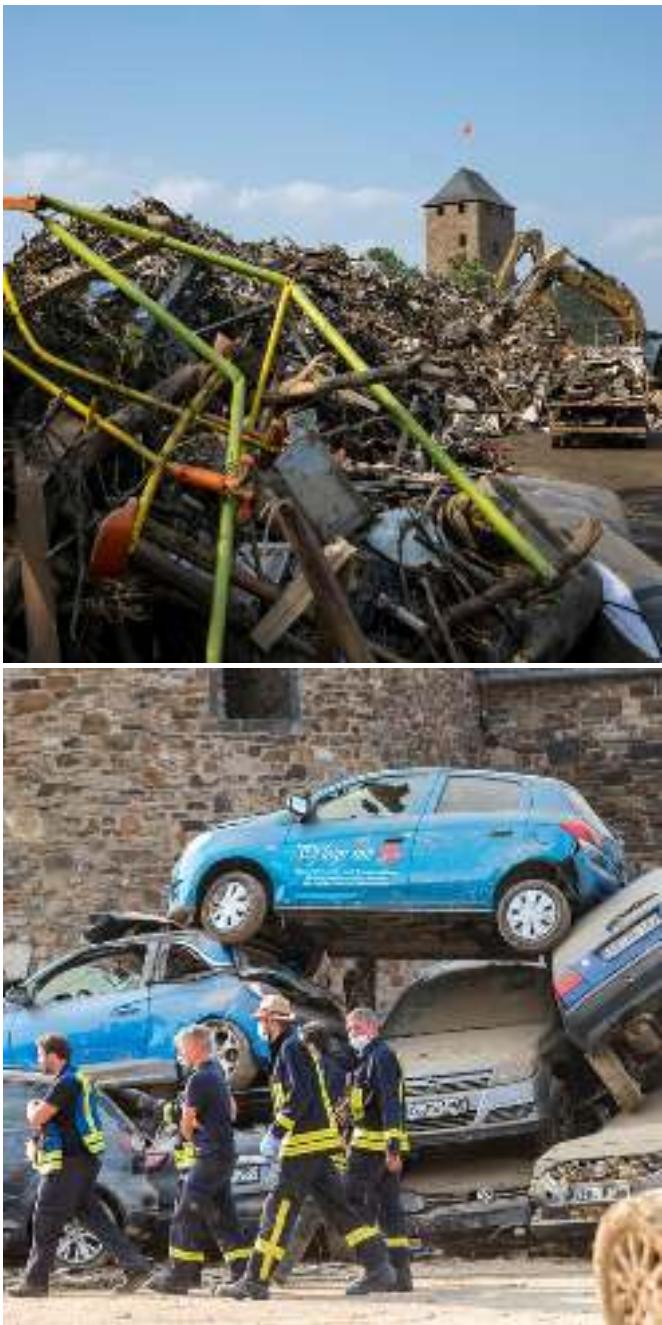
by [Kate Connolly](#) in Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler. Photographs by Thomas Lohnes

Fri 23 Jul 2021 09.31 EDT

A brown line one and a half metres high on the kitchen wall marks where the waters reached when Christian Ulrich's house was inundated. The electrician stands amid the mud-splattered walls and his voice breaks as he recalls how he had barely enough time after the warning came to reach the cellar to get food and water and send his mother up the stairs. He had just managed to let in the neighbours who had banged on the door for help, when there was an "almighty crash – like an explosion" as a huge wave of water rolled in from the back and front of the house, so strong it pushed out the front door and many of the windows.



- Rubbish and destroyed furnishings are piled up in front of the old city wall



Eight days on, Ulrich, standing in the ruins, says he can finally “breathe again”, thanks to a man on a mechanical digger outside on Bachemer Strasse, who has spent the last few days on the street clearing the rubble from Ulrich’s family home and others. The downstairs furniture and fittings, and the contents of the cellar, still fill the street, but he says the smelly heap is now only a fraction of the height it was. “We are just so grateful to these people. But we are saddened that there has so far been very little official help,” he says.

A banner hanging from an upstairs window, where Ulrich's mother is trying to recover from the trauma, reads: "Thank you dear helpers".



- Volunteers carry mud from a physiotherapy practice into the street via bucket chain while a helper takes a break

Ingo Mellenthin, who is operating the digger – lent by a landscaping company – with an efficient calm, travelled from Herten, 100 miles away, to volunteer. His son Jonas is in an adjacent street doing the same. "We thought we'd better come here to help, knowing we had skills they might need," says the self-employed builder, who had been due to go on holiday.

A similar scenario is playing out in thousands of homes across this spa town in Rhineland-Palatinate state – all of which are without running water, electricity, or gas – and in turn in scores of towns and villages across the region, some of which are still cut off. Almost 42,000 people have been affected, many losing their homes. In Rhineland-Palatinate alone, 128 people have died. A further 766 were injured and 155 people remain missing.



- Udo Förtsch's antiques shop

In street after street, lines of mud-coated volunteers scoop the gunge from cellars and ground floors in buckets and pass them on. The last in the chain dumps the mud in the street. Many punctuate the work with a joke or a song. One group of women and girls, calling themselves “Paw Patrol”, are clearing the cellar of a physiotherapy practice on Ahrhutstrasse. “It’s time to help, simple as that,” says Hatice Sadet. The youngest helper spotted is seven-year-old Eno, in wellington boots, who alongside many others is pushing a shovel into the thick sticky grey mud which has to be watered down to stop it from clogging the drains.

On the market square, Hartmut Schönhöfer is busy stripping the plaster from the walls of the picturesque 18th-century Marktbrunnen (market fountain) pub, which he and his wife, Martina Caspers, the owner, had spent the best part of lockdown painstakingly renovating. It was due to open in three weeks’ time.



- Maike Sperlich helps to load rubbish from the houses into containers and trucks

“When the waters came it was like pinball as it seemed to come from all over the place and really fast,” he says. “Cars were swimming down the street.

“None of us died – for that we’re grateful,” he adds. “But our tragedy is that we had put €300,000 net (£256,000), into the renovation and we’ll need another €150,000-€200,000 to restore it now. But we have no elemental damage insurance [to cover storms and severe weather]. It was just not available.” The story is repeated in homes and businesses across the town.





- Top: Bundeswehr soldiers distribute water. Above: A helper removes mud from a residential building

At Dr von Ehrenwall's clinic for psychiatry and neurology, the deputy administration manager, Heike Heideck, delegates jobs to staff who have gathered to help with the cleanup. About 150 patients had to be moved to the top floors where they stayed the night before being evacuated to a makeshift shelter in a Haribo sweet factory.

In Kurgartenstrasse in another district, on a strolling promenade popular with rich weekenders from Frankfurt, Düsseldorf and further afield, the Förtsches are sorting through the remains of their antique shop. "Here, take this as a souvenir," Udo Förtsch half jokes, picking up a mud-smeared Marc Chagall print. His wife Uschi washes down some brass statues and a glass vase and places them in a plastic box. But more or less all the rest of their €150,000 of stock is destroyed.



- Above and right: a helper distributes home-baked cake. Far right: Helpers are treated to free bratwursts and chips





They are not insured either. “We planned to retire in a couple of years. We can forget that now,” he says. A fellow shop owner comes to tell them that their landlord’s 18-year-old daughter was drowned as she tried to get the car out of the garage as the waters came. “We are the lucky ones,” Uschi Förttsch says, wiping away tears.

Steps away, the curtains of the five-star Steigenberger hotel flap in the wind. The windows were smashed by the force of the water, their frames buckling along with the pipes and lamp-posts outside. A ballroom is thick with mud, and plates, cutlery and champagne buckets are scattered across the floor. A Peugeot has been flung against the hotel terrace. “It’s like Bosnia after the war,” says Tim, from a Gummersbach firm specialising in construction cleanups who has just arrived and is surveying the scene from the banks of the brown, fast-flowing River Ahr.



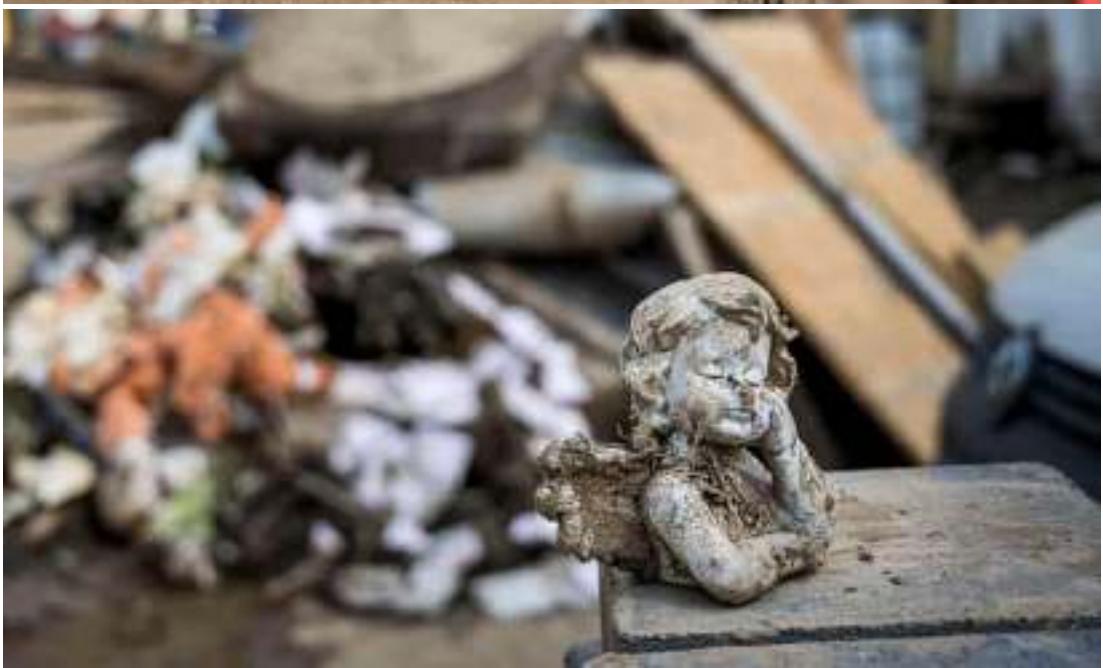
- Top: Benjamin Monschau, right, and his helper Johannes Ehmer shovel mud from his grandfather's grave. Above: destroyed and silted graves in the cemetery

In the Ahrweiler district a non-stop column of trucks and tractors, lent or driven by local farmers, gardening centres and construction firms, drive

through the Ahrtor, one of four gates in the old town's ancient wall, and queue up to tip seemingly unending loads of the mud-drenched contents of homes and businesses – washing machines, carpets, wine barrels, bird houses, shop models, car seats – on to a huge heap.

A digger operator is tasked with compressing the mound as much as possible and loading it onto trucks which are transporting it to incinerators across [Germany](#) and the Netherlands. Spotting a red carpet from a hotel or restaurant in the waste, he picks it up in the teeth of his excavator bucket and waves it at his fellow workers, offering a brief moment of levity amid the misery.







- Figurines found amid the wreckage

The efficiency of the operation is fine-tuned to the extent that lorry maintenance engineers are on hand to offer repairs for everything from tyre punctures to loose screws, for which demand is high.

The Auths have driven their “Brat King” (Grill King) catering truck the 160 miles from Fulda, stocked with thousands of sausages and other donations from butchers, supermarkets and individuals, to feed helpers and residents.



- A muddied town centre thoroughfare

Maria, whose restaurant, Delphi, is in ruins, together with Lily, a waitress, tuck into a currywurst and chips as they take a break from cleaning up. Lily recalls leaving work early after a flood warning came late on the night of Wednesday 14 July, and driving on the bridge over the river Ahr towards home. “I swear I could feel it shifting,” she says. Several cars were on it when it subsequently collapsed. “I think if I’d been 15 minutes later I might have been swept away.” She points to the bridge, just metres away, which appears to have snapped in two. An excavator trying to clear the rubble around it has just toppled over into the fast-flowing water, but the driver has been hauled to safety.



- A ruined road surface in the town centre

Close by, next to the riverbank, part of the fire station has collapsed, its garage doors buckled, though luckily the fire brigade managed to drive the vehicles out in time.

A few metres further on, the town's cemetery lies desecrated. Cars and a van are tossed among broken gravestones and there is hardly a blade of grass in sight. Benjamin Monschau tends to the grave of his grandfather Erich. The headstone is still standing but, with the help of a friend, he's trying to free the rest from the mass of sticky mud. "I didn't want to let my grandmother see it like this," he says.



- Bad Neuenahr a week after the flood

Masks are worn here primarily to protect from mud, dust and bacteria, rather than coronavirus. A muddy handprint has become a hallmark of the cleanup effort.

Elisabeth Parschau has placed two of hers on the front of her boyfriend's T-shirt. "What we need right now is a lot of love, and to hope it keeps coming – the town will need a lot of help in the coming months," she says. She is sitting playing her piano flanked by two water tanks delivered earlier by the army, outside their house with its bucolic courtyard laced with grapevines.



- Elisabeth Parschaun plays her ruined piano in the street

The instrument, which stood in half a metre of water, is ruined, she says. But before it's carted away with the rest of the debris, she has chalked the invitation "*Spiel mich*" – play me – on it. Residents and rescue workers in need of a respite have been readily taking up the offer.

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